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Linguistic Ethnonationalism

P Eisenlohr, Washington University, St. Louis,
MO, USA

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further back than the 18th century, and this also applies to forms of nationalism drawing on perceptions of linguistic difference as a justification for popular sovereignty.

The first comprehensive formulation of linguistic ethnonationalism is commonly traced to Herder's critique of Kant's transcendental philosophy of subjectivity. According to Herder (1968), intellectual production and human subjectivity are not to be understood as based on a putatively universal pure reason but as grounded in and created out of particular linguistic traditions, which constitute humankind as a plurality of 'peoples'. Accordingly, the status of a group as a 'people' with a claim to nationhood is upheld by cultural difference, which is inseparably linked to a particular linguistic tradition. The 'spirit' of a nationalized 'people' is thus both expressed and shaped through cultural creativity necessarily bound to the use of a certain language. Herder claimed that language is not a transparent medium of cultural production, but argued that the particular characteristics of a linguistic variety or linguistic tradition have a profoundly shaping impact on the cultural life of a 'people.' Thus, according to Herder, language necessarily mediates cultural traditions not in constituting a neutral means of expressing them and conveying them to others, but in the sense of playing a productive role in cultural life and leaving an indelible imprint of its particularities on everything it cocreates and mediates.

This formulation has been extremely influential in the formation of German nationalism and other nationalisms of central and eastern Europe, and continues to inspire nationalist ideologues in a wide range of locations today. However, it is precisely the inevitability of the link suggested by Herder between a particular linguistic tradition and a particular sense of nationhood, which has the effect of naturalizing language-based nationhood, that has been widely rejected among scholars of nationalism, even by those insisting on premodern origins of the nation. Instead, the way apprehensions of linguistic difference have constituted and legitimized claims to nationhood has been shown to be a historically contingent process and subject to dynamic cultural construction and contestation. However, scholars have differed considerably in how much latitude they have assigned to such processes of construction. Another important division in approaches to linguistic ethnonationalism is between those emphasizing politicized images of linguistic belonging and difference as creative forces in the rise of nationalism since the 18th century versus those authors privileging the

The scholarly treatment of linguistic ethnonationalism is intimately linked to the question of the origins of the nation. A main division in scholarship on nationalism, between those who conceive the nation as an entirely modern phenomenon and those who trace its roots further back in time, has also resulted in contrasting positions regarding the role of language and linguistic practice in the rise of the nation. In the European context, proponents of the latter position have tended to treat linguistic difference as one of the principal markers of pre-existing 'ethnic' difference that later developed into full-fledged nationhood in the 18th and 19th centuries. Anthony Smith (1989), for example, described awareness of linguistic boundaries and of sharing a vernacular language with emerging literary traditions as one of the features of 'ethnic cores' established in the premodern period, which provided a base for modern nationalism later on. Josep Llobera has argued that in the case of the territories later developing into England, France, Germany, Italy, and Spain, a sense of nationhood, even if restricted to a small part of the population and varying in salience among those territories, was already in place in the late Middle Ages. These early notions of nationhood also rested in part on the sharing of what were identified as common vernacular languages (Llobera, 1994). In contrast, modernists such as Benedict Anderson and Ernest Gellner categorically reject continuities between premodern forms of political identification and modern nationhood, nor have they treated premodern apprehensions of linguistic difference as significant for the constitution of modern nations. Instead, for them the importance of language and linguistic practice in the creation of modern nationhood lies above all in their integrative functions in processes of vernacular standardization and mass communication through print, a line of inquiry initially associated with Karl Deutsch (1953). There is little doubt that a concept of the nation existed in parts of Europe before the 18th century, as for example in the case of Spain, where in the early 17th century nationhood was already explicitly linked to the concept of a distinct vernacular language (Woolard, 2004). However, both modernists and those insisting on medieval or early modern origins of the nation tend to agree that nationalism as a political ideology demanding a form of popular sovereignty rather than a dynastic polity cannot be traced

role of language in nationalism in its functional roles in modern systems of mass communication.

s0005 **‘Modernist’ Theories of Language and Nationalism**

p0020 Ernest Gellner’s and Benedict Anderson’s approaches to nationalism tend to stress the latter, ‘modernist’ position. For Gellner (1983), the emergence of the nation is a product of industrialization in the modern world. In order for industrial civilization to be possible, the multitude of local cultural and linguistic particularities characteristic of agrarian societies has to be superseded by large-scale cultural and linguistic uniformization. In particular, the spread of modern standardized vernacular languages protected by state-sponsored educational systems is described by Gellner as functionally necessary for the workings of industrialization. Nationalism emerges as a new ideology serving an integrative function for the larger social aggregates formed by industrial processes of production as well as vernacular literacy and mass communication, which crucially underpin them. Thus, nations are modern inventions, and can only arise under conditions of industrialization, while the cultural contents of nationalisms and the kind of standardized languages they are based on are ultimately arbitrary. Benedict Anderson depicted a related scenario in explaining the rise of nationalism, in which language also plays a central role (Anderson, 1991). Anderson shifted the focus from industrialization to print capitalism in arguing that the circulation of books, newspapers, and pamphlets in vernacular languages in Europe and its settler colonies in the Americas since the early modern period led to the creation of ‘imagined communities’ of nations transcending face-to-face interaction in new circuits of mass mediated communication. Thus, nations are essentially conceived as reading publics separated from each other by the use of different print vernaculars.

p0025 The association of ethnolinguistic nationalism with the relative decline of sacred languages and the rise of standardized vernaculars is a common theme in these approaches, postulating a close relationship between language and nationalism while explaining the latter as the result of a transformation of patterns of mass communication under conditions of capitalism or industrialization. In this context, both Anderson and Gellner tended to treat the spread of standardized vernaculars more as a matter of functional and administrative convenience rather than a political process driven at least in part by ideologies of linguistic difference. In Anderson’s view, language is important because print languages function as channels of

communication regimenting access to and exclusion from the national community, while constituting a shared medium through which ideas of the nation can be disseminated. Both Anderson and Gellner tended to downplay how linguistic ethnonationalism privileges language as an ideological site where the imagination of the nation is produced and boundaries of national communities are conceived and formulated. The ways in which language, especially standardized vernacular language, emerges as an ideological prism through which membership of such communities is defined and justified are not just confined to the communicative separation of different reading publics or social aggregates of industrialism due to vernacular linguistic difference. Also, vernacular standardization has often been not only a matter of administrative convenience but also an eminently political process, mediating membership in and exclusion from national communities. Anderson, for example, described the rise of standard French and English as relatively unplanned and driven by ‘pragmatic’ reasons (1991: 40–42), also stating that in 19th-century France and England, “for quite extraneous reasons, there happened to be, by mid-century, a relatively high coincidence of language-of-state and language of the population” (1991: 78). However, the political and military events behind such coincidence need also to be addressed in an understanding of linguistic ethnonationalism. As the work of Eugen Weber shows, a highly ideologized state-driven process of linguistic unification and suppression of regional languages was still ongoing in late 19th-century France, as “the Third Republic found a France in which French was a foreign language to half its citizens” (Weber, 1976: 70). That is, the spread of standardized vernaculars was also furthered through coercion against those now deemed minorities or foreigners in a national community conceived through the lens of political representations of linguistic difference. Thus, Anderson’s important work on the rise of the nation as a consequence of new forms of mass mediated communication needs to be complemented with a stronger emphasis on politically charged ideas of linguistic differentiation as motivating forces in the construction of new national communities.

Linguistic Anthropological Approaches

The relationship between linguistic practice and senses of nationhood has been conceived in different terms in linguistic anthropology. Dell Hymes and John Gumperz argued in the 1960s that the use of a linguistic variety as a shared medium of communication does not necessarily turn those sharing a linguistic code into a community or ethnic unit. This

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tradition of skepticism regarding integrationist approaches assigning shared standardized vernaculars a key role in the formation of modern nations puts contemporary linguistic anthropology at odds with the revival of the assumption in contemporary theories of nationalism that 'shared language' results in the creation of groupness.

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Instead, linguistic anthropologists have emphasized the importance of ideological mediation in establishing a link between language and nationality. In a research paradigm of 'language ideology' (Silverstein, 1979; Woolard and Schieffelin, 1994) linguistic anthropologists have described how such politically charged ideas about language and its users have resulted in the projection of national communities (Gal, 1993; Silverstein, 1996; Schieffelin *et al.*, 1998; Errington, 2000). While concurring with the 'modernist' approach to nationalism in treating nations as dynamically constructed cultural phenomena of relatively recent origin, they also extend this perspective to the construction of languages and linguistic communities. Linguistic varieties and linguistic communities are not simply present 'on the ground' ready to be made use of by modern systems of mass communication to generate a sense of shared nationhood, they are frequently themselves the outcome of scholarly and administrative construction informed by nationalist ideologies (Gal, 1995). That is, linguistic anthropologists have insisted that vernacular standardization is a political process, which is often the result of the rise of the nation rather than merely its precondition.

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Urla's study of Basque linguistic ethnonationalism is a case in point, not only showing that linguistic standardization of Basque was in part motivated by an emerging Basque nationalism, but also that a focus on Basque became central to Basque nationalism precisely because many of those considered members of a Basque nation turned out to have little knowledge of it. The sense of a language being 'threatened' can thus emerge as a catalyst for linguistic ethnonationalism, and the language portrayed as an emblem of the nation may not always be the language employed in the systems of mass communication used for national mobilization and the creation of a national public (Urla, 1988, 1993).

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The latter point is especially important in assessing approaches to linguistic ethnonationalism proposed by political scientists explaining it as a reaction to blocked social mobility and political exclusion due to imposed linguistic barriers in state institutions, as Inglehart and Woodward (1972) did for the 19th-century Austro-Hungarian monarchy and, more recently, DeVotta (2004) did for Sri Lanka. According to this interpretation of linguistic ethnonationalism,

a national public arises when members of a group sharing a vernacular language, often a minority or otherwise subordinate group within a state, face discrimination when the state they live in imposes another linguistic variety as the sole medium of education and administration. As a counterreaction, influential members of the group start to agitate for a separate nation-state whose institutions would function in their vernacular. The new nation-state to be created would thus provide the opportunities for social mobility that are denied by the institutions of the state that members of such a minority have so far lived in. However, this model does little to account for frequently widespread bi- or multilingualism among linguistic minorities, nor for those scenarios where knowledge of and especially literacy skills in the dominant language of state are more common among members of a minority than corresponding skills in the minority language promoted as the emblem of a new nation. As Urla wrote about the origins of Basque linguistic ethnonationalism in the late 19th century, "when Sabino Arana y Goiri, the son of a Bilbao industrialist and founder of the PNV (Partido Nacionalista Vasca, Basque Nationalist Party), declared Euskera to be one of the defining features of the Basque nation, the first thing he had to do was to learn it himself" (Urla, 1993: 822). The Basque case exemplifies such a situation where bilingual and in many instances predominantly Spanish-using members of a Basque middle class did not face linguistic exclusion in a previously Spanish-only system of education and administration. It also does little to explain why, as in the Basque and the Austro-Hungarian cases, precisely those multilingual urban intellectuals with a full command of the dominant language of state were the initiators of separatist linguistic ethnonationalisms rather than the monolingual rural populations who were often portrayed as exemplary members of the new nations to be created.

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In other words, linguistic ethnonationalism needs to be taken seriously on its own terms, as the imagination and construction of communities through images of language and linguistic difference. It thus has to be understood as a politically creative force in its own right and as a form of regulating social life, and not be treated as the epiphenomenon of an essentially nonlinguistic political process of competition over scarce resources and state power. Also, the national boundaries thus created through ideologies of language cannot always be reduced to the boundaries between different reading publics, which, according to Anderson, rest on the "fatality of human linguistic diversity" (Anderson, 1991: 43). It is important to realize that linguistic ethnonationalism as a social and political force has frequently reshaped regimes

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of linguistic diversity by mapping social and political differentiation on perceived linguistic differences in novel ways. For some scholars, this circumstance has been nowhere more clearly illustrated than in European attempts at linguistic description and reorganization in the colonial world.

The Colonial Context and the Worldwide Spread of Linguistic Ethnonationalism

An important question in assessing the global spread of Herderian ideologies of linguistic ethnonationalism is whether the thesis of the modularity of nationalism generally postulated by Anderson (1991: 4) can also be extended to linguistic ethnonationalism. As such, the question of linguistic ethnonationalism in colonial and postcolonial contexts is bound up with wider debates about whether colonial and postcolonial nationalism exhibits irreducible differences from the European-American and European nationalisms that were its first historical instances, as, for example, suggested by Partha Chatterjee (1993). European colonial governments as well as other European non-state actors active in the colonial world, such as missionary societies, embarked on extensive projects of identifying, describing, classifying, and standardizing vernacular languages of their subject populations, which frequently led to large-scale transformations of the linguistic and political situation in colonies (see also Errington, 2001). One of the main ways in which such colonially induced transformations came about was the introduction of new ideas of linking social to perceived linguistic differentiation. In particular, the Herderian principle of linguistic ethnicity, according to which a population is constituted as an ethnic group by virtue of sharing a common vernacular language, informed such linguistic classificatory work and language construction in the colonies. A second assumption derived from the European trajectory of linguistic ethnonationalism also had a large impact on the colonial reorganization of linguistic landscapes: the idea that a vernacular linguistic tradition necessarily has a standard form. Wherever this standard was not readily discernible, the task was to find and identify the 'real' standard form of vernacular varieties, which inevitably resulted in language construction. Colonial India provides a good example of how both these tendencies set off political processes whose outcomes did not always conform to the intentions of the colonizers. For example, the search for a 'language of command' for northern and central India by scholars of Fort William College in Calcutta led them on a search for the 'real Hindustani,' knowledge of which was expected to facilitate the rule and

administration of large parts of India. Undeterred by the initial puzzlement of their Indian subjects, whose visions of linguistic differentiation were largely dominated by an opposition of standardized sacred (Sanskrit, Arabic) and imperial (Persian [Farsi]) languages on one hand, and largely unstandardized local vernacular varieties on the other, colonial scholars and administrators constructed a standard Hindustani. They thus contributed to the emergence of the Hindi-Urdu conflict, the partition of India, and the creation of Modern Standard Hindi as a national language of India later on (Cohn, 1985; Lelyveld, 1993). In India, the introduction of the Herderian principle of linguistic ethnicity through the colonial mapping of vernacular languages was institutionalized as an alternative to previously established modes of conceiving linguistic differentiation above all in terms of links between ranked endogamous descent groups (*jati*) and linguistic varieties in eminently local contexts (Washbrook, 1991). This also turned out to have important consequences for postcolonial politics. Linguistic ethnicity in the end provided the basis for political claims for distinct 'homelands' for users of particular standardized linguistic varieties, which resulted in a reorganization of federal states along assumed vernacular linguistic lines in postcolonial India.

One of the ironies of the global spread of linguistic ethnonationalism is also that in many instances this new political principle originated in colonial attempts at linguistic classification and language construction, which were intended to facilitate and legitimate colonial rule, only to provide a platform for the emergence of anticolonial nationalisms later on. The colonial creation of a standard Malay, for example, not only provided a unified administrative language for a large and populous archipelago with great linguistic diversity. It also facilitated the emergence of an anticolonial public among local elites, who subsequently used the new language, now labeled Indonesian, against their Dutch colonizers, turning it into a key emblem of a newly imagined Indonesian nation whose citizens were expected to become users of the language (Errington, 2000).

Related processes were at work in colonial Africa, where the construction of standardized vernaculars for missionary or administrative purposes often led colonial administrators to assign populations distinct 'ethnic' or 'tribal' identities on the basis of such newly defined linguistic affiliations. These practices had important political consequences once such classifications became established and accepted by large numbers of those subjected to such colonial mapping of social and political difference (Harries, 1988;

Irvine, 1993; Meeuwis, 1999). Linguistic anthropologists have seen in these colonial policies particularly illustrative instances of the creative power of linguistic ideologies, where politically charged images of language and linguistic differentiation motivated the creation of new social aggregates with claims to ethnic and national identities (Irvine and Gal, 2000).

Nevertheless, it would be inadequate to speak of a simple imposition of European assumptions of linguistic ethnicity and linguistic ethnonationalism by colonial actors on colonized populations, since the outcome of colonial vernacular language standardization and language construction often resulted in cultural forms profoundly different from European understandings of linguistic ethnonationalism. Sumathi Ramaswamy's study of Tamil language-focused nationalism provides a vivid analysis of how colonial perspectives interacted with local visions of language and group identities in unforeseen ways (Ramaswamy, 1997). In taking up European characterizations and comparative analyses of Tamil, Tamil activists linked the Herderian idea of linguistic ethnicity to established notions of devotional practice. They thus arrived at a vision of the Tamil language as a female deity, *Tamiltay*, and Tamils as a family of faithful children determined to protect a language simultaneously conceived as deity and mother. Ramaswamy has argued that this colonial and post-colonial form of linguistic ethnonationalism should better be understood as 'language devotionalism.' The Tamil scenario provides a compelling case for re-examining and refining Anderson's thesis of the modularity of nationalism and its language-based aspects. Ramaswamy's work suggests that the spread of nationalism in the colonial and postcolonial worlds should be conceptualized as the result of complex articulations of European understandings of nationality and linguistic belonging with precolonial traditions of establishing links between linguistic practice and social identifications rather than a directly modular adoption of European forms of belonging.

Contemporary Movements of Language Renewal and Linguistic Ethnonationalism

Linguists have recently voiced concern about the increasing loss of linguistic diversity in the contemporary world, seeking to mobilize public opinion in Western countries in favor of supporting the continued use of those languages with often smaller numbers of users undergoing language shift. In doing so, they have often drawn on discourses of biodiversity, literally describing these languages as

'endangered' species which need to be saved from extinction. Another theme in professional discourses of 'endangered' languages is cosmopolitan concerns about the necessity to prevent the loss of intellectual production, feared by many as a consequence of the eventual demise of many lesser-used languages, which would benefit humanity in its entirety. However, actual investigation of the social and political contexts of more successful instances of reversing language shift shows that such cosmopolitan views about the necessity to preserve knowledge for 'humanity' or the benefits of linguistic diversity portrayed as equivalent to those of biodiversity have played only minor roles. Instead, language activists have often rallied in favor of continued use of a language in response to perceived threats to positively valued forms of groupness, often cast in ethnic or national terms. Thus, such movements for reversing language shift have frequently drawn on the Herderian theme of a necessary link between a particular linguistic tradition and the constitution of a population as an ethnic group with the ethnonationalist claims often implied in a politics of recognition.

Furthermore, such contemporary language renewal movements also represent an interesting parallel to earlier scenarios of linguistic ethnonationalism in their extensive use of mass-mediated communication, now also in its electronic and digital forms (Eisenlohr, 2004). First, for example, in digitally recording linguistic practice in an 'endangered' language for purposes of documentation and instruction, language activists and linguists also engage in the production and archiving of electronic artifacts in a way that recalls earlier modern forms of storing and displaying the heritage of a 'people,' such as the museum and the archive (Silverstein, 2003). Such techniques of collecting and curating have in turn been closely linked to the history of the rise of nationalism, the display and archiving of 'traditional' objects and art forms being one of the ways of producing the imagined community of the nation (Anderson, 1991). In creating and selecting documented linguistic material for use in projects of language revitalization, language activists and supporting linguists often define the linguistic 'tradition' of the people who are interested in the renewal of a language they identify as 'theirs.' They thus play a key role in constructing boundaries of communities through representations of linguistic difference in a manner recalling the roles played by lexicographers, folklorists, and grammarians in 19th-century European nationalism (Anderson, 1991, Hobsbawm, 1990).

Second, in their attempts to create mass-mediated publics for users of lesser-used languages, language activists have often sought to promote the use of such

varieties by replicating the creation of new forms of community and political solidarity often associated with the circulation of mass-mediated discourse in a shared vernacular. On the other hand, it is not just that new electronic practices of mass mediation are ways of disseminating and circulating discourse differently, but also, in the eyes of its consumers, mediated discourse is often invested with particular qualities since such practices of mass mediation are frequently associated with notions of modernity and sophistication. Language activists frequently draw on such evaluations of electronically mass-mediated discourse by seeking to transform valuations of a lesser-used language by using it on television, radio, CD-ROM, DVD, and the Internet. Thus, the use of languages to be revitalized in electronic media is not only aimed at the creation of new publics but also at changing images of the language among its users through a demonstration that the linguistic variety and its users are indeed part of a modern world.

Nevertheless, the example of language activism on behalf of lesser-used languages shows that linguistic ethnonationalism can also focus on 'heritage' or 'ancestral' languages, which are only rarely used in everyday interaction or in practices of literacy, as is for example the case among several Native American groups in the United States and Canada. Such scenarios, not infrequently found among users of a language in advanced stages of language shift, demonstrate that given the appropriate ideological background, the particular linguistic variety adopted as an emblem of ethnonationality need not always be related to those varieties used either in vernacular practice or in mass mediation of discourse.

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The scholarly treatment of linguistic ethnonationalism is intimately linked to the question of the origins of the nation. A main division in scholarship on nationalism, between those who conceive the nation as an entirely modern phenomenon and those who trace its roots further back in time, has also resulted in contrasting positions regarding the role of language and linguistic practice in the rise of the nation.

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Author Contact Information:

Patrick Eisenlohr

Department of Anthropology

Washington University

Campus Box 1114

One Brookings Drive

Saint Louis, Missouri, 63130-USA

peisenlo@artsci.wustl.edu