

# Disinventing and Reconstituting Languages

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**BILINGUAL EDUCATION AND BILINGUALISM 62**

Series Editors: Nancy H. Hornberger and Colin Baker

# **Disinventing and Reconstituting Languages**

Edited by

Sinfree Makoni and Alastair Pennycook

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Sibusisiwe Dube-Makoni,  
my life-long partner**

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## Foreword

# ***Intervening Discourses, Representations and Conceptualizations of Language***

OFELIA GARCÍA

Rarely does one pick up a book that decenters epistemological knowledge and simultaneously expands understandings in dynamic ways, as it presents an inter-related perspective. Makoni and Pennycook's *Disinventing and Reconstituting Languages* is such a book. For the reader, and particularly for those of us who work on language scholarship, the image of the *banyan tree*, referred to in Makoni and Mashiri's chapter, comes to mind. Our understandings grow up, out and down at the same time. Although the book *disinvents* language, asking us to question languages, conceptions of language and metalanguages, it also *reconstitutes* it, warning us that the results of the invention are *real*, but that we must rethink what the social, political and economic consequences would be if we no longer posited the existence of separate languages. In other words, this book argues that the invention of languages has implications that are situated in very material language effects. Rooted firmly on the communication that takes place among people and not on language as 'a thing that leads a life of its own outside and above human beings' (Yngve, 1996: 28), the book takes a step beyond the allegations of language as imagined or invented and yet roots itself firmly in the discursive field that constitutes acts of *linguaging*.

The book achieves its original dynamism by presenting the ideology of Dis/Invention posited by the two editors and the content of the individual chapters in ways that are inter-related and mutually implicated and that juxtapose different historical and philosophical scholarly traditions, spatializing time. Drawing from the scholarship on the invention of Africa (Makoni) and the invention of English (Pennycook), the editors refer to a dialectic process in which language and nation were constructed together. But Makoni and Pennycook's disinvention of language is also rooted in Hopper's concept of 'emergent grammar' and his claim that the system-

aticity of language is just an illusion, a regulated process of repetition in discourse, a product of performative acts. Signification is produced by the partial settling or 'sedimentation' of frequently used forms. And so language itself has been mediated by and constrained by, historically sedimented patterns of usage.

The process of disinvention of languages that the book proposes calls into question many of the significant issues that surrounded the study of language in the 20th century and that form the basis of our present understandings of sociolinguistics and applied linguistics in the 21st century. Drawing on different situations of language dis/invention – the inventing of Bahasa Indonesian, language planning in southern Africa, English as an international language, sign language, Hiphop Rap/Discourse, language education in different contexts – the book challenges basic assumptions. For me, who has spent a lifetime studying language in schools and particularly bilingual education, this book has engaged me in further reflection about questions that I thought I had settled long ago.

Since I started teaching in 1970, I have defended the use of the students' mother tongue in their education and particularly the use of Spanish in teaching US Latinos. But in demonstrating how the indigenous languages of Africa were constructed, Makoni and Pennycook remind me that Spanish was also 'administratively assigned' to the colonized population and continues to be so in many parts of Latin America. In fact, Spanish has been shown to create and accentuate many of the social differences in Latin America. Although in 1970, most of my students in New York City were Spanish-speaking Puerto Ricans, leading us to 'forget' the genocide of the Taíno Indians and their language, today New York City Latino students are increasingly users of other languages, besides Spanish, confronting all of us with the complexity of identifying the students' mother tongue, or what it means to be a 'Spanish-speaker.'

Makoni contends that, instead of focusing on the invented indigenous languages, African language policy should be looking at urban vernaculars that are not 'hermetically sealed'. This also reminds me that my New York Puerto Rican students in the 1970s were not simply users of Spanish. Living side by side with urban African Americans and increasingly in contact with speakers of other contact-Spanishes, my students' vernacular often had little to do with either the 'standard English' of the autonomous texts used in schools, or the 'standard Spanish' that was purported to be their link to a better education in the bilingual education programs.

The bilingual education models that I have worked with throughout my professional career have always been founded on notions of difference, ideas that in the United States are still considered inappropriate and

maybe even 'dangerous.' But Makoni and Pennycook remind us that, if language is an invention, then there is no reason to separate students into ESL classes or to advocate for bilingual education that simply is 'monolingual pluralization.' This book has engaged me in a key question that must surround the ways in which we think about bilingual education in the future: What would language education look like if we no longer posited the existence of separate languages? How would we teach bilingually in ways that reflect people's use of language and not simply people as language users?

This book proposes an innovative model of language education based on what the authors call 'translingual language practices'. Cen Williams coined the Welsh term *trawysieithu* (translanguaging) to refer to a language education pedagogy where students heard or read a lesson in one language and developed their work in the other. Baker (2003) clarifies that translanguaging is not about code-switching, but rather about an arrangement that normalizes bilingualism without diglossic functional separation. But in disinventing language, Makoni and Pennycook go way beyond William's pedagogical innovation. Language classification has been a construct to control variety and difference and thus it excludes mixed language practices, creoles and other ways of using languages in multilingual networks. Language teaching then, as Canagarajah tells us in his chapter, should aim not at mastery of an invented 'target language', but at developing negotiation strategies and a repertoire of codes. Students should, Canagarajah tells us, 'shuttle between' repertoires. And so the notion of 'Spanglish' which has been so controversial in the United States, is as invented as is the notion of Spanish or English. And the question that we should be asking is not whether code-switching is an appropriate responsible pedagogy, or whether 'translanguaging' is valuable in itself or whether 'Spanglish' should be accepted in the classroom. If language is an invention, then we must observe closely the way in which people use language and base our pedagogical practices on that use, and not on what the school system says are valuable practices.

Throughout my professional life I have defended multilingualism and linguistic diversity and have supported language policy that enables peoples to use their languages in public. I have often used language census data to show the strength of language diversity in the United States, but Makoni and Pennycook remind me that the enumerability of languages is an invention and acts as a measure to contain and control. With Phillipson I have argued against the linguistic imperialism of the United States, especially with regards to their language minorities. But Makoni and Pennycook critique linguistic imperialism by pointing out that the imposi-

tion is not of English as a language, but of the ways in which speech forms are constructed into languages. Multilingualism and linguistic human rights, this book tells us, may indeed romanticize plurality rather than question the language inventions and critique the damage it has caused. What the world needs, Makoni and Mashiri propose, is not linguistic human rights, but 'linguistic citizenship' (Stroud, 2001), interaction 'governed by stylistic and strategic deployment of numerous styles and a range of languages'. This is a novel idea, one that challenges, expands and builds on linguistic human rights. It is people themselves that have rights to use their styles and ranges of languages in whichever way they do. And our work is to support people, enhance communication between them and create 'communicative contexts which would enhance people's abilities to carry out their activities to improve their social welfare.'

This book, especially through the position of Pennycook, also argues against what I had believed to be accurate ideas about English in the 21st century – the fact that there are many Englishes, and that English is a world or global language. Pennycook reminds us that English is not a language *per se*, but could be considered a discursive field – neoliberalism, globalization, human capital. What is important is to study what people do with English, their Englishing, that is, their investments, desires and performances in English.

When I was asked to write this Foreword, I had no idea that I would find myself questioning some of my 'venerable' assumptions about language and education or language and minority rights. What is most valuable about this book is that it disinvents language without dismissing the effects that it has had in our scholarship, in our teaching, in our societies, in our schools. It links pre-modern discursive and communicative use with the present-day desires and performances that technology juxtaposes as people engage in the act of *linguaging*. It offers then, not just a criticism of the invention of language, an intervention at the level of discourse, representations and conceptualization, but a way of reconstituting these to facilitate people's ability to carry out their activities to improve their social welfare.

Nowhere is this proposition more problematic than in school. And yet, as the children's linguistic heterogeneity is brought closer together through the communication enabled by technology in the 21st century, the distance between the invented languages that schools have chosen to teach and assess in and the children's practices only grows larger. Translation of instructional material, offering the tests in the child's language, bilingual teachers, bilingual pedagogy is not enough, for it is based on an invention and it rarely reflects the ways in which children communicate. The value of Makoni and Pennycook's proposition is precisely that it makes evident, at

least to me, that schooling is not about improving children's social welfare. The Dis/Invention paradigm facilitates for all of us who take it seriously, the ability to become aware and move beyond the ways in which language has been thought about in the real world and in particular in socio-linguistic and applied linguistic scholarship.

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## Chapter 1

# ***Disinventing and Reconstituting Languages***

SINFREE MAKONI and ALASTAIR PENNYCOOK

This book starts with the premise that *languages, conceptions of languageness* and the *metalanguages* used to describe them are inventions. By making this claim we are pointing to several interrelated concerns. First, languages were, in the most literal sense, invented, particularly as part of the Christian/colonial and nationalistic projects in different parts of the globe. From Tsonga, Shona, Afrikaans, Runyakitara, chiNyanja in Africa (Harries, 1987; Chimhundu, 1992) or Fijian in the Pacific and Bahasa Malay in Indonesia (Heryanto, 1995) to Inkha in Latin America (Mannheim, 1991) and Hebrew (Kuzar, 2001) in Israel, the history of language inventions is long and well documented. Our interest here is in the naming and development of these languages, not so much as part of a diachronic linguistic focus on the invention of languages but rather as an attempt to propose an alternative, more 'useful notion of history' (Inoue, 2004: 1), a critical historiography that allows for multiple temporalities rather than a linear progression of change and development.

Second, a related interest here is not only in the invention and naming of specific languages but also in the broader processes and contexts of linguistic construction. From this point of view, all languages are social constructions, artifacts analogous to other constructions such as time: The rotation of the earth on its axis is a natural phenomenon, but the measurement of time is an artifact, a convention. When we argue that languages are constructed, we seek to go beyond the obvious point that linguistic criteria are not sufficient to establish the existence of a language (the old language/dialect boundary debates), in order to identify the important social and semiotic processes that lead to their construction. Social processes include, for example, the development of colonial and nationalist ideologies through literacy programs. Semiotic processes, following Irvine and Gal (2000) include the ways in which various language practices are made invisible (*erasure*), the projection of one level of differentiation onto another

(*fractal recursivity*) and the transformation of the sign relationship between linguistic features and the social images with which they are linked (*iconization*). These different social and semiotic processes interact in complex ways, so that nationalism, for example, generates iconization and fractal recursivity, which in turn generate more nationalism as part of an ideological process of homogenization. As Irvine and Gal (2000: 47) describe the process of 'linguistic description' of Senegalese languages by 19th century European linguists, 'The ways these languages were identified, delimited, and mapped, the ways their relationships were interpreted, and even the ways they were described in grammars and dictionaries were all heavily influenced by an ideology of racial and national essences'.

Third, in a parallel process, a linguistic metalanguage – or as we prefer, given its broader coverage, a *metadiscursive regime* (Bauman & Briggs, 2003: 299) – was also invented. Metadiscursive regimes are representations of language which, together with material instantiations of actual occurring language, constitute forms of 'social action, social facts and can function as agents in the exercise of social and political power' (Jaffe, 1999: 15). Alongside or, rather, in direct relation with the invention of languages, therefore, an ideology of languages as separate and enumerable categories was also created. In one of its extreme manifestations, this nominalist view becomes a biological essentialist one in which languages are posited as having identities that correspond to species (Jaffe, 1999: 121; Pennycook, 2004). In its most common guise, this metadiscursive regime treats languages as countable institutions, a view reinforced by the existence of grammars and dictionaries (Joseph, 2004). The enumerability of language has to be understood as part of a broader project of 'governmentality', part of a Eurocentric culture which 'relentlessly codified and observed everything about the non-European ... in so thorough and detailed a manner as to leave no item untouched, no culture unstudied' (Said, 1989: 6; cited in Thomas, 1994: 38). In addition to the enumerability of languages, other aspects of these metadiscursive regimes include the widespread view of language in terms of what Grace (1981; 2005) calls *autonomous texts*. Autonomous texts are those which the speakers would require very limited amounts of contextual information to process, the prototypical mode being the written.

Fourth, these inventions have had very real and material effects. On the one hand, by advocating a view of languages as constructions, our position may be seen as a non-materialist view of language: languages do not exist as real entities in the world and neither do they emerge from or represent real environments; they are, by contrast, the inventions of social, cultural and political movements. On the other hand, we would argue for the very real material effects of linguistic inventions since they influence how

languages have been understood, how language policies have been constructed, how education has been pursued, how language tests have been developed and administered, and how people have come to identify with particular labels and at times even to die for them, as the violent nature of ethnic rivalry in Africa, South Asia and elsewhere amply demonstrates. Thus, while the entities around which battles are fought, tests are constructed and language policies are written are inventions, the effects are very real.

Finally, as part of any critical linguistic project, we need a project not only of critique but also one of reconstruction. We need therefore to reconstitute languages, a process that may involve both becoming aware of the history of the construction of languages, and rethinking the ways we look at languages and their relation to identity and geographical location, so that we move beyond notions of linguistic territorialization in which language is linked to a geographical space. Given the real and contemporary effects of these constructions, our intention is not to return to some Edenic pre-colonial era (although we are willing to look to the past to seek inspiration; see Canagarajah, this volume). Rather, our intention is to find ways of rethinking language in the contemporary world, a need arising from an acute awareness that there is all too often a lack of fit between ostensible language problems and the languages promoted as part of the solution (Povinelli, 2002: 26). The broad discursive field of indigeneity and language maintenance, for example, has emerged from a set of particular constructions of the indigenous and of languages that frequently cannot address the current problems faced by disadvantaged people in the contemporary world (Povinelli, 2002). We need to rethink language in order to provide alternative ways forward.

We are not, of course, the first to draw attention to some of these concerns. The invention of languages is reasonably well documented, the problematic assumptions underlying the metalanguage of linguistics have not escaped the attention of some linguists (e.g. Harris, 1980, 1981; Mühlhäusler, 1996; Yngve, 1996) and anthropological linguists have drawn our attention to the ways in which local language ideologies construct languages in particular ways (e.g. Blommaert, 1999b; Kroskrity, 2000). It is our contention, however, that the interrelationship between these elements, the implications for domains of applied linguistics, and the development of strategies for moving forward have not been adequately considered. It is one of the objectives of this book to outline how such strategies can take us beyond a framework only of critique. A central part of our argument, therefore, is that it is not enough to acknowledge that languages have been invented, or that linguistic metalanguage constructs the world in particular

ways. Rather, we need to understand the interrelationships among metadiscursive regimes, language inventions, colonial history, language effects, alternative ways of understanding language and strategies of disinvention and reconstitution.

## Invention, Imagination, Co-Construction

Our use of the concept of invention locates this work within a particular tradition of historical and philosophical scholarship. In *The Invention of Africa*, Mudimbe (1988) critically examines the different Eurocentric categories that have been used to analyse Africa, dramatizing the distinction between an invented Europe and an invented Africa. Zeleza & Makoni (2006) enumerate seven origins of the name Africa, all of which are non-African in origin. The foreign nature of the origins of the term prompted African Nobel laureate Wole Soyinka (1976/87) to propose alternative names rooted in African languages, *Abibirim* and *Abibiman* from Akan, a language widely spoken in Ghana in West Africa. The term Africa was initially used in Roman times to refer exclusively to North Africa, an area roughly equivalent to modern Libya. Subsequently, Africa was then used to refer to the entire continent; more recently it tends to be restricted to sub-Saharan Africa and is divorced from its original usage.

The key issue is that the ways in which notions about Africa are understood have changed over the years, and that, in a very real sense, the idea of Africa is a European construct. The argument that Africa is a European idea is effectively articulated by Nyerere, as quoted by Mazrui (1967):

Thus, to use Nyerere's rhetoric 'Africans, all over the continent, without a word being spoken either from one individual to another or from one country to another, looked at the European, looked at one another, and knew that in relation to the European they were one. In relation to another continent, this continent was one: this was the logic of the situation'. (Mazrui, 1967: 47)

A similar point can be made for Aboriginal Australians' identification with each other as Indigenous, or for the possibility of identifying as Indian (Krishnaswamy & Burde, 1998).

Crucially, however, it is not only the geographical and political space of Africa that was constructed through European eyes, but also African history, languages and traditions. As Terence Ranger (1983) argued in his influential essay, *The Invention of Tradition in Colonial Africa*, what came to count as tradition was often a retrospective image constructed in colonial interests. There are at least four distinct ways in which Africa is

constructed: Africa as biology, as image, as space, as memory. The invention of Africa and African tradition, furthermore, was part of the massive 19th century project of invention, with Europeans inventing both their own histories and those of the people they colonized (Hobsbawm & Ranger, 1983; and see Pennycook, this volume).

The concept of invention is relevant to both colonial and contemporary post-colonial metropolitan contexts. Hobsbawm and Ranger (1983: 1) use the term to describe those traditions which on the one hand appear to be relatively old, but which 'in reality are quite recent in origin': 'Novelty is no less novel for being able to dress easily as antiquity' (Hobsbawm & Ranger, 1983: 3). The Scottish kilt, for example, which, as well as the Highland culture of which it is supposed to be an integral part, is often presented as if it has been part of Scots culture since time immemorial, is a relatively recent creation. In the 18th century, Gaelic, which is thought of as one of the defining features of Highland Scots, was referred to as Irish. The 19th Century Gothic style used for buildings such as the British Houses of Parliament was also part of the creation of an illusion of a long 'factitious' tradition: 'A striking example is the deliberate choice of a Gothic style for the 19th century rebuilding of the British Parliament, and the equally deliberate decision after World War II to rebuild the parliamentary chamber on exactly the same plan' (Hobsbawm & Ranger, 1983: 1–2)

A great deal of historical work has drawn attention to the common project of the invention of history (the processes by which we establish legitimacy, lineage and linkage by reference to a constructed past (see Hobsbawm, 1983, Ranger 1983, Wallerstein, 2000)). As Cohn (1996) and Wallerstein (2000) argue, a major aspect of the British colonial project in India was to turn Indian languages, culture and knowledge into objects of European knowledge, to invent an India not in Britain's image, but in Britain's ideal of what India should look like. This project of invention needs, therefore, to be seen not merely as part of European attempts to design the world in their own image, but rather as part of the process of constructing the history of others for them, which was a cornerstone of European governance and surveillance of the world. Although this process was perhaps most self-evident in the late 19th century and early 20th centuries in colonial times, it developed as a form of national-imaginary whose original focus was the European nation state.

It is this European national imagination that Ranger has in mind when he writes:

The 1870s, 1880s and 1890s were a time of a great flowering of European traditions – ecclesiastical, educational, military, republican and monar-

chical. They were also the time of the European rush into Africa. There were many complex connections between the two processes. (Ranger, 1983: 211)

As Ranger suggests for Africa, and Cohn (1983) for India, the invention of traditions became a crucial part of colonial rule as Europeans sought to justify their presence and redefine the colonized societies in new terms. According to Hardt and Negri:

British administrators had to write their own 'Indian history' to sustain and further the interests of colonial rule. The British had to historicize the Indian past in order to have access to it and to put it to work. The British creation of an Indian history, however, like the formation of the colonial state, could be achieved only by imposing European colonial logics and models of Indian reality. (Hardt & Negri, 2000: 126)

Invented traditions derive their strength from compulsory repetition, such as the wearing of wigs by British judges. It is important in this discussion of invented tradition to keep the notions of tradition and custom separate: 'The object and characteristic of traditions, including invented ones, is invariance. Custom cannot afford to be invariant because even in traditional societies life is not so' (Hobsbawm, 1983: 2). While custom is therefore a changing and dynamic space, tradition is all too often a retrospective construction of stasis, an invention of a prior way of being that is used to justify supposed historical continuity. Similarly, when we talk of the invention of languages, we are looking at the construction of linear histories that imply particular origins; we are not suggesting that language use itself is anything but dynamic and changing.

In questioning the invention of tradition, we should of course also be wary of casting notions of tradition aside. In African historiography it is not so much modernity that has been a source of controversy as the notion of tradition itself (Spear, 2003). Traditions have endured because (while creating the impression of timelessness) they have survived owing to an ongoing dialogical tension between social and historical realities. According to Vansina (1990), 'tradition is a robust and enduring endogenous process which represents, contrary to ahistorical expectations, fundamental continuities which shape the futures of those who hold them'. In African historiography, it is not language per se that is of central importance, but discourse. Tradition is one type of discourse, with different traditions having different discourses through which their individual histories are articulated.

Our understanding of invention links closely with what Blommaert (1999a: 104) calls the 'discovery attitude', the defining aspect of which is

that, prior to colonization, the colonial territories were a blank slate on which Europeans had to map their categories. The categories that were created included names of ethnic groups, languages, and how they were to be described. The categories are of interest not only theoretically, but because of their impact on social life. Another concept related to invention is Said's 'being there' (Said, 1985: 156–7). The very fact of having been present in Africa, in the Middle East, India or South-East Asia, irrespective of length of stay or nature of association, is deemed adequate to claim knowledge of the native languages and cultures. Everyone who had some knowledge could present this knowledge as 'discovery'.

Missionaries, administrators and other colonial functionaries who wrote grammars and textbooks learnt their own versions of indigenous languages. The local languages that the missionaries and colonial administrators learnt were at times given special names by the colonized persons themselves. For example, in Zimbabwe, the variety of Shona spoken by the priests was referred to as *chibaba* – the language of the priest. These invented indigenous languages arose throughout the European empires and central to the claims being made is that the languages as they were described were products of the inadequate language skills of the missionary linguists. In other words, linguistic descriptions were what we might call *interlinguistic descriptions* based on European interlanguages (Fenton, 2004: 7).

There are substantial similarities between the notion of 'invention' and Anderson's (1991) 'imagined communities': Both point to the ways in which nations are imagined and narrated into being, and both stress the role of language, literacy and social institutions in that process. While Ranger (2004) has suggested that Anderson's use of 'imagined' may be preferable to his own use of 'invented', since it effectively captures the multidimensionality of the process of construction, we prefer to use what we see as the more dynamic, intentional and complex concerns that underlie the notion of invention. Thus, while Spear's (2003) point is well made that the notion of invention runs the danger of downplaying the agency of the colonized, leaving us with an impression of a gullible and malleable populace, it is also equally (if not more) dangerous to exaggerate the agency of the colonized. Arguments about the agency of the colonized need to foreground the severe constraints within which that agency might have been exercised.

Unlike Anderson, furthermore, we regard both languages and nations as dialectically co-constructed, and thus concur with Joseph (2004) in his critique of the one-sidedness of Anderson's formulation:

Anderson's constructionist approach to nationalism is purchased at the price of an essentialist outlook on languages. It seems a bargain to the sociologist or political scientist, to whom it brings explanatory simplicity not to mention ease. But ... it is a false simplicity. National languages and identities arise in tandem, dialectically, if you like, in a complex process that ought to be our focus of interest and study. (Joseph, 2004: 124)

Important here too is Woolard's argument that

'the historicization of language ... had such profound political reverberations, specifically in relation to consciousness of nation and national belonging, at least two centuries earlier than the conventional dates given for the phenomena of historicism and nationalism on which Anderson depends. (Woolard, 2004: 58)

Thus, while Anderson's notion of imagined community remains important here, it needs to be seen as both a dialectic process, with language and nation constructed together, and as located in a different time frame, with ways of thinking about time and language reframed in relation to nation.

Several important issues emerge here. First, the invention of tradition is about the creation of a past into which the present is inserted. Thus, these constructed histories are also about the constructed present. Secondly, a particular type of relationship between past and present is implied here, one characterized by linear development. Such a developmental view of history, which sees a continuous line of progress between the past and the present constitutes a very particular way of understanding time and change. We shall return later to discuss alternative and competing views of time and history that are equally plausible. Third, the process of invention was always one of co-construction. That is to say, the position from which others' languages and histories were invented was not a preformed set of extant ideologies, but rather was produced in the process. Thus:

Even if the European national imaginary of colonial states were derived from European imagination of itself, European colonialists were more a work in progress than fully formed, multiple rather than singular, diverse rather than uniform, contradictory rather than consistent, and at times a reflection of the despotism which was produced under colonial rule. (Mamdani, 1996: 39)

European colonizers invented themselves and others in a reciprocal process.

Finally, then, it was not just colonized languages that were invented but

also the languages of the colonizers. The invention of languages such as French entailed forging relations between language, citizenship and patriotism, and the military and national service were crucial in that respect. A French Army manual in the late 1800s, for example, made these associations explicit by insisting that recruits be taught that:

(1) we call our mother tongue the tongue that is spoken by our parents, and in part, by our mothers (that which is) spoken also by our fellow citizens and by the persons who inhabit the same place as we do; (2) our mother tongue is French. (quoted in Weber, 1976: 311 cited from Jaffe, 1999: 84).

The First World War (1914–1918), with its large numbers of recruits and deaths, continued to reinforce these European associations between language and citizenship.

An important starting point for understanding the invention of and specific ways of imagining language is, therefore, within the broader context of colonial invention. Our position that languages are inventions is consistent with observations that many structures, systems and constructs such as tradition, history or ethnicity, which are often thought of as natural parts of society, are inventions of a very specific ideological apparatus. To claim authenticity for such constructs, therefore, is to become subject to very particular discourses of identity. That is to say, while lived contemporary practices may create an authenticity of being and identification with certain traditions, languages and ethnicities, the history behind both their construction and maintenance needs to be understood in terms of its contingent constructedness.

## **Inventing Languages and Constructing Ways of Thinking about Language**

It was the metadiscursive regimes of European thought that produced the histories and the languages of the empire from the materials they found in the field. One of the great projects of European invention was Sir George Abraham Grierson's massive linguistic *Survey of India*, completed in 1928. A central problem for Grierson, as with many other linguists, was to decide on the boundaries between languages and dialects. Dialects tended to be considered spoken forms, while languages were accorded their special status according to other criteria such as regional similarities, family trees or literary forms. One of the problems with this, however, was that while people had terms for their dialects – or at least terms for other people's dialects (their own being considered the way one speaks) – they did not

have terms for these larger constructions, 'languages'. As Grierson explained:

Few natives at the present day are able to comprehend the idea connoted by the words of a language. Dialects they know and understand. They separate them and distinguish them with a meticulous, hair-splitting subtlety, which to us seems unnecessary and absurd, but their minds are not trained to grasp the conception so familiar to us, of a general term embracing a number of interconnected dialects. (Grierson, 1907: 350)

Grierson makes several important moves here. He positions himself as able to perceive the reality of languages while local knowledge is dismissed as on the one hand an irrelevantly hair-splitting obsession with difference and on the other an inability to grasp the broader concept of languages. Having thus opened up a position in favour of a European understanding of superordinate languages, he is then able to explain why:

... nearly all the language-names have had to be invented by Europeans. Some of them, such as Bengali, Assamese, and the like, are founded on words which have received English citizenship, and are not real Indian words at all, while others, like 'Hindustani', 'Bihari', and so forth, are based on already existing Indian names of countries and nationalities. (Grierson, 1907: 350)

While it is interesting at one level to observe simply that the names for these new entities were invented, the point of greater significance is that these were not just new names for extant objects (languages pre-existed the naming), but rather the invention and naming of new objects. The naming performatively called the languages into being. As suggested above, this invention of Indian languages has to be seen in the context of the larger colonial archive of knowledge. The British, as Lelyveld (1993: 194) points out, 'developed from their study of Indian languages not only practical advantage but an ideology of languages as separate, autonomous objects in the world, things that could be classified, arranged, and deployed as media of exchange'. This whole project was of course a cornerstone of the Orientalist construction of the colonial subject. Orientalism, suggests Ludden (1993: 261), 'began with the acquisition of the languages needed to gain reliable information about India. Indian languages became a foundation for scientific knowledge of Indian tradition built from data transmitted to Europeans by native experts'.

At the heart of the problem here is the underlying ideology of count-ability and singularity, reinforced by assumptions of a singular, essentialized language-object situated and physically located in concepts of space

founded on a notion of territorialization. The idea of linguistic enumerability and singularity is based on the dual notions of both languages and speakers of those languages being amenable to counting. It has been widely attested that there is a massive disparity between the number of languages that linguists believe exist and the number of languages people report themselves as speaking. Ethnologue, the Christian language preservation society, for example, notes the disparity between the close to 7000 languages that exist in the world according to their 'approach to listing and counting languages as though they were discrete, countable units', and the 40,000 or so names for different languages that are in use. As they point out, 'the definition of language one chooses depends on the purpose one has in identifying a language' (*Ethnologue*, 2005: np).

Nevertheless, many linguists interested in preservation are content to deal in terms of enumerative strategies that on the one hand reduce significant sociolinguistic concerns to the level of arithmetic, and on the other overlook both the problematic history of the construction of such languages and the contemporary interests behind their enumeration:

Over 95% of the world's spoken languages have fewer than one million native users, some 5000 have less than 100000 speakers and more than 3000 languages have fewer than 10000 speakers. A quarter of the world's spoken languages have fewer than 1000 users, and at least some 500 languages had in 1999 under a hundred speakers. (Skutnabb-Kangas, 2003: 32)

Mühlhäusler (2000: 358) views this position as a continuation of the tradition of segregational linguistics, which insists that 'languages can be distinguished and named'. To abstract languages, to count them as discrete objects, and to count the speakers of such languages, is to reproduce a very particular enumerative strategy. Yet the enumeration of speakers of a language is founded on a 'monolingual norm of speakerhood' (Hill, 2002: 128), a paradoxical state of affairs given that many language counters are also proponents of multilingualism. At the heart of such language enumeration is the same census ideology that has been such a cornerstone of the colonial imaginary (Anderson, 1991; Appadurai, 1993; Leeman, 2004).

Discussing language use in Papua New Guinea, Romaine (1994) asks how we come to terms with the problem that speakers may claim to speak a different language when linguistically it may appear identical. She goes on to point out that the:

... very concept of discrete languages is probably a European cultural artifact fostered by procedures such as literacy and standardization.