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Intertextual politics: Presence, erasure, and the Hopi language

Abstract: Forms of Hopi cultural knowledge, and the Hopi language in particular, circulate across Indigenous and settler speech communities. Circulation is a process of recontextualization. In connecting sites of usage, it brings into being different regimes of intertextuality that can either amplify or diminish Hopi presence. To illustrate this, I look at three instances in which outsiders recontextualize Hopi objects or language: archaeologists use potsherds to establish timelines, non-Hopi people use Hopi words as pet and brand names, and I use Hopi sentences for linguistic analysis in my own research. Each recontextualization threatens to erase Hopi presence in the here and now, which tribal members contest through acts of what I call *indexical tethering*. [*intertextuality, recontextualization, language, appropriation, Indigeneity, presence and erasure, Hopi*]

On a spring afternoon in 2018, an audience of 25 or so people gathered at the Hopi Cultural Preservation Office (HCPO). We—the staff of the HCPO and I, a volunteer research assistant—had earlier set up the shared conference room. The room itself was ordinary: beige walls illuminated by fluorescent panel lights, a long table surrounded by a dozen or so cushioned office chairs. The only suggestion that this room was on Hopi land, in the high desert of northeastern Arizona, was the thin layer of sand that was inevitably tracked in from the parking lot, especially during the windy months.

When I volunteered at the office, from 2016 to 2018, staff members met in this conference room with representatives from state government offices, a DNA scientist, Indigenous architects, environmental activists from across the Four Corners region, lawyers from the East Coast, curators from Chicago, international film crews, and academics seeking research permits, not to mention tribal members from each of the 12 Hopi villages.¹ The array of people with whom the HCPO staff interact reflects the wide range of issues they address and the reach of this small office, whose core crew has rarely exceeded more than eight employees. It also

suggests something of the intense curiosity that Hopi ways of life have sparked in tourists, new age spiritualists, collectors, and, of course, anthropologists and linguists since the late 19th century.

Despite the legacy of harmful intrusions from researchers, the HCPO has been at the leading edge of collaborative anthropology since the early 1990s. This work is detailed in *Footprints of Hopi History: Hopihiniwtiput Kukveni'at*, coedited by Leigh Kuwanwisiwma,² who served for almost three decades as the director of the HCPO, and by anthropologists Chip Colwell and T. J. Ferguson (Kuwanwisiwma, Ferguson, and Colwell 2018). The publication coincided with Kuwanwisiwma's retirement and presented an occasion for the office staff to commemorate his long tenure as director. He agreed to give a presentation about the new volume, and it was for this reason that we had prepared the conference room.

The seats filled up quickly. A few of the village community centers organized a trip to the office for their older residents, many of whom had grandchildren in tow. Employees from the other offices housed under the Hopi Tribe's Department of Natural Resources filtered in, along with employees from other tribal services and programs. Most employees identify as Hopi, but some are settlers or are from neighboring Indigenous nations.

Kuwanwisiwma is an engaging speaker, by turns comical, reflective, punchy. He wove between English and Hopi, deftly addressing the varied audience and often recapitulating in one language what he had just said in another. About 45 minutes into his discussion, the topic of migrations arose.

As those in attendance would know, the migrations in question are journeys that clans undertook from their places of emergence to the center place, or today's Hopi mesas (Kuwanwisiwma and Ferguson 2004; Hopkins et al. 2021). The clans embarked on these

journeys at the behest of Måasaw, a spiritual guardian and caretaker who instructed clan ancestors to learn about this land by walking to its distant reaches. They ventured out on different routes, undertaking “circuitous journeys” before eventually converging and coming to rest at the “spiritual center” (Hopkins et al. 2021, 18–22). Migrations are characterized not only by the wide travels of ancestors, but also, ultimately, by an inward pull and a shared connection to the center place.

Although the clans converged, they did not assimilate. The distinct experiences and insight they gained on their various routes are passed down to their descendants, contemporary clan members, but they are generally not shared beyond this group. Clan differences have been an integral part of Hopi life since “time immemorial,” as many tribal members put it. Beyond clan membership, which is inherited matrilineally, Hopi people learn different kinds of knowledge according to which religious societies they are initiated into, which village they live in, and even which family lineage they are born into. People continually negotiate these lines of differentiation and ties of belonging, and maintaining their balance is integral to the proper unfolding of ceremonial and everyday life (Ishii 2001; Richland 2008a, 2008b, 2009; Whiteley 1998). It is not surprising, then, that Kuwanwisiwma spoke carefully about the migrations, without introducing clan-specific knowledge. After all, listening in were non-Hopi audience members, but the Hopi people present belonged to a wide variety of clans, as is the case for most gatherings at the office.

Addressing the audience, Kuwanwisiwma explained that as a result of the migrations, “today in the Southwest, millions and millions of pottery sherds” are scattered. These potsherds are considered “footprints” (*itàakuku*) that clan ancestors left along their routes as evidence that they adhered to Måasaw’s instructions (Ferguson, Berlin, and Kuwanwisiwma 2004;

Kuwanwisiwma and Ferguson 2004; Richland 2018). After this comment, Kuwanwisiwma paused, struck by a memory. Some of the archaeologists with whom the office collaborated sought to understand the potsherds by going backward in time, he remarked, tracing a trajectory out and away from the present, leaving it behind. But “Hopi doesn’t do that,” he reminded his audience with a conspiratorial chuckle.

Hopi,³ explained Kuwanwisiwma, is a living social collective, present in the here and now. Accordingly, one does not leave the present behind in order to understand Hopi history. Instead, the past is continually drawn into the present through knowledge held by contemporary clan descendants. While Kuwanwisiwma’s remarks were confined to a discussion of history and potsherd interpretation, I draw inspiration from his discussion to think more broadly about the circulation of Hopi cultural knowledge and language, and its relation to presence and erasure.⁴

Kuwanwisiwma’s correction of the backward trajectory invoked by some archaeologists is a vital statement of Hopi presence. As I will elaborate shortly, it asserts that Hopi is a grounding center to which semiotic objects, like potsherds, as well as cultural knowledge and even language are connected. While such things may circulate into new settings, recontextualized by outsiders, they always retain their ties to Hopi. Their momentum is centripetal: like the migrations, they bear a connection to the center. This kind of circulation positions Hopi as a lively mediating presence, not some source that can be left behind.

Similar corrections and statements of presence were expressed by many Hopi friends and colleagues with whom I’ve spoken over the past five years. They arose most often in response to outsiders who recontextualized forms and products of Hopi knowledge. Such occasions were common. Owing to the intense (uninvited) interest in Hopi ways of life over the past century, artifacts, imagery, and language have been widely disseminated. Unlike people in other

ethnographic settings (Davis 2018; Munn 1992), in which the increased circulation of an object can amplify its value for its steward(s), Hopi community members often encounter the prospect of wider dissemination with concern. In fact, increased circulation can diminish, even erase Hopi interpretations of their own artifacts, imagery, and language (Coombe 1998; Irvine and Gal 2000).

The relationship between circulation and erasure is illuminated by the concept of “recontextualization” (Bauman and Briggs 1990; Urban and Silverstein 1996).

Recontextualization is based on the insight, from Peircean semiotics, that signs do not move of their own accord; it thus emphasizes that signs must be “take[n] up” and “reframe[d]” by actors in specific, historically situated events of discursive interaction (Gal 2015, 231). Such a process is “transformational” (Bauman and Briggs 1990, 75). We can witness these transformations unfold by observing what a semiotic object “brings with it from its earlier context(s)” of use—and notably what it does *not* carry forward—as it gains a newly “emergent form, function, and meaning” through events of recontextualization (75).

In what follows, I take up three contemporary instances in which outsiders recontextualized the Hopi language and other forms of cultural knowledge. Through these recontextualizations, different semiotic objects were extracted from the frameworks of value and interpretation through which they gain meaning for Hopi tribal members. As a result, these meanings were denied and marginalized. Countering this, different Hopi interlocutors enacted what I term *indexical tethering*, insisting that the language and other signs remain dynamically connected to their ever-unfolding contexts of use within the Hopi community. These interlocutors did not seek to foreclose recontextualization altogether, but instead reshaped

patterns of circulation, creating emergent intertextual networks that centered Hopi and invited outsiders into more appropriate, even “good” relation with this social collective (TallBear 2019).

I turn now to elaborate on Kuwanwisiwma’s discussion of potsherds in order to discuss intertextuality, indexical tethering, and their relation to presence and erasure. Two further sets of examples follow. First, I examine an instance in which a tourist, seemingly interested in new age spiritualism or heritage appreciation, used the Hopi word *kiva* as the name for his dog. I also link this to a parallel use of *tàapu’at* as part of a brand image. Second, I discuss the translation of sentences between Hopi and English from my own linguistic fieldwork, which I conducted not as an HCPO volunteer but as a linguist steeped in Anglo-American ideologies about language and knowledge. While the recontextualized objects are diverse, I show that a similar intertextual politics of presence and erasure transpires across these three sets of examples.

Potsherds: Presencing Hopi, tethering signs

The book discussion organized by the HCPO staff fell toward the end of the 18 months I spent volunteering at the office. There was rarely a slow day. The staff worked together to affirm ongoing connections to material in museological and archival collections; to lands, waterways, and archaeological sites across the vast Hopi ancestral territory; and to other instantiations of Hopi clan knowledge that have “traveled” far beyond the mesas. By affirming these connections, the staff insisted that Hopi people and Hopi ways of being persist. They pushed back against those who, however unwittingly, failed to recognize Hopi as a coeval social formation (Fabian 1983). It’s with this background in mind that I listened to Kuwanwisiwma’s discussion of pottery sherds.

Transcript 1 shows a short stretch of Kuwanwisiwma’s discussion.⁵ The transcript presents word-by-word translations underneath Hopi utterances, along with a more idiomatic

translation in italics. Further, directional expressions and spatiotemporal locators, or deictics,⁶ are underlined. Line 1 comes immediately after Kuwanwisiwma said, “Archaeologists are helping us retrace the pottery in this book, going backwards, see?”

Transcript 1. Reorienting trajectories

- 1 and I told the archaeologists
- 2 hey wait a minute!
- 3 Hopi doesn't go backwards
- 4 heh (.) they got it the reverse
- 5 the archaeologists go back in time and try to retrace it noo?
right
see?
- 6 like that archaeology
- 7 and I told them Hopi doesn't do that.
- 8 we start from here noo?
right
don't we?
- 9 yep itam yeesiwa
here we be.inhabited
we live here
- 10 pangqw pu' itam u'ni'yyungw(?) haqaqw itam pew öki
from.there then we remember from.where we here arrive
from there, we remember where we came from to arrive here

Kuwanwisiwma evokes two differing kinds of movement in lines 3–5 and 8–10. He notes that the archaeologists approached the potsherds by going “back in time” (line 5). This is a trajectory that moves out and away from the present toward some unknown horizon. It is the “reverse” (line 4) of the way Hopi people would understand these pottery sherds. Hopi people,

he reminds the audience, “start from *here*,” emphasizing the deictic indicating proximity to speaker, “here” (line 8). Continuing, he picks up again on this deictic in the next line, where he says “we live here” using the Hopi *yep* (here/now). *Yep*, as opposed to other similar proximal deictics, has emphatic overtones (Malotki 1983, 22). This emphasis is discursively underlined as well by the fronting of the deictic. Across lines 8 and 9, then, Kuwanwisiwma is explicitly making a statement about Hopi presence “here” (for parallel discussion, see Hopkins et al. 2021, 15).

This emphasis on starting *and being* “here,” being present, builds in line 10. In this line, he describes an arrival “here,” *pew öki* (arrived [to] here). Notice that this line is just the opposite of the movement he ascribes to archaeologists. Going back in time is an act of departing that proceeds away from an origin, leaving it behind, whereas the movement he ascribes to Hopi people is one of arriving “here,” an ever-emergent destination.

Further, in line 10, Kuwanwisiwma characterizes knowledge of the migrations as a “memory” held by living clan members.⁷ This suggests that migrations are mediated by living people in the present: it is in relation to the here and now, to the people who hold the memories, that Hopi history is meaningful. This is certainly not to suggest that the past is unimportant or irrelevant. Rather, the past does not draw one away from “here” but becomes folded into the present (Koyiyumptewa and Colwell-Chanthaphonh 2011). Across lines 8–10, Kuwanwisiwma asserts that Hopi is “here” as a starting point, an emergent destination, and a constant mediating presence.

The different movements contrasted in Transcript 1 present a way to think about trajectories of circulation and the intertextual networks they bring into being, in relation to not only potsherds but also language. In an early reflection on the circulation of Indigenous

languages, Laverne Masayeva Jeanne (1992, 24) observed that scholarship on Native American languages has resulted in the development of stable institutional structures for professional linguists, but it has not, with few exceptions, produced meaningful returns for Indigenous communities, who have “been involved primarily as a source of data and have not reaped the benefits. . . . which could, in principle, accrue to them.” As reclamation efforts reckon with this legacy of reducing Indigenous languages to linguistic data, there has been a renewed effort to recognize and uphold local understandings of language (Leonard 2017). This has led to more attention to the transformations that recontextualization can bring about. Scholars are thus increasingly describing “struggles to control the indexical associations of a code that is being decontextualized from ‘traditional’ community settings and cultural forms and recontextualized . . . in new written genres and institutional settings” (Schwartz and Dobrin 2016, 116).

Indexical associations, within a Peircean semiotic framework, refer to those elements of a sign’s meaning that arise from relations with its object, that is, relations of contiguity, copresence, or causality (Peirce 1958–66, chap. 2, 227–30, chap. 3, 305; for elaboration on this point, see Silverstein 1976, 1998, 2003). Typical examples of indexicality include the relationship between smoke and fire, a knock at the door and an impending arrival, and the relationship between “I” and the speaker who utters it. The meaning of an index, explains Constantine V. Nakassis (2018, 289), “can’t be fully specified solely by appeal to transcontextual rule, law, or essence, but only relative to other arrays of sign tokens that . . . reflexively frame and determine the value/reference of such an indexical sign (if only for then, there, and them).” That is to say, indexical associations are inherently unstable and particularly susceptible to modification across events of recontextualization. In the same vein, stabilizing indexical associations requires constant reinforcement.

Paul Kroskrity (1993, 1998, 2000) and Erin Debenport (2015) describe the heightened attention paid to indexical associations of Arizona Tewa and Keiwa (a pseudonym), two Indigenous languages of the Southwest. The stakes are high when it comes to ritual speech, like fixed songs and prayers, for which “innovation is neither desired nor tolerated” among Arizona Tewa community members (Kroskrity 1998, 104). In such discursive contexts, the potential transformations between successive enactments of a prayer or song are minimized, so that there is as little variation or modification as possible. Such efforts to minimize transformation across events of recontextualization sustain “highly conservative, traditionalizing modes of creating textual authority” (Briggs and Bauman 1992, 149), and they do so by establishing indexical connection to a projected original, authentic source.

Like Tewa and Keiwa speakers, Hopi interlocutors carefully managed recontextualizations of their language. Yet questions of tradition and innovation did not seem to be at issue, at least for the cases discussed in this article (perhaps because none involved the recontextualization of ritual speech or prayer). Rather, it was the assertion of presence, against a specter of erasure, that came to the fore as the language was recontextualized.

Assertions of presence, like Kuwanwisiwma’s, are dialogic responses to recontextualizations that effect erasure. Rosemary Coombe (1998) describes a form of erasure that is all too common when it comes to the recontextualization of Indigenous imagery and, as will be seen, language. Writing about sports mascots featuring caricatures of Indigenous bodies, she explains that “the most complicated of the injuries effected by . . . sports fantasies” is that “they make mythic and imaginary images of Native Americans more visible than they *are as living peoples with contemporary concerns and pressing political problems*” (Coombe 1998, 189; emphasis mine). Indigenous people are cast as belonging to a then and there, never a here

and now. Importantly, the denial of Indigenous presence does not depend on romanticized or fantastic projections of Indigeneity. Erasure can take a much more mundane route. Following Judith T. Irvine and Susan Gal, I understand erasure as a semiotic process that pares down a complex social field to peripheralize certain actors, activities, or things such that the existence of others can be inflated (Irvine and Gal 2000, 38). Kuwanwisiwma's discussion of potsherds further shows that erasure can operate through particular kinds of intertextual organization.

Together with Michael Silverstein (2013), we can envision how sites of usage are connected through successive events of recontextualization, which in turn bring into being wider networks of intertextual relation. These networks have "emergently fixed and tiered structures"; some sites of usage become authoritative centers amplified by citation and other forms of reference, while others fade into peripheral nodes (Silverstein 2013, 329). Thus understood, acts of intertextual erasure exclude Indigenous people from the very networks of interaction in which instances of their language or knowledge circulate. They are relegated to the outskirts, a distant source from which semiotic objects have become untethered, like loose threads.

Indexical "tethering" counters this marginalization by maintaining connection across events of recontextualization, reattaching the loose threads. This means that even as a given instantiation of the language circulates, it is not completely severed from its frameworks of interpretation in the Hopi community. Rather, it continually references them. For instance, any effort to use potsherds as evidence for a chronology of human habitation in the Southwest would necessarily have to reckon with their status as footprints left behind by ancestors of contemporary Hopi people.

Acts of tethering do not seek to minimize transformations in order to uphold a "traditionalizing" authority, as is often invoked in ritual speech or prayer (Briggs and Bauman

1992). In fact, tethering can be a delicate interactional move precisely because Hopi interlocutors use it to resist fixing or typifying meanings. Countering erasure demands cultivating a dynamic presence, one that does not deny that Hopi is “ever changing,” as one friend put it. This particular kind of presence was enacted, as will be seen most clearly in the final set of examples, through asserting the limits of one’s authority over Hopi knowledge or language. Much as refusals can be generative (McGranahan 2016; Richland 2009, 2021; Simpson 2007, 2014), enacting limits brings into being the community’s emergent, expansive nature.

Genericization, from pet names to brand images

In the Southwest, it is common to see Hopi words and imagery incorporated into a wide range of media: street signs, clothing, even tattoos. The increased, everyday visibility of Indigenous languages can counter a narrative of Indigenous disappearance. Consider how Jenny L. Davis (2018, 110), citizen of the Chickasaw Nation and linguistic anthropologist, describes shifts in the Chickasaw linguistic landscape after the language was increasingly used to name events, organizations, and services:

Programs given names in Chickasaw are then represented in announcements in the *Chickasaw Times*, signs for departments in various Chickasaw Nation buildings, and as discussed in the previous chapter, T-shirts and other memorabilia for those programs. For example, the *Chikasha holisoplich* honor program provides stoles to qualifying graduates, which are then worn during university graduation ceremonies both locally in Oklahoma and throughout the United States.

Davis’s description evokes a network of dense intertextual reference, which she describes as amplifying the presence of the Chickasaw Nation. Although she mentions one instance in which the language was felt to be inappropriately used, a point to which I will return, by and large these

naming practices function “as a performative act through which people, places, and things are made (more) Chickasaw” (103).

A similar linguistic landscape is visible on the Hopi Reservation; many families label things around the home with Hopi words, schools feature the language in the hallways, and children are routinely given Hopi names. The HCPO frequently fields calls from Hopi-based organizations and tribal services that need help with short translations, since they are incorporating more Hopi language into their events. But the Hopi language is also drawn into other intertextual networks that do not result in the kind of amplification that Davis describes. Rather, they diminish “Hopiness” through a process of genericization. This is exemplified by two instances of naming: the use of *kiva* as a dog name and the use of *tàapu’at* in the logo of a kombucha brand.

The prospect of using *kiva* as a dog name arose one day when I was answering the main HCPO phone line. This task usually fell to the office manager, but on exceptionally busy days, I would cover the front desk, taking down messages or transferring callers to the appropriate staff member. On occasion, however, a *pahaana* (Anglo/white person/settler) would call with a request that seemed out of place for a busy government office. These kinds of calls were familiar to the staff and soon became familiar to me. Over the years, the office has received a wide range of communications from correspondents seeking to develop some kind of affiliation with the Hopi community, one often predicated on the deep spiritual and environmental connection that Hopi people are presumed to embody. Consider the following call, from someone searching for a dog name.

HANNAH. Cultural Preservation, this is Hannah.

CALLER. Yeah, hi. I used to have a dog named Kiva, and we're getting a new dog and wanted to give him a Hopi name. Can you recommend a name? What do the Hopi usually call their dogs?

H. . . . Oh. Uhhh. Just hold on a sec and let me ask around the office.

This question elicits a groan from the staff, as well as some rolled eyes and furrowed brows. *Pòoko* is suggested by a staff member, and I relay this to the caller:

H. Hi again. OK, how about Pòoko?

C. Pòoko. OK. Can you tell me the meaning of that name?

H. Umm. Dog.

The caller seemed disappointed with this answer, suggesting he may have been after a more evocative name, but he thanked me politely before we disconnected. The HCPO policy is to handle phone calls with professional courtesy, which is not to say without humor, no matter the request. One of the research assistants, a woman in her mid-30s, excelled at this kind of interaction. Like many of the staff, she grew up on the Hopi Reservation but had spent time in different cities in the Southwest completing her education. She had a real knack for responding to these requests, listening to callers and explaining kindly but firmly why their proposed ways of honoring or engaging with Hopi practices might be misplaced. I asked her about this call during an interview. She spoke from her experience not only as a tribal employee but also as a clan member, mother, and tribal member.

COLLEAGUE. I mean, it's funny at first, but then you—it's kind of scary to think that we're using the word *kiva*, in a way, in a way to, uh . . . I mean *kiva* is a ceremonial chamber. It's kind of like an important place.

HANNAH. So that word in particular.

C. So we wouldn't name our dog Kiva either unless maybe it lived at the *kiva* [laughs]. You know? Something like that, or like, umm, I don't know! Maybe somebody was that clan? [Laughs.]

The memory of this phone call elicited mixed feelings. It is “funny” that some *pahaana* would name a slobbery furry creature after a place of ceremony and prayer, let alone call a government office to share this information and ask for a second name. And yet the prospect of its use as a dog name is also disconcerting, even “scary.” Choosing the word *kiva* is certainly transgressive, but the word itself is not part of a restricted register used only in ceremonial contexts by people invested with certain clan or religious society responsibilities (Debenport 2015; Kroskrity 1998). What partly makes this act of naming disconcerting is that it profanes the term by associating it with a dog. This is much like an example that Davis (2018, 88) mentions, in which a T-shirt commemorating a Chickasaw language gathering was put on a pet dog. Some felt that this was degrading, since it linked Chickasaw speakers and dogs. But there is another, more subtle process of erasure that using the word *kiva* effects, one that my colleague in fact resists in her response.

Notice that she offered two hypothetical situations in which one might, conceivably, name a dog Kiva. Her laughter, hesitation, and hedging suggest that they are unusual, but even as hypotheticals they are revealing. In one scenario, the dog lives at the kiva, and in the second, the owner is affiliated in some way with the kiva through their clan. The dog, therefore, is figured as part of the kiva, either by being nearby or by having an extended clan or kinship relation. Even as a dog name, the word is indexically connected to the kiva as a specific, locatable site in the world, used by members of certain clans or religious societies. The word has been stretched a bit, yet it remains indexically tethered in a way that it is not when used by the caller.

As the caller recontextualizes *kiva* as a dog name, separating it from any clan or spatial connection to an actual kiva, this indexical connection is weakened. *Kiva* is one of the few Hopi words that has been anglicized through its circulation into new discursive contexts like those linked with new age spiritualism, Southwest tourism, heritage appreciation (Hill 2002), or the tribal art market. Other such words include *kachina* (from *katsina*) and *kokopelli* (from *kookopölö*). All these words have connections to ceremonial activities, suggesting something of the selective image that outsiders often have of Hopi. We might consider the loosening of *kiva*'s indexical connections as a precursor to the more thorough untethering undergone by semiotic objects like *kokopelli* and *kachina*.

One would be hard-pressed *not* to encounter the word *kokopelli* or the corresponding humpbacked flute player in the Southwest, where it is ubiquitous. But its connection to the Hopi *kookopölö* is tenuous. In a 2019 episode of the radio program *Native America Calling*,⁸ three commentators, from Santa Clara Pueblo, Pueblos of Zuni and Laguna, and Hopi, explained that the *kokopelli* has become “bigger” than any discrete figure that is particular to their communities. That is, the *kokopelli* has lost its specificity. Daryn Melvin, a Hopi tribal member and linguist, explained that *kookopölö* is the word for a “robber fly,” and there is also a *katsina*, a spirit being, that takes its name from this insect because they share qualities: a humped back and a prodigious appetite for copulation. The *kokopelli*, however, is an amalgam of various Indigenous figures, a “pan-native symbol” that now indexes Southwest spiritualism generally. Thus, the unique meanings this figure has for Hopi, or Zuni, or Laguna, or Santa Clara, are both “evacuated” and “subordinated,” in Peter Whiteley’s (2003, 718) terms.

The word *kookopölö*, in short, has become genericized. This is one of the most common semiotic processes by which Hopi semiotic objects become untethered. One need look no further

than Tapuat Kombucha to see this genericization in process and to consider how it might be curbed. I first encountered Tapuat Kombucha on a poster at a self-styled holistic grocery store in Chicago. The poster explained that *Tapuat* is a Hopi name for “mother earth,” “connection,” and “renewal,” and the poster featured it alongside a labyrinthine symbol with a human figure in the middle. After some discussion with a number of speakers, the closest Hopi word to this that I’ve encountered is *tàapu’at* (his/her cradleboard).⁹ The kombucha company’s website elaborates on the meaning behind the name that it has incorporated into its brand image (emphasis my own):

Although the Tapuat symbol has been attributed to the Hopi, similar maze-type symbols have been found in other tribes and cultures around the world. Nearly all Indigenous people recognize this symbol as the icon for the cycle of human life.¹⁰

The “Tapuat symbol” moves from being “attributed to the Hopi” to, more broadly, something found in “other tribes and cultures around the world” and recognized by “nearly all Indigenous people,” becoming, ultimately, a symbol of “human life.” As the attribution and meaning become wider in scope, any indexical connection to Hopi is progressively undone. In and by genericization, Hopi becomes raw material for recontextualization.

The use of Indigenous bodies, imagery, and language as trademarks, or their incorporation into the aesthetics of commercial goods, grew markedly alongside the development of early federal trademark laws in the US in the late 19th century. As Rosemary Coombe (1998, 175) explains, such signs formed part of “a pool” of “recognized signs of social difference”: foreign, mythical, or unfamiliar enough to allow the good to be differentiated from other similar merchandise, yet not so different as to be unsettling. They were an approachable, tamed mark of alterity that manufacturers could claim as theirs. Such trademarks form part of a longer history of

appropriation dating back to the 1700s. At the heart of this appropriation, however, lies an ambivalent tension: “The glorification of Indian imagery, often by and for the benefit of non-Indians . . . simultaneously subordinates Indian people” (Riley and Carpenter 2016, 863; see also Deloria 1998).

Many trademarks that adopt signs of Indigeneity are markedly derogatory, like the former name of the NFL franchise now known as the Washington Football Team (NCAI 2013; for discussion of some Indigenous support, see Riley and Carpenter 2016). The name, stylized by critics as “R*dskins,” had been contested since 1968, especially by Suzan Shown Harjo, but it was not changed until 2020, thanks to pressure from protests, social media hashtag campaigns, threats from major corporate sponsors, and court cases arguing that the mark should be retired because it is disparaging.¹¹

Is the use of *Tapuat* as part of a brand image really comparable to this? *Tapuat* is not in any way pejorative, nor is *kiva*. These differences matter. Yet Coombe’s (1998, 189) reflection on the harm wrought by mascots and associated sports imagery—“that they make mythic and imaginary images of Native Americans more visible than they are as living people with contemporary concerns and pressing political problems”—justifies considering these different (mis)uses together. *Tapuat Kombucha* reveals more than questions of debasing the sacred, as one might argue regarding *kiva* (or *katsina* or *kookopölö*), or the amplification of a pejorative term, as one might argue regarding sports mascots and team names. The kombucha brand reveals the extent to which appropriation is not just about the “what” but the “how.”

Relevant here is how a sign is recontextualized, not just its nature. It bears asking: What kinds of intertextual networks are brought into being in and through new acts of recontextualization? Do they expand in all directions, or do they loop back to their sources?

Whose frameworks of value and interpretation do they amplify, and whose are pushed aside?
Ultimately, who is part of these networks, and who is not?

Reshaping intertextual networks

When the issue arises of Hopi material being used commercially, tribal members often contend that dissemination quickly spins out of control. They describe a rushing or gushing forth that is impossible to rein in, a centrifugal spread. Consider the following reaction to the use of Hopi clan designs signifying water. This was expressed by the same colleague with whom I discussed the use of *kiva* as a dog name.

In Transcript 2, I have used the horizontal axis to more clearly express the poetic form of the text, aligning different repetitions of analytic interest, following Michael Silverstein (1998, 2004; see also Tedlock 1983).

A sense that the design starts to gain momentum, being reproduced on ever-new sorts of commodities, is expressed across lines 3–8. My colleague poetically conveys this by repeating “it’s on,” at the beginning of each line, until she runs out of examples. She evokes a sensation of uncontrolled spread. Not only are the designs circulating outside the Hopi community, but, perhaps even more importantly, this mode of circulation ignores norms of access and use that surround clan-specific designs, which hold even among tribal members, as I will discuss shortly.

To curb unchecked dissemination, some Hopi people have sought to stop the circulation of materials altogether. For instance, certain ceremonies are no longer open to the public. This prevents photographs from being posted on the internet or accounts published in academic texts, at least by *pahaanam*. This is a strong way of reconfiguring intertextual networks: simply disallowing any recontextualization by outsiders whatsoever. But there are other ways that intertextual networks can be reconfigured, as suggested in Transcript 2.

(“compensation”), or simply through an explicit statement of indexical connection to Hopi (“attribution”). Although she critiques the commodification of the designs in lines 4 and 8, her response is in fact more about asserting presence through ongoing connections than problematizing commercial use.

My colleague’s response to the surfboard company’s use of clan designs is a question not just of being included in their intertextual networks, but ultimately of reconfiguring those networks. Tethering aims to incorporate the surfboard company into the clan design’s ongoing and always-evolving circulatory trajectories as they are made by tribal members’ own acts of recontextualization. Indeed, negotiating how and by whom a Hopi sign can be recontextualized is not something that occurs only across Hopi and non-Hopi communities. As Justin B. Richland (2008b, 262) has written, Hopi people “are deeply engaged in diagnosing the limits of knowledge and its exchange” among themselves. In relation to this, consider something my colleague said during our interview:

I mean, it’s [appropriation] been around for a long time. Even the Grateful Dead tried to bank on some of the iconic images of potteries! And that’s a hard thing to say no to, because it’s ever changing. Like Nampeyo [a renowned First Mesa potter], she did her work based on our archaeological designs that were at Sikyatki, you know, ruins, you know what I mean? So we do that all the time as Hopi people, because we know what they mean and we respect it and we try to leave it to whoever they belong to, as far as clan-wise.

Refusing recontextualization can be difficult, precisely because Hopi is meant not to be a static entity or way of life, but a social collective that is “ever changing”: connected to an enduring, inherited past but also emergent in the here and now. Even Nampeyo was inspired by designs she encountered in villages that are no longer inhabited physically (they are still, and always will be, occupied spiritually). Drawing inspiration from past designs is common; it’s a

way that clan relations are named and carried forth. But such uses should not usurp others' inheritances or relations. Being part of a clan means having not only the privilege to use certain designs but also the discipline to refrain from claiming things that belong to someone else, leaving them to their rightful stewards.

Leaving something alone, choosing *not* to use a design, does not contract Hopi presence. In fact, through these self-limits, different clan members recognize and express that Hopi extends beyond them. It is an expansive social formation that can never be totally encompassed by one of its component parts (Ishii 2001). Imposing a self-limit is a way of recognizing others and positioning oneself in good relation to them (TallBear 2019).

It is already a delicate interactional achievement to appropriately situate oneself within ties of belonging and lines of differentiation among fellow Hopi people. Extending this web of relationality to encompass outsiders is all the more intricate, requiring one to correct presumptions about the Hopi language and refuse its extraction, without at the same time fixing the meaning of a given sign or claiming the authority to speak for the collective as a whole. The final set of examples, taken from my own elicitation sessions, considers more closely the discursive work of bringing outsiders in.

Suspending reference and pragmatics, Hopilavayi in linguistic elicitation

Despite the new and varied settings in which Indigenous languages appear—hats, branded commodities, public signs—the production of descriptive materials, like dictionaries, texts, and pedagogical works, remains among the principal means through which Indigenous languages are recontextualized. Although seemingly more mundane, these sites of recontextualization can also erase Indigenous presence. Linguistic elicitation, a common research activity in the fields of language documentation and description, requires linguists and speakers to engage in acts of

calibration across grammatical codes, language ideologies, and forms of linguistic expertise. Historically, such calibration was decidedly one-sided. In the 19th century ethnologists like Daniel Garrison Brinton concluded that Indigenous languages lacked regular sound patterns and grammatical rules. Such conclusions reflected attempts to describe these “new” languages through the lens of the more familiar categories and structures drawn from the analysts’ own languages. Although erroneous, these conclusions provided a foundation from which to argue that the speakers of such languages were mentally deficient, incapable of abstract thought (Brinton 1890, 1888; for a canonical critique, see Boas 1889).

Data from elicitation sessions is no longer put to this kind of social-evolutionist agenda. Yet in making “linguistic data” out of Indigenous languages, the legacy of unbalanced calibration and the subordination of local language ideologies and ontologies to those that linguists gain in their training can endure (De Korne and Leonard 2017; Dobrin and Berson 2011; Leonard 2017). As M. Eleanor Nevins (2013, 32) explains, linguistic elicitation makes its object by “identif[ying] and bound[ing] off grammar and lexicon from their contingency in the spoken life of the community.” This activity creates a space in which the language can be purified, where abstract structural regularities and vocabulary can be teased out from everything else that accompanies actual, situated, discursive interaction. My attempts to pare down the language in this way, even momentarily, were promptly corrected by the speakers with whom I worked.

Along with the ethnographic interviews and volunteering described above, I held a handful of elicitation sessions in which I met with one to two speakers at a time to verify the findings of previous work and delve deeper into the expression of knowledge and possessive relations in Hopilavayi, as community members call the Hopi language.¹² In these meetings, I

asked speakers to translate sentences from English to Hopi or provide opinions on Hopi sentences I constructed or found in published work. Across our meetings, my interlocutors continually challenged my propensity to purify the language in the way that Nevins (2013) describes.

One way of understanding the different approaches to language that arose in my elicitation sessions is through Willard van Orman Quine's (1940, 23–26) distinction between “use” and “mention.” A word is “used” when it is employed to refer to something, with full pragmatic effect, within some particular social context. By contrast, to “mention” a word is to treat it as a pure signifier or sign vehicle, as if its referential and pragmatic meanings could be suspended. Regardless of whether something like pure mention, without any residual use, is in fact possible, in what follows my interlocutor consistently refused and corrected my presumption that Hopilavayi could be merely mentioned and that, concomitantly, linguistic elicitation can be held apart from “real” events of communication. Although my suspension of reference and pragmatics did not put forth the kinds of romanticized images of Hopi people that arose in the previous set of recontextualizations, it was nonetheless a denial of Hopi presence.

My first elicitation sessions took place with an older woman who has worked with a number of other researchers and is familiar with language work. I asked her to translate “My dog is outside.” Because we were not engaged in an *actual* event of communication, I did not expect her to prefer “our” over “my,” which is reported as common by the *Hopi Dictionary Hopiikwa Lavàytutuveni* (Hopi Dictionary Project 1998, 872). Along with respect for clan differentiation, discussed above, the recognition of others to whom one is related is another aspect of relationality that Hopi people value. So just as lines of differentiation are respected, so too are ties of belonging routinely acknowledged.

Transcript 3a shows the exchange between me (H) and my interlocutor, whom I have labeled “Hopi Speaker” (HS). At crucial points in the transcript, the deictics are underlined, and two repairs (lines 6–7 and 9–10) are indented.

Transcript 3a. Instances of pronoun repair.

- 1 H: um OK what about (.) my dog is outside
- 2 HS: you know umm let me
- 3 let me just point out this one maybe we’ll change it
- 4 I don’t know but
- 5 I’m-I’m not real (.) comfortable with saying just my as an individual
- 6 it’s alw-
- 7 I always include (.) whoever is there ((sweeping arm around))
- 8 I mean familywise.
- 9 but we never (.) you know
- 10 I was taught that we’re never here alone so
- 11 we don’t say I as opposed to saying we or our
- 12 H: great (.) then you can give me our when I say my if you feel like that’s
- 13 more appropriate

In this exchange, I asked my interlocutor to “animate” a particular sentence in Hopi (line 1). She, however, took on the role of a principal in Erving Goffman’s (1979, 17) sense: In contrast to an animator, who serves merely as a “sounding box,” a principal is “someone whose position is established by the words that are spoken, someone whose beliefs have been told,

someone who has committed himself to what the words say . . . a person active in some particular social identity or role.” Declining to say “my” (line 5) is a refusal to inhabit the role of the kind of person who would say “my.” It is a refusal to treat elicitation sessions as if they were somehow set apart from other interactions among Hopi speakers, as if in this space, for the purposes of my research, I could expect my interlocutor to weaken or leave unacknowledged her kin and clan ties.

Her explicit statement of discomfort with the term *my* is an act of tethering, an effort to ensure that utterances are pragmatically apposite, rather than just grammatically “correct.” This correction carries through something of the discursive context of the Hopi speech community (namely kin relationality) when such an utterance is reproduced in field notes, archival materials, and grammatical descriptions. This explicit correction was further accompanied by a more subtle act of presencing that can be discerned across the transcript.

Note that even as this speaker says she is uncomfortable saying “my” (line 5) and prefers to say “we” and “our” (line 11), positioning herself as a member of some larger collective, the transition from the first-person singular possessive to the first-person plural possessive is a point of friction. In line 6, she starts to say “it’s always,” using an impersonal pronoun indicating a normative statement rather than one spoken from an individual perspective. She then immediately makes a repair in line 7, replacing “it’s always” with “I always,” to indicate that she is speaking from her own perspective. A similar repair recurs shortly after. In line 9, she begins a statement with the first-person plural pronoun “we never,” again speaking for others beyond herself, but then hesitates and repeats the statement, fronting an additional clause in line 10: “*I was taught that we’re never.*” In so doing, she demotes herself to the patient of a passive verb.

Through these repairs, the speaker circumscribed her statements by either emphasizing that they are made from her perspective alone or grounding them within a teaching relationship. Both are ways of expressing the existence of a larger, differentiated collective, a kind of recognition that regularly arose among my interlocutors. The refusal to speak on behalf of the whole is generative, in Audra Simpson's (2007, 2014) sense. It opens up space for the possibility of other voices, other opinions, other tribal members' understandings of the language. These repairs are not discursive attenuations of presence but moments when this interlocutor is sorting out how to be in good relation with fellow tribal members in real time. This is something I have made difficult by interpellating her as a Hopi-wide authority and presenting a pragmatically inappropriate sentence.

Not only did this interlocutor take care to properly establish her positionality, but she also invited me to better position myself through her use of "we" in line 3: "let me just point out this one, maybe *we* 'll change it." Here she gently rebuked my line of questioning and modeled how I might align myself more closely with the norms of linguistic interaction she had been taught. As lines 12–13 show, however, I was either unable to see this as an invitation or unwilling to do so. Instead, I held fast to my own framing of our interaction, declining to change my questions and stating that she could respond in whatever way suited her. In so doing, I prevented her acts of tethering from reconfiguring our interaction. In declining to change my orientation to Hopilavayi, I only further reinforced my status as an outsider, entrenching the difference between "linguist" and "speaker."

As our elicitation session continued, so did my interlocutor's attempts to reorient and correct my understanding of Hopilavayi. About an hour later, I asked about the following sentence: *Nu' as sòosok isipalay kwanamni'ytakyangw qa mööya* (Hopi Dictionary Project 1998,

171). My interlocutor translated it as “I have all my peaches split open, but I haven’t laid them out to dry.” I included this sentence in our session because I was interested in learning whether the use of the possessive (-‘y-) with the durative (-ta(-)) in *kwanamni* ’ytakyangw (have split open) might occur with a less agentive subject than other similar verbal suffixes. My questioning, presented in Transcript 3b, centered around trying to determine the subject’s agentivity. Again, the deictics of interest are underlined and repairs indicated by indentation.

Transcript 3b. Different approaches to coreference.

- 1 H: the question I have (.) in this sentence
...
2 I have all my peaches split open but I haven't laid them out to dry
3 would it be possible that someone else had split open the peaches
4 or is it necessarily this person who split the peaches open?
5 HS: ((laughter)) I don't know! ((laughter))
6 it would have to be you
7 it would have to be you as the owner of the peaches.
8 you wouldn't—
9 I mean I wouldn't ask anybody!
...
10 HS: no. for myself.
11 I wouldn't ask someone else!

My interlocutor laughed in line 5 when I asked her who split the peaches. What a strange question to ask about a sentence plucked from a dictionary and offered in isolation, with no

previous history or context. This was ultimately no less incongruous an approach to Hopilavayi than contacting a tribal government office and asking for a dog name. And yet this interlocutor had a resolute answer (lines 6–7). Her reasoning and response were premised on treating the utterance as one she had spoken herself, as a Goffmanian principal, as a woman who is responsible for activities like splitting the peaches that are grown and harvested by male relatives. I, however, was not approaching the sentence as a statement about familial responsibilities. A token of some discoverable grammatical convention, it was purely hypothetical and had no necessary connection to embodied actions.

Compare the pronouns we used to harken back to the “I” of the object sentence, which is underlined in line 2. I used “this person” (underlined in line 4). Accordingly, the “I” was not, for me, a referential index, something that pointed to me as the speaker (Urban 1989). I did not treat this sentence as one I uttered myself as a principal, as someone committed to what the sentence says. It comes from the dictionary, and I acted merely as a (re)animator.

Observe, by contrast, that this interlocutor responded to my question as if the “I” were indeed a referential index, pointing to me as the speaker and principal. Accordingly, in lines 6 and 7, she referred to me with the appropriate pair-part response for such a role inhabitation: the second person singular “you” (as opposed to, say, “that person”). In so doing, she yet again invited me to position myself appropriately, to take responsibility for the utterance as she would, treating this sentence as one “used” and not merely “mentioned.”

By framing the “I” as a referential index, this speaker is keeping a hypothetical utterance tethered to the interactional norms of the Hopi speech community. The sentence is ultimately a statement about fulfilling one’s gendered, familial obligations. After the repair in lines 8–9 (which follows the pattern discussed in relation to Transcript 3a) this interlocutor and her son

had a short back-and-forth that is not included in the transcript. They laughed about what would happen if someone asked family members, even close relations like grandmothers, to help them split peaches. To wrap up this aside, this interlocutor returned to address me in lines 10–11. She repeats that she is speaking only of what *she* would do, using an emphatic reflexive pronoun, “myself.” In addition to yet again establishing generative limits, this illustrates all the more that she is reasoning about this sentence as a principal and modeling how someone responsible for the utterance should act. For this interlocutor, these sentences are loaded, ethical statements (Debenport 2015; Nevins 2013).

The differences between the deictics I used to establish a coreferential relationship to the object sentence (“this person”) and my interlocutor’s (“I/you”) show that we were not calibrating the narrated event of peach splitting to our shared event of speaking in the same way. For me, the “I” of the object sentence did not connect the speaker of the quoted utterance to the kinds of commitments a speaker in the Hopi speech community would be expected to hold. These were easily separable for me: quoted utterances were simply signs mentioned, not signs being used referentially or pragmatically. By contrast, my interlocutor inhabited the “I” of the object sentence as a principal with the same commitments she would hold in “real” events of speech. In both Transcripts 3a and 3b, her use of personal deictics emphasized the inextricability of the language, and its speakers, from relationships of responsibility that inhere in everyday activities. She refused to let my recontextualization leave behind or impoverish this context.

Conclusion: Intertextual politics

The three examples discussed above feature a diverse range of semiotic objects, from potsherds to dog names to a sentence about peaches. Each is recontextualized as part of an equally diverse set of projects, from a timeline of human habitation in the Southwest to a foothold in the

beverage market to linguistic anthropological theory. On its own, each example might be considered an unrelated act of appropriation, and a minor one at that when compared with other pressing issues that challenge tribal sovereignty. When taken in concert, however, these different recontextualizations disclose a similar kind of intertextual erasure, one that merits critique and attention.

The intertextual erasure I've described—whether it operates through genericization or through the suspension of referential and pragmatic meaning—untethered Hopilavayi and other kinds of cultural knowledge from Hopi speech communities. Interlocutors, in turn, resisted this extraction by insisting on a flexible indexical connection, a tether. Sometimes this was expressed through an explicit statement, at other times it was enacted through subtle deictic shifts. In each case, however, tethering restored connections to Hopi, recentering and reshaping the developing intertextual networks in ways that, more often than not, brought outsiders in. Finally, these acts of tethering entailed a presence that was lively, not static. Through the expression of limits, interlocutors expressed the existence of a larger Hopi world that is unknowable to anyone in its entirety, ever unfolding, ever here.

The particulars of the intertextual politics described above are unique to a segment of the Hopi speech community. They reflect and enact local orientations toward cultural knowledge, language, and collectivity, and they are shaped by the specific experiences of appropriation Hopi members have faced. But intertextual politics, in themselves, are not unique to Hopi. Any intertextual regime carries forward certain connections while eliding others. The particular structure of intertextual relations that amplifies presence depends on local understandings of how, by whom, and for what purposes a language should be used. If Indigenous language reclamation aims to remake connections between Indigenous peoples and languages and counter

the ongoing legacy of settler-colonial interruption, the foregoing examples suggest that an integral part of this process is the reconfiguration of intertextual regimes.

Notes

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1. The 12 Hopi villages extend over one and a half million acres of land. According to the 2014–18 American Community Survey, the population of the Hopi Reservation is just under 9,000 people. Native Peoples Technical Assistance Office, University of Arizona, "Hopi Tribe Community Profile," <https://nptao.arizona.edu/hopi-tribe>.

2. I refer to public figures by name and anonymize other interlocutors, as they have requested. Rather than use pseudonyms, I refer to them by their institutional role or relation to me.

3. Tribal members use the term *Hopi* as an ethnonym and as an adjective that denotes positive characteristics of humility and simplicity. Often, the two uses blend together, so the

word comes to describe a way of life based on a set of shared protocols and practices. When I use *Hopi* without an article or further specification, I mean it in this broader sense.

4. I leave aside the fraught issue of Hopi and “Standard Average European” concepts of temporality (Hinton 1988; Lee 1996; Malotki 1983; Whorf 1956).

5. Sue Kuyvaya and Trent E. Tu’tsi helped translate this transcript. Here and in the rest of the transcripts, I abide by the following conventions:

Line numbers divide interactional discourses in a phrase-by-phrase progression.

. . . An ellipsis between line numbers indicates that some speech has been omitted.

—A dash indicates that speech was suddenly cut off.

? A question mark indicates a rising pitch.

! An exclamation point indicates emphasis.

. A period indicates a falling pitch.

(.) A period in parentheses indicates a short, untimed pause.

(()) Double parentheses indicate extralinguistic information, like laughter.

Italic indicates translation into English of original Hopi utterances.

Bold indicates speaker emphasis.

Underline indicates the portion of the transcript to which the reader should pay extra attention (it does *not* indicate speaker emphasis).

6. Deictics are words whose meaning shifts depending on the location of the speaker in physical and social space. They include personal pronouns like *I* and *you*; spatial terms like *here* and *there*; temporal terms like *then* and *now*; and many others.

7. The verb “remember” in line 10 likely has a subordinator affix, but it cannot be heard clearly on the recording.

8. *Native America Calling*, “Kokopelli: Origins, History and Appropriation,” June 5, 2019, <https://nativeamericacalling.com/wednesday-june-5-2019-kokopelli-origins-history-and-appropriation/>.

9. While these speakers did not have the same associations with the word as those advertised by the kombucha company, such notions of maternal bonds and care could conceivably spring from the definition that was more familiar to speakers.

10. Tapuat LLC, “Our Story,” accessed July 30, 2021, https://www.tapuatcha.com/our_story.

11. There is disagreement as to the original meaning of the epithet and whether it has always been pejorative. Suzan Shown Harjo (2001) has linked it to scalp taking, which Ives Goddard (2005) has disputed.

12. From an academic linguistic point of view, the Hopi language is well documented. There are published texts (e.g., Malotki and Lomatuway’ma 1984), grammatical descriptions (Laverne Masayesva Jeanne 1978; Whorf 1946), and a comprehensive dictionary (Hopi Dictionary Project 1998).

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