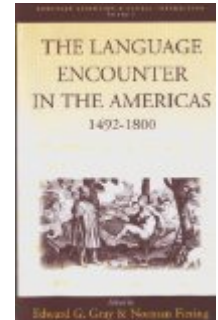


Edward C. Gray, Norman Fiering, eds.. *The Language Encounter in the Americas, 1492-1800*. New York and Oxford: Berghahn Books, 2000. x + 342 pp. \$49.95, cloth, ISBN 978-1-57181-160-8.



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The Communicative Dimension of Colonial Contact in the Americas

One of the most neglected phenomena in accounts of the New World colonial period has been the processes of communicative interaction between indigenous and European individuals and institutions. *The Language Encounter in the Americas, 1492-1800* joins other recent works to help fill that void by examining the complex interaction between indigenous and Amerindian languages in the colonial Americas. Many of the scholars represented here have been influential in demonstrating the importance and productivity of this line of inquiry. The nature of this subject is inherently interdisciplinary and the contributors to this volume come from the fields of anthropology, art history, history, linguistics, and literature. Although the various essays focus on different sets of issues and perspectives, the unifying theme of linguistic or communicative interaction ties them together in complementary ways.

The essays that comprise the book were originally presented at a conference organized by Norman Fiering and Edward Gray at the John Carter

Brown Library at Brown University. As Director and Librarian of the John Carter Brown Library, which houses one of the most extensive collections of early indigenous-language printed material, Fiering wished to promote a dialogue that would help break down disciplinary barriers and allow a cross-fertilization of insights and perspectives from different fields. To this end, Fiering and Gray brought together a group of scholars who were working on similar issues from different disciplinary perspectives. The strength of this book is precisely its diverse and multi-disciplinary nature. The essays provide an introduction to many of the issues raised in all the disciplines represented. In this way, they further pave the way for even more integrated approaches and foster a more complete understanding of the cultural and linguistic encounter that took place in the Americas.

The book is divided into five sections: Terms of Contact; Signs and Symbols; The Literate and the Nonliterate; Intermediaries; and Theory.

I. The Terms of Contact

The first essay by James Axtell, "The Babel of Tongues: Communicating with the Indians in Eastern North America," provides an historical overview of the problems and solutions related to the language encounter along the coast and the inland of Eastern North America. He begins by discussing how language problems reveal themselves in early colonial texts. He then surveys the various solutions to these problems, and their advantages and disadvantages. The article discusses the use of gestures and the development of jargons and pidgins. Of particular interest are the issues and processes involved in the acquisition of European languages by Indians and of Indian languages by Europeans who then served as interpreters. Axtell demonstrates how these linguistic phenomena fit into the European project of colonization and how native people reacted, accommodated, and/or resisted these processes. In so doing, he documents an often neglected component of the colonial encounter.

In "The Use of Pidgins and Jargons on the East of Coast of North America," Ives Goddard discusses the "little known fact that a number of local pidgins and jargons were spoken on the East Coast, in the Northeast and the Mid-Atlantic region" (p. 61). The article focuses primarily on the best documented of the East Coast pidgins, Pidgin Delaware, but also briefly deals with other East Coast Algonquin-based pidgins and pidgin English. Goddard argues that the grammatical features of Algonquin-based pidgins demonstrate that the Indians played the major formative role in developing these media. Thus, "the use of Algonquin pidgins furnishes important insights into the attitudes of the East Coast Indians toward the Europeans as they tried to control the impact of the European encounter" (p. 75).

II. Signs and Symbols

In "Pictures, Gestures, Hieroglyphs: 'Mute Eloquence' in Sixteenth-Century Mexico," Pauline Moffit Watts analyzes the various forms of non-verbal communication -- what she labels "mute

eloquence" -- utilized by missionaries in sixteenth-century Mexico. She discusses rhetorical gestures, visual images, the influence of monastic sign language, dramatic representations, and the pictographic testarian catechisms. Although Moffit provides little direct evidence for the influence of some of these forms of representation -- rhetorical gestures and monastic sign language, for example -- they certainly formed a part of the cultural resources available to European priests. Some may disagree with Moffit's extremely expanded notion of literacy, but her analysis raises provocative questions about communicative interaction between Spanish and indigenous cultures in the early colonial period.

In "Iconic Discourse: The Language of Images in Seventeenth-Century New France," Margaret J. Leahey discusses the response of Hurons to the images introduced by the Jesuits as aides in catechization. Leahey explains that the disparity between the cultural background of the Hurons and that of the Europeans necessarily produced a very different interpretation of religious imagery. In support of this argument, she analyzes the Huron reaction to disease and the stylistic changes in ceremonial masks.

The final essay in this section, "Mapping after the Letter: Graphology and Indigenous Cartography in New Spain" by Dana Leibsohn, analyzes the convergence of indigenous pictographic cartography and alphabetic script in sixteenth and seventeenth-century land *merced* documents. Leibsohn emphasizes the materiality of painting and alphabetic writing -- something that historians and literary critics often ignore -- and analyzes the relationship between these two media in such documents. Leibsohn's own critical performance is a creative combination of art criticism and textual analysis that deserves attention in its own right.

III. The Literate and the Nonliterate

The sixth essay in the collection, "Continuity vs. Acculturation: Aztec and Inca Cases of Alpha-

betic Literacy," by Antonio Mazzotti is a brief overview of colonial texts that represent the appropriation of alphabetic literacy by indigenous writers. Mazzotti argues that texts written or compiled by writers such as Sahagun and Ixtlilxochitl from Mexico and Titu Cusi Yupanqui, the Inca Garcilaso de la Vega, and Guaman Poma from Peru exhibit, to varying degrees, attributes derived from indigenous perspectives and modes of representation, with a particular emphasis on orality and structures of ritual. Although Mazzotti himself recognizes that his treatment is very general, his discussion has important theoretical implications that are sure to produce more in-depth analyses of specific traditions and individual works.

In "Native Languages as Spoken and Written: view from Southern New England," Kathleen J. Bragdon discusses the relationship between language and colonization through an examination of seventeenth-century linguistic descriptions from Southern New England. She explains that contact situations demand the establishment of a shared communicative practice. Although ostensibly the English controlled the formation of that practice in both English and native languages, texts produced by native speakers of Massachusetts preserve many of the attributes of native discourse. Bragdon argues that the alphabetic communicative practices of New England natives both complement indigenous oral traditions and contest the imposition of colonial authority.

In "The M'ikmaq Hieroglyphic Prayer Book: Writing and Christianity in Maritime Canada, 1675-1921," Bruce Greenfield traces the use of literacy in the history of European evangelization among the M'ikmaq Indians. The French catholic missionaries originally emphasized the rote memorization of prayers, hoping for an understanding over time. As an aide in this memorization, they introduced a hieroglyphic prayer book that the M'ikmaq adopted and preserved for 250 years even during extended periods with no European

presence or supervision. Greenfield points out that the French use of this hieroglyphic script represents an attempt to control the dissemination of knowledge that is analogous to the situation in France as well. The ease with which the Indians adopted and preserved this script, along with other evidence, attests to the pre-existence of a hieroglyphic system of representation that the M'ikmaq were able to adapt conceptually to the new context of European religion. Greenfield argues that the preservation of this tradition along side alphabetic literacy introduced later by English Baptist missionaries reveals the ideological nature of literacy practice and demands an approach that considers the hieroglyphic prayer book as an artifact with symbolic properties used in specific social contexts.

IV. Intermediaries

The next essay, "Interpreters Snatched from the Shore: The Successful and the Others" by Frances Karttunen, examines the qualities necessary for the survival of interpreters who were forced to gain their linguistics skills in a foreign and often hostile environment. Karttunen surveys the lives of several colonial interpreters and the diverse paths that led them to this career: victims of kidnapping, castaways, missionaries, ritual kin, etc. She concludes that among the most important attributes for success were flexibility, youth, sharp intellect, and good luck.

In the second essay of this section, "Mohawk Schoolmasters and Catechists in Mid-Eighteenth-Century Iroquoia: An Experiment in Fostering Literacy and Religious Change," William B. Hart analyzes the use of native leaders as schoolmasters and catechists in eighteenth-century evangelization efforts and the introduction of literacy and the translation of texts into alphabetic Mohawk. He explains that although this made Christianity a viable, indeed essential, part of indigenous religion, it supplemented rather than supplanted native beliefs and practices. Furthermore, literacy and the use of native leaders fostered a sense of

local ambition and autonomy that led the Iroquois to adapt and adopt Christianity in unique ways.

In "The Making of Logan, the Mingo Narrator," Edward C. Gray uses the case of the Revolutionary-era Indian orator Soyechtowa, also known as Logan, in order to examine the eighteenth-century notion that the speech of indigenous Americans had a unique and natural eloquence. Gray explains that Logan's reputation was based on an address allegedly given in 1774 after being defeated by the Virginia militia. First, Gray argues that both biographical details and what little we know of northeastern Indian speechways, which valued silence over verbosity, seem to contradict the popular image of Logan as a respected indigenous leader. Gray also places the "myth of native eloquence" in the context of eighteenth-century theories of language, translation, and society as well as the ideology of the Revolutionary-era North American colonies.

V. Theory

In, "Spanish Colonization and the Indigenous Languages of America," Isaias Lerner provides a brief overview of Spanish colonial policies and practices concerning the study and use of indigenous languages. This history is inherently related to the linguistic interaction between Spanish and indigenous tongues, and Lerner discusses how this interaction reveals itself in literary texts from the period, from *Ercilla* to *Cervantes*.

Lieve Jooker's essay, "Descriptions of American Indian Word Forms in Colonial Missionary Grammars," examines eighteenth-century grammatical descriptions of Amerindian languages and their relationship to pre-Enlightenment European language theory. Jooker demonstrates how the "European criteria of universality and appropriateness, relying on a model of classical languages, impeded in many cases a truthful description of Indian speech" (p. 299). He goes on to show that although a few writers were able to produce empirical linguistic descriptions free of the preconceptions based on classical grammars, they

did not "yield a theoretical separation between the structure of a language and its connection with evaluative cultural categories" (p. 307).

While Jooker's essay focuses on instances of linguistic description and their relationship to the theory of language, the final chapter of the collection, "'Savage' Languages in Eighteenth-Century Theoretical History of the Language" by Rudiger Schreyer, examines the debate that was taking place between competing theories of language origin and evolution. America became the battleground where these theories vied for position by attempting to use evidence from indigenous languages to support their claims. On the one hand, "Christian doctrine viewed linguistic change as a deterioration from the God-given and perfect language of Paradise" (p. 318); on the other, the new science of the eighteenth century posited that language evolved in conjunction with civilization from primitive chaos to sophisticated structure. The history of this debate sheds light on European attitudes toward indigenous languages and societies.

In reviewing a collection of essays, it is difficult to be specific about the merits of the entire work. The diversity of disciplinary approaches represented in this book makes the task doubly difficult. The editors and authors, however, have done an excellent job of avoiding esoteric methodologies that would have limited the audience. This is a very accessible interdisciplinary book that will be essential for anyone interested in European and indigenous contact in the colonial period.

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