

[연구논문]

“So That You Would Not be Tongue-Tied”:
Mapping Language and Race in
Post-World War II U.S. through
the Figure of the Bilingual Child

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“A small child entering a school which appears to reject the only words he can use is adversely affected in every aspect of his being. He is immediately retarded in his schoolwork.”¹⁾ Commissioner of Education Harold Howe summarized the crisis of the non-English speaking child in this vivid image of the linguistic alienation of a vulnerable child. Cited in H.R. 13103, the House bill proposing bilingual education in 1967, Howe’s moving image of the bilingual child was at the heart of the legislative and educational debates on bilingual education in the 1960s. Initially based on the problem of the underperformance and high drop-out rate of the Spanish-speaking children in schools, debates on bilingual education in the 1960s opened the floodgates to inquiries on how language affects development, the

1) U.S. Congress, House, *Bilingual Education Act*, 90th Cong. (1st sess. 13 Nov. 1967), 3.

psychic cost of being deprived of a language, and the dynamic of group identity and national identity.²⁾ The Spanish-speaking child received an unprecedented amount of attention in the legislative and educational debates on bilingual education. The set of issues that developed around the Spanish-speaking children in public education, such as the conflict between the home culture and the culture of the school, the misdiagnosis of the Spanish-speaking children as learning disabled, and increasing youth violence, were explored through the Spanish-speaking child's confusion between Spanish and English.

This essay examines the figure of the bilingual child in the post-World War II American imagination as a significant cultural site that registered an evolving relationship between language and race.³⁾ Behind the moral imperative of bilingual education as a measure of

2) This can best be seen in the Congressional hearings on bilingual education. See also Fishman, Hakuta, Wiese and Garcia for detailed debates on bilingual education. Joshua Fishman, *Bilingual Education: An International Sociological Perspective* (Rowley: Newbury House Publishers, 1999); Kenji Hakuta, *Mirror of Language: The Debate on Bilingualism* (New York: Basic Books, 1986); Ann-Marie Wiese and Eugene E. Garcia, "The Bilingual Education Act", *Bilingual Research Journal* 22,1 (1998): 1-18. While the legislators who discussed the Bilingual Education Act initially wanted to include only Spanish in bilingual education, mention of any specific language was omitted from the Bilingual Education Act of 1968. See Bilingual Education Act, Pub. L. 90-247, Stat. 81,816, 1968. Bilingual education at local schools between the 1960s and the 1990s covered a wide range of languages other than English depending on students' needs.

3) Throughout this essay I use the term "bilingual child" in the way it was used in the debates on bilingual education in the 1960s. Sometimes used interchangeably with "Spanish-speaking child", the term "bilingual child" implied a range of English fluency from just knowing a handful of English phrases to having basic fluency. In later discussions on bilingual education, "language-minority child" came to be the preferred term. See Sandra McKay and Sau-ling Wong, ed. *New Immigrants in the United States* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2000).

compensatory education was the popular misunderstanding of bilingualism as a deficiency. As the linguist Einar Haugen points out, references to the bilingual child and to bilingual education employed bilingualism in a dual sense: "For many people", he says, "bilingual' [was] a euphemism for 'linguistically handicapped'", "a nice way of referring to children whose parents have handicapped them in the race for success by teaching them their mother tongue, which happens not to be the dominant language in the country they now inhabit."⁴) In this popular usage of bilingualism, the bilingual child's background placed her in the category of the culturally deprived regardless of her proficiency in English.⁵) Linguistic difference as a representative example of cultural deprivation introduced another way of looking at educational equity at a time when racial difference was the paramount sign of unequal access to education. For the most part, linguistic difference was identified as an outcome of structural inequity in a cultural climate heavily influenced by the debates on racial segregation's negative impact on children's development.⁶) However,

4) Einar Haugen, "The Stigmata of Bilingualism", *The Ecology of Language: Essays by Einar Haugen* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1972), 308.

5) Frank Riessman, *The Culturally Deprived Child* (New York: Harper & Row, Publishers, 1962); Benjamin S. Bloom, Allison Davis, and Robert Hess, *Compensatory Education for Cultural Deprivation* (New York: Holt, Rinehart and Winston, Inc., 1965). The notion of "cultural deprivation" that prevailed in the mid-twentieth century held that children from a cultural background different from the culture that public education is modeled on are ill-equipped to succeed in school. See Riessman and Bloom, Davis, and Hess for an overview of the concept of cultural deprivation as it relates to compensatory education.

6) Anne Cheng, *The Melancholy of Race: Psychoanalysis, Assimilation, and Hidden Grief* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2001), 3-6. Cheng discusses the cultural significance of Kenneth Clark's doll test in *Brown v. Board of Education*.

unlike racial difference, linguistic difference held out the promise of equality without difference. Whereas racial difference was not something that could be done away with, linguistic difference was perceived as malleable. One can always learn a new language. As an educational ideal, bilingual education tried to use this aspect of linguistic difference to transform the liability of bilingualism into an asset. The bilingual child would learn English as she retains her home language. The English-speaking child, on the other hand, would learn the home language of the bilingual child. While they may start out as linguistically different, they would both gain by learning the language of each other.

Despite its proximity to the more recognized figures of the culturally deprived child and the minority child, the bilingual child as a cultural figure in the discursive realm was unique in the developmental promise it held out: from deficiency to excellence, the bilingual child's projected developmental trajectory charted a new way of handling difference that would become prominent in postwar multiculturalism.⁷⁾ If difference creates a social problem, a viable

7) I would like to make it clear that I am not referring to the historically specific bilingual children of the 1960s but to the social type of the bilingual child that emerged through a discourse on bilingual children, David A. Hollinger, *Postethnic America: Beyond Multiculturalism* (New York: Basic Books, 1995); Nathan Glazer, *We Are All Multiculturalists Now* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1997); Slavoj Žižek, "Multiculturalism, Or, the Cultural Logic of Multinational Capitalism", *New Left Review* 225 (1997): 28-51; Avery F. Gordon and Christopher Newfield, ed., *Mapping Multiculturalism* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1996). See Hollinger and Glazer for reviews of post-World War II multiculturalism in the U.S. Multiculturalism has come under heavy critique by critics of the left in recent years as "the cultural logic of multinational capitalism", as Slavoj Žižek put it. See Gordon and Newfield, ed., *Mapping Multiculturalism* for cogent critiques of post-World War II multiculturalism in the U.S.

solution from the state's perspective is to make difference amenable, appealing, and universal. As part of the educational reform of the 1960s, bilingual education as a federally supported project aimed to rectify the differential academic performances of children from non-English speaking homes and English-speaking homes by simultaneously promoting fluency in a language that is spoken at home and a language that is different. For all its ideals of social reform, the outcome of a federally supported bilingual education since the 1960s has not been so favorable. Bilingualism is still associated with deficiency for children whose home language is not English while federal and local support for bilingual education has noticeably dwindled.⁸⁾ What happened to bilingual education that purported to transform the popular perception of bilingualism from deficiency to excellence?

This essay seeks an answer to this question in the implications of race in the figure of the bilingual child. While the racial implication of bilingual education can be seen in the prominence of Spanish-speaking children in debates on bilingual education, the role that race plays in bilingual education has not received adequate attention, resulting in the isolation of linguistic difference as a matter to be treated separately from racial difference.⁹⁾ The

8) Mike Davis, *Magical Urbanism: Latinos Reinvent the U.S. City* (New York: Verso, 2000), 139; Antonia Darder and Rodolfo D. Torres, *After Race, After Race: Racism after Multiculturalism* (New York: New York University Press, 2004), 67-68.

9) Notable exceptions include Nelson, Oboler, and Darder and Torres. Adam Nelson, *The Elusive Ideal: Equal Educational Opportunity and the Federal Role in Boston's Public Schools, 1950-1985* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2005); Suzanne Oboler, *Ethnic Labels, Latino Lives: Identity and the Politics of (Re)Presentation in the United States* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1995), 95. While it comes up marginally in

imbrication of race and language in the discursive construction of the bilingual child as a cultural figure, however, is implicit in the concept of cultural deprivation that structurally places the bilingual child in the position of the deficient. In this essay, I contend that the linguistic difference of the bilingual child was at once a racialized difference in the postwar imaginary. Despite the absence of race as an explicit point of reference in the debates on bilingual education after the 1960s, bilingualism as lived experience continues to be articulated through the imbrication of racial difference and linguistic difference.

The first section locates the culturally deprived child as the progenitor of the bilingual child. In examining the birth and circulation of the concept of cultural deprivation, I turn to Erik Erikson's developmental psychology and the place of minority children in it. The role that minority children play in Erikson's formulation of identity crisis in development shows how deprivation, and later deficiency in the case of the bilingual child, is determined in relation to the capacity to seamlessly blend in. Erikson raises the question of structural injustice that places certain groups of children at odds with mainstream society, predetermining them for cultural deprivation, yet focuses on delineating and encouraging healthy development within the given social parameters. The second section turns to a literary text, *The Woman Warrior: Memoirs of a Girlhood Among Ghosts*

their discussion of the implementation of bilingual education in schools, both Nelson and Oboler note the conflict and confusion around bilingual education and racial balance laws in the classroom. From the perspective of minority rights, Darder and Torres argue that bilingual education, as a language policy, should be viewed in light of the "racialized constructions of the modern nation-state." Darder and Torres, *After Race*, 68.

(1976), by the Chinese American writer Maxine Hong Kingston to examine a representation of the bilingual child that closely adheres to the lived experience of bilingualism. A critically acclaimed book since its publication, Kingston's text has become indispensable in discussions of postwar multicultural U.S. literature. I trace how the experiences of language and race converge in the narrator's struggles to develop into a speaking subject. Through her representation of the bilingual child, Kingston shows how deeply social norms depend on linguistic norms, an understanding that desists from viewing bilingualism as at either end of the two poles of deficiency and excellence.

Minority Children and Cultural Deprivation: Articulations of Identity and Crisis

The mid-twentieth century experienced an upsurge of studies of childhood and child rearing. An interest in new child-rearing practices that sprouted among the generation preceding the baby boomers bloomed into a comprehensive examination of the cultural meanings of childhood and what they revealed about American society and culture, involving scholars from various fields including the anthropologist Margaret Mead and the child psychiatrist Robert Cole s.¹⁰⁾ Interestingly, childhood studies of this era simultaneously

10) Coles was a student of Erikson and wrote one of the earliest biographies of Erikson in 1970. His *Children of Crisis* series, published in the 1960s, examines the crises of American society through analyses of the risks various groups of minority children face. Margaret Mead and Martha Wolfenstein, ed., *Childhood in Contemporary Cultures* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1955). Mead and Wolfenstein's essay collection shows Erikson's collaboration with Mead. See Nicholas Sammond, *Babes in Tomorrowland: Walt Disney and the Making of the American Child, 1930-1960* (Durham: Duke University Press, 2005), for an account of

accommodated an engagement with normative practices of child rearing, as attested by the popularity of such child-rearing manuals as Benjamin Spock's, and an interest in comparative studies of culture. Looking at child rearing and education in foreign cultures often served the purpose of understanding what is unique about the American way of child rearing and of cultivating a democratic citizenry. As an expatriate psychoanalyst who fled Nazi Germany, Erik Erikson found an intellectual home in the budding field of child psychology in postwar U.S. While Erikson is rarely discussed in relation to the politics of identity that became prominent after the 1960s in the U.S., the concept of identity crisis, commonly used to describe the angst of bicultural children and youth in later years, owes much to Erikson's work on development and identity formation.¹¹⁾

While he was a student and analyst of Anna Freud, Erikson's emphasis on the social and cultural environment in development marked his departure from Freud. Whereas Freudian psychoanalysis looked into the inner world apart from the outer world for insights into the human psyche, Erikson believed that "[w]here the two worlds intersected, an individual obtained some sense of his or her pursuit of identity."¹²⁾ By locating identity at the crossroads of the psychic

Erikson's work in the context of the 1950s cultural studies of childhood spearheaded by Mead.

- 11) Lawrence J. Friedman, *Identity's Architect: A Biography of Erik H. Erikson* (New York: W. W. Norton & Company, 1963). Identity is a keyword in Erikson's work, a fact that his biographer, Friedman, acknowledges in the very title of his biography. While identity was not an uncommon term in psychology, Erikson elevated it to the cornerstone of the ego and "claim[ed] that the study of identity is ... a contemporary counterpart of the Freudian study of sexuality." Steven Weiland, "Erikson on America: *Childhood and Society* and National Identity", *American Studies* 23 (1982): 7.
- 12) Friedman, *Identity's Architect*, 159. Friedman says that "Erikson emphasized

realm and the social realm, Erikson made the grounds for analyzing child development through environmental influences. His interest in minority children was primarily based on such an emphasis on the role of the social and cultural environment in development. Because minority children came from socially and culturally marginalized families, they inevitably underwent identity crisis when they came in contact with the dominant culture and demonstrated the obstacles to maintaining a continuous sense of self as well as the effects of discontinuity in the sense of self.¹³⁾ Used in relation to minority children, the concept of identity crisis had the effect of elucidating the social configuration of difference and its effect on psychological development. To put it slightly differently, Erikson was able to find a productive use of the concept in relation to minority children because the social conditions of minority children that marked them as different from middle-class, white children introduced complications for the dominant model of development.

While Erikson highlighted the social and cultural exclusion of minority groups from mainstream society as causing the identity crisis

the "outer world" more than any previous ego psychologist." Weiland points to Erikson's "inclusive conception of cultural development" that reflected how he viewed the effects of the environment on the ego and the superego. Weiland, "Erikson on America", 6.

13) Erikson first developed his concept of identity crisis when he worked with war veterans at the Mt. Zion Rehabilitation Clinic in San Francisco in the 1940s. Confronted with pathological symptoms in the veterans, Erikson desisted from diagnosing the veterans as pathological and instead attended to how the drastic changes in the veterans' environment caused by their participation in the war obstructed a coherent and continuous sense of self in them. By approaching the disturbances plaguing the veterans through identity crisis, Erikson could diagnose the cause as psychological rather than biological and treat the veterans through psychoanalysis and counseling rather than through medication.

of minority children and, hence, provided a way of understanding minority children's problems as problems of social structure, the identity crisis he attributed to minority children sat uncomfortably between individual pathology and structural inequity.¹⁴⁾ In his widely read book *Childhood and Society* (1950), Erikson used the examples of black children and Native American children to explore the dilemma of minority children's development: "[w]hat if the "milieu" is determined to let live only at the expense of a permanent loss of identity?"¹⁵⁾ Through the example of black children, he observed the self-formation of minority children whose racial identities were socially ignored or underappreciated. Through the example of Native American children, he tackled the issue of minority children's maladjustment and marginalization in the public realm. Both examples led him to doubt the benefits of Americanization for minority children even as he could offer no other solution than a kind of "separate but equal" development that acknowledged the autonomy of the minority children's cultures.

Erikson explored the dilemma of black identity through the story of a black boy who used to listen to the radio show Red Rider every night while indulging in imaginative fantasies of being Red Rider. The boy's identification with Red Rider, however, suddenly came to an end when he realized the racial difference between him and Red Rider:

14) David Palumbo-Liu, for one, points out that the notion of "dual personality" used in reference to Asian Americans in the 1970s and 1980s in sociology and psychotherapy pathologized individual racial and ethnic subjects without attending to the issue of institutional racism. David Palumbo-Liu, *Asian/Americans: Historical Crossings of a Racial Frontier* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1999), 300.

15) Erik H. Erikson, *Childhood and Society* (New York: W. W. Norton & Company, 1963), 241.

"But the moment comes when he sees himself galloping after some masked offenders and suddenly notices that in his fancy Red Rider is a colored man. He stops his fantasy."¹⁶⁾ The recognition of racial difference constituted a primal moment in the ego formation of the black boy. Before recognizing his racial difference the boy was effusive and expressive; afterwards he became someone who displayed no emotional fluctuation. The best way to describe him was to say that he was non-descript: "Today he is calm and always smiles; his language is soft and blurred; nobody can hurry him or worry him-or please him. White people like him."¹⁷⁾ Through the example of the black boy Erikson illustrated his point that "the chances for a continuity of identity in the American Negro Child" are close to none.¹⁸⁾

Based on his interest and engagement with two Native American tribes, the Sioux and the Yurok, Erikson answered the question of Native American children's underperformance in public schools asked him by educators and administrators as essentially a problem of culture contact.¹⁹⁾ "The problem of Indian education is", he said, "one

16) Ibid., 241.

17) Ibid., 241.

18) Ibid., 241. Interestingly, Maxine Hong Kingston confesses to a similar experience of recognizing racial difference as a significant event in her becoming a writer. In an interview in 1986, she recollects being absorbed in Louisa May Alcott's *Little Women* until one of her characters marries a Chinese man: "He was so funny, he was so weird and different. I was reading along, identifying with the March sisters, when I came across this funny-looking little Chinaman. It popped out of the book, I'd been pushed into my place. I was him, I wasn't those March girls. That kind of reading made me create my new place in literature." Jody Hoy, "To Be Able to See the Tao", *Conversations with Maxine Hong Kingston* (Jackson: University Press of Mississippi, 1998), 62. In Kingston's autobiographical story, the disruption of identification by racial difference becomes the source for the creation of a new identity.

of culture contact between a group of employees representative of the middle-class values of a free-enterprise system on the one hand, and on the other, the remnants of a tribe, which, wherever it leaves the shadow of government sustenance, must find itself among the underprivileged of that system.²⁰⁾ Erikson's loaded statement went beyond describing the clash of incompatible systems to touch upon the relations of power that produced conflict and within which conflict had to be worked out. In both examples of black children and Native American children, Erikson displays a keen awareness of the pressure minority children are under in due to their exclusion from the social and cultural norms.

Despite his awareness of the structural characteristic of minority children's developmental dilemma, Erikson's summary of the "dangers awaiting the minority-group American" is ambivalent at best in its proposed solution to this problem:

As indicated, minority groups of a lesser degree of Americanization are often privileged in the enjoyment of a more sensual early childhood. Their crisis comes when their mothers, losing trust in themselves and using sudden correctives in order to approach the vague but pervasive Anglo-Saxon ideal, create violent discontinuities: or where, indeed, the children themselves learn to disavow their sensual and overprotective mothers as temptations and a hindrance to the formation of a more American personality.²¹⁾

19) Through his friendship with the anthropologists Scudder Mekeel and Alfred Kroeber, Erikson gained the opportunity to engage in firsthand observation of the Native American tribes and their child-rearing practices, an occasion that gave rise to a lifelong interest in comparative cultural studies. Friedman, *Identity's Architect*, 185-87.

20) Erikson, *Childhood and Society*, 154.

21) *Ibid.*, 245. In the same paragraph included in a later essay, Erikson

Identifying the point of crisis as the disavowal of the minority children's culture, Erikson advises against such disavowal. In fact, minority children grow up the best when they resist the allure of "a more American personality" and maintain a cultural continuity in their sense of self. The fact that the norms of an American personality remain exclusive of these "groups of a lesser degree of Americanization" goes unquestioned in Erikson's account of minority children's developmental dilemma. The options left for minority children are either they assimilate by disavowing their home cultures and end up with severe identity crisis or they adhere to their cultural norms and remain isolated from the mainstream society. Either way, they are less American than children born and bred in mainstream social and cultural norms.

The scale that determined the degree of Americanness in Erikson also determined the degree of deprivation in the concept of cultural deprivation that prevailed in the social and educational parlance of the mid-twentieth century. Cultural deprivation held that since public education is compatible with a middle-class culture, children who were not from middle-class backgrounds were at a cultural disadvantage in schools.²²⁾ Within a public education setting, the culturally deprived referred to the "substantial group of students who do not make normal progress in their school learning ...[S]tudents

specifies the "minority groups of a lesser degree of Americanization" as "Negroes, Indians, Mexicans, and certain European groups," Erikson, "Growth and Crises of the Healthy Personality", *Identity and the Life Cycle* (New York: International University Presses, Inc.), 90.

22) Tulkin, Steven R, "An Analysis of the Concept of Cultural Deprivation", *Developmental Psychology* 6,2 (1972). The concept of cultural deprivation, as much as it gained popularity in a short time also quickly came under critique for its narrow understanding of culture.

whose early experiences in the home, whose motivation for present school learning, and whose goals for the future are such as to handicap them for schoolwork,"²³⁾ While the idea that children who were excluded from the means of production were also excluded from the advantages of reproduction was nothing new, the focus on "culture" in the cultural deprivation registered a novel attempt to think about social privileges not in terms of biology but in terms of culture. According to the definition employed by the Research Conference on Education and Cultural Deprivation held in 1964, cultural deprivation was delineated in contradistinction to race, ethnicity, and biological conditions.²⁴⁾ It "should not be equated with membership in an ethnic group" and it "should not be equated with race."²⁵⁾ It was not to be confused with "biological deprivation", although "there [was] little doubt that very frequently the two are associated, especially in the more poverty-stricken groups in our society."²⁶⁾ Delineated primarily through what it was not, the concept of cultural deprivation manifested an explicit effort to steer away from viewing group affiliation, most prominently race, as a basis for social disadvantage and to situate disadvantage "in terms of characteristics of the individual and/or the characteristics of his environment."²⁷⁾

Language became the most important index of development in the effort to dissociate deprivation from any kind of biologized group affiliation.²⁸⁾ Viewing deprivation in terms of culture and not in

23) Bloom, Davis, and Hess, *Compensatory Education for Cultural Deprivation*, 4.

24) Erikson was a participant at the conference.

25) *Ibid.*, 5.

26) *Ibid.*, 9.

27) *Ibid.*, 5.

terms of race, problematic as it became soon after, was in line with the ongoing effort to view race itself as a social construct and not a biological condition. The bilingual child, as a subtype of the culturally deprived child, however, belied the effort to dissociate language from group affiliations that were biologized. This can be seen most succinctly in the confusions caused in the classroom after the implementation of bilingual education. The biggest problem in bilingual education became the racial balance laws mandated to ensure desegregation in public schools after *Brown v. Board of Education*. Most bilingual children who needed bilingual education were racial minorities which made the isolation of these children for bilingual education a breach of racial balance laws. In fact, the 1973 *Keynes v. School District No. 1* "stated that Spanish-speaking students could not be sent to schools with primarily African American student populations as a means of circumventing the 1954 *Brown v. Topeka Board of Education* decision against segregation."²⁹) In some cases, the imperative to consider both language and race in constituting the classroom resulted in black children being classified as "Anglos" for the purpose of bilingual education.³⁰)

Reading the bilingual child in the debates on bilingual education alongside Erikson's discussion of minority children and the idea of cultural deprivation reveals the web of associations around difference,

28) According to the researchers of cultural deprivation, "one major difference between culturally deprived and more advantaged homes is the extension and development of the speech of children." Bloom, Davis, and Hess, *Compensatory Education for Cultural Deprivation*, 14. See also A. R. Jensen, "Social Class and Verbal Learning", *Social Class, Race, and Psychological Development* (New York: Holt, Rinehart, and Winston, 1968).

29) Oboler, *Ethnic Labels*, 95.

30) Nelson, *The Elusive Ideal*, n.70.

deprivation, and deficiency that inevitably linked language and race in the figure of the bilingual child. The continuing perception of bilingualism as deficiency when it comes to certain groups to this day, decades after the first legislative effort to dispel such perception, is a telling sign of the burden of race the bilingual child inherited and its persistent presence in the articulation and circulation of linguistic difference.³¹⁾ In the following section, I read Maxine Hong Kingston's acclaimed autobiographical fiction, *The Woman Warrior*, to trace the interrelations of race and language in the narrator's experience of growing up Chinese American. The deep imbrication of race and language in the narrator's awareness of her differential development from her non-Chinese peers in school reveal a role of language in the constitution of self that goes unacknowledged in debates on educational equity.

Cutting the Tongue³²⁾

Of the many controversies that *The Woman Warrior* (1976) was swept up in, the exchanges between Diane Johnson, who published a review of Kingston's book in *The New York Times Book Review*, and Jeffery Paul Chan, one of the editors of *Aiiieeeee!* and the then head of the nascent Asian American Studies program at San Francisco State University, remain memorable due to their discrepant views on the linguistic isolation of Chinese American communities.³³⁾ Almost as

31) Davis, *Magical Urbanism*, 139.

32) I draw partly from a previously published essay that reads Kingston's text with an emphasis on how the racialization of language in the text constructs linguistic difference as a disability in this section. See Jeehyun Lim, "Cutting the Tongue: Language and the Body in Kingston's *The Woman Warrior*", *MELUS* 31.3 (2003).

an aside to her favorable review of *The Woman Warrior* as a book that illustrates the universal struggles of growing up as a woman, Johnson noted the curious phenomenon of the Chinese Americans' linguistic isolation. "The Chinese-Americans", she said "are a notably unassimilated culture. It is not unusual in San Francisco to find fourth- or fifth-generation American-born Chinese who speak no English."³⁴) Johnson's review immediately met with a heated retort from Chan who viewed Johnson as complicit with Kingston in misrepresenting the Chinese American community. But what infuriated Chan the most was Johnson's comment on the linguistic non-assimilation of Chinese Americans. "In California", he exclaimed in exasperation, "it is the law that children attend school ... Common sense would inform Ms. Johnson that fourth- and fifth-generation American-born Chinese speak English."³⁵) Johnson held on to her

33) Another prominent controversy around *The Woman Warrior* concerns the question of genre and the creative license Kingston takes with autobiography. See Chin and Wong I read the *The Woman Warrior* as autobiographical fiction rather than as autobiography. Kingston says in an interview that she first "thought of [*The Woman Warrior*] as a novel when [she] mailed it out to the publishers" and that the book's categorization as non-fiction was a publishing strategy adopted by her publisher. Gary Kubota, "Maxine Hong Kingston: Something Comes From the Outside Onto the Paper", *Conversations wit Maxine Hong Kingston* (Jackson: University Press of Mississippi, 1998): 2. For Frank Chin, Kingston's most outspoken detractor, the main problem of Kingston's book was that it was categorized as non-fiction. Li quotes the letter Chin wrote to Kingston where he says that "[a]s fiction ... [he] can like [her] stuff." Kubota, "Maxine Hong Kingston", 189.

34) Diane Johnson, "Ghosts", *Critical Essays on Maxine Hong Kingston* (New York: G. K. Hall & Co., 1998), 82.

35) Jeffrey Paul Chan and Diane Johnson, "The Mysterious West [and Diane Johnson's Reply]", *Critical Essays on Maxine Hong Kingston* (New York: G. K. Hall & Co., 1998), 85. Kingston herself corrected Johnson in an essay she published to point out the "cultural mis-readings by American

point about Chinese Americans' linguistic foreignness despite Chan's retort, presenting it as a generally recognized fact rather than her opinion and marshalling faceless and nameless people, "doctors, hospitals, community workers, even the phone company" as her witnesses.³⁶⁾ The exchanges between Johnson and Chan are at once striking and embarrassing not only because Johnson misses such an obvious point about Chinese American nativity (they are a part of the American public education) but also because they highlight the enduring stereotype of Chinese Americans as linguistic outsiders.

The point of contention between Johnson and Chan regarding Chinese Americans' relationship to English is a question that actually lies at the heart of *The Woman Warrior*. The narrator's experiences in school and her initiation into English revolve around the social function of language to mark one's place in a community and the role segregation plays in one's linguistic development. The narrator recalls how "[w]hen [she] went to kindergarten and had to speak English for the first time, [she] became silent."³⁷⁾ An intense negotiation between silence and speech constitutes the main drama of the narrator's school life as she tries to find her voice, place, and personality between the two poles of silence and speech. In the beginning the narrator is unaware that not speaking is a problem. She is able to enjoy silence even as she "flunk[s] kindergarten."³⁸⁾ It

reviewers"; "Diane Johnson in *The New York Review of Books* says that there are fourth and fifth generation Chinese Americans who can't speak English. (It is more often the case that they can't speak Chinese. A fourth of fifth generation Chinese American and Caucasian American are not too different except in looks and history.)"(102).

36) *Ibid.*, 87.

37) Maxine Hong Kingston, *The Woman Warrior*, 165.

38) *Ibid.*, 165.

is only when she becomes cognizant of the stigma attached to her silence "that school [becomes] a misery, that the silence [becomes] a misery."³⁹⁾ The narrator's gradual understanding of the significance of talking in school takes place side by side her coming to awareness of a relationship between silence and group membership: "The other Chinese girls did not talk either, so I knew the silence had to do with being a Chinese girl."⁴⁰⁾ Learning to express herself in English means much more than learning the language for the narrator. It requires her to shift into a mode of being that seemingly conflicts with the mode of being "a Chinese girl."

School authorities mistake the nuanced meaning of the narrator's silence as a sign of her maladjustment. The narrator gets a zero IQ on her record and is periodically pulled out for speech therapy with her sister, although "[their] voices would straighten out, unpredictably normal, for the therapists."⁴¹⁾ The narrator teeters on the border of the normal and the abnormal according to the educational establishment which has no means of accounting for the narrator's bilingual background. For her effort to establish an understanding of herself in relation to both Chinese and English, the narrator is asked to stand in the "low corner under the stairs", the place for "noisy boys" and delinquent girls.⁴²⁾ Asked to read a passage from a book, the narrator comes to a halt when she comes across the word "I":

The Chinese "I" has seven strokes, intricacies. How could the American "I", assuredly wearing a hat like the Chinese, have only

39) Ibid., 166.

40) Ibid., 166.

41) Ibid., 172.

42) Ibid., 167.

three strokes, the middle so straight? Was it out of politeness that this writer left off strokes the way a Chinese has to write her own name small and crooked? No, it was not politeness: "I" is a capital and "you" is lower-case. I stared at the middle line and waited so long for its black center to resolve into tight strokes and dots that I forgot to pronounce it.⁴³⁾

The narrator's psycholinguistic query on the orthographic difference of self-representation is cut short by the teacher's misunderstanding of her pause as intellectual tardiness. While the teacher takes the narrator's halted speech as a sign of her deficiency, the narrator's pause in reading veils a sophisticated cognitive endeavor.

Based on the above passage, Thomas Couser characterizes *The Woman Warrior* as a book about "a crisis of self-translation from an ethnic first language into the language of the dominant culture."⁴⁴⁾ However, the crisis lies not so much in the translation of the self between Chinese and English as in the absence of the license to linger between the two languages and to reflect on their differences. Chinese and English both point to certain norms of self-representation in the narrator's mind. The crisis comes not from the norms themselves but more from the pressure to promptly choose one or the other. Norms become normative under such conditions. The narrator says that in school most of the Chinese American girls, including herself, eventually "invented an American-feminine speaking personality."⁴⁵⁾ While acknowledging the place she acquires in English, the narrator also admits that the speaking

43) Ibid., 167.

44) Thomas G. Couser, "Biculturalism in Contemporary Autobiography: Richard Rodriguez and Maxine Hong Kingston", *Altered Egos: Authority in American Autobiography* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1989), 228.

45) Kingston, *The Woman Warrior*, 172.

subject she has become is an invention based on a normative understanding of what an American girl sounds like, which is defined in opposition to "the way Chinese sounds, chingchong ugly, to American ears."⁴⁶⁾

Growing up in two languages attunes the narrator to the fact that there are multiple ways of expressing different states of being and feeling. The seeming freedom entailed in such abundance of options, however, is drastically curtailed by the difficulty of moving between different languages, something that is imprinted on the narrator through her mother's cutting her tongue even before she experiences the formidable linguistic barriers in a segregated community: "She pushed my tongue up and sliced the frenum. Or maybe she snipped it with a pair of nail scissors. I don't remember her doing it, only her telling me about it ..."⁴⁷⁾ In response to the narrator's questions about her tongue-cutting, the mother says that it was meant to enable the narrator to cross linguistic barriers freely and speak in many languages:

I cut it so you would not be tongue-tied. Your tongue would be able to move in any language. You'll be able to speak languages that are completely different from one another. You'll be able to pronounce anything. Your frenum looked too tight to do these things, so I cut it.⁴⁸⁾

The mother's candid and simple answer, however, is not sufficient to assuage the narrator's anxieties about her cut tongue. She harbors

46) *Ibid.*, 171.

47) *Ibid.*, 164.

48) *Ibid.*, 164.

contradictory feelings about what the mother did to her tongue: empowerment and terror.⁴⁹⁾ The contradiction propels her to identify with the “outlaw knot-maker” of the Chinese tales who twisted knots to extraordinary designs when such knot making was prohibited by law and those who made such knots were blinded by the strain of knotting. On the one hand, the narrator feels powerful in her desire to transgress in pursuit of a creative act that pushes the boundaries of possibility. On the other hand, she is terrified at the thought that what lies in prospect for the knot-maker—punitive legal measure and loss of sight—also awaits her. The “cruel knot”, so named for its demand of sacrifice on the knot maker, alludes to the sacrifice the narrator might have to make to fulfill her mother’s dream of her lingual mobility.

The mother’s dream of her daughter’s lingual mobility, however, can hardly be dismissed as fantastic given bilingualism’s association with stuttering and frenectomy’s medical function as a cure for stuttering.⁵⁰⁾ Bilingualism was often seen as a cause of stuttering and

49) Feminist critics have highlighted the relationship between the body and language and between the mother and the daughter in their readings of the tongue cutting. In all of the readings, the tongue-cutting constitutes a primal moment in the narrator’s self-comprehension through language. Sidonie Smith, *A Poetics of Women’s Autobiography* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1987); Deborah Madsen, “(Dis)Figuration: The Body as Icon in the Writings of Maxine Hong Kingston”, *Yearbook of English Studies* 24 (1994); Lisa Crafton, “We Are Going to Carve Revenge on Your Back: Language, Culture, and the Female Body in Kingston’s *The Woman Warrior*”, *Women as Sites of Culture* (Aldershot: Ashgate, 2002); Lee Quinby, “The Subject of Memoirs: The Woman Warrior’s Technology of Ideographic Selfhood”, *De/Colonizing the Subject* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1992).

50) John Van Borsel, Elise Maes, and Sofie Foulon, “Stuttering and Bilingualism: A Review”, *Journal of Fluency Disorders* 26 (2001); Mary

an impediment to fluency in speech. While frenectomy, the medical term for cutting the frenum, is generally performed on children with tongue-ties or similar congenital conditions of the mouth that impede articulation, the popular misunderstanding that a defective tongue is the underlying cause of speech disorders led to frenectomy's being used on children who stutter.⁵¹⁾ The cutting of the narrator's tongue incisively points to this web of associations around the biological organ of speech, bilingualism, and fluency in speech. The tongue-cutting can be seen as a preemptive measure on the part of the mother to ensure that the narrator's bilingualism does not bring any speech disorder. From this perspective the mother's expectations for her daughter's physically transformed tongue—"Your tongue would be able to move in any language. You'll be able to speak languages that

Arthur Carrow, "Linguistic Functioning of Bilingual and Monolingual Children", *The Journal of Speech and Hearing Disorders* 22,3 (1957). Van Borsel, Maes, and Foulon offer a list of studies that see a correlation between stuttering and bilingualism. A few studies that came out between the 1930s and the 1960s suggest a causal relationship bilingualism and stuttering. The authors of the review submit that there is a higher ratio of stuttering among bilinguals than among monolinguals. Comparative studies between monolingual and bilingual children in the 1960s often find articulation as a weak language processing area of bilingual children.

- 51) Paul A. Levy, "Tongue-tie: Management of a Short Sublingual Frenulum", *Pediatrics in Review* 16,9 (1995): 345. Frenectomy is sometimes used to prepare children for early English acquisition in East Asia. The most recent awareness of this in the U.S. comes from the media reports on frenectomy among Korean children in South Korea. See Barbara Demick, "A Snip of the Tongue and English is Yours!" *The Los Angeles Times*, 8 April 2002 and "Korean Kids' Tongues Cut to Improve English", *The Houston Chronicle* 19 Oct. (2003): A32. The American media reports follow suit on a series of investigative reports in South Korea on the fad of tongue-cutting that propels Korean parents to have their children undergo frenectomy with the hope that it will optimize their children's chances for acquiring English without an accent.

are completely different from one another. You'll be able to pronounce anything" — take on a social connotation.⁵²⁾ The mobility the mother wishes on her daughter's tongue is linked to social mobility that comes with standard speech and that will give her daughter a way out of her segregated neighborhood. However, the mother's gift of lingual mobility endows new languages on the narrator not at the expense of but in addition to the mother tongue. As she wishes away the stigma of bilingualism from her daughter by prematurely equipping her with a flexible tongue, she also suggests that the narrator can retain her relationship to the mother tongue. In this aspect, the mobility the mother dreams of is not only an acknowledgement of existing social conditions but also an ideal of social transformation.

Despite the mother's wishes for her daughter's mobility, the narrator often finds herself immobile in her segregated neighborhood where the Chinese-speaking world and the English-speaking world seldom intersect. The game that the narrator and her siblings play where they pretend to be the neighborhood's newspaper boy shows how ephemeral the exchanges between the two languages are in the narrator's community:

We collected old Chinese newspapers (the Newsboy Ghost not giving us his ghost newspapers) and trekked about the house and yard. We waved them over our heads, chanting a chant: "Newspapers for sale. Buy a newspaper." But those who could hear the insides of words heard that we were selling a miracle salve made from boiled children. The newspapers covered up green medicine bottles. We made up our own English, which I wrote down and now looks like "eeeeeeeee." When we heard the real newsboy calling, we hid, dragging our newspapers under the stairs or into the cellar, where

52) Kingston, *The Woman Warrior*, 164.

the Well Ghost lived in the black water under a lid. We crouched on our newspapers, the San Francisco *Gold Mountain News*, and plugged up our ears with our knuckles until he went away.⁵³⁾

As the newspaper boy's shout of sale instigates the children's game, the spatial separation of the children from the outside worlds is undone by the flow of sounds that crosses the spatial divide. The children's imitation of English in their game connects the world of home to the outside world. However, the absence of substantial linguistic exchanges between the two worlds deprives the sounds of meaning. English becomes unreal in the children's world of isolation. It becomes a symbol for an alien world rather than a means of communication. At the same time, the children's imitation of English is not intelligible to anybody else but them. In fact, the narrator speculates that their imitation of English sounds might actually have exacerbated stereotypes on the part of the listeners in a segregated neighborhood. Even a harmless children's game cannot avoid being a part of the exoticism bred by the thick walls separating the neighborhood's peoples. Those who mishear the children's imitation of English as the selling of "a miracle salve made from children" illustrate how one's preconceived notions influence what one hears and comprehends. In a community devoid of real exchanges between peoples, languages are reduced to sounds that breed prejudices and wild imagination.

The children's newspaper-boy game betrays the newspaper's role in creating an "imagined community" around the modern conception of "homogeneous, empty time."⁵⁴⁾ Benedict Anderson, in his

53) *Ibid.*, 97.

54) Benedict Anderson, *Imagined Communities: Reflections on the Origin and*

path-breaking work on nationalism in the modern era, attributed to the newspaper the function of creating in its readers the sense that they are occupying "the same, clocked, calendrical time" which, in turn, allowed them to see themselves as part of a community whose geographical boundary far exceeds their personal spatial boundaries.⁵⁵⁾ But if the aim of the newspaper is to close the geographical distance that separates its readers and to thereby enable a sense of connectedness, the narrator and her siblings stand outside the community of readers. Their response of running and hiding when they sense the newspaper boy approaching shows the frightening prospect of an interracial community for the children who are used to separate spaces for different peoples. The narrator's Chinese-speaking world, which acquires its coherence not by the English newspapers but by the Chinese newspapers, punctuates the assumed homogeneity of national time by inserting the language of the Old World in the New World.⁵⁶⁾

The narrator's initial silence in school is her response to the change in the environment as she moves out of a segregated world

Spread of Nationalism (London: Verso, 1983), 30.

55) *Ibid.*, 31.

56) Rosaura Sanchez makes a similar statement about the relationship between ethnic minorities and the U.S. nation-state: "Notwithstanding ... the leveling power of hegemonic ideologies to create consensus, antagonistic class, race, and ethnic relations and the center's domination through strategies of exclusion and segregation have in fact ensured and propitiated alternative 'imagined communities' (B. Anderson) within this country, giving rise to a form of polyculturalism often reinforced by spatial segregation and linguistic diversity." Rosaura Sanchez, "Calculated Musings: Richard Rodriguez's Metaphysics of Difference", *The Ethnic Canon: Histories, Institutions, and Interventions* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1995), 155-156.

and experiences the intermingling of different peoples. The lessons she learns in her neighborhood valorize minimalism in linguistic exchanges as in the case when the police come asking questions to her father. A policeman appears on their door and asks her father to translate the Asian words written on a piece of cloth pinned on a dead Asian man, presumably killed in gang violence in the neighborhood. The father adamantly refuses any involvement: "No read Japanese, Japanese words, Me Chinese."⁵⁷) The barriers that separate people are reinforced by the barriers of languages. The brevity of the father's response indicates an unwillingness to participate in substantive linguistic exchanges when the segregation of bodies throws doubt on the potential of languages to cross barriers. The narrator's claim on English is marked by skepticism of linguistic agency from the outset. The grown-up narrator confesses to an abiding stress when it comes to speaking in public even after her full assimilation into English: "A dumbness—a shame—still cracks my voice in two, even when I want to say "hello" casually, or ask an easy question in front of the check-out counter, or ask directions of a bus driver, I stand frozen, or I hold up the line with the complete, grammatical sentence that comes squeaking out at impossible length."⁵⁸) The narrator's shame, which leaves her either speechless or verbose and always feeling inadequate to the occasion of speech, reflects her internalization of the principle of segregation according to which she has no claim on English, a language exterior to the language of her kinship.

As she acquires a personality in English the narrator comes to see the racial inequities that separate peoples and breed prejudices. She

57) Kingston, *The Woman Warrior*, 52.

58) *Ibid.*, 165.

starts speaking up against racism but her vexed relationship with English introduces a troubling uncertainty in her desire to disagree. Each time she brings herself to voice her opposition to racism, she becomes unsure of her ownership of English. The narrator talks back to her employer at the art supply house who makes a racist joke about "nigger yellow", but only in her "bad, small-person's voice that makes no impact."⁵⁹ She refuses to follow orders at the developer's association based on her support of the civil-right movement, but again her voice turns "squeaky and unreliable."⁶⁰ While her racist employers' voices never waver, the narrator has to find her voice in English and assert it each time she dissents.

Finding a voice in English also influences the narrator's relationship to her mother tongue. In the process of negotiating her relationship to English, the narrator relegates her mother tongue to the back of her mind. The demands of everyday negotiations in English make the narrator relocate Chinese outside of her everyday life into her dreams. "To make my waking life American-normal", she says "I turn on the lights before anything untoward makes an appearance. I push the deformed into my dreams, which are in Chinese, the language of impossible stories."⁶¹ The narrator's effort to contain Chinese in her dreams is an effort to compartmentalize her bilingual world in the face of the social pressure to appear normal. In a monolingual society, having bilingual affiliations becomes an abnormality, and the narrator relinquishes her negotiations between the Chinese "I" and the English "I" to approximate the monolingual

59) *Ibid.*, 48.

60) *Ibid.*, 48-49.

61) *Ibid.*, 87.

norm, which, in turn, will help her find a voice in English. In contradistinction to her early school years when she had to struggle to speak, the narrator's later school years display scholastic achievement—"I got straight A's, Mama"—that serves as proof of her normal cognitive development.⁶²⁾ The show of regular cognitive development, however, belies the mother's wish for the narrator's lingual mobility. While the mother attempted to fix her daughter's tongue for lingual flexibility, the narrator ends up having a tongue that's more or less fixed on English.

Despite the seeming compartmentalization of her two languages into waking life and dreams, the dream language keeps infiltrating the narrator's waking life. Her fantasies, in which the narrator discovers compensation for "[her] American life [that] has been such a disappointment" and which constitute a liminal space between the waking life and dreams, become a medium for Chinese to exert influence over English.⁶³⁾ The narrator's rewriting of the Chinese myth of Fa Mulan, in this sense, can be viewed as the repressed Chinese of the dreams finding a way out through the medium of English.⁶⁴⁾ If the woman-warrior fantasy is a byproduct of the narrator's suppressed bilingualism, the narrator's translation of

62) *Ibid.*, 45.

63) *Ibid.*, 45.

64) The extent to which the narrator departs from the original source of the woman-warrior myth in her fantasy has been criticized by some critics, most notably Frank Chin, as evidence of Kingston's inauthenticity as a Chinese American writer. See Frank Chin, "Come All Ye Asian American Writers of the Real and the Fake", *The Big Aiiieeee!* (New York: Meridian, 1991). Kingston herself says that "'The White Tigers' is not a Chinese myth but one transformed by America, a sort of kung fu movie parody." Maxine Hong Kingston, "Cultural Mis-readings by American Reviewers", *Critical Essays on Maxine Hong Kingston*, 97.

Chinese into English is an attempt to smuggle Chinese into the realm of the socially acceptable. But more obliquely, the suppressed bilingualism manifests itself in the narrator's obsession with the power of words and its relation to social justice. The most distinct articulation of the relation between words and social justice comes at the end of the fantasy when the narrator shifts the primary mode of revenge from feats of war to words. "The reporting", the narrator says, "is the vengeance—not the beheading, not the gutting, but the words."⁶⁵ At this point, it becomes clear that the narrator's fantasy is not a looking-back to the Old World in search of a cultural identity but an active engagement with the disappointment of her American life. The narrative act parallels the swordswoman's pursuit of social justice and the entire book becomes a compensation for the suppression of Chinese, the uncertainty of her English voice, and the hesitancy with which she claimed the language when she had to speak up against racism.

In drawing the parallel between vengeance by sword and vengeance by words and between the swordswoman and herself, the narrator points to the "words at our backs" as the ultimate sign of their kinship.⁶⁶ The words refer to the "list of grievances" carved on the swordswoman's back as testimony of her family's sufferings and

65) Kingston, *The Woman Warrior*, 53.

66) *Ibid.*, 53. Carving words on the swordswoman's back is a key departing point for Kingston's woman-warrior story from the original source. Critics have pointed out that the carving of words belongs to another Chinese myth, the myth of the general Yu Fei. See Sau-ling Cynthia Wong, "Autobiography as Guided Chinatown Tour? Maxine Hong Kingston's *The Woman Warrior* and the Chinese American Autobiography Controversy", *Maxine Hong Kingston's The Woman Warrior: A Casebook* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1999), 33.

potential memorial of her death in the war. As she claims an identification with the heroic swordswoman, the narrator says that she also has words on her back: "And I have so many words—"chink" words and "gook" words too—that they do not fit on my skin."⁶⁷) Her list of grievances reflect the narrator's awareness of the debilitating effects of racism on her linguistic development as it echoes the relationship between the body and language established in the act of her mother's cutting her tongue. In her admittance of the inadequacy of the skin as parchment, the narrator constructs another connection between the body and language that counterbalances the one constructed by her mother. Whereas the mother believes she can engineer the body to get rid of any bodily limitations in one's linguistic development, the narrator quietly ponders on her bodily limitation in her struggle with words. She accepts her yellow skin that instigates the chink words and gook words as part of her reality that she has to deal with in her growing up. The narrator's linguistic development, which ultimately places her in the monolingual world of English, betrays the mother's expectations for her lingual mobility. However, the narrator's awareness of her racialized body suggests that the effects of racism on the bilingual child's linguistic development cannot just be dealt with by changing the body to accommodate the dominant language.

In conclusion, I would like to turn to a much analyzed scene in Kingston's text where the narrator turns into a bully to harass a Chinese American classmate who does not speak. Pointed out by many literary critics, most notably Sau-ling Wong, King-Kok Cheung, and

67) Kingston, *The Woman Warrior*, 53.

Anne Cheng, as demonstrating the narrator's reproduction of a racial logic of assimilation, this scene is remarkable not so much for its depiction of a minority subject's agentic violence but more for its insight into the significance of language in defining the terms of sociality.⁶⁸ In portraying the narrator as a bully, Kingston redirects the reader's attention from language as systems of communication—as in natural languages—to language's role in placing the subject in society. The narrator consciously adopts the position of the tough "Mexican and Negro girls" and performs what is regarded as an anti-social mode of being.⁶⁹ In her conscious identification with a racialized, negative mode of social existence and expression, the narrator attempts to outmaneuver the social prescriptions of identity by adopting what is outcast. But what the narrator fails to see is how her idea of a social self is already defined in terms of a speaking subject. She tries to recuperate agency through an identification with the "bad" American subject since it still promises sociality even if it is defined negatively. Refusing to become a speaking subject, however, denies the very possibility of sociality, and this is what makes the silent classmate so troubling to the narrator.

68) Sau-ling Cynthia Wong, *Reading Asian American Literature: From Necessity to Extravagance* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1993); King-Kok Cheung, *Articulate Silences: Hisaye Yamamoto, Maxine Hong Kingston, Joy Kogawa* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1993); Anne Anlin Cheng, *The Melancholy of Race* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2000).

69) *Ibid.*, 176. The bully that the narrator becomes seemingly corresponds to the "delinquent" in Erikson's developmental psychology. According to Erikson, "[w]here such dilemma [of identity] is based on a strong previous doubt of one's ethnic and sexual identity, delinquent and outright psychotic incidents are not uncommon." Erik H. Erikson, "Growth and Crisis of the Healthy Personality", *Identity and the Life Cycle* (New York: International University Presses, Inc., 1959), 91.

The narrator exhorts her classmate to speak outside the bounds of her kin not just as proof of her normal development but also as sign of her potential to be a social subject:

I looked right at her. "I know you talk", I said. "I've heard you." Her eyebrows flew up. Something in those black eyes was startled, and I pursued it. "I was walking past your house when you didn't know I was there. I heard you yell in English and in Chinese. You weren't just talking. You were shouting. I heard you shout."⁷⁰⁾

In this intense confrontation, the narrator momentarily establishes a non-verbal contact between herself and the girl. But instead of pursuing this line of contact, the narrator persists in her demand that the girl talk. What her persistent and physically abusive pursuit gets her are approximations of words—"[s]ounds ... sobs, chokes, noises that were almost words", and the narrator herself breaks down into sobs in front of the girl's unexpected resilience.⁷¹⁾ Ultimately, the two girls create a strange harmony of these "almost words", finding a togetherness at the threshold of language: "Her sobs and my sobs were bouncing wildly off the tile, sometimes together, sometimes alternating."⁷²⁾

Through this powerful representation of the two girls' wordless harmony, Kingston puts forward the question of language for racialized minority subjects as something that exists beyond the associations of difference, deprivation, and deficiency. While the narrator's identification with the racialized subject position of a "bad"

70) Kingston, *The Woman Warrior*, 177-178.

71) *Ibid.*, 178.

72) *Ibid.*, 179.

American subject is an attempt to reclaim the stigma of race, she comes to realize that no language is really adequate in her project of reclamation since the biases of social norms that perceive agency only in terms of a speaking subject are already a part of her linguistic self-expression. The subject position of the "bad" American is also mired in a bias of the speaking subject that yet again constructs deprivation and deficiency against the valences of the speaking subject. The complex relation between racial difference and linguistic difference the narrator illustrates in this example is a sobering reminder that the effort to dispel with the stigma attached to bilingualism as deficiency and to redefine it in terms of excellence can only take effect when it views language as functioning in tandem with race to mark the minority subject.

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Abstract

**“So That You Would Not be Tongue-Tied”:
Mapping Language and Race in Post-World
War II U.S. through the Figure of the
Bilingual Child**

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This essay examines the figure of the bilingual child, prominently featured in the debates on bilingual education in the 1960s, to limn the shifting relations of language and race for the minority subject in post-World War II U.S. An example of progressive educational reform, bilingual education aimed to transform the negative perception of bilingualism, as a linguistic handicap, to a positive model of hyphenation. I locate the figure of the culturally deprived child, popular in the mid-twentieth educational and social discourse, as a precedent to the figure of the bilingual child to show the underlying significance of race in the cultural construction of the bilingual child. In the first section I read Erik Erikson's discussion of minority children's identity formation in *Childhood and Society* (1950), his most widely read text in child psychology, as a psychological explication on cultural deprivation. I draw attention to how Erikson's articulation of the minority child's identity crisis at once highlights the structural inequalities that plague minorities and shores up a sense of normative American identity. I read Maxine Hong Kingston's *The Woman Warrior* (1976) in the second section as a text that resonates with, yet is different from, Erikson's understanding of minority children in its representation of the bilingual child. The racial implications in the figure of the bilingual child, oblique at best in the debates on bilingual education, are made explicit when viewed through Erikson's

delineation of minority children's identity crisis and Kingston's representation of the bilingual child.

Key Words

Bilingual Child, Cultural Deprivation, Identity Crisis, Language, Race, *Childhood and Society*, *The Woman Warrior*