

“You’re a Liar—You’re Just
Like a Woman!”

*Constructing Dominant Ideologies
of Language in Warao Men’s Gossip*

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I would like to take up an issue that is succinctly raised by Pierre Bourdieu in his *Outline of a Theory of Practice*. The notion that social groups produce arbitrary modes of thinking and acting, social structures, and the like is common anthropological fare. Interested in the Marxist problematics of power and ideology, Bourdieu (1977:164) goes on to suggest that “every established order tends to produce (to very different degrees with very different means) the naturalization of its own arbitrariness.” A similar concern guides Michel Foucault’s work on the emergence in the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries of “a new technology of the exercise of power” that gained its productive capacity through its ability “to gain access to the bodies of individuals, to their acts, attitudes, and modes of everyday behavior” (1980:124, 125). Antonio Gramsci (1971, 1995) was interested in the way that hegemony, resistance, and revolution both create and challenge dominant structures; literary critics, such as Frederic Jameson (1981) and Raymond Williams (1977), and anthropologists, such as Jean and John Comaroff (1991) and James Scott (1985), have drawn on Gramsci’s insights in exploring the politics of culture. Michael Taussig has demonstrated the power of commodity fetishism (1980) and of terror and shamanism (1987, 1991) for naturalizing social and racial inequality in postcolonial South America.

My goal in this chapter is to link this question to a subject of growing interest in linguistic anthropology—the study of ideologies of language. As Dell Hymes

(1974) pointed out years ago, perspectives on language structure and use vary as widely between speech communities as do linguistic structures and speech norms. While linguistics has generally considered speakers' reflections on linguistic structure and use to be uninformative and unreliable, a number of writers have opened up fruitful perspectives on these issues. While the contribution of Roman Jakobson's writings on the metalingual function (1960), shifters (1957), and metalanguage (1976) is widely recognized, his earliest published paper also focused attention on the role of literature in moving linguistic structures into and out of conscious awareness ([1921] 1973). Research on the ethnography of speaking has produced a great deal of data not only on the many ways that people think about language but on the relative importance of language use and linguistic reflexivity (contrast Bauman 1983 with Sherzer 1983). Michael Silverstein (1979) has explored the role of linguistic ideologies in shaping scholarly characterizations of language and in attempting to regulate or transform linguistic structures and practices (1985, 1987). Much recent research has focused on the relationship between linguistic ideologies and nationalist agendas (Anderson [1983] 1991; Gal 1979, 1991a, 1993; Woolard 1985, 1989a, 1989b).

In this essay, I suggest that bringing together research on the naturalization of social relations with studies of linguistic ideologies can be extremely productive. The success of this enterprise rests, however, on an adequate conceptualization of the nature of linguistic ideologies, their social distribution, and their location within the processes by which power is produced, naturalized, and challenged. I argue against viewing ideologies of language simply as part of the linguistic background shared by the members of a speech community. I maintain that such a perspective is not only empirically unsound and unenlightening but also figures among the means by which scholars naturalize their own interpretive authority. My data are drawn from research conducted with speakers of Warao, an indigenous language of eastern Venezuela, between 1986 and the present. I begin by discussing the importance of age, gender, and social status in shaping the way that social relations constrain access to linguistic ideologies.

The main focus of the chapter is on a particular example that illustrates the deployment of ideologies of language in discursive interaction—an exchange of gossip between two male curers. I use it to explore some of the ways that ideologies of language are contested within the social formations and sites in which people produce and receive discourse. At first glance, the exchange of gossip between two senior and powerful men would seem to constitute an odd focus for a discussion of contestation, in that the dialogue draws in large measure on one ideology of language in assessing the 'truth' of a wide range of narratives. Suggesting that it stands as the proverbial exception that proves the rule, I argue that the ideological framework that the two men advance is not simply *a* or *the* (dominant) Warao ideology of language, a manifestation of some sort of shared cultural or cognitive foundation. Nor would it be accurate to say that it reflects the linguistic ideology of a particular social group—older male curers. I rather characterize it as a collaborative construction of an ideological stance on language and an attempt to delegitimize competing ideologies. I argue that such cases, in which one ideology appears to dominate, provides fascinating vantage points from which to examine how ideologies of language, to paraphrase Clifford Geertz (1966), become both constructions

of and for social inequality, provided that scholars become critically aware of (rather than seduced by) the ways that dominance over competing ideologies and practices is naturalized.

Approaches to the Comparative Study of Linguistic Ideologies

If one accepts the value of studying linguistic ideologies, a number of potential theoretical and methodological pitfalls are close at hand. How are we to locate linguistic ideologies? How can they be extracted for scholarly examination? What strategies can we adopt as means of forestalling the emergence of postcolonial dichotomies between "ourselves" and "Others" or between "the West" and "the rest"? I find an article published 15 years ago by the late Michelle Rosaldo (1982) to be quite useful in focusing these issues. Rosaldo draws on extensive fieldwork with the Ilongot of the Philippines in critiquing Searle's (1969) presentation of speech act theory. She draws on Ilongot ideologies of language in showing how Searle "falls victim to folk views that locate social meaning first in private persons—and slight the sense of situational constraint" (Rosaldo 1982:212). She argues that Western ideologies of language are so deeply embedded in Searle's analysis of performative verbs that his work should be read less as presenting universal laws of speech acts than as "an ethnography—however partial—of contemporary views of human personhood and action as these are linked to culturally particular modes of speaking" (228).

One of the most interesting implications of Rosaldo's comparison of Western and non-Western linguistic ideologies is its potential for discrediting what I call the myth of the linguist as hero. This myth has two facets: first, even such a cultural relativist as Boas (1911) believed that linguistic categories "always remain unconscious" for native speakers; anything that the uninitiated may say about their own language constitutes a patently false "secondary elaboration." The linguist is purportedly the only individual who can discern patterns of language structure and use without falling victim to the distorting influence of her or his own "native language." Rosaldo's analysis suggests that linguistic ideologies are much too pervasive and subtle to enable students of language the luxury of transcending their own linguistic ethnocentricity. Her work also points to the fruitfulness of treating scholarly studies of language as objects of analysis in the study of linguistic ideologies rather than simply as (ideally) transparent tools for analyzing speech (see also Silverstein 1979 and his contribution to this volume).

While I find the goals of Rosaldo's project to be clearly laudable, I have a number of reservations regarding the way she sets up the comparison. First, like a number of students of linguistic ideology, she presents Ilongot thinking about language in essentialist terms, positing a single linguistic ideology that would seem to be distributed homogeneously throughout the community. Interestingly, although Rosaldo argues that Ilongot speech acts must be studied in terms of the way they emerge in social relationships and interactive settings, she treats linguistic ideologies as unconscious residues that provide unproblematic bases for speech and action. Nevertheless, data from her own writings and those of Renato Rosaldo point to important points of social/cultural differentiation among Ilongot. Michelle

Rosaldo (1980) details important contrasts between the social experience of women and younger men on the one hand and that of senior males on the other. Renato Rosaldo (1980) has shown that these Ilongot cultural patterns have been shaped by colonial and postcolonial contexts of missionization, World War II, guerrilla insurrections and counterinsurgency campaigns, and encounters with anthropologists. It seems likely that ideologies of language deployed in Ilongot communities are no less complex, contested, differentially distributed, and historically produced than other dimensions of social life.

While the opposing, Western view is identified mainly with a particular brand of philosophical discourse, Michelle Rosaldo concludes that "certain of our culturally shaped ideas about how human beings act have limited our grasp of speech behavior, leading us to celebrate the individual who acts without attending to contextual constraints on meaning" (1982:228; emphasis mine). Exactly how the first-person plural is constituted in this assertion is not entirely clear. Reading directly from particular statements regarding language structure and use to some sort of cognitive common denominator that is evenly and passively inserted into "the brain of each member of a community" (in Saussure's [1916] 1959:19 famous words) seems highly unsound.

While I believe that the cultural roots of linguistic ideologies are profound, I suggest that they can be best characterized not as a homogeneous cultural substratum but as dimensions of practices that are deployed in constructing and naturalizing discursive authority. In this chapter I point to the advantages of the latter approach through an examination of how influential men in indigenous communities in eastern Venezuela attempt to assert the dominance of ideologies of language that are closely associated with their positions of authority.

The Social Distribution of Warao Ideologies of Language

Where the Orinoco River, which traverses Venezuela, flows into the Caribbean, it explodes into a broad fan of tributaries that create a swampy delta region. Some 24,000 persons who are designated and refer to themselves as "the Warao," as members of an *étnia* 'indigenous ethnic group', live in marshlands of the delta and surrounding areas.¹ I have worked primarily in two areas, the Mariusa region in the central delta and the Murako-K^wamuhu region to the southeast. Formerly, the Warao lived by harvesting forest products, fishing, and hunting in the moriche palm groves near the coast. The Mariusa group continues to live primarily in this fashion, while horticulture is now of more importance than gathering in Murako and K^wamuhu.

In turning initially to the ways that men talk about language, one is struck by the amount of time that men spend talking about talk, discussing the nature of discourse and its role in social action.² I have discussed elsewhere the salience of competing models of language use in *monikata nome anaka*, dispute mediation events, and their crucial role in rendering these procedures effective (Briggs 1996a). Linguistic ideologies are similarly foregrounded in *abokona serebuayaba*, predaw-

exhortations and demonstrations of ritual knowledge delivered by curers and political leaders.

In this section I contrast two types of Warao discursive practices—women's performances of ritual wailing and men's performances of curing songs. I discuss the fundamentally contrastive character of the ideologies of language that are associated with these two types of discursive practices.

Ritual Wailing

When a relative dies, women sit next to the corpse and wail from the time of the death until the mourners return from the burial site. The texted songs composed by each woman consist of *refrains*, which consist of a kinship term and a formula expressing grief, and *textual phrases*, longer stretches of discourse that tell of the deceased, his or her life, the victim's relationship to the wailer and other members of the community, and the circumstances that led to the death. Women take turns (on the basis of kinship) sitting next to the body, and the person occupying that location generates a much higher percentage of textual phrases. While other wailers continue to compose their own textual phrases, their content is derived in part from the verses sung by the principal wailer.

Two facets of ritual wailing are particularly striking. First, the complex poetic structure of lament texts includes extensive use of reported speech. Stretches of discourse are extracted from discourse events in which women are rarely able to participate actively, such as political rhetoric, as well as from gossip and everyday conversation. Reported speech is used in creating a critical portrait of what is said and done in the community, one that takes male political leaders and curers to task (see Briggs 1992b). Second, ritual wailing is highly polyphonic and intertextual; while all performers embody their own perspective in a distinct text, both verbal and musical parameters are coordinated in producing a collective performance (see Briggs 1993b).

In talking about ritual wailing, women emphasize the importance of the collective nature of the performance, noting that *emo onakumoni*—*aweriseke onaya* 'we couldn't cry apart from one another—we cry very close to one another'. The referent in these expressions is not simply spatial; the women are referring to social relations as indexed by pitch, timbre, and rhythmic coordination. Note that these acoustic features convey powerful affect.³ Both men and women assert that only by expressing the sorrow and rage engendered by the death in ritual wailing can the performers and their audiences put the disruptive effects of mourning behind them. Several of my interlocutors attributed the success of this process to a special form of intersubjectivity: *onayakore, abobona ekó tia* 'when they cry, their thoughts are emptied out'. *Obobona* can be translated as 'thoughts', 'consciousness', and 'intentionality'. The locus of personal identity, the *obobona* contains the cognitive and affective elements that are unique to a given individual. When one's *obobona* is 'emptied out', intentionality and personal agency disappear. The voice that emerges is quintessentially collective, being jointly constructed by a number of performers in concert, and it creates shared understandings of recent events. This voice is ac-

cordingly unimpeachable: *nome sike onaya*; *obohonamo onakumoni* they only cry the truth; they couldn't cry lies'. Even individuals who are being denounced in bold and salacious terms as having caused the death find it difficult to deny the validity of the claims made in laments.

Curing Songs

I now contrast ritual wailing with *hoa*, songs used by *hoarotu* curers in curing and killing (see Olsen 1996, Wilbert 1972). Initiates learn to use songs, ritual cigars, the breath, and massage in controlling malevolent spirits. Practitioners emphasize two aspects of curers' discourse. First, curers stress the power of the 'names' of *hoa* spirits that emerge in songs. *Hoa* songs draw on a specialized lexicon that is unintelligible to noninitiates. This lexicon, when lodged in the poetic, acoustic, and musical patterning of the song, enables the curer to access the transformative energy that lies behind invisible dimensions of the natural world. Proper use of these 'names' forces the spirits to attend to the curer's discourse; they also demonstrate the practitioner's knowledge of and power over the distinctive attributes of the spirit in question and its *obohona*.⁴ A second feature, the linear structure of the song, is referred to as *anaru* 'its path'; moving correctly along the 'path' is crucial if the song is to achieve performative efficacy. The overall rhetorical structure of the song and the parallelistic patterning evident in clusters of lines and verses enable the practitioner to draw the *hoa* along a 'path' that leads either from the patient back to the spirit's home or from the *hoa*'s dwelling through the curer and into a victim's body.

Comparison of Ideologies Connected with Ritual Wailing and Curing Songs

The ideologies associated with ritual wailing and curing songs are similar in one important way—both are regarded as powerfully performative uses of speech. While *hoa* songs can either kill or cure, ritual wailing creates collective structures of feeling that enable communities to overcome the disruptive effects occasioned by death and that significantly affect future events. Beyond this shared feature, however, the two ideologies are highly contrastive. A first difference is gender—while ritual wailing is cited as a quintessential embodiment of women's social power, curers' discourse is the ultimate manifestation of men's social power.⁵ The ideological contrasts are also tied to a vast difference in the roles of performer and audience. Ritual wailing not only is by definition collective discourse but also exhibits a high degree of recipient-design, in Sacks's (1992) terms. Performers often declare openly who should be listening, how they should interpret what is being sung, and what action should be taken. In *hoa*, on the other hand, no human audience need be present. Curers sing alone, often out in the forest, when using *hoa* to cause illness. Even though the patient and her or his relatives may be listening when the goal is to cure, the discourse is not directed at them. This exclusion from the overt role of audience is marked by the use of curers' lexicon.⁶

A key difference in the way that men and women contrast the uses of language associated with the two types of discourse lies in the realm of *intentionality*.

Research conducted by Du Bois (1992), Duranti (1988), Rosaldo (1982), and others has pointed to contrasts between speech communities with respect to the role accorded to intentionality. The contrast evident in the way that intentionality is constructed in ritual wailing as opposed to *hoa* songs is as sharp as the gulf that Rosaldo perceived between Western (scholarly) and Ilongot discourse. *Hoa* songs can be characterized as *hyperintentional* speech, as means of imposing the curer's *obohona* on the *obohona* of both spirits and victims through the use of "names" and "paths." The social power of wailing is seen as emerging through the *displacement of intentionality* by "emptying out" the *obohona* (rather than using it purposively to control the *obohona* of others) and by sharing authorship via the process of collective composition.

The Deployment of Linguistic Ideologies in Gossip

I would like to forestall two possible readings of the comparison I have just made. First, I do not wish to imply that competing ideologies of language are evident only in speech settings that revolve around highly marked formal patterns and social contexts; to the contrary, I argue in this section that the deployment of linguistic ideologies also plays a crucial role in everyday discourse. Second, I argued earlier that access to ideologies of language is socially distributed. I suggest, however, that the relationship between contrastive ideologies and social differentiation is vastly more complex than a mere one-to-one correlation would suggest. It is not simply the case that men conceive of language in *X* terms and women in *Y* or that curers assert *A* and noninitiates *B* about language. In order to tease out some of these complexities, I now examine the way that two men give voice to competing ideologies of language in an exchange of gossip.

The sorts of narrative exchanges generally termed "gossip" provide an ideal ground on which to examine how power is created and legitimated in the circulation of discourse. Scholars have long documented the crucial role that gossip plays in creating and contesting intimacy, knowledge, and reputation (see Abrahams 1983, Gluckman 1963, Haviland 1977, Szew 1966, White 1994). Research has focused more recently on the reflexive or metadiscursive (Bauman and Briggs 1990, Briggs 1993b, Silverstein and Urban 1996) power of gossip; tellers and audiences seek to regulate the circulation of discourse not only within and between gossip sessions but also in other sorts of discursive settings (Besnier 1989, Brenneis 1996, Goodwin 1990, Hannerz 1967, Shuman 1986). Building on Gluckman's (1963) classic interpretation of gossip as an instrument of informal social control, Merry (1984) suggests that the representations formulated in gossip are often incorporated into more "formal" agencies of control. White (1994) argues that gossip about others provides people with a particularly poignant way of revealing things about themselves. The case I examine here is particularly interesting in that the two principal participants attempt to counter and reconfigure widely dispersed representations of themselves under the guise of gossiping about how others are gossiping about them. As such, their exchange provides a fascinating window on the power and the limitations of gossip and its purveyors to control multiple and often conflicting representations, discourse genres, and ideologies of language.

In Warao, gossip is generally termed *debe wara*—‘to tell stories or gossip’. As is true of a wide number of languages and social groups, the term *gossip* is used in two contrastive senses. It can be used to refer to the pleasurable exchange of everyday narratives about people: *Debe waraki!* ‘Let’s tell gossip!’ Particularly when the suffix *-witu* (which denotes intensity and/or exclusivity) is attached, *debe* can also denigrate particular narratives as vicious and vacuous—*tamaha debewitu!* ‘that’s nothing but a bunch of lies!’ Exchanges of gossip can take place nearly anywhere and in the midst of nearly any activity—except the sorts of performances (such as dispute mediation, ritual wailing, and ritual events) that open up discourse to broad audiences and increase accountability for what is said.⁷ As in many types of communities and settings, a wide range of speech forms emerge in exchanges of gossip; since gossip includes a great deal of reported speech, things that were spoken previously in dispute mediations and public proclamations are just as likely to get recontextualized as intimate whisperings. Gossip is much like ritual wailing in this regard. Finally, while everyone has the right to tell and to listen to gossip, people are careful about *what* they say to *whom*: gossip is thus most commonly exchanged between relatives and friends. Gender, age, sexuality, and, as we shall see, social status affect how particular people tell gossip and with whom they choose to exchange it.

The example on which I focus is an exchange of gossip between two senior men, Manuel Torres and Santiago Rivera,⁸ which took place shortly after I took up residence in the Mariusa region in May 1987. These men, both of whom were about sixty years of age at the time, were two of the three most powerful leaders in the region. Mr. Rivera was the *kobenaboro* ‘governor’, the paramount indigenous authority in the area, and he was also one of the most widely feared *hoarotu* practitioners in the delta. He died in 1992, one of the first victims of a cholera epidemic that killed hundreds of Warao (see Briggs and Mantini Briggs 1997). Mr. Torres is deemed by many to be *the* most powerful *hoarotu*. Both men were skilled in other types of curing practice as well. They each had three wives, a clear indication of their social stature. Apprenticeships that provide expertise in curing also enable one to use the same body of knowledge, coupled with a slightly different set of techniques, in sorcery. Thus, while gaining a reputation as being quite skilled in using at least one form of curing/sorcery confers a great deal of authority and social status, this sort of recognition also invites sorcery accusations, which can have very serious consequences. Curers use exchanges of gossip to learn what others are saying about them and to circulate counterassertions designed to undermine the credibility and legitimacy of charges that have been lodged against them.

After the morning meal, Mr. Rivera, his wives, several of their children, and I visited Mr. Torres at his house, which was located at the juncture of the Mariusa River and the Caribbean. Once they had exchanged greetings, the two men sat on the floor of the house, face-to-face, less than two feet apart. Lowering their voices and maintaining eye contact with each other, they excluded others from primary roles in the conversation. Their wives and several of their older children and sons-in-law, who were sitting in an adjacent section of the house or lying in nearby hammocks, broke into the conversation from time to time. These interventions are indeed significant, and I will analyze these contributions from the sidelines in

a future paper; here I concentrate on Mr. Rivera’s and Mr. Torres’s roles in the exchange. Since I had turned off a larger tape recorder that was attached to two semi-shotgun microphones shortly before the dialogue began, they forgot that my small cassette tape recorder was still in operation.⁹

The two men are concerned mainly with questions of health, sickness, and death, not only in their community but throughout the delta as a whole. Statistics provided by Miguel Layrisse, George Salas, and H. Dieter Heinen (1980:66) for five areas of the delta suggest that approximately 50 percent of the children die before reaching puberty. Unfortunately, health conditions appear to have significantly worsened since the years from 1950 through the 1970s, when these data were collected; various diarrheal diseases and malnutrition continue to kill children, and mortality related to tuberculosis appears to have risen dramatically. It thus seems far from surprising that daily talk in Mariusa, as in much of the delta, centers on questions of health, illness, and curing. The role of Warao medical practitioners in both curing patients and causing illness is a particularly common topic of conversation by people in general. Given Mr. Rivera’s and Mr. Torres’s status as prominent curers, many of the charges they discuss had been leveled against them. I focus on the way that the two men use linguistic ideologies in representing these accusations and—as you might imagine—denying their validity.

Early in the conversation, both Mr. Torres and Mr. Rivera admit that they have retaliated through the use of *boa* against practitioners who live in other regions in response to what they deemed to be acts of sorcery. These self-incriminating statements would never have been made in a setting in which they could be held accountable, that is, if an audience were present, rather than overhearers, and if anyone who might be listening were not a close relative or ally. Such an indiscretion might leak this information to the two men’s enemies.

Mr. Rivera then contrasts the persona that he has just constructed for himself—as a powerful and vengeful sorcerer—with the way he conducts himself at present in his capacity as ‘governor’:

(1) *Conversation between Santiago Rivera (SR) and Manuel Torres (MT); Mariusa, 1987¹⁰*

- a. SR *Atusike debu asidaba debuya.*
‘Long ago I really did use bad speech’.
- b. SR *Ama ine debu moaya,*
‘Now I counsel people’,
SR *maribu nokoitiane;*
‘and they must listen to my words’;
- d. SR *tataka uriabane debu moaya.*
‘I counsel them slowly and carefully’.

Here Mr. Rivera juxtaposes two basic modes of discourse production. The first, *debu asidaba* ‘bad speech’, is generally used in reference to utterances that reflect anger (*yari*), jealousy (*miabi*), or the like. Such discourse does not emerge from careful consideration of one’s *obobona*, the locus of personal identity, cognition, affect, and intentionality. Such uncontrolled speech also fails to respect the *obobona* of one’s interlocutors, and it is likely to generate conflict (see Briggs 1996a). When used in the context of talk about curing, particularly when the suffix *-ba* is present,

abhu asidaha is often used to refer to the expression of anger through sorcery. These practices are, as I have noted, deemed to be the epitome of hyperintentionality and individual, asocial agency. Mr. Rivera seems to be using the term 'bad speech' both in reference to unreflective speech and to sorcery.

In (1) Mr. Rivera contrasts his former use of 'bad speech' with his current reliance on *abhu moa*—'counseling'. This discourse mode embodies an idealized model of discourse production. *Aidamo* 'leaders' must 'counsel' the members of their community regarding how one should talk and act. A great deal of 'counseling speech' consists of model utterances that are designed for recontextualization in the mouths of their addressees. 'Leaders' assert that if people speak in this way, social conflict can be avoided. 'Counseling speech' is deemed by leaders to be the quintessential embodiment of order. Since *aidamo* 'leaders' counsel *nebu* 'followers' or 'workers', parents counsel children, and husbands 'counsel wives—but not vice versa—'counseling speech' constitutes a central discursive means for constructing social inequality (see Briggs 1996a).¹¹

The conversation between Mr. Torres and Mr. Rivera then turns to recounting the accusations against them. Not surprisingly, the two attempt to refute the charges by labeling them as 'bad speech'. These narratives are characterized as *debe* 'gossip'. How could the two men establish the falsity of these widely circulated narratives? Stories are deemed to be 'gossip' when they do not reflect authoritative knowledge of the events they claim to represent. Determining the 'truth' or 'falsity' of such narratives involves uncovering the many layers of intertextuality that have been built into the narratives, or, as Bauman and I (1990) have referred to it, the process of decontextualization and recontextualization. Mr. Torres and Mr. Rivera thus carefully trace the chain of transmission backward, as it were, assessing how each narrator purportedly told the narrative, how she or he extracted it from previous accounts, and why. The crucial point in the discussion of each narrative is the determination of *abotana* 'its beginning': the story can be assessed as 'the truth' or 'just a lie' once it has been traced to the purported first telling and the narrators' knowledge of the events in question has been assessed; motives for narrativizing the events are also examined. Mr. Torres and Mr. Rivera use this process of reconstructing the successive recontextualizations of these narratives as a means of asserting that the stories are based on a lack of authoritative knowledge as to what took place.

The concepts of 'bad speech' and 'counseling speech' provide an ideological basis for a great deal of talk—and talk about talk—in Warao communities. *Abotana* 'its beginning' similarly holds the key to linguistic ideologies presented by Warao men in a wide variety of speech genres. Crucially, this concept motivates a generative system for transforming *debe* *nobo* 'ancestral narratives', what we would call myths, into curing songs. Known to cures alone, these songs invoke and harness supernatural power by revealing the *abotana* of each element of the social and natural world, as I discussed in the case of *baa* songs. *Abotana* also provides a key to grasping the complex system of epistemic evaluatives in Warao—suffixes and particles that grammatically encode assertions as to the nature and reliability of the evidence on which one's utterance rests. It would similarly be possible to connect these factors of linguistic ideologies with Warao ideologies of emotion, the person, the body,

and so forth (see Briggs 1992b, 1996a). Indeed, I believe that the concepts that I have outlined are quite telling with respect to the way Warao construct language, action, subjectivity, truth, and knowledge.

I submit, however, that it would be misleading to simply assert that the concepts of 'counseling', 'bad speech', and 'the beginning' form key elements of linguistic ideologies that underlie Warao men's speech. Let us return to the conversation between Mr. Rivera and Mr. Torres. Recall their status as two of the respected—and feared—curers in the delta. Directly confronting such individuals would be viewed as suicidal. As the gossip they report bears witness, however, spend a great deal of time criticizing what are seen as their abuses of power—they are safely out of earshot. While the two men often adopt a mocking, parrotone when recounting this gossip and an air of bravado in reporting their own responses, hushed, serious, and genuinely fearful reactions to particularly poignant charges also emerge. Indeed, such gossip provides a powerful—if precarious—means of constraining their actions. A host of subversive recontextualizations of their narratives could spark such an extensive expansion and legitimization of lines of rivalry and resistance against the two men that they might lose power, be expelled from the area, be denounced to government authorities (as "evil *baa* sorcerer" and/or become the objects of serious retaliation. If these sorcery accusations were tied to a death in the community, the gossip narratives would certainly gain even more weight once they were broadcast to the community in a number of vocal through ritual wailing.

The two men have a great deal of fun attempting to discredit a series of challenges leveled against them by a man named Francisco Gómez, who is not a curer, but López, a specialist of much lesser stature who practices a different sort of curer and a number of unnamed female narrators. Mr. Rivera and Mr. Torres trace gossip back to contentions by Mr. Gómez and Mr. López that the latter "saw" two cures in their dreams. The two *baa* practitioners deem Mr. Gómez's accusations to be particularly laughable—since he possesses no supernatural capital himself, he could not possibly have "seen" a *hoaroti* in his dreams.¹² While Mr. López is a curer, he is a *babanaroti*, not a *hoaroti*, and it is accordingly deemed impossible for him to have 'seen' a *hoaroti* in his dreams. The manner in which Mr. Rivera claims to have refuted Mr. López's charges in a confrontation with his accuser particularly telling:

(2) Continuation of conversation; SR = Santiago Rivera, MT = Manuel Torres

a. MT *Warao are era*.

'People tell a lot of gossip.'

b. SR *Warao arebu*.

'People's gossip.'

c. MT *Warao, warao arebu*.

'People's, people's gossip.'

d. SR *ʔama thi obobonamo, obobonamo, obobonamo, obobonamo—tida monuka!*

"So you're a liar, a liar, a liar, a liar—you're just like a woman!"

e. MT

["*obobonamo, obobonamo*
"a liar, a liar"]

- f. SR "¿Qué pasa, pues?"
"So what's the matter with you?"
- g. "Thi noboto?"
"Are you a child?"
- h. "Thi idamo diana, thi kate kayamo idamo diana!"
"You're an old man already, and you aren't even as old as we are!"
- i. MT |
"thi kate idamo mi diana!"
"look, you're old too!"
- j. SR *Tanaba mi diana ine.*
"That's what I said to him!"

People very seldom witness curers' attempts to inflict *boa* or other purported acts of supernatural violence. Instead, the most reliable evidence is provided by the dreams that come to curers after treating patients. Access to the *abotana* 'beginning' of these sorcery accusations is thus predicated on forms of symbolic capital, to use Bourdieu's (1991) term, that only curers possess. Lacking the symbolic capital that accrues to a powerful *boa* practitioner, Mr. López is reduced to the status of those individuals who are most impotent, in the terms advanced by Mr. Rivera and Mr. Torres—women and children. The way that Mr. Rivera focuses on his accusers' age is important. A generation younger, Mr. Gómez and Mr. López enjoy much more limited access to the discursive regime associated with curing and sorcery. It is, on the other hand, precisely the members of their generation who are posing significant challenges to the positions of leadership enjoyed by Mr. Rivera, Mr. Torres, and other senior men. I return to this point later.

Mr. Rivera and Mr. Torres dismiss the narratives told by women (as repeated by the two men's wives and daughters). They claim that *naminanabarone*, *are debe waraya*, *debe waraya*, *debe waraya*—even though they don't know what they're talking about, they're always telling gossip and telling gossip and telling gossip. What basis do they have for asserting that their female accusers are ignorant of the events in question? Except in the case of those few women who become skilled curers, the concept of *abotana* marginalizes women's narratives—and thus their attempts to call the authority of men like Mr. Rivera and Mr. Torres into question—by fiat.

The implications of the situated use of these linguistic ideologies is not confined to this conversation or these particular events. I claim that deploying linguistic ideologies plays an important role in contesting social inequality and social power in Warao communities. Performances of such discourse forms as ritual wailing and gossip narratives, along with curing songs, ancestral narratives, and political rhetoric, constitute powerful forms of social action. I noted earlier that women's ritual wailing provides a crucial means of appropriating and criticizing types of authoritative male discourse to which women are seldom granted access as performers. Gossip plays an important role in Warao social life not simply by virtue of its potential uses in generating collective criticism of 'leaders' but also in that it is accessible, *mutatis mutandis*, to everyone. It thus enables women and men who are not political leaders or curers to contest issues of power and violence. When leaders stand accused of having flagrantly abused their power, gossip provides a means of attempt-

ing to create the consensus needed to force public disclosure of their actions in a dispute mediation.¹³ Mr. Rivera and Mr. Torres were not only two of the most powerful 'leaders' in the region, but they entered into social conflict frequently, purportedly using sorcery to achieve their ends. At the time of the gossip session, they were jointly countering efforts by other men to usurp their authority and negotiating (sometimes fractious) relations with members of nearby communities. Their alliance ended some two years later, and the complex discursive constructions of hostility and competition that each leveled against the other became an important focus of social life in Mariusa.

Recounting this gossip and attempting to discover its *abotana* thus constituted crucial means of both constructing and deploying their alliance (while it lasted). If either man should be forced to defend himself in a dispute mediation session, it would be extremely useful to have worked out a good defense in advance in a setting in which accountability was lower and the possibilities for recontextualization were greatly constrained. This tactic was particularly valuable in that the other ally, being a 'leader' (*aidamo*), would likely serve in the role of either key witness or officiating 'leader' in a dispute mediation, thereby creating an excellent opportunity to recontextualize the lines of defense that had been devised in this gossip session. Note that the two men devote much of the conversation to asserting what they would say in response to the charges advanced through gossip, should an open confrontation take place. The social power of what they are saying lies not just in its utterance in the present interaction itself but in its potential recontextualization; the two men thus exploit the way that conflict talk circulates between a variety of agencies of social control, as Merry (1984) reminds us.

The entextualization process, the shaping of the discourse into textual segments that can be lifted out of the conversation for future use (see Bauman and Briggs 1990), is not oriented simply toward dispute mediation events. During the conversation, the two men were clearly aware that their families were listening and, at times, collaborating in revealing the gossip that was being told about them. As they traced the *abotana* of the 'gossip', Mr. Rivera and Mr. Torres issued a number of warnings that were designed to be relayed to the individuals who were spreading the 'gossip'. They asserted that they would use their power as 'leaders' in assessing a cash fine against the women for concocting 'mere gossip'. The warnings for the two men who claim to have seen Mr. Rivera and Mr. Torres in their dreams were more pointed. They threatened to send *boa* against them: if Mr. Gómez and Mr. López were *truly* practitioners of *boa*—as their claims to having "seen" *hoaratu* curers in their dreams would suggest—they could simply deflect the invading spirits; if not, they would die.

In mustering linguistic ideologies in the service of discrediting the gossip directed against them, Mr. Rivera and Mr. Torres claimed to reveal the "truth," asserting that their detractors were only telling "lies." As Michel Foucault argues, presenting truth claims goes much deeper than simply validating a particular body of facts:

Each society has its régime of truth, its 'general politics' of truth: that is, the types of discourse which it accepts and makes function as true; the mechanisms and instances

which enable one to distinguish true and false statements, the means by which each is sanctioned, the techniques and procedures accorded value in the acquisition of truth; the status of those who are charged with saying what counts as true. (1980:131)

Foucault's statement provides an important impetus to push the analysis toward understanding how power relates not just to discourses but to the mechanisms through which discourses are produced, circulated, and legitimated. In contrast, the way that he posits one-to-one correlations between societies and regimes of truth casts the relationship in much too static, homogeneous, and unitary a fashion. As Gal (1993) suggests, linguistic ideologies are contested by powerful social actors within European nation-states. The assumptions that are embedded in Foucault's notion of a "régime of truth" similarly lessen its usefulness as a framework for analyzing the production of truth in the Delta Amacuro of Venezuela. Mr. Rivera and Mr. Torres used linguistic ideologies in attempting to exercise tighter control over the economy of truth and, consequently, to deny their adversaries access to the socially significant discourses that are regulated by this economy. These ideologies naturalize a hierarchy of discursive forms; since women and non-specialist men lack direct access to the *abotana*, their discourse can be characterized as "mere gossip" that lacks the power associated with curing speech, accounts of dreams, ancestral narratives, and political discourse. Such uses of linguistic ideologies can play a crucial role in efforts by elder men to naturalize the construction of their substantial political and supernatural capital. Only individuals who enjoy access to the "beginning" of recent events and of curing power—which also emanates from the dreams of initiated practitioners—can speak authoritatively and expect their words to become the basis for collective action. Linguistic ideologies thus provide crucial means of attempting to naturalize the social structural status quo.

White (1997) argues that gossip reveals how penetrable even the most prominent reputations may be, disclosing not only areas of greatest vulnerability but also the boundaries of attack. By entering into the stream of gossip about themselves, individuals can attempt to shore up weak lines of defense, reposition the boundaries that limit offensive and defensive actions, and raise or lower the stakes. By placing such rearward actions in a venue that is open to many and not tightly controlled by any, however, the objects of gossip risk heightening the visibility and social consequences of attacks on their reputation. It is small wonder that individuals who enjoy privileged access to other discursive institutions often loudly signal their refusal to respond to such charges—that is, assert that they are unwilling to participate in the circulation of gossip about them.

Nor would it be accurate to suggest that the regimes of truth in which Warao communities operate are entirely shaped by the economy of spirit dreams and its resistance by women and younger men. Indeed, if this were the case, I doubt that Mr. Rivera and Mr. Torres would have been so concerned with the accusations that had been made against them. The ideologies of language that they use operate within the sphere of influence of four powerful sets of institutions: the Capuchin (Catholic) Mission, which was established in the delta in 1925; national political parties, especially the Acción Democrática, Partido Cristiano Social, and Movi-

miento al Socialismo; national and regional governmental bureaucracies; and business enterprises and corporations operating in the delta, which range in scale from one-family fishing operations to factories that export palm hearts to Europe and the United States to British Petroleum. None of these institutions has ever opened an office in the Mariusa region, and the positions of authority occupied by Mr. Rivera and Mr. Torres were not conferred on them by agents of the nation-state, political parties, corporations, or missions. Nevertheless, Mr. Rivera's considerable power as *kobenaboro* was based in part on his ability to obtain at least some goods and bureaucratic support from priests, politicians, capitalists, and bureaucrats and to provide some measure of resistance against the exploitation of Mariusans by these parties. While his ability to present himself as the "traditional" leader of the region—and thus to counsel and cure his followers—was crucial, knowledge of Spanish, literacy, and familiarity with bureaucratic procedures were also extremely useful skills.

While Mr. Rivera was much better versed in this area than his peers, his rudimentary competence was greatly inferior to that of a number of younger men who had been employed for years by commercial fishermen who operate in the Mariusa area. These younger individuals were increasingly threatening his authority; they talked of seizing the position of *kobenaboro*, and several tried to gain the post of *comisario* 'commissioner', which is granted directly by the government. Literacy is required for such appointments, and neither the Capuchins nor the government has ever attempted to establish a school in the Mariusa area; to date, therefore, illiteracy has precluded the possibility that the *kobenaboro* might have to confront the authority of a government-appointed official in Mariusa. Nevertheless, in 1987, the authority of senior men was being contested by individuals who could draw on new possibilities for building alliances with institutions of the nation-state; the regime of truth that Mr. Rivera and Mr. Torres used in exerting power over women and younger men was thus being confronted with new forms of contestation. In sum, it was becoming quite clear by 1987 that Mr. Rivera and Mr. Torres could not fend off attempts to usurp their power for terribly long.

Again I wish to make it clear that I am not asserting that one social group (senior males) and one ideology of language are facing off with competing sectors (women, younger men, and older men who lack the status of curers) and a competing ideology; the construction of difference and inequality is much more complex in political-economic and historical terms than this simple opposition would suggest. As I noted earlier, the alliance between Mr. Rivera and Mr. Torres exploded and was supplanted by highly acrimonious rivalry some two years after this conversation was recorded. Unable to muster support for displacing Mr. Rivera as *kobenaboro*, Mr. Torres endeavored for several years to draw on the power of the nation-state, seeking to become a government-endorsed (and-remunerated) local official. Monolingual and unable to sign his name, he failed to obtain an appointment as a *comisario*. He eventually moved with some one hundred other Mariusans to a town on the mainland where he could gain government recognition as a *cazique*, a term used by Spanish speakers to designate persons whom they consider to be traditional leaders of Native American communities. Thus, Mr. Rivera and Mr. Torres were also willing to participate in competing regimes of truth in advancing

their claims to power.¹⁴ When Mr. Rivera was killed by the cholera epidemic in 1992 (his death was initially blamed on Mr. Torres), his son was named *kobenaboro*. Lacking training as a curer, the younger Mr. Rivera was chosen precisely because he could speak Spanish relatively well and was able to deal more effectively with bureaucrats. My point here is not that spirit dreams no longer play a crucial role in constructing authority, for this is not the case. Rather, the growing penetration of ideologies of language and discourse practices associated with the nation-state and other institutional nexuses underlines the importance of Mr. Rivera's and Mr. Torres's interventions within this contested discursive economy.

Ideologies, Contestation, and Practices

I have suggested that this gossip session revolved around the imposition of a single dominant ideology and discursive regime. How does it relate to the questions regarding the *contestation* of ideologies of language that I raised in the introduction to this chapter? If contesting language ideologies is at stake here, why don't Mr. Rivera and Mr. Torres take on these competing ideologies more directly?

Let us reexamine the three major ways that ideologies of language emerged in this portion of the gossip exchange in addressing these questions. In the opening segment of the transcript, Mr. Rivera contrasted his former use of sorcery in aggressive and highly successful acts of vengeance with his current concern with "counseling" members of his community. As I have detailed elsewhere (1996a), the use of discourse in creating conflict as opposed to imposing order and interpersonal harmony is associated respectively with representations of discourse as "bad words," tools for aggressive and sometimes violent self-assertion, versus "counseling speech," discourse that quintessentially embodies social order and authority. These ideologies of language are presented as a part of representations of particular, situated discursive practices—that is, as an important dimension of the ways that social relations are created and sustained within and between communities.

The question of the accusations that had been leveled against Mr. Rivera and Mr. Torres by women is complex, and I included more in-depth discussion in another essay (see Briggs 1993a). The two men's representations of this gossip is confined largely to signaling the content of the accusations themselves; rather than criticizing the sorts of evidence that the women marshal to legitimate their accounts. Mr. Rivera and Mr. Torres simply dismiss the narratives as lacking a factual basis: "even though they don't know what they're talking about, they're always telling gossip and telling gossip and telling gossip." The two men may not know all that much about the evidential underpinnings of the women's narratives. Women often base the authority of their gossip narratives on detailed knowledge of everyday activities, such as gathering, preparing, and distributing food and caring for the sick, about which they have particularly detailed information. Since women generally exchange gossip with other women, Mr. Rivera and Mr. Torres learn about these accusations through their wives and daughters. When such narratives are recontextualized for the benefit of male relatives, very little of the detailed description that provides their evidential basis is retained.

A very complex form of contestation is thus going on here. On the one hand, the two men's attempt to impose the ideology of language associated with the curers' discursive regime on gossip affects the relative legitimacy—and thus the social force—of narratives associated with these contrastive ideologies; accepting *abotana* as the only basis for legitimating such narratives would deprive women's gossip of a great deal of its social and political force. On the other hand, women's selective use of silence, the withholding of detailed information regarding the ways they represent language and experience in gossip, helps shield the discursive regimes over which they exert more control from attempts by senior males to belittle women and their narratives. Here ideologies of languages are closely tied to highly gendered practices—curing and sorcery, on the one hand, and such activities as securing, preparing, and distributing food and caring for the sick, on the other hand. The opposition that Mr. Rivera and Mr. Torres invoke between men's and women's gossip is thus closely tied into the social construction of gender and the overall economy of relations between women and men. The relationship here between women's and men's gossip points to the complexity of the issue of women's silence, as poignantly delineated by Susan Gal (1991b). To analyze this issue adequately, we must attend to men's denigration of women's gossip, women's attempts to limit male access to their gossip, and the way that women pass along gossip to their male relatives (Briggs 1993a).

The attack on the stories told by Mr. Gómez and Mr. López seems at first glance to revolve a great deal less around contesting contrastive ideologies of language than around restricting access to the ideologies of language that Mr. Rivera and Mr. Torres are constructing as dominant, and to some extent this is the case. By succeeding in according hegemony to a particular ideology, one can enjoy a position of authority by virtue of having demonstrated control over the *process* of shaping how discourse can legitimately be produced, circulated, and rendered authority—that is, in Foucault's terms, over regimes of truth and knowledge. If access can be restricted to the use of discursive practices that are deemed to embody these dominant ideologies, then the champions of these ideologies can provide themselves with an even more effective means of creating social power. By tying the production and legitimation of "knowledge" and "truth" to the discursive practices that provide access to *abotana*, Mr. Rivera and Mr. Torres can largely restrict rights to practitioners like themselves with respect to what they are constructing as the most authoritative discursive realm. Since they are recognized as being more knowledgeable than nearly all of the remaining curers, they can potentially exercise a great deal of control over the social construction of discourse and power. Crucially, the practices to which they attach discursive authority also greatly shape, through curing and sorcery, the overall economy of life and death.

Nevertheless, I believe that this interpretation stays rather too close to Mr. Rivera's and Mr. Torres's representation of the nature of these accusations. As I noted earlier, Mr. Gómez and Mr. López, a generation younger than Mr. Rivera and Mr. Torres, were at the time beginning to compete for leadership roles with the senior generation. In launching their challenge, Mr. Gómez and Mr. López were attempting to draw on the experiences they gained as employees of the commercial fishermen who exploit Marisan natural resources and labor. Since Mr.

Rivera and Mr. Torres lacked this experience, Mr. Gómez and Mr. López enjoyed more fluency in Spanish and more in-depth knowledge of petty capitalist production. Moreover, the owners of these small-scale fishing enterprises lent material and sociopolitical support to members of the junior generation due to the closer social ties they enjoy and the owners' ability to exert greater control over them; senior men, particularly Mr. Rivera, seek to maintain much more autonomy from individuals, such as the commercial fishermen, who have their own sources of social and economic power. Bureaucrats, politicians, and missionaries have also frequently shifted their alliances from older and established leaders to younger aspirants. Ventriiloquizing the words of the owners and of government officials thus played a crucial role in the way that Mr. Gómez, Mr. López, and others articulated their challenges.

What Mr. Rivera and Mr. Torres failed to mention in characterizing the charges that Mr. Gómez and Mr. López leveled against them is that the accusations included a threat to denounce the two men to magistrates and police in Tucupita—as malevolent sorcerers who were creating conflict in their own communities. Mr. Rivera and Mr. Torres were aware that if these younger men brought their conflicts with senior men to the attention of government officials (particularly magistrates and police officers in town), revealing spirit dreams that lay the blame on other practitioners' shoulders would evoke only ridicule from officials. They were well aware that being accused by women and younger men of generating conflict and abusing power could undermine their credibility in the eyes of government officials entirely—if not land them in jail. Note the interesting contradiction in Mr. Gómez's and Mr. López's position. On the one hand, they declared that sorcery must stop and that the power of the nation-state must supplant it as a means of creating social order. They were similarly, as I noted, quite interested in gaining remunerated positions as representatives of that order. On the other hand, they claimed to be able to prove that Mr. Rivera and Mr. Torres are sorcerers by telling about their *own* spirit dreams. Mr. Gómez and Mr. López thus combined two largely patriarchal modes of establishing social dominance—as associated with curing/sorcery and the nation-state—in such a way as to erode the authority of the former and greatly enhance that of the latter.

This is not to say that Mr. Rivera and Mr. Torres did not also attempt to draw on discourses associated with the nation-state; as I noted, Mr. Torres attempted several years later to be designated as a *comisario* in order to effectively challenge Mr. Rivera's position as *kobenahora*. Nevertheless, in their gossip they sought to incorporate ideologies and practices associated with the state while at the same time maintaining the preeminent discursive authority of the curing/sorcery régime over which they enjoyed a virtual monopoly. In sum, the process of contesting ideologies and practices is very much at stake in the discussion of the accusations by Mr. Gómez and Mr. López.

That Mr. Rivera and Mr. Torres undertook this process in an exchange of gossip adds, I think, an interesting twist to our understanding of gossip as a social and discursive institution. Gossip sessions are heteroglossic events par excellence in which interlocutors enjoy a great deal of freedom to juxtapose a diverse range of genres, topics, styles, and perspectives. Mr. Rivera and Mr. Torres exploit the discursive

openness and heterogeneity of gossip in quoting the words of women, younger men, and other types of curers, and they draw on a range of discursive forms and contexts. As competing perspectives are introduced, however, the range of discursive goals and modes of building authority associated with them are reduced to truth claims about supernatural knowledge. Rather than presenting these claims as emanating from alternative formations—equally systematic bodies of ideologies and discursive practices that are tied to other individuals, identities, and sites—the two men simply reduce them to the status of defective versions of the one sphere of ideology and practice that they are promoting. As successive narrative performances are recounted in reverse, competing discursive propositions are demolished until only one ideological framework and one mode of imposing it emerge as dominant. If they can construct the discursive regime that they closely control as being the only valid path to 'knowledge' and 'truth', its deployment will continue to provide a dominant means of regulating the production, circulation, and legitimization of discourse. Brenneis (1996) has argued that Fijian Indians celebrate heteroglossia and polyphony when they gossip. The present case points to the way gossip can ironically draw on these properties in attempting to suppress them.

This exchange illustrates the metadiscursive power—and the pitfalls—of gossip. The intertextual reach of gossip positions it as an excellent means of exploring the tensions between multiple and often competing forms and sites of discourse and social control and of attempting to change their relationship to each other and one's own position within them. Paradoxically, the least regulated and least authoritative discourse form is used in an attempt to regulate the production, circulation, and reception of much more authoritative and tightly related discursive institutions. But the move is just as risky as it is powerful—circulating representations in gossip can drag participants into these other arenas, such as dispute mediations and de-meaning and possibly dangerous encounters with police and judicial officials. Gossip sessions provide excellent venues for constructing and pre-testing rhetorics that could be collectively deployed in such encounters. But if these representations are transformed into public accusations of sorcery in one of these contexts, the new mix of players, interests, and alliances may well depart drastically from prefabricated dialogues.

Gluckman (1963) pointed out long ago that gossip is a powerful tool of social control. I am arguing here that this capacity is tied not only to the much touted value of gossip for representing persons, events, and social relations but to its status as talk at the limits of metadiscursive regulation that can be used to regulate other discourses. In doing so, I want to distance myself from the teleological functionalism that underlies both Gluckman's and many other formulations. Gossip does not simply seek to bring behavior and discourse in line with preexisting shared and stable norms and social constructions. Generally deemed to be a violation of social and discursive rules itself, the relationship between gossip, other discursive institutions, and social control is as contradictory, contested, unstable, and uncontrollable as it is productive.

I devote the remainder of this essay to proposing two responses to the following question: What sort of analytic approach would best prepare us to study how dominant ideologies of language are created, sustained, and legitimated?

A useful point of departure for addressing the first aspect is provided by an issue raised by Paul Kroskrity in his contribution to this volume; it is relevant to the present discussion not only in that Kroskrity focuses on how ideologies of language become dominant but in that his formulation is framed, in part, as a critical response to my own work (Briggs 1992a). Generalizing on the basis of his assessment of a religious structure and institution—the ceremonial kiva—as “the ‘site’ of the Arizona Tewa dominant language ideology” and as providing “a prestige model” for everyday verbal conduct,” Kroskrity argues that “successfully ‘naturalized’ beliefs and practices . . . are not publicly challenged and seldom enter members’ discursive consciousness” (chapter 5, this volume). Distinguishing “dominant ideologies” of language from “contended ideologies,” he argues that dominant ideologies can be characterized by such a high degree of “taken for grantedness” (see Schutz 1966:74) that their discursive authority rests on a cultural consensus that effectively shields them from contestation.

I have never attempted to suggest that the naturalization of language ideologies does not constitute a valuable topic of research—to the contrary, I believe that it is of tremendous scholarly and political importance. Kroskrity’s extensive documentation of the complex place that dominant language ideologies and practices occupy in the Arizona Tewa community is thus particularly valuable (see Kroskrity 1993). I do differ from Kroskrity, however, in my analysis of how domination and naturalization are created and sustained. The Arizona Tewa are no less enmeshed in postcolonial relations that involve the penetration of discourse practices associated with the nation-state, capitalism, missionaries, and the media than are Warao communities in Venezuela. Given both this historical and political-economic positioning and the presence of marked social inequality, it would be difficult to imagine that no other ideologies and practices potentially impinge upon the dominance of “the Arizona Tewa dominant language ideology.” As Raymond Williams has noted, “no mode of production and therefore no dominant social order and therefore no dominant culture ever in reality includes or exhausts all human practices, human energy, and human intention” (1977:125; emphasis in original). To be sure, the two examples differ in that linguistic purism and cultural compartmentalism are highly salient among Arizona Tewa, while cultural and linguistic hybridity is celebrated in most dimensions of social life in Warao communities. Nevertheless, even if notions of pure and traditional Arizona Tewa culture are constructed as standing in opposition to and in isolation from modern, non-Pueblo forms, they must be continually redefined and relegitimated in the context of changing historical circumstances. As Gal (1993) has argued, heterogeneity and contestation are evident in the language ideologies that are championed by administrative (and, one might add, capitalist) elites of nation-states; insofar as “the Arizona Tewa dominant language ideology” resists the complex and contested array of ideologies imposed on Arizona Tewa by missionaries, schoolteachers, bureaucrats, politicians, employers, merchants, and the media, such resistance must be, at least to some extent, complex, dynamic, heterogeneous, and dialogic.

Accordingly, if other language ideologies and discursive practices do not overtly compete with the forms associated with kiva ceremonialism, then the question remains as to how we can account for this situation analytically. As I have argued

for Warao gossip, asserting the legitimacy of dominant forms not only affects the value of other possible ways of organizing discursive relations but can serve as a means of attempting to suppress explicit discussion of their bases in contrastive epistemologies, practices, and social identities. I thus suggest that contestation is not simply a feature of *some* ideologies (Kroskrity’s “contested ideologies”) or a process that emerges in special circumstances that lead people to begin questioning taken-for-granted ideologies; to the contrary, *contestation is a crucial facet of how particular ideologies and practices come to be dominant*. The apparent absence of competing ideologies and practices should give us clues as to the nature of the processes through which alternative forms have been erased or suppressed—that is, to the particular means by which dominance has been established for particular forms. My fear is that when scholars suggest that forms derive their dominance from a cultural consensus that leaves no space for alternative forms and processes of contestations, they run the risk of further reifying the processes through which dominance is created, sustained, and legitimated.

These issues lead me to a second way of taking up the question of analytic approaches to studying dominant ideologies of language. I suggest that gaining a deeper understanding of how ideologies of language become dominant and how others are suppressed and discerning the broad range of ways that contestation takes place involves developing more and more sophisticated ways of studying the complex relations that obtain between language ideologies and discursive practices. Clearly, ideologies of language are not to be equated with discursive practices, as Silverstein (1979) has argued, and they are important social facts in their own right. Nevertheless, I have tried to show that relationships between ideologies and practices are not inherent or fixed but form a central facet of the process of situated social construction that Mr. Rivera and Mr. Torres undertook in their conversation. Recent research suggests that this active process of linking ideologies of language and discursive practices has played an important role in creating, legitimating, and challenging social inequality in the course of the creation and transformation of nation-states (see, for example, Bauman and Briggs 1994, Fraser 1992, Gal 1991a, Gal and Woolard 1995, Habermas [1962]1989, Joseph and Taylor 1990, Landes 1988, Woolard 1985).

I believe that the essays included in this volume are quite helpful in advancing our understanding of the way that language ideologies are constructed as models of and models for discursive practices. While I am clearly paraphrasing Clifford Geertz (1966) here, I am shifting the image in such a way as to grant agency less to “symbols” and “meanings” (for Geertz) or to language ideologies than to the producers and receivers of discourse. The way that ideologies of language and discursive practices are linked is not somehow fixed by or inherent in cultural and/or linguistic patterns but is created, legitimated, and challenged as discourse is produced and circulated. The cultural and political effectiveness of ideologies of language derives from the iconic, synecdochic, and highly reductive ways that they are linked to discursive practices. This relationship simultaneously involves powerful processes of mimesis, construction, and regimentation. Work on metapragmatics and reflexive speech (see Silverstein 1976, 1979; Lucy 1993), performance approaches (see Bauman 1977, Hymes 1975), ethnopoetics (see Hymes 1981), and the social sig-

levolent spirits—as embodied in the voice of the practitioner (see Briggs 1996b). I have not encountered any examples of such dialogic interaction in attempts to cure victims of *boa* spirits.

7. This is not to say, however, that exchanges of gossip do not take place away from the social and spatial centers of these events. For example, when the residents of various Mariuan communities gather for the *nabamamu* ritual cycle, exchanges of gossip seem to take place everywhere and at all times—except on the dance platform and in the “spirit house.”

8. In view of the complex restrictions regarding the use of Warao names, particularly curers’ names, I use pseudonyms in this article.

9. I was not seeking to lead the two men into thinking that I was not recording the conversation. I had been using a larger tape recorder with two large microphones earlier in order to document the exchange of greetings between the two families and other aspects of the conversation. The small tape recorder, which was clearly visible and had been in operation the entire time, provided a backup, ambient recording of the entire encounter between the families. When we later listened to this recording, the two families gave me permission to use it.

10. The narrative is broken into lines in accordance with prosodic and grammatical features and in keeping with turn taking. Brackets between lines indicate overlaps in adjacent turns.

11. For a fascinating parallel situation, see Haviland’s 1996 study of the role of parallel couplets in Tzotzil-language Zinacantan dispute mediation.

12. Francisco Gómez is skilled in treating lacerations, venomous stings, and the like; this type of curative practice does not, however, involve contact with powerful malevolent spirits, such as *boa*.

13. See Abrahams 1983; Besnier 1989; Brenneis 1984; Goodwin 1980, 1990; Haviland 1977; and Shuman 1986 for comparative data on the interpersonal dynamics and sociopolitical effects of information disclosure and withholding in gossip.

14. In another article (1996b), I document a curing ceremony in which a different type of practitioner (a *wisidatu*) ventriloquized the voices of *hebu* spirits in legitimating Mr. Torres’s position in the course of the struggle with Mr. Rivera. Treating Mr. Torres’s grandson for an acute respiratory infection thus evoked the “regime of truth” associated with curing in an attempt to validate Mr. Torres’s (and an ally’s) attempt to harness the power of the nation-state for their own ends. This event took place in June 1990, just over three years after I recorded the gossip session.

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nificance of formal patterning (see Jakobson 1960; Feld 1990[1982]; Graham 1995; Haviland 1996; Urban 1986, 1988) suggests that a wide range of representational processes can be packed into particular discourses. At the same time that ideologies of language highlight and thus transform certain aspects of discursive practices, they erase or minimize others. Forms of writing and electronic mediation are also powerful tools for metadiscursive selection and reification, and they are similarly dependent on the objects that they purport to represent at the same time that they constitute powerful means of constructing their objects.

It is, in my estimation, particularly crucial for students of language ideologies to attend closely in both empirical and analytic terms to the way that particular ideologies are discursively linked to competing ideologies and modes of representation. The problem is that scholars, like other producers and consumers of discourse, have their own vested interests in particular sorts of reifications. Thus, while attending to the representational practices that are framed as language ideologies can help open up broad questions of reification, this line of investigation can lead in the opposite direction when ideologies of language are characterized as standing in one-to-one, uncontested relationships with social or linguistic groups. When scholars rely on dominant ideologies in this way, they can play a conspicuous role in naturalizing attempts to erase questions of difference, inequality, and contestation.

NOTES

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1. The *Censo Indígena de Venezuela, 1992* (OCEI [1993]) places the Warao population in the Delta Amacuro State at 20,942, while 2,716 are listed as living in the neighboring state of Monagas and 266 in Sucre. Warao also live in adjoining areas of Guyana.
2. Note that Sherzer 1983 reports that metallurgists similarly pervades the discourse of Kuna political leaders.
3. For comparative data on this point, see Urban 1988.
4. See Sherzer 1982 for a strikingly similar ideology of ritual language that is evident in Kuna society.
5. I do not mean to suggest here that only women wail or that only men sing *boa* songs. While I have never seen a man wail, I have heard that some individuals do perform alongside women in certain areas of the delta. Similarly, although most *boa* practitioners are men, women are occasionally able to become skilled in these practices; I had the good fortune of being able to work with one of them.
6. An important exception in this regard pertains to certain sections of curing songs used by *wisidatu* curers; here a relative of the patient engages in a dialogue with the ma-

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