

Language as an Artifice of Oppression: Creolization as a Praxis of Liberation

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In *Borderlands La Frontera: The New Mestiza* Gloria Anzaldúa writes, “so if you want to really hurt me, talk badly about my language. Ethnic identity is twin skin to linguistic identity. I am my language. Until I can take pride in my language, I cannot take pride in myself” (Anzaldúa 2012, 81). This paper examines the concept of linguistic identity postulated by Anzaldúa. It examines the relationship between the language one speaks and the self. As Anzaldúa notes, the language she speaks is related to her identity in non-trivial ways. Language accounts for who we are it enjoins us in linguistic communities that inform both our social and our personal identity. I consider linguistic identity such a crucial aspect of the self; such that any pernicious linguistic policy or practice necessarily has an adverse effect on identity. It is therefore, my thesis that hegemonic linguistic practices are oppressive and discriminatory; they violate the autonomy of the linguistic subject. Both linguistic injustice (harm done to an individual in her capacity as a speaker of a particular language/member of a specific language community) and linguistic oppression (structural harm that follows from formal discriminatory language policies), result from malevolent policies and practices that marginalize some languages and the associated identities.

Language has been used as a device to initiate, facilitate, and reify asymmetrical relationships that have their genesis in coloniality. Arbitrary language standards are universalized resulting in the marginalization of all linguistic practices that fall outside the domain of this “standard”. This is an attempt at a decolonial analysis of hegemonic language standards which result in linguistic oppression. While a decolonial critique of standard language is not unique (a number of Latin American Scholars, such as Anzaldúa have challenged these standards) this discussion offers a distinctly Caribbean perspective. The Caribbean exists both intellectually and geographically as a peripheral space where the “standard” Euro-centric identity and language conditions cannot hold. As a space of resistance, miscegenation, and instability it challenges ideas of purity that have come to characterize normalized ways of being and speaking. A distinctly Caribbean perspective on the questions of language and identity is, therefore, a disruption to the current philosophical discourse on language, it rejects “traditional” ideas of freedom and considers instead, creolization as a method of liberation. In the Caribbean, the vexing issue of linguistic oppression has been and continues to be the preoccupation of historians, sociologists, linguistics and Caribbean theorists, however, there is little philosophical analysis of the subject as it relates to the intersection of language and identity. By drawing on “traditional” philosophical discussions of language, personal identity, and decoloniality this discussion offers an intersectional analysis linguistic identity.