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Bodies that speak

Bodies That Speak:
Languages of Differentiation and Becoming in Amazonia

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Abstract
In this article I consider the metaphysical underpinnings of a specific language ideology in Amazonian Ecuador by comparing Waorani ideas about the agency of speech in shamanism and funerary practices to their engagements in language documentation. I relate the notion of language as a force inseparable from the bodies of speakers to concepts of language as "culture" in research to document their language. By considering how Waorani consultants have come to see certain features of their language in video recordings, such as sound symbolism, I examine the differences and interconnections between Waorani language ideology and multiculturalist understandings. These interactions suggest divergent ontologies at the same time as they demonstrate how indigenous people operate simultaneously within contrasting imaginings of differentiation.

[Language ideology; ontology; language documentation; ideophones; Waorani; Ecuador]

Introduction
Among indigenous peoples of the Americas language is often seen less as a system of representation than as a practice that brings things into being or effects changes (Course 2012, Smith 1985, 1998, Whiteley 2003, Witherspoon 1977). Being spoken to or being evoked in language, even at a distance, can have material effects and consequences for people and their relations with others. As linguists and philosophers have observed with regards to speech-acts in Western languages (Austin 1962), certain utterances demonstrate the performative qualities of language as a form of action that does far more than simply represent the world. While the force of language to effect changes is certainly not exclusive to Amerindian contexts, in Amazonia the relational power of speaking as a bodily practice evokes key differences in terms of how people imagine the very nature of language. In places where social relations routinely transcend our own distinctions between "nature" and "culture" (Descola 1994, 2013, Viveiros de Castro 1998, Hallowell 1955, Brightman 1993, Smith 1998), non-human beings also have important stakes in linguistic practices. Amazonian understandings of the force of language are particularly clear in shamanism, ritual, and various forms of singing that transform or create something in the world (Deleage 2009, Townsley 1993). In these contexts language, or more specifically the embodied act of speaking, has an ontological status distinct to that with which many Westerners are familiar. But what is language exactly for these people that allows it to have such force in these contexts? How much is this power understood to be specific to a given language, and how much of it do they see as a general feature of speech in any language?

In this article I explore these questions in terms of what Waorani people in Amazonian Ecuador understand as the particular power of speaking their language. Since Waorani themselves rarely reflect openly on the nature of language in abstract terms, I consider contexts where the effects of language become apparent in making or unmaking relations. As has been described among other Amerindian peoples,

Waorani generally understand language to have a certain agency of its own. More than simply a mode of representation, certain kinds of speech have powerful and even dangerous effects in inter-subjective relations, whether between humans or between humans and non-human beings. While the spoken words of a shaman can themselves do harm, in funerary practices speaking in unintelligible languages is part of how Waorani differentiate and separate themselves from deceased kin and the dangers associated with them. The ontological status of language in these contexts presents certain contrasts to the idea of language as "culture" in the social dynamics of a research to document their language through video recordings, transcriptions and translations. By considering how Waorani language consultants have come to see certain features of their language in video recordings, such as the extensive use of ideophones, I examine the differences and interconnections between Waorani language ideology and the multiculturalist paradigm that tends to frame language documentation work. Whether in shamanism, funerary practices, or the foregrounding of perspective in ideophonic performances, the affective properties of language point to the inseparability of body and voice in Waorani understanding of becoming.

While I am interested in the differences between Waorani and Western understandings of language, I also want to resist the tendency in previous work on ontology to posit them simply as polar opposites. Even if the natures of language in "Western" and "Amerindian" contexts are in some ways logically incommensurable, in practice Amazonian peoples are engaged in diverse social contexts that cannot be reduced to a single, coherent metaphysical understanding of language. In addition to exploring different situations where the power of speaking comes to the fore in making and unmaking social relations, I suggest that emergent Waorani understandings of language as emblematic of "culture" – whether in bilingual education or language documentation research – might present exactly the contexts where ontological differences become most apparent. Put another way, collaborative projects premised on shared ideas of language and culture are precisely the sites where we can better understand these differences as part of what shapes contemporary social dynamics in Amazonia. In this way, attention to distinct metaphysics of language may have important practical implications for rethinking current educational programmes in the region.

The Affective Properties of Voice/Body

One of the clearest examples of the agency of language can be seen in Waorani understandings of shamanism, and particularly assault sorcery[1]. Shamans, who have a special adoptive relationship with jaguars, are at times inhabited by jaguar-spirits who speak through a shaman's body in dreams. While jaguar speech is said to bring about successful hunting, it is also associated with a dangerous predatory perspective (High 2012a). One of the great risks in shamanism is the power of the jaguar/shaman's speech to cause actual harm to other human beings. Though Waorani tend to say little about the technical process of how shamans enact assault sorcery, on several occasions it was explained to me that they can cause harm by merely speaking the names of specific people. Part of what is dangerous about a jaguar-spirit that inhabits the body/voice of a shaman is that other people present may (even inadvertently) bring misfortune on a person by talking about him or her (even jokingly) during

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[1] For a more extensive analysis of Waorani understandings of shamanism and assault sorcery, see High (2012a, 2012b, 2015a, 2015b) and Rival (2002).

jaguar speech. Given the potential effects of speech in these contexts, elders remind young people to take great care in what they say in the presence of a jaguar shaman.

I would be wary of reading a specific Waorani theory of language into a highly specific context like jaguar-shamanism. Animals do not normally speak – at least not in ways that are intelligible to Waorani people in the way human language is. In fact, in everyday life they generally find troubling the idea of a non-human being speaking (in human language) to them. This is evident in Waorani concerns about assault sorcery and encounters with nonhuman beings who appear and speak as humans[2]. I remember watching the movie *Star Wars* (dubbed in Spanish) in a Waorani village about 15 years ago, when, after a scene where Yoda talks with Luke Skywalker, a young man asked me: "Do animals really talk to people in your country?" This was at a time when Waorani had less access to movies and other foreign images than many do today. As elsewhere in Amazonia (Descola 1994), they routinely point out the social lives of animals in terms that are analogous to humans. What I think baffled the man about Yoda, quite reasonably, was the idea of a clearly non-human body speaking in human form. For Waorani, language, rather than being a uniquely human capacity, is about relations with beings who share the same bodily form. So although it did not make sense for Yoda to talk with Luke, a jaguar can speak to human beings insofar as it inhabits the body/voice of a shaman. What this appears to suggest is that "body" and "voice" are intrinsically connected insofar as they define the character of inter-subjective relations[3].

This connection between language and the body evokes Viveiros de Castro's (1998) proposal that Amerindian perspectivism posits a "multinaturalist" ontology whereby the body (rather than "culture") is the principle site of differentiation. He contrasts multinaturalism, whereby all beings share the same social categories, to the Western emphasis on "culture" as the primary site of difference in multiculturalism. Viveiros de Castro's formulation illustrates the need to think about difference in Amerindian contexts beyond conventional Western understandings of "cultures" as different representations of (or perspectives on) a single natural world. And yet, the apparent inversion of multiculturalism he sees in multinaturalism risks ignoring the ways in which Amerindian cosmologies collapse familiar Cartesian dualisms altogether[4]. Smith (1998), for example, describes how Canadian Chipewyan thought is monistic insofar as our own distinctions, whether between body and mind, thought and action, human and nature, spirit and matter, are absent. He draws on this observation to describe a physiological and phenomenological inseparability of the senses (Merleau-

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[2] Encounters with nonhuman beings in the forest who appear and speak as human beings are particularly dangerous and even fatal, as speaking with them involves adopting their (nonhuman) perspective (see also Lima 1999).

[3] This has certain parallels with Vilaça's (2016) description of a concept of translation among the Wari of Brazilian Amazonia in which the possibility of communication between different human and animal beings "occurs through a bodily transformation enabled by new foods, the proximity to other bodies, and the new relations of sociality as a whole" (59-60).

[4] Ramos argues that Viveiros de Castro's description of perspectivism simplifies the complexity and diversity of indigenous Amazonian thought by simply inverting our own "deeply rooted dichotomies" of "nature" and "culture" (2012:483). Course (2010) observes that descriptions of perspectival cosmologies draw on a rhetorical analogy between subject and object familiar to speakers of European languages that risks obscuring the ontologies implicit in Amerindian grammars.

Ponty 1962, Farnell 1995) in which the power of speaking is "inherent in the sounds of the words themselves" (Smith 1998:417).

I suggest that by leaving aside familiar mind/body nature/culture dualisms, we are in a position to understand the inseparability of body and voice in a Waorani metaphysics of language. Rather than a symbolic system separate or distinct from human action, language is for them a bodily practice that has a distinct capacity to effect and create intersubjective relations, and thus bring about changes in the world. In this way speaking their language, Wao-Terero, is inseparable from what has often been described as the "moral economy of intimacy" (Viveiros de Castro 1996) or the "aesthetics of conviviality" (Overing and Passes 2000) in Amazonia.

This understanding of what language is sheds light on how people are made and how Waorani have understood and spoken to outsiders. While sorcery highlights the negative consequences that language can bring about, in everyday life speaking with, to and about people is part of how relations are made. Here too language is understood to have affective properties, even if in less formalized ways than in shamanism. Much Amazonianist scholarship emphasizes how kinship and personhood are constituted less by birth or descent than through living together, a process by which bodies become consubstantial and babies become people (Gow 1991, McCallum 2001, Overing and Passes 2000). All of this is part of the process of making kin out of others (Vilaça 2002). Just as living together entails shared bodily transformations, speaking the same language is part of how kinship is recognized (Taylor 2007, Vilaça 2016). Language, as a form of inter-subjectivity that corresponds specifically to human bodies, is both a product and catalyst of this process of affective relations[5]. Much like the act of eating or drinking, speaking together is an essential part of how kinship is constituted, even, it seems, in situations where speaking to others is anything but straight-forward.

Eating and Speaking with Others
During much of the 20th century, and to some extent still today, Waorani have been famous for their relative isolation and resistance to outsiders. Today, speaking Wao-Terero, a language unrelated to others in the region (Klein and Stark 1985, Peeke 1973, 1979), is part of what constitutes being a Waorani person. Elders describe how, before the missionaries arrived, they debated whether outsiders were indeed people. Still today they refer to them as *kowori*, a term that until recently denoted aggression and a semi-human state of cannibalism. Many Waorani feared that *kowori* - whether other indigenous groups, missionaries or mestizos – were intent on eating them. Rather than real people, whose bodies are the product of eating food fit for human consumption, *kowori* were a kind of predatory being, not entirely unlike the dead. The word *kowori* is closely related to the word for the "deceased" (*wori*). In this sense *kowori* were not understood to share the same kind of human body (or food) that constitutes Waorani people. Since language corresponds to a particular kind of inter-subjective relation between human bodies, which are made from the collective consumption of human food (not human flesh), it would have made little sense to try

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[5] In this way language can be understood in term's of Viveiros' de Castro's (1998) understanding of the body as "a bundle of affects and capacities...which is the origin of perspectives" (478).

to relate to or speak with cannibals. And this was in fact the case: many Waorani went to great lengths to distance themselves from *kowori* – some still do.

This changed in the late 1950s and 1960s with the arrival of American missionaries. Visiting and living with missionaries and the Quichua-speaking Runa people who accompanied them appears to have changed the predatory status of *kowori*, who proved not to be cannibals. In eating real food and living with *kowori*, Waorani came to understand them as people with human bodies – even if somewhat odd ones. They even started speaking to them as people. One of the first missionaries (Elliot 1961) observed how this happened in the early days of contact in 1957, when two Waorani women arrived at a Runa village. The missionary there, Elisabeth Elliot, was surprised to see that as the two women began cooking and eating the same foods as their Quichua hosts, they spoke to her and the Runa people in Wao-Terero as if they could understand. The missionary, who understood almost nothing of their language, was baffled by their incessant speech directed at her and their apparent insistence that she could understand them[6]. Elliot wrote that the Runas present, who understood the Waorani to be "wild" forest-dwelling Indians, were surprised to see that the Waorani women had the capacity for language at all.

It appears that if *kowori* were indeed people with human bodies, rather than cannibals or the deceased, they should be able to speak, or at least understand Waorani language. This is to say that speaking, like eating together, was part of how Waorani envisioned themselves creating a human relationship with *kowori*. In this way living together appears to have been simultaneously about coming to share corresponding bodies and voices. The power of language in making relations with "others", in this context, is part of a more general emphasis on "becoming" in Amerindian ontologies that Viveiros de Castro (1992, 2011) contrasts to relatively fixed ideas of kinship, identity and humanity familiar to Western contexts. Just as Waorani babies become people and kin through sharing food and drink and learning to speak with people in their household, the close connection between language, collective consumption and the body appears to be inseparable in this wider process of becoming.

While I can only speculate about this process historically, a close connection between the capacity to speak their language and becoming part of proper human sociality was evident in my own fieldwork decades later. By then many Waorani households had incorporated Quichua-speaking spouses who, despite their continuing status as *kowori*, invariably learned to speak Wao-Terero and came to share a consubstantial body with people in their household. Other *kowori*, such as missionaries and anthropologists, have also come to share the body/voice that constitutes Waorani sociality. I often found it odd how, despite my struggles to learn Wao-Terero, my hosts would openly comment to other Waorani people and outsiders that I speak their language well. Just as they would comment on my body becoming like theirs as a result of living and eating with them – and thus requiring that I observe specific dietary taboos when a household member fell ill, their insistence on my capacity to speak and hear their language was inseparable from the status of my relationship with

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[6] This example resonates with Vilaça's (2016) description of the Wari, who experienced a similar degree of linguistic isolation. She writes that "To them it seems obvious that those who perceive each other as humans, as companions, automatically share the same language" (60).

them as co-residents[7]. This meant that I ended up, to some extent, in a similar position to that of the missionary Elliot in the late 1950s.

Differentiating the Dead and the Living

The ontological status of language or speech as an embodied form of human sociality, rather than a distinct mental capacity distinguishable from the body, is perhaps most clear in Waorani attempts to unmake relations. The death of a kinsperson requires just the opposite of the intended effects of language in making people and relations. The living must separate themselves from the deceased, who are dangerous because, not knowing or accepting themselves as dead, they may resist letting go of their relationships with living people. Affective relations with the dead can only be harmful to the living, who risk sickness or death if they fail to differentiate themselves from them. This attention to the dangers of the dead and the need to separate or differentiate them from the living, appears to be widespread in Amazonia (Carneiro da Cunha 1978, H. Clastres 1968, Conklin 2001, Taylor 1993) and elsewhere in South America (Harris 2000, Praet 2005). As Anne Christine Taylor observes,

> The stress on the otherness as well as the contemporaneity of the dead in Amazonian eschatological thought accounts for the fact that mortuary rituals in lowland cultures…largely centre on the process of forcing individual beings (the recently deceased) identical to oneself (that is, to the living), to become ontologically distinct (1993: 655).

Language is part this process of Waorani people unmaking relations with their dead kin, as the (temporary) forgetting of the deceased involves speaking and acting as if the deceased relative did not exist. On one occasion, in which several kin gathered in the home of the bereaved after a burial, I observed two men clowning around the house laughing and appearing to speak in tongues. One of them later explained to me that they were speaking in "French" as "gringos"[8], and that the point of their intentionally comedic performance was at once to lessen the grief of the bereaved and to make the people present unidentifiable to the deceased[9]. The coming together of many living kin speaking in Wao-Terero or the emotional cries of a bereaved mother might otherwise attract unwanted attention from the recently deceased. That is, speaking in tongues and making jokes in this context was part of an effort to exclude the deceased from the affective relations of sociality to which they can no longer contribute safely. A person who grieves alone or too openly risks succumbing to the deceased relative's desire for ongoing interaction with the living and ultimately may cause them to adopt the perspective of the dead. Attempts to forget or distance the dead from the living are temporary, as stories about how deceased kin were killed in

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[7] See also Vilaça's (2016:61) account of how Wari understand language to be determined by coresidency, as they say that a person will "learn their language by eating their food".

[8] The term "gringos" refers generally to white foreigners in much of Amazonian Ecuador.

[9] Praet (2005) describes a similar practice among the Chachi people of Northwest Ecuador, who play "funerary games" that involve "utterances that are meaningless in the vernacular…language and cannot be translated into Spanish either" (133). As with the Waorani, these practices are meant to "ensure the unambiguous passage of the deceased person from the realm of the living to that of the dead" (139).

the past are central to Waorani oral histories, but only once the dead are safely separated from the sociality of the living.

The use of language in funerary practices, or more specifically the evocation of unintelligible "gringo" language to differentiate or unmake relations with the dead, underscores the agency of language to make relations or bring people together. It also begins to address the question of whether, in Waorani understanding, such a theory of language is specific to their own speech or a more general feature of language. Whether in their insistence on my ability to speak their language, or speaking "French" as a way of unmaking relations, there does seem to be a sense that speaking Wao-Terero has a certain force that other languages do not – at least when it comes to Waorani sociality and Waorani bodies. This is subtly evident in their attention to ideophones described in the following sections. Although I have not heard Waorani explicitly state that "gringo languages" are deficient or less conducive to the kinds of human sociality they value, there is a sense that different languages correspond to different bodily forms – both human and animal. As the practice of speaking "French" to separate the dead through intentional unintelligibility illustrates, Wao-Terero and *kowori* languages appear to evoke distinct bodily forms and corresponding affective properties.

The central issue here, then, is not just one of how different languages have distinct kinds of agency, but the Waorani emphasis on how they correspond to different bodies. What was troubling about Yoda in the *Star Wars* movie, for example, was not that he could speak, or even that he spoke to Luke, but that he spoke to Luke in a human language that did not correspond to his own evidently animal body. In contrast, Waorani routinely observe that members of a variety of animal species speak – both with each other and, at times, to human beings. Birds in particular are known for their prophetic calls, often foretelling a successful or unsuccessful hunt, dramatic changes in weather, or even the immanent arrival of an attacking group. Most bird names in Wao-Terero correspond to the sounds associated with them (as ideophones), and in some cases their calls are interpreted as messages with reference to specific mythic narratives. Although Waorani are able to learn the meanings of their calls, they draw a clear distinction between bird messages and human language. There is nothing troubling or unusual about the intelligibility of bird calls since, in contrast to Yoda conversing with Luke or a jaguar speaking through the body of a shaman, their "language" corresponds to their distinct bodily form.

This example raises questions about the generalizability of Vilaça's (2016) description, based on the premise of perspectivism, that for the Wari in Brazil "there is just one language through which people who live together could immediately communicate" (57). For Waorani, linguistic differences - whether those between human beings or between human beings and nonhumans - correspond in certain ways to bodily differences. Of course, Waorani today are not only aware of *kowori* languages; many of them are bilingual in Spanish or Quichua as a result of schooling, interethnic marriages with Quichua speakers, or experiences outside their home communities[10]. Other Ecuadorians and foreigners are still *kowori*, even if this category no longer denotes cannibalism. We *kowori* do have human bodies (and thus human language), but our bodies (like our languages) are different. From the point of

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[10] There is also an increasing emphasis on learning English.

view of Waorani elders, the bodies of young people have changed substantially at the same time as they have come to speak a foreign language. At school, where they learn Spanish, they eat food that older Waorani see as making their bodies weaker and less able to hunt or endure long treks in the forest (High 2010). So even if it is clear to Waorani today that many people who perceive themselves as humans do not share the same language, there remains a strong association between bodily differences and speaking or learning different languages. This may help explain why, in the context of language documentation research I describe below, some Waorani have become particularly interested in ideophones and the bodily gestures that accompany them.

Documenting Language as "Culture"
Alongside schools, indigenous politics and discourses of "culture" in Ecuador and beyond involve new ways of thinking about differentiation and language. Like the long spears and distinct body decoration for which Waorani have become known in Ecuador (High 2009), their language has in some contexts acquired the status of a cultural object to be defined, presented, and even preserved as part of the very integrity of "indigenous culture". If what I have described among the Waorani is a universalist understanding of language as something intrinsic to relations between human bodies, bilingual education, cultural politics, and language documentation research insist on language as something that differentiates Waorani people from others "culturally". In these emerging contexts, languages are differentiated not in terms of bodily experiences and capacities, but as distinct representations of a single world that are at once disembodied from speakers and objectified as an essential characteristic of indigenous groups. Put simply, in this ontology, language, as "culture", is part of what constitutes people as different. At the same time, language rights discourses tend to reify language as an allegory of ethnic identity in such a way that language is seen as "detachable" rather than integral to ritual practices, religious beliefs and social forms (Silverstein 1998, Whiteley 2003:716).

Laura Graham describes how the link between language and culture is often essentialized in Western language ideologies that assume monolingualism to be the norm (2002:183). As a result, when indigenous leaders make pubic speeches in European languages they risk being understood by outsiders as "inauthentic" or "corrupted", even in contexts where speaking a native language may compromise their ability to effectively communicate the propositional content of a message to outsiders (189). In this way language has become an increasingly important facet of the shifting "middle ground" in Amazonia (Conklin and Graham 1995), in which alliances and interactions between indigenous people and outsiders are often based on unrealistic expectations and fundamental misunderstandings (Kelly 2011)[11].

Like anthropological fieldwork in Amazonia in general, Waorani collaboration with foreign linguists and anthropologists in language documentation research funded by international institutions is part of this middle ground. Since 2009 I have been working with young Waorani adults to record videos of Waorani people speaking, with a view to transcribing and translating the texts for a video archive. With the help

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[11] Jose Kelly (2011: 163) emphasizes how the "working misunderstandings" in relations between indigenous Amazonian people and outsiders are often based on non-communication or mistaken assumptions about shared understandings.

of a field linguist specialized in the documentation of endangered languages[12], from 2010 we began a major Waorani language documentation project funded by the Endangered Languages Documentation Programme (ELDP)[13]. While firmly grounded in a language endangerment and language rights framework that merits critical attention (Errington 2003, Hill 2002, Silverstein 1998, Whiteley 2003)[14], the project was designed to involve a high degree of collaboration between academic researchers and Waorani people. Based on Dickinson's (2011) notion of collaborative language documentation, the research involved Waorani language consultants and communities as much as possible in both choosing the content of the video recordings and in learning to carry out nearly all of the technical demands of language documentation. Several young adults worked full-time on the project collecting videos and transcribing texts, and many other Waorani from several different communities worked occasionally on specific recordings, with the linguist managing the data and the growing electronic database resulting from it.

By 2013 some Waorani language consultants were proficient in making quality language video recordings in remote communities, transcribing them on a computer programme, and translating them from Wao-Terero to Spanish. After many hundreds of hours of documentation work, some of them effectively became highly skilled linguists despite having only basic literacy skills. With the guidance of a linguist, at least two Waorani began analyzing specific linguistic features of the texts, parsing and glossing words from the transcriptions by themselves. One man, who became particularly interested in what he came to understand as the prevalence of sound symbolism in Wao-Terero, traveled to the United States to present his work on this topic at a linguistics conference.

Working as language consultants on a documentation project like this one is not the only or even the primary way in which Waorani people engage in new ideas about language and "culture" in contemporary Amazonia. But it does render language – or at least Waorani language – a distinct cultural object in a way that departs from what I have described as the ontological status of language in shamanism, funerary practices and previous encounters with *kowori* people. Rather than an embodied form of human sociality with a seemingly universal force of its own, in language documentation research Waorani language consultants must to some extent also come to understand their language as a symbolic system of representation. As Whiteley observes among the Hopi, "when a language becomes thought of as detachable from locality and from an assemblage of cultural codes and practices, it turns into a denatured symbolic system" (2003:715). Without ignoring what Waorani language consultants see as unique to their language, they come to understand that much of the very premise of

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[12] Linguist Connie Dickinson has had a central role in training Waorani language speakers and managing the corpus data for the duration of the project.

[13] ELDP is based at the School of Oriental and African Studies (SOAS), University of London.

[14] Hill (2002) warns that the "hyperbolic valorization" of endangered languages by linguists and anthropologists risks unwittingly undermining their advocacy by converting languages into objects "more suitable for preservation in museums…than for ordinary use un everyday life." Errington (2003) and Whiteley (2003) also describe how language rights discourses tend to objectify language, like culture, as a form of alienable property in ways that are often at odds with Native American communities concerned with the circulation of linguistic texts as a form of potential appropriation.

documentation is to record, transcribe and translate Wao-Terero into textual representations that have meaning and value beyond the recorded speech acts.

As Turner (2002) has described in the context of indigenous filmmaking, new technologies of objectification such as video can lead to new forms of historical consciousness and reflexive understandings of "culture" in Amazonia. This is part of what makes videography interesting and politically important to many indigenous people. In language documentation, Wao-Terero has become something that can be interpreted, written and translated as representations of a single world ostensibly shared between Waorani and *kowori* people. What is important here is that while language documentation values Wao-Terero "culturally" – as a distinct, visual object that differentiates Waorani people from others - it simultaneously devalues the power of language as a force in the world. Subjected to the language ideology of documentation, Wao-Terero becomes an endangered cultural resource to be collected, analyzed and archived for future generations, rather than an immediate, embodied force in inter-subjective relations.

Just as language documentation is not the only context in which Waorani practices are translated or assimilated as representational forms of "culture", being a language consultant does not involve simply trading one language ideology for another. Language consultants continue to recognize the power of words to effect relations and changes in the world, whether in shamanism, mortuary practices, or everyday life. At the same time, they come to understand their language as a different kind of force in the world as they struggle to translate words and concepts on a computer keyboard. More than a force that constitutes inter-subjective relations between beings who share the same bodily form, Wao-Terero has acquired a new, seemingly disembodied power as a cultural object that is highly valued by outsiders – whether by linguistic researchers or mestizo audiences who listen to their speeches at urban folklore festivals.

Some young Waorani adults are more invested than others in this new understanding of language. Some speculate about why *kowori* people would want to record and document their language, wondering if they might have a special economic value in foreign countries. Others with more experience with "middle ground" interactions see a clear value in the language videos as an index of Waorani "culture" that should be valued both by outsiders and younger generations of Waorani people who stand to learn from them. I am particularly interested in how the school-educated bilingual adults who participated as consultants in Waorani language documentation have come to see certain features of their language, such as the extensive use of ideophones, and video recordings of speakers, as objects of "culture".

Ideophony and the Limits of Translation

To some extent, the process of language documentation establishes a new separation between body, voice and agency that I have argued is absent in conventional Waorani metaphysics of language. For the purposes of documentation, one of the strengths of video is that it integrates images of speakers with sound in the process of transcription. This is particularly important for working with Wao-Terero, a language so replete with ideophones that is at times difficult to follow without being able to see the corresponding gestures of speakers. And yet, documentation ultimately disembodies language from its speakers, especially as the videos become "texts" to be

translated and archived in distant computers and institutions. The process of translating from Wao-Terero to Spanish, though fascinating and important to me, is exactly what Waorani language researchers find most difficult in language documentation. Quite reasonably, even the most skilled consultants are sometimes exasperated in their attempts to translate Waorani language, often using lengthy contextual descriptions to describe to me why a speaker used a particular word or grammatical form.

For example, when asked to translate a particular ideophonic expression, such as one simulating a person or animal moving through forest foliage during a hunt (*woro-woro)*, Waorani consultants will often describe the broader context of the encounter, including the point of view of the hunter and certain behavioral characteristics of the animal. In some cases they conclude that such a word simply "does not translate" to Spanish. Despite these difficulties, what seems to interest Waorani language consultants most are contexts where speaking Wao-Terero is not easily separated from the speakers or translated in any straightforward way. Ideophones are particularly interesting in this respect because they do not lend themselves well to being translated as an abstract representational form. Through corresponding physical gestures, they simulate sensations, perceptions and shifts in perspective rather then just refer to them (Nuckolls 2010). Often described as "a vivid representation of an idea in sound" (Doke 1935: 118), "vivid sensory words" (Dingemanse and Akita 2016) or "vocal gestures" (Voeltz and Kilian-Hatz 2001:3), ideophones are characterized by expressivity and "communicate by imitating a variety of subjective impressions spanning a range of sensory domains" (Nuckolls 2010: 29). While onomatopoeia familiar to European languages tend to be restricted to words that imitate sounds, ideophones refer to a much wider variety of sound symbolism, such as visual effects, texture, aspect and other sensory domains.

While a linguistic analysis of ideophones in Wao-Terero is beyond the scope of this article, their prevalence and use appears to share much in common with neighbouring Amazonian groups in Ecuador, particularly Quichua-speaking Runa. Janis Nuckolls describes how, in their ideophonic performances:

> Quichua speakers…reconfigure what are conventionally understood as background components into the foreground. Ideophonic performances bring prosodic and gestural features right into the foreground…[they]…baldly call attention to a change in perspective. The speaking self of the speech event communicates by imitating and thereby becoming the force that creates a movement, sound, or rhythm (Nuckolls 2010: 31).

This "becoming", the momentary shifts in perspective that ideophony entails, involves not just an alignment between human participants, but also between human and non-human beings in what Nuckolls describes as a form of "ecological dialogism" (49)[15]. Though there are surely significant differences between Quichua and Wao-Terero ideophones, one of the striking features of many Waorani language

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[15] Nuckolls's linguistic research into ideophones was a key inspiration for Kohn's (2013) proposal for an "anthropology beyond the human" based on fieldwork with Runa people. Her concept of ecological dialogism lends strong support for Kohn's suggestion that "nonhuman life-form also represent the world" (8).

videos is a similar foregrounding of other perspectives in ideophones and corresponding gestures. Despite the difficulties in translating ideophonic performances, they appear to be a feature of language that interests Waorani language consultants. Their foregrounding of gestures, whether marking the point of view of other human beings or animals, illustrates again how body and voice are not easily separated in Waorani understandings of language. It is this inseparability of body and voice that gives ideophones their relational force and makes them difficult for Waorani people to translate into Spanish. It is perhaps no surprise that, as they come to associate language with "culture", ideophony is central to what the most experienced Waorani language consultants see as particular to their language.

Ideophonic performances have a heightened presence in language videos in part as a result of the social contexts in which they are made and the kinds of content that language consultants seek to record. They are aware that, for the purposes of language documentation, the videos should include as much diversity as possible in terms of natural language use. This includes the age and gender of the speakers and the locations and social contexts of the recordings. And yet, the videos tend to be recorded in comfortable settings in peoples' homes – often with close kin or people with whom the consultants are at least familiar. As a result, many of them take the form of myths and historical accounts – whether autobiographical narratives of elders or stories about the past experiences of the narrator's kin. What these stories tend to share in common, particularly for the people who tell and record them, is a particular aesthetic of storytelling characteristic of everyday conviviality. These highly valued speech events in the home and in the presence of close kin are precisely where ideophonic performances appear to be most common (Nuckolls 2010:44). The extensive use of ideophones in these intimate contexts points to the emotive and relational force of linguistic forms that express experiential knowledge.

It is in part the extensive use of ideophony in these stories that makes them so enjoyable and engaging to Waorani listeners. Among the most typical examples are hunting stories men tell in the evening while other household members are gathered around the cooking hearth. Whether the hunt was successful or not, these are entertaining accounts because they tend to focus on the dramatic movements, sounds and perceptions of Waorani hunters and game animals attempting to evade them. Whether describing the distant calls of toucans (*yawe*), the sound of a spear hitting its target (*tek!*), a poison dart blasted from a blowpipe penetrating the body of a monkey overhead (*pereik!*), or the sound of a white-lipped peccary stomping on forest leaves (*ua! ua!*) as it attempts to escape a hunter, in these accounts ideophony marks a shift in perspective whereby the hunter temporarily "becomes" the hunted. As far as I can see ideophones are no less prevalent in the narratives of women than men, whether in comedic stories about everyday life, well-known myths, or tragic stories about how people were killed by enemies in the past. Young people use them extensively as well, though it appears not as skillfully or to the same extent as elders. Whether an elder is reporting a recent experience in a manioc garden, or telling a detailed story about how a deceased relative was killed by an enemy group, I suspect there is at least some correlation between the prevalence of ideophony in a speech event and the depth of knowledge recognized in the speaker.

What is most striking to me as a listener is how ideophones powerfully convey the experience of an encounter through a simultaneous expression of sound and bodily

movement. As with Quichua ideophones that communicate what Nuckolls describes as the "vivid truths of everyday experience", Waorani ideophonic performances appear to also have "a lyrical quality that captures the aesthetic appreciation and enjoyment of a perception, rather than an objectively detached version of a perception" (2010: 44). This keen attention to sensory perception points to why they are so highly valued by Waorani audiences and language consultants in particular. In this way what is often in the background in our own thinking about language becomes central to what is being expressed – whether from the point of view of a human or nonhuman being. Waorani Language consultants who have worked long hours struggling to translate Wao-Terero texts would agree with Nuckolls' observation that ideophones express "a kind of documentary truth value that has no exact equivalent within our own speaking culture" (48). And yet, the work of language documentation involves translating ideophonic performances, however clumsily, into textual representations of language – part of a different "speaking culture". Sounds that are, for Waorani, sensory experiences inseparable from the bodies that express them through gesture, must come to stand for something.

<u>Political Speech and the Truth of Becoming</u>
In this way language, or more specifically speech, becomes a different kind of force in the world beyond that which constitutes inter-subjective relations. It is not entirely clear what kind of power Waorani language and ideophony in particular will come to hold as an emerging index of cultural difference. But there is already a clear difference between the agency Waorani attribute to speech in shamanism, funerary rites and everyday life and the kinds of language that characterize their relations with outsiders. In contrast to what I have described as the power of language to make or unmake relations, or the vivid sense of "becoming" expressed in ideophony, public political speech appears to have little of this power. Several scholars have pointed out that the kinds of speech that engage indigenous politics, government officials, and inter-ethnic relations more broadly are necessarily "impoverished" or simplified for circulation among diverse audiences (Ramos 1998, Graham 2002). When addressed specifically to outsiders, Waorani political speech is often conducted in Spanish, which can restrict what leaders are able to express. In contrast to the intimate, convivial contexts where ideophones so often foreground diverse sensory experiences and perspectives, there is little place for ideophony in political speech (Nuckolls 2010).

I suspect that the relative lack of dialogue or the vivid "documentary truth value" expressed in ideophones indicates why Waorani people tend to give little weight to the political speech of their indigenous leaders – who are predominantly young men. While many recognise the importance of indigenous politics, particularly in dealing with the state and oil companies, the distinct values they attribute to public political speech and everyday language reflects a more general egalitarian ethic that limits the authority of individual people (P. Clastres 1987 [1974], High 2007). Though elected periodically by their peers at large meetings, Waorani leaders often face intense criticism from their communities, whether for their privileged access to external wealth, questionable dealings with oil companies, or the general perception that their words should not be trusted. These observations are typically couched in a broader criticism that leaders spend too little time in Waorani communities. Rather than eating, drinking and speaking together with their kin and neighbours, their lives are understood to be closely connected to *kowori* audiences in the city. In a context where

hierarchical leadership and representational democracy have little traction, Waorani leaders to some extent speak for themselves when they speak to *kowori* audiences.

There is a noticeable contrast between the lack of credibility Waorani often attribute to their leaders and the important weight given to the everyday language of elders who have little presence in formal indigenous politics. Like young male leaders, older men and women have little hierarchical authority over others – even their own children (High 2015b). But what elders say, particularly in convivial contexts of storytelling, attracts focused attention in part because it is pleasurable to hear. Even as they speak of things temporally or geographically distant to their audience, elders express a depth of experiential knowledge of people and events in part through ideophony. The sound symbolism and corresponding gestures they employ are often compelling, whether provoking raucous laughter about the folly of a particular person or relatively quiet contemplation of the deep suffering of another. In this way elders express the kind of veracity of experience that is often lacking in political speech as they mimic and "become" the sounds they express. Their words, it seems, are understood to have precisely the social force that politicians lack.

In a highly egalitarian context, this kind of speaking is powerful not because it conveys orders to be followed, but because it expresses the "the vivid truths of everyday experience" (Nuckolls 2010:44). If the knowledge expressed in ideophones has the "documentary truth value" in indigenous understanding that Nuckolls suggests, we should not mistake this for an idea of "truth" as something independent from diverse experiences or points of view. The objectivity of ideophony instead stems from how speakers skillfully embody sounds and temporarily "become" the people and beings they describe. It is precisely this feature of stories that gives them the weight, credibility and entertainment value often lacking in political speech.

In contrast to the dialogic properties of everyday language that express diverse perspectives, political speech tends to draw on a more generic expression of dialogue between Waorani and *kowori* people. Increasingly, as in so many places, political speech adopts discourses of "culture" in expressing these differences. And yet, for the younger adult generations of Waorani speakers who become ethnopoliticians, language consultants and teachers, the idea of "culture" is still up for grabs. I was struck by the contrast some young adults drew between their language documentation work and that of the official Waorani political organization, which they described as not being "real Waorani culture". Though the questions of authenticity that emerging political discourses of "culture" and indigeneity bring to the fore are in many ways antithetical to anthropology, it is worth thinking more deeply about how and why Amazonian people evaluate these new processes and translate them in diverse contexts. While political speech in Amazonia increasingly (and perhaps necessarily) engages a seemingly generic language of "culture", for some language consultants it is antithetical to Waorani "culture" precisely because it departs from convivial and dialogic qualities of everyday speaking.

Conclusions: Ontologies of Language Beyond Dualism
I am convinced that attention to the ontological status of language and what it tells us about the power of speaking can shed new light on debates about perspectival cosmologies in Amazonia. Rather than abstracting a generalized Amerindian ontology from anthropological readings of the content of myths, shamanic cosmologies or

hunting practices, what I have described is how speaking can itself be a bodily practice of becoming in everyday life. Whether in making others into kin, differentiating the dead from the living by speaking in a foreign language, or the ecological dialogism foregrounded in ideophonic performances (Nuckolls 2010), speaking constitutes the actual practice of shifting perspectives in everyday language use. As we have seen, these shifts may be from one human perspective to another or between human and nonhuman beings. All of these contexts point to an intrinsic connection between language and the body that at once resonates with theorizations of multinaturalism and yet dissolves the familiar body/mind, nature/culture dualisms upon which such theories are based. In conveying other perspectives and the affective properties of an encounter simultaneously through sound and gesture, Waorani ideophony points to how the power of words derives from the inseparability of body and voice. Since, for Waorani, speech gains its entertainment value and relational power by conveying sensory experience, speaking Wao-Terero foregrounds what is often in the background in our own thinking about language as a system of symbolic representation. The power of language to make and unmake relations in convivial contexts, derived from experiential veracity expressed in ideophonic expressions, is precisely what is often lacking in public political speech.

Thinking about language in these contexts should cause us to take a step back from the dualisms through which we tend to understand indigenous Amazonian people more generally. One of the immediate problems in talking about ontological differences with regards to language is that we tend to imagine seemingly absolute alterities, revealing logical contradictions between, for example, Western "naturalism" or "multiculturalism" and Amerindian "multinaturalism". Part of my interest here has been the differences and interconnections between Waorani understandings of what language is and the culturalist paradigm that tends to frame language documentation. Although these interactions suggest different ideas of the nature of language and what speaking can do, they also illustrate how indigenous people operate simultaneously within contrasting imaginings of differentiation. I do not think that language consultants are simply trading one idea of what language is for another as they participate in documentation research. Nor are they unaware of the dominant language ideology and discourses of "culture" around them. While I have followed Nuckolls in highlighting the differences between political speech and the kinds of language that constitute everyday life, the complex positioning of Waorani language consultants, like many other young adults in Amazonia, requires that they in some contexts speak simultaneously to local and external audiences (Graham 2002). The dialogues in which they engage involve not only very different and sometimes contradictory expectations, but highly unequal power relations.

It is in this context that we should understand the importance of the metaphysical properties of language in Amazonia and the discourses of cultural difference in which indigenous peoples experiences are increasingly embedded. Waorani language consultants work, live and develop new ideas about their language in this dynamic "middle ground" (Conklin and Graham 1995) constituted by the divergent expectations of indigenous people and outsiders. More than simply a site where Western language ideology effects Waorani understandings of the nature of language, this middle ground, of which language documentation research is part, also highlights ontological differences with regards to language. Through their work Waorani language consultants to some extent come to understand their language as one

symbolic representation of the world among others, a cultural object that differentiates them from other people. And yet, they still find it difficult to translate ideophones, which requires separating language from the vivid sensory experiences and bodily gestures of Waorani speakers. In this way their understanding of ideophony as "culture" at once reflects a distinct Waorani theory of language as a force in the world and Western understandings of language as culture.

More than simply objects of intellectual curiosity, the ontological differences anthropologists describe in Amazonia and elsewhere should help us reflect more deeply on how state development agendas, educational programs and research projects accommodate, suppress or come into conflict with such differences[16]. Attention to the diverse "natures" of language is particularly important in this regard. Whether in bilingual education programs, collaborative projects to document endangered languages, or efforts to revitalize indigenous language use in the Americas, such work stands to benefit from looking beyond a conventional Western metaphysics of language. The ontology of language I have described points not just to the difficulties of translating ideophones, but more importantly how the power of language is to some extent inseparable from the everyday convivial contexts in which it is spoken. The problem of separating indigenous languages from such contexts is particularly acute in North America, where some Native communities reject the circulation and teaching of their language beyond private contexts as a threat to their sovereignty (Whiteley 2003: 716). In the context I have described, the effects of speaking Wao-Terero appear to diminish when it is dislocated from the gesturing bodies of speakers. Examples like these illustrate the challenges of political projects and educational programs that decontextualize language from the social contexts in which speaking has the power to make and unmake relations.

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[16] A good example is Kelly's (2011) study of indigenous people and Criollo doctors involved in state healthcare provision in Yanomami communities in Venezuela.

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