



# Linguistic Syncretism and Language Ideologies: Transforming Sociolinguistic Hierarchy on Rapa Nui (Easter Island)

**ABSTRACT** Recent work in linguistic anthropology highlights the role of linguistic ideologies, or cultural conceptions of language, in transforming social relations and linguistic structure and use. This article examines the links between language attitudes and uses in their institutional and interactional contexts on Rapa Nui, a Polynesian island community that is part of the Chilean nation-state. By the 1970s, a sociolinguistic hierarchy and functional compartmentalization of languages between Spanish and Rapa Nui—what I will describe as “colonial diglossia”—had become established in the community, which was rapidly becoming bilingual. Language shift toward Spanish has continued to advance since then. However, rising Rapa Nui syncretic language practice and consciousness, combined with the political successes of a local indigenous movement and changes in the local economy, are now contributing to the breakdown of colonial diglossia, generating better conditions for the maintenance of the Rapa Nui language. [Keywords: language ideology, language maintenance, language shift, bilingualism, ethnolinguistic minority]

**O**N RAPA NUI, as in many other ethnolinguistic minority communities such as those where Mexicano, Maori, Hawaiian, Occitan, and Dyirbal were spoken, colonial languages and, later, state languages were imposed from above by politically and economically dominant groups. State-sponsored institutions, such as the formal education system and politico-administrative offices, disseminate the state language and, in some cases, act to suppress minority language(s). After Chile annexed the remote Polynesian island of Rapa Nui in 1888, it promoted cultural and linguistic assimilation gradually over the first half of the 20th century, leading the community on a path of language shift toward Spanish. This process became greatly accelerated after the mid-1960s arrival of a large Chilean civil administration and the opening of regular air passenger travel to the island. The habitual monolingual use of Rapa Nui came to be replaced by increasing use of Spanish and new syncretic Rapa Nui speech styles, and more and more Rapa Nui children are growing up as native Spanish speakers.

As colonial or postcolonial state governments integrate subject ethnolinguistic groups, the functions of languages tend to become compartmentalized into institutionally based domains of use and a system of sociolinguistic distinctions typically develops that mirrors and reinforces social hierarchies. State language use becomes privileged and

its “authorized and recognized” users (Bourdieu 1991) exert authority in both formal institutional settings and in everyday interactions between minority and dominant group members. Unequal power relations influence not only language choices in particular interactions but also the evaluation of language varieties and, by extension, their users. I propose to label this kind of sociolinguistic hierarchy *colonial diglossia* to emphasize its political and economic origins and the diglossia-like functional compartmentalization of language varieties.

Charles Ferguson (1959) used the concept of “diglossia” to describe a sociolinguistic arrangement in which varieties of the same language are functionally differentiated in a single speech community, in which a High variety is used for most written and formal spoken purposes and a Low variety for ordinary conversation. He discussed four cases: Greece (classical and colloquial Greek), Switzerland (High German and Swiss German), Middle Eastern countries (classical and colloquial Arabic), and Haiti (French and Kreyòl).<sup>1</sup> The concept of “diglossia” has since been extended to describe bilingualism among ethnolinguistic groups, most notably by Joshua Fishman (1967) in his discussion of Guaraní-Spanish bilingualism in Paraguay (see also Eckert 1980; Jaffe 1999). Agreeing with Ferguson that diglossia is (or the combinatory effect of its characteristics

makes it) a stable sociolinguistic arrangement,<sup>2</sup> Fishman (1991) suggests that endangered minority language maintenance can benefit from functional compartmentalization in “diglossic bilingualism.” Penelope Eckert (1980), by contrast, argues that diglossic functional compartmentalization had the opposite effect of accelerating language shift toward French in Occitan communities (see also Kuter 1989).

Bonnie Urciuoli’s (1996) notions of “outer and inner spheres of interactions”—which refer respectively to interactions characterized by asymmetric or symmetric power relations—are useful in characterizing the ways in which colonial or state languages penetrate into and transform ethnolinguistic minority communities under situations of colonial diglossia. The state language first becomes elevated in status in the minority’s outer spheres of interaction, which are primary sites for the reproduction of inequality. The situation motivates the minorities to become bilingual, although in such contexts linguistic markers of minority status—such as accents—become liabilities and reinforce sociolinguistic hierarchy.

Over time, the state language also tends to penetrate into inner spheres, contributing to language shift. Here, two broadly different tendencies can be identified. In some cases, the functional differentiation of the state and ethnic languages is maintained through bilinguals’ interlocutor-based code choice patterns. As the intergenerational gap in bilingual competence grows, the ethnic language is restricted to ever-smaller inner spheres. Examples include Hungarian in Austria (Gal 1979); Corsican and Occitan in France (Jaffe 1999; Eckert 1980); Arvanítika in Greece (Tsitsipis 1998); Gaelic in Scotland (Dorian 1981); and Dyrirbal in Australia (Schmidt 1985). Language maintenance among the Arizona Tewa appears to have benefited greatly from the strong association between language and identity and ideological adherence to strict compartmentalization and purism despite over three centuries of multilingualism (Kroskrity 1993, 1998). In recent years, however, economic incentives have led younger generations to shift identity and language, and the domains of Tewa use are becoming increasingly restricted.

In other cases, the minority develops and adopts syncretic language practices in inner spheres where they become an index of new ethnic identity. Examples of this include diaspora communities such as Puerto Ricans in the United States (Urciuoli 1996; Zentella 1997); Italians in Germany (Auer 1984; Gal 1987); and indigenous communities such as Mexicano (Nahuatl) speakers in Mexico (Hill and Hill 1986), Urban Wolof speakers in Senegal (Swigart 1992), and the Rapa Nui. Here as well, the intergenerational transmission of the ethnic language may suffer and language shift may progress.

I employ the term *syncretism* to refer to the relatively new ways of speaking Rapa Nui that emerged in the 1970s and 1980s. Syncretism involves bilingual “simultaneities” characterized by a range of interlingual phenomena—including not only codeswitching but also interference and “bivalency” (Woolard 1998). Today, syn-

cretism is observable at all linguistic levels as Spanish and Rapa Nui accents, words, grammatical elements, phrases, and genres are mixed within and across speakers’ utterances, while remaining subject to systemic constraints of the sort discussed by Shana Poplack (1980) and Carol Myers-Scotton (2002). *Syncretism* also describes the interactional norm and “practical,” as opposed to “discursive” (Giddens 1984), consciousness of the language users who allow and expect bilingual simultaneities and demonstrate great accommodation toward speakers of varying bilingual competence and preference. As discussed below, although syncretic Rapa Nui is linguistically similar to syncretic practice in the Mexicano communities described by Jane Hill and Kenneth Hill (1986), its functions are quite different and this has shaped the dynamics of sociolinguistic change.

The devaluation of their own identity and language by minorities constitutes a major catalyst for language shift (e.g., Kulick 1992). Pierre Bourdieu (1991) describes the process of “symbolic domination” whereby the dominated come to tacitly endorse the prestige of the state language. Yet, clearly, the reproduction of structural inequalities and language shift need not be uniform or automatic. Claims over resources can be contested and renegotiated, and not all language users equally recognize the authority of the state language or the devaluation of the ethnic language across all institutional and interactional contexts. Attitudes toward language differentiation and mixing can become a determining factor in different sociolinguistic developments. Shifts in “symbolic capital” (Bourdieu 1991) can be brought about that lead to the reorganization of the speech community’s communicative economies.

Like nonlinguistic forms of tradition, “ways of speaking” (Hymes 1974), or speech “styles” (Irvine 2001), can be construed as cultural practices to be actively and selectively elaborated. In this process people use historically contingent and culturally bound categories and models to exploit new political, economic, and linguistic opportunities, inevitably and often unintentionally transforming these categories and models.<sup>3</sup> This article is my attempt to interpret the recent sociolinguistic changes on Rapa Nui within a Rapa Nui history of resistances, accommodations, and appropriations (Marcus and Fischer 1986:78). An “ethnopragmatic” (Duranti 1994) analysis points to how, as their island became more integrated into the larger world economy, speakers have cultivated linguistic resources to build a new identity for themselves centered around syncretism. The Rapa Nui were quick to seize economic opportunities in the postcolonial period, particularly in the growing heritage tourism economy. Rapa Nui political activists also took advantage of new political opportunities in the period following Chile’s return to democracy in 1989, strategically integrating their kin-based networks into the Chilean political party system and allying with Chilean and international nongovernmental organizations to call for increased local decision-making autonomy and land rights. In this process, the Rapa Nui have successfully appropriated Spanish and

accommodated Rapa Nui to their political and economic advantage.

Recent work in linguistic anthropology highlights the role of linguistic ideologies in transforming social relations and linguistic structure and use.<sup>4</sup> Syncretic Rapa Nui can be viewed as the cumulative outcome of a great many practical compromises and creative inventions at both individual and group levels. Rather than being merely reflective of the process of language shift, or a contributing factor to it, elements of this syncretism can be viewed as an indication of the Rapa Nui language's vitality and adaptability. Syncretic speech styles have become integral to the performance of Rapa Nui identity, and positive attitudes toward syncretism and success of the political movement are leading the Rapa Nui to extend syncretic Rapa Nui from inner to outer spheres contributing to breakdown colonial diglossia. Syncretism has also come to play an important role in Rapa Nui language maintenance. As in other contexts, such as among Hawaiians and the Maori, new indigenous movements have increased the symbolic value of the islanders' ancestral language. It seems clear, however, that the symbolic value of language to Rapa Nui ethnic identity and politics *became* more meaningful only as the successful *communicative* function of syncretic Rapa Nui became more apparent, especially in political discourse.

### THE ESTABLISHMENT OF COLONIAL DIGLOSSIA ON RAPA NUI

The Rapa Nui history of contact with outsiders is tragic but also represents a remarkable case of language maintenance in the face of overwhelming adversities. The island's population was decimated from an estimated five thousand to a mere 110 as a consequence of slave raids in 1862–63 and the spread of new diseases (Maude 1981; McCall 1980; Routledge 1919).<sup>5</sup> Today, about half of the island's 3,700 residents can trace their ancestry to these surviving *Rapa Nui*, while most others are Chilean *Continental*s. Virtually all residents speak Spanish. I estimate that about two-thirds of the Rapa Nui (and only a few *Continental*s) are bilingual (albeit with varying degrees of competence) and others, primarily Rapa Nui children, hold varying degrees of passive competence in Rapa Nui.<sup>6</sup>

During the first half-century, Chile established authority over its colony primarily by delegating control to the aptly named "Easter Island Exploitation Company." This company leased the entire island except for Haŋa Roa village as a private sheep ranch from 1895 to 1955. Spanish-speaking administrators of the company—and, after 1935, the Catholic Church priest—acted as state representatives and mediators between the Rapa Nui and the colonial government (Porteous 1981). The company and, later, the Chilean Navy confined the Rapa Nui to live and remain within Haŋa Roa, reserving the rest of the island for sheep grazing. The government prohibited Rapa Nui from traveling from the island and continued to limit their movements on the island until the 1960s (El Consejo de Jefes

de Rapanui and Hotus 1988). Although the Rapa Nui now have Chilean citizen rights today, the state continues to control about three-fourths of the island territory as a state farm and a national park. In 1915, the government established a civil registry and together with the church encouraged the Rapa Nui to take Spanish names. Regular public school instruction in Spanish began in 1934. The use of Rapa Nui in the classroom was prohibited and even punished until 1976 when Rapa Nui language instruction was incorporated into the curriculum as a subject area. The initial political arrangements thus clearly argued against Rapa Nui maintenance. Observing the situation for six months in 1934, Swiss anthropologist Alfred Métraux noted how the Rapa Nui were "fully aware of the decadence of their language" and pessimistically predicted that it was "almost inevitable that the Easter Island language will disappear entirely" (1940:32, 33).

The Rapa Nui's positive evaluation of Spanish as the language of trade and litigation was an important motivation in the development of bilingualism. Communication in Spanish proved crucial, for example, in the Rapa Nui's numerous attempts starting in the 1890s to negotiate for better treatment by the company and later direct appeals with the government to bring a civil administration to the island. Spanish became the language of the public domain and the main instrument of access to material and political resources. However, the physical and social isolation of the island and local Rapa Nui demographic dominance contributed to Rapa Nui maintenance in inner spheres of interaction.

A Rapa Nui-led campaign of civil disobedience finally brought about the end of navy rule and the establishment of local civil administration in 1966. The Rapa Nui were granted rights to travel freely within and outside of the island and to participate in electoral political processes beginning with the election of a Rapa Nui mayor. The Rapa Nui used Spanish to interact with the *Continental*s in state-sponsored institutions and in interactions brought about by commerce and travel. Having equipped themselves with the language of trade and administration, the Rapa Nui began to cultivate avenues of upward mobility in economic arenas and to participate in the island's administration. In this context, Spanish shifted from being a primary medium of Chilean control and exclusion to becoming an instrument for Rapa Nui political advocacy and economic gain.

The political victory of "decolonization" soon led, however, to a new form of internal colonization with the influx of nearly four hundred *Continental* public functionaries and family members to work in newly established institutions, such as a municipal government and courthouse.<sup>7</sup> In addition, both Rapa Nui men and women married *Continental*s in increasing numbers and Spanish was rapidly penetrating into family domains. This expanded the domains of Spanish use for the Rapa Nui and reinforced the colonial diglossic hierarchy. Such situations often lead minorities to devalue their own languages and replace them with the dominant group's languages. Eager to participate

**TABLE 1.** The use of Rapa Nui grammatical element.<sup>9</sup>

Wife: 'I hē ia te korohu'a nei?	1	W: Where is the old man?
Husband: <u>Me está diciendo korohu'a otra vez. ¿A quién está diciendo korohu'a mi amor?</u> [laughter]	2	H: <u>You (formal) are calling me old man again. Who are you (formal) calling old man, my dear?</u> [laughter]
W: No, a tí no, a mi papá.	3	W: <u>No, not to you (informal), to my dad.</u>
H: <u>Acuérdese que yo soy joven 'ā.</u>	4	H: <u>Remember (formal) that I am still young.</u>
Friend: ¿ <u>Cómo será ia, ahani e 'apa pa'ari ro 'ā, ko ture mai 'ā.</u>	5	F: <u>What will it be, (he) is barely half adult but is already talking back.</u> [laughter]
[laughter]		[Conversation recorded on October 1, 1994]

in the national society and economy, the Rapa Nui at first followed this pattern and a serious intergenerational gap in language competence developed in the late 1960s and 1970s indicating the sort of language shift “tip” that Nancy Dorian (1981) associates with the beginning of language loss.

### SYNCRETIC RAPANUI

As community-wide bilingualism matured and the island became integrated into the national political economy, the Rapa Nui developed syncretic language practices for in-group interactions in which Rapa Nui and Chilean varieties of Spanish are mixed with Rapa Nui. Today syncretic Rapa Nui has become the dominant norm for interactions, and Rapa Nui-only interaction is rare and considered unnatural. *Chilean Spanish* refers to a set of Spanish varieties originally spoken on Continental Chile, particularly in the Santiago–Valparaíso–Viña del Mar area. Model users of Chilean Spanish on the island are Continental residents and visitors. Formal and colloquial styles of Chilean Spanish are also propagated in classrooms and by radio and television programs. I estimate that more than three-quarters of the Rapa Nui are quite fluent in Chilean Spanish, and the great majority of the approximately six hundred elementary school children (one-third of whom are Continental) are dominant Chilean Spanish speakers. *Rapa Nui Spanish* originated with second language acquisition strategies of native Rapa Nui speakers in the development of bilingualism on the island and is characterized by Rapa Nui interferences at prosodic, phonological, and morphosyntactic and other linguistic levels (Gómez Macker 1982).

Linguistic syncretism is characterized by “simultaneities,” or the copresence of Rapa Nui and Spanish elements, in the form of inter- and intrasentential code-switching, interference, and “bivalency” (Woolard 1998).<sup>8</sup> Codeswitching constitutes readily segmentable (clausal and lexical) resources for various discourse functions such as quoting and shifting “footing” (Goffman 1981; Gumperz 1982; Zentella 1997). While interference is less segmentable because it involves more than one level of linguistic organization (such as prosody, phonology, morphology, and syntax), it adds wealth of resources for indexing social identities and contexts (Woolard 1998). As a morphosyntactic example of interference, Spanish verbs (in their third-person sin-

gular present forms) are used as nouns, or Spanish nouns as verbs, within the otherwise Rapa Nui utterances. For a phonological example, the Rapa Nui name of the village Haja Roa is sometimes pronounced as /hanga roa/ especially when it is embedded within otherwise Spanish utterances. A range of phonological interferences can be illustrated in the multiple realizations of Spanish loanword *después* (afterwards): /despues/, /despue/, /despuē/, /depuē/, or /repuē/, listed here in order of increasing conformity to Rapa Nui phonology. The variant choice is sometimes predictable from the individual’s bilingual competence and preference, but the same person may use multiple variants, which potentially constitutes a strategic interference pointing toward Rapa Nui or Chileanness.

Crucial to understanding the value and function of syncretic Rapa Nui are the ways that bilingual simultaneities serve what Roman Jakobson (1960) called “poetic” function in combination with other functions such as “phatic,” “emotive,” and “conative” ones. Teasing is very common, for example, among the Rapa Nui, who enjoy each others’ company and reaffirm or redefine interpersonal relations through verbal interactions that take advantage of simultaneities, combining elements from two linguistic systems sequentially as well as across hierarchical levels of linguistic organization. Table 1 is an example taken from a casual conversation between a wife, a husband, and a male friend, all in their forties.

In line 4, the Rapa Nui postverbal particle ‘ā, (used normally within the Rapa Nui verbal frame with preverbal *e* for a progressive or with *ko* for a resultative aspect as in line 5) at the end of the otherwise Spanish sentence emphasizes the enduring visible and known quality of the expressed state, in this case, that he is still young. The use of this particle is interesting as it has “bivalent” quality, or membership to two codes. *Chilean Spanish* speakers often use clause-final discourse marker *ah* to indicate emphasis and reiteration. The bivalency derives from the phonological similarity with this Spanish marker and its common syntactic position. While such forms are relatively uncommon in syncretic Rapa Nui in comparison to more closely related language pairs such as Catalan and Castellano (Woolard 1998), bivalency plays a part in syncretic Rapa Nui, especially in the use of Spanish loanwords, whose membership in Rapa Nui can be augmented, for example, by heavy Rapa Nui pronunciation.

TABLE 2. The use of Spanish grammatical gender.

Reina: <i>¿Y ese?</i>	1	R: <u>And that one?</u> [pointing to the box]
Tiare: <i>Es de la ella.</i>	2	T: <u>It is hers.</u>
Mako'i: <i>A Juan ho'i.</i>	3	M: <u>It's Juan's, you know.</u>
T: <i>Lleva mis cosa por favor, estoy enferma.</i>	4	T: <u>Take my things please, I am sick (feminine)</u> [in a high pitch voice].
M: <i>Ko mau'ui 'ā.</i>	5	M: <u>(Subject) is sick.</u>
R: <i>¿Por qué está enferma? ¿Está mau'ui vahine?</i>	6	R: <u>Why is she sick (feminine)? Is (she) having her period?</u>
T: <i>Porque salió anoche.</i>	7	T: <u>Because (subject) went (3rd person)<sup>10</sup> out last night</u> [in a high pitch voice].
M: <i>Ko refriao 'ā.</i>	8	M: <u>(Subject) caught a cold.</u> [Angela (Reina's daughter) arrives]
A: <i>¿Dónde están las niñas?</i>	9	A: <u>Where are the girls [to her mother]?</u>
R: <i>Ta'e ō ararua kōrua ko te niña=</i>	10	R: <u>The girl is not with you?= T:=(Subject) is with Grandpa.</u>
T: <i>=Está con el tata.</i>	11	[Ema (Reina's younger daughter) arrives]
E: <i>¿De quién es esa caja?</i>	12	E: <u>Whose box is that [pointing to the box]?</u>
T: <i>Es del Juan. Ka kokohu mai koe i te heke e tahi . . .</i>	13	T: <u>It's (masculine) Juan's. Scoop up an octopus for me. . . [continues in Rapa Nui].</u> [Conversation recorded on June 15, 1994]

Table 2 illustrates another kind of teasing and how speakers' strategic code choice reflects a high degree of metalingual awareness of the grammatical differences between the two languages. The mother of the house, Reina, had been conversing in Rapa Nui when her sister, Tiare, and male friend Mako'i entered with a box of vegetables. Reina asks about the box in Spanish, to which Tiare playfully responds, "*es de la ella*" (it's hers). The use of the definite article *la* (the) preceding a pronoun deviates from Chilean Spanish usage, in which it frequently precedes personal names. Tiare thus emphasizes the femininity of her friend, a transgendered man who is not present, while withholding "her" exact identity. Niko Besnier (1989) identifies this kind of information withholding as a conversational strategy to elicit the audience's involvement in gossip. Mako'i offers a repair in Rapa Nui, clarifying that Tiare is referring to their mutual friend, Juan. Instead of confirming Mako'i's intervention, Tiare goes on to imitate Juan in Spanish (which may not have been the original code) in a high-pitch effeminate voice, "Take my things please, I am sick," using the feminine form *enferma* (sick). Reina joins her sister for another round of verbal play before the conversation shifts tone because of the arrival of her daughters.

Each time Tiare speaks in Spanish, Mako'i rephrases her descriptions in Rapa Nui, building a "nonreciprocal" bilingual conversation (Gal 1979). Their code choice is clearly motivated by awareness of the differences in the two languages' overt grammatical categories. Unlike Rapa Nui, Spanish has grammatical gender distinctions in pronouns, articles, and adjectives, and person distinctions in verbal morphology. Mako'i's descriptions (lines 3, 5, and 8) are all gender neutral and contrast with Tiare's gendered representation of Juan's femininity through the use of Spanish grammatical gender and a high-pitch voice. When her young niece Ema arrives to ask about the box, Tiare abandons the verbal play, perhaps because it is only meant for adults and responds, "It is Juan's" in Spanish, this time us-

ing the masculine definite article *del* in accordance with colloquial Chilean Spanish use.

Unreciprocated code choice is frequent in intergenerational interactions involving young "semi-speakers" (Dorian 1981), or those with only passive competence, and reflects changing patterns of bilingual competence and preference. For example, in one recorded conversation, a 30-year-old father, although fluent in Spanish, uses Rapa Nui, while his five-year-old daughter, clearly understanding all that is said in Rapa Nui, insists on her Spanish choice while carrying on the conversation over nine turns of exchange. Similar patterns of unreciprocated code choice are reported in other communities under language shift such as amongst Puerto Ricans in the United States (Zentella 1997). Through their participation in syncretic interactions, individuals with low productive competence in Rapa Nui (including children and even some Continental residents integrated into Rapa Nui families) develop and maintain at least passive knowledge of Rapa Nui and contribute to the establishment of a syncretic interactional norm. Children's Spanish utterances are also syncretic as they are typically marked with Rapa Nui words (see Makihara n.d.). For the most part speakers rarely comment or correct others' word and code choice.<sup>11</sup> This contrasts with other communities, such as that of the Catalan, Dyirbal, or Hungarians in Austria, where code choice is primarily interlocutor based, and especially with the Dyirbal community, whose elders are reported to engage in constant corrective acts (Gal 1987; Schmidt 1985; Woolard 1989a).

### THE TRANSFORMATION OF COLONIAL DIGLOSSIA

As recently as the 1980s, Rapa Nui seemed to be going the way of other minorities such as Dyirbal and Occitan language communities, in which a colonial diglossic force seemed to contribute to the devaluation of Rapa Nui, language shift to Spanish, and confinement of Rapa Nui to smaller inner spheres. However, the development of

syncretism, changing economic opportunities, and the rise of political movements on the island have created spaces and instruments for a significant redefinition of the functions and values of speech styles over the relatively short period of the last two decades. Syncretic speech styles, once largely confined to inner spheres, have moved into public and outer spheres, leading to the erosion of the colonial diglossic boundaries. Several factors lie behind this important change of language consciousness and practice.

First, rapid economic growth since the mid-1960s raised incomes and generated employment. Although the school's role in acculturation and language shift has been substantial and undeniable, education is not the only avenue for access to many important segments of the local labor market. Earnings in the heritage tourist industry, for example, depend in large part on land ownership, skills such as crafts and performing arts, and being integrated into Rapa Nui kin networks. Ethnic distinctiveness serves Rapa Nui economic interests, leading to active construction and commoditization of the local culture. Thus, the special nature of the local labor market that is heavily dependent on heritage tourism has helped to complicate the unification of "linguistic market" (Bourdieu 1991) under the Chilean nation-state, motivating the Rapa Nui to often challenge the state for political and economic resources and elevating the values of Rapa Nui identity and language. During my first visit to the island in 1991, there were still some Rapa Nui who spoke of their language as being "just a dialect." By 2003 such characterization had disappeared completely.

Second, efforts to increase local political and economic control became greatly enhanced by national democratization and decentralization initiatives leading to and following the 1989 end of military dictatorship. This led to successful campaigns to press the government for increased land rights and a transfer of decision-making power to islanders. Today the Chilean Congress is debating proposals to grant the island a new form of administrative autonomy. Exchanges with fellow Polynesians like the Maori, Hawaiians, and Tahitians, and with other indigenous groups in Chile such as the Mapuche, have provided models and alliances for the Rapa Nui to use in advocating increasingly radical demands against the Chilean state and appealing for financial and political support from the global community. Political projects in this period, such as the introduction of the 1994 Indigenous Law, reflected a significant change in outlook by the national government toward its indigenous populations. The law, which was extensively debated on the island, led large numbers of Rapa Nui to participate in local politics. To illustrate, in 1999, 45 Rapa Nui (32 men and 13 women of all ages)—six percent of eligible voters—presented themselves as candidates for five slots on the Development Commission newly created by this law.

The Rapa Nui found themselves expanding the use of syncretic speech styles. In 1991, syncretic Rapa Nui was still relatively confined to inner spheres. However, instead of maintaining Spanish as a medium of communication with outsiders and as the exclusive language within institutional

domains characterized by unequal power relations, Rapa Nui men and women challenged the colonial diglossic hierarchy by demanding the right of participation in local politics, and by bringing syncretic Rapa Nui into these spaces. Syncretic Rapa Nui is now used extensively within institutional domains such as local government offices that only a decade ago had been dominated by monolingual Spanish usage. What is significant is the choice of Rapa Nui for such topics and settings. These same participants could have easily carried out the same kind of discussion in monolingual Spanish, and they likely would have done so in the past. But now they are speaking "in Rapa Nui." The Rapa Nui have furthermore created new political fora for asserting their voices—for example, community meetings, protests, strikes, boycotts, and the takeover of public buildings and land parcels. In this process, the Rapa Nui are remaking their language into a public language.<sup>12</sup> By continuing to use Rapa Nui—albeit in syncretic styles—the Rapa Nui are resisting pressures to abandon their language or restrict it to ever-smaller inner spheres of interactions.

Third, integration into the national and global economy also contributed to the local reevaluation of Spanish speech styles. In contrast to the Continental functionaries sent by Chilean institutions, many of the recent migrants, whose number and diversity have increased markedly since the 1960s, came from Chilean working-class backgrounds. Many are employed as workers in Rapa Nui-owned tourist inns. Spanish thus came to be no longer only associated with socioeconomic status and Chilean institutional dominance. Awareness of the existence of nonprestigious varieties of *Chilean Spanish* and of the high prestige of English in global contexts, evident locally in tourism and the mass media, helped to upset the earlier equation of Spanish with status and power. While acquiring Chilean Spanish, the Rapa Nui are also continuing to use *Rapa Nui Spanish*. Today, the in-group use of Rapa Nui Spanish, often within syncretic Rapa Nui conversation, generally serves to highlight ethnic solidarity, whereas its out-group use may serve to authenticate Rapa Nui identity or to polarize ethnic differences.<sup>13</sup> The persistence of Rapa Nui Spanish points to the Rapa Nui's positive self-identification and estimation of this previously stigmatized Spanish speech style.

While sociolinguistic changes have been integral to the island's recent political transformation, Rapa Nui language maintenance was not the result of a conscious concerted effort. The spread of syncretic Rapa Nui to public fora most likely did not start as part of an overt political agenda. A quite plausible interpretation is that it was partly led by disputes and arguments amongst the Rapa Nui spilling into the public and outer spheres. By 1994, for example, two separate Councils of Elders competed for recognition by the community and the Chilean State. Many public meetings in the presence of Continental government officials that I witnessed that began in Spanish became laced through with heated side arguments amongst Rapa Nui in syncretic Rapa Nui. Over time Rapa Nui participants may have grown increasingly aware of code choice as an effective means to

**TABLE 3.** “Do you know where the Rapa Nui language is?”

Haoa: Ko 'ite 'ā koe 'i hē te vanaŋa Rapa Nui e noho mai ena?	H: Do you know where the Rapa Nui language is?
Miki: 'I hē e noho mai ena?	M: Where is it?
H: 'Ai ruŋa i te ma'uŋa era o Punapau, 'i te mokomoko. 'I ira te vanaŋa Rapa Nui.	H: There, on top of Punapau mountain, on the tip. That's where the Rapa Nui language is.
M: 'I te hora nei?	M: Now?
H: Ka noho, ka noho. I tu'u mai era te papa'ā ki nei, he ma'u mai i te mauku era mo te pua'a mo haŋai, mo te mamoe. I tupu era te mauku era, he tute he iri i te mauku Rapa Nui, ē ka ŋaro rō ki ruŋa i te ma'uŋa. 'Ai te mauku Rapa Nui e tere e iri era ki ruŋa i te potu. Pē ira te vanaŋa Rapa Nui i tere i oho ena i te vanaŋa hiva ē ai ka tu'u ro ki ruŋa i te potu. E u'i o rehu!	H: Wait, wait. When the foreigners <sup>16</sup> came here, they brought their grass to plant to feed the cows and sheep. This grass grew and chased the Rapa Nui grass until it drove it out to the top of the hill. Escaping, the Rapa Nui grass ran away, up to the top of the hill. That is how the Rapa Nui language escaped the foreign (Continental) language and went until it reached the top. Do not forget this!
M: Mo raŋi mo hoki mai ia?	M: What if we call it to come back?
H: E haŋa 'ā te mauku era mo hoki mai ki te kona tupu era o'ona.	H: That grass wants to return to its birthplace.
R: Mai ta'e ŋaro pa'i.	R (a man in his 40s): So it won't be lost.
M: Mo hapa'o.	M: To be taken care of.
H: Mo tupu haka'ou o'ona i to'ona kona tupu era. 'O ira e kī ena i te vanaŋa hiva e te Rapa Nui, “he mauku.” Mai nei te mana'u i ai ai mo kī he mauku te vanaŋa hiva. “Ko vanaŋa mauku 'ā.”	H: So that it takes root in its birthplace. This is why the Rapa Nui call the foreign (Continental) language “mauku” (grass). This is where the idea of calling the foreign (Continental) language “mauku” came from. (We say) “You are speaking mauku.” [Conversation recorded on June 20, 1994]

exclude or diminish the power of monolingual Chilean participants, and as a way of making metapragmatic and political claims of Rapa Nui rights over local decision-making processes and resources.

### LANGUAGE ATTITUDES AND LANGUAGE CONTACT

On September 9, 1888, Chile annexed Easter Island in a ceremony conducted in front of the Church in Haŋa Roa. Facing the gathered Rapa Nui and Chilean representatives, Rapa Nui king Atamu Tekena reportedly placed a fistful of soil into his pocket and then handed a bundle of grass to Chilean Navy Captain Policarpo Toro (Estella 1920). The soil in Tekena's pocket is said to have symbolized the Rapa Nui's continued land ownership, and the grass placed in the Captain's hand the partial usufruct rights granted to Chile. Time and again the Rapa Nui have invoked this image in the conflicted history of contact with their governing state. The Rapa Nui colloquially call Chileans “Tire” (Chile), but sometimes, less kindly, refer to them as “mauku” (grass), perhaps in reference to this allegory. They call Spanish “vanaŋa Tire” (Chilean language) and sometimes “vanaŋa mauku.”

Coincident images were evoked by the words of the elder, Nico Haoa, in a conversation I recorded in 1994. As a well-respected elder, he was at the time participating in the island's language “structuration” commission, which later published a grammar and a dictionary (Comisión para la Estructuración de la Lengua Rapanui 1996, 2000).<sup>14</sup> Haoa had been sitting at the edge of the churchyard, listening in on a conversation about *moai*<sup>15</sup> that I was having with several Rapa Nui men gathered near a display of political banners protesting Chile's territorial control over the island.

He interjected by calling out my name to offer the following allegorical account (Table 3).

Haoa's words point to the community's demographic and sociolinguistic changes over the last 140 years. While his botanical metaphor resonates with Rapa Nui (and Polynesian) tropes of kinship and genealogy,<sup>17</sup> and with the connection between nation, territory, language, and history common around the world (Alonso 1994), it also fashions the image of the Rapa Nui language having an autonomous existence removed from its everyday use.

Haoa spoke in what I call *purist Rapa Nui*, an emerging speech style characterized by the conscious avoidance of Spanish mixing especially of lexical items and other surface-segmentable parts of language. Purist Rapa Nui has been elaborated in recent years by cultural and political leaders who use it strategically in oratories in public political domains to index the ethnic group's claims to heritage and resources. Haoa's code choice augmented the authority of his statement, and others around him offered respectful silence. This was in contrast to the earlier conversation much more typical of everyday speech that had been full of Spanish mixing and overlapping speeches.

Although purist speech such as Haoa's is heard, many Rapa Nui find the absence of Spanish elements awkward. Some Rapa Nui claim that it is more practical and natural to speak Rapa Nui in bilingual and syncretic ways. A local fisherman in his late fifties who I shall call Beto expresses such a view in Table 4.

In the conversation, Beto was reacting to purist Rapa Nui speeches delivered by the island's governor and mayor on local television. He explains why he himself speaks in “vanaŋa 'apa Tire, 'apa Rapa Nui” (half-Chilean, half-Rapa

**TABLE 4.** "We prefer to speak so that people understand."

...A au ho'i e vanaŋa atu ena, 'apa<sup>18</sup> o te vanaŋa Rapa Nui, 'apa o te vanaŋa Tīre. Pero mo'oku, 'ina ho'i he vanaŋa Rapa Nui pe nei e perfecto. Mo'oku, perfecto mo vanaŋa hai vanaŋa 'apa Tīre 'apa Rapa Nui. ...E prefiere tātou mo vanaŋa ki āŋiaŋi e te nu'u ena o e koe mau 'ā. No! ...I a au, me'e ra cuenta au i te vanaŋa, bueno, 'ina ho'i au kai 'ite rīvariva i te vanaŋa Rapa Nui. Me'e rahi pa'i te vanaŋa Rapa Nui 'ina au kai 'ite pero toa manera (de todas maneras) e ai ro 'ā, te vanaŋa Rapa Nui noho māi ena 'ina e tātou he usa.

...I am speaking to you, half in the Rapa Nui language and half in the Chilean (Spanish) language. But for me, there is no one perfect Rapa Nui language, you know. For me, it is perfect to speak in half Chilean and half Rapa Nui. ... We prefer to speak so that people understand, or it's you only. No! ... And me, what I said about the language, well, I don't know the Rapa Nui language very well. Many Rapa Nui words I don't know, but in any case the Rapa Nui language exists, we just don't use it. [Conversation recorded on April 6, 1995]

Nui) but ends with a view of the current speech community much like Haoa's that the *vanaŋa Rapa Nui* "exists" even though it is no longer used by people. His positive evaluation of syncretism emphasizes both its practical and symbolic values for the Rapa Nui. Such embracing attitudes underscore the strong sense of ethnic solidarity among the Rapa Nui, who often emphatically insist that they "are not Chileans at heart" and readily extend group membership to Spanish-speaking children of mixed marriages. The practical consciousness behind the now-widespread syncretic language practice seems to acknowledge the entrenched reality of asymmetric bilingual competence. This compromise may be enabling the Rapa Nui language to evolve and survive (cf. Dorian 1994; Woolard 1989b).

Many Rapa Nui acknowledge that the way they speak has changed and that their children are speaking Spanish. Like Beto, Rapa Nui speakers often comment with a certain mixture of lament and realism that "The Rapa Nui language exists, we just don't use it" or "I don't know the Rapa Nui language." At other times, the same people proudly embrace their ways of speaking Rapa Nui. While purism and syncretism expressed by Haoa and Beto appear at one level contradictory, they both accord the language an autonomous existence separate from its users, a view that resonates with Saussurean structuralist conceptions of language and an important idea behind the practical consciousness that allows the Rapa Nui to proudly speak syncretic Rapa Nui.

The emergent purist linguistic ideology, in contrast, is discursively elaborate, and its users attempt to redraw the ethnolinguistic boundaries through self-monitoring in symbolically charged settings such as TV and radio announcements, public events, and political meetings involving Continentals. Thus, purist Rapa Nui is being developed as a speech style for a new genre of ethnic politics oratories in the context of indigenous movement. Most users are political and cultural leaders, including some who hold office within the Chilean political administration and who, like others, habitually speak syncretic Rapa Nui. While the linguistic differences between syncretic and purist Rapa Nui resemble those between Mexicano "power and purist codes" (Hill 1993, 1998; Hill and Hill 1986), their social locations and functions are very different.

Language shift in ethnolinguistic minority communities can be viewed as being driven by individuals' and group's attempts to overcome the barriers, or exploit the opportunities, presented by sociolinguistic differentiation and hierarchy. The hierarchies of *colonial diglossia* are often "recursively" (Irvine and Gal 2000) reproduced *within* minority groups as seen for instance in the case of Mexicano communities where local senior male landholding elites employ a hispanicized Mexicano power code to maintain internal social differentiation. More recently, male factory workers who migrate weekly to cities have led language shift to Spanish.

In contrast, the Rapa Nui adopted bilingualism relatively quickly and much more evenly. In the earlier history of contact with Chileans, bilingual skills held by some Rapa Nui men also clearly carried prestige, and they probably led the introduction of Spanish borrowings.<sup>19</sup> However, post-contact Rapa Nui internal social organization never became marked by the same level of class differences, gender inequality, or land concentration seen in the Mexicano communities. This is likely explained by the social and linguistic leveling among the Rapa Nui produced by the population crash of the 1870s and shared life on a remote colony for the better part of the following century. When the island's isolation was finally broken in the 1960s, there were relatively equally spread opportunities to be seized in the rapidly growing local tourist economy. Spanish (and English) language skills were instrumental and the Rapa Nui leaped at the opportunity to cultivate them. Yet in heritage tourism, Rapa Nui-cized Spanish could be turned into an asset. These were important factors favoring rapid and widespread bilingualism and syncretism.

Syncretic language use emerged at first within inner spheres as a corollary to the situation of colonial diglossia that became established by the early 1970s. In contrast to other situations in which syncretism has remained confined to inner spheres of use, over time, the Rapa Nui pushed syncretic practices into outer spheres in ways that began to undermine the earlier established sociolinguistic hierarchy. Rapid economic development, as well as the new political opportunities created by national political democratization and decentralization projects beginning in the late



1980s, opened up a wealth of new opportunities that the Rapa Nui were quick to grasp. The 1990s generated an outpouring of new forms of political participation and a veritable scramble by the Rapa Nui to appropriate lands, political leadership, government resources, and employment opportunities that had previously been managed by Continentals. The comparatively low level of socioeconomic differentiation and gender inequality meant that participation by the Rapa Nui became, in many instances, both massive and widespread. Syncretism burst into outer spheres in part as the Rapa Nui vied amongst themselves for leadership of these movements and as they sought to challenge Chilean authority and control. While language was not part of explicit political agenda, syncretism proved very effective at broadening the appeal of identity politics and ethnic solidarity by extending participation to younger generations of predominantly Spanish-speaking Rapa Nui.

A key factor in the transformation of colonial diglossia and Rapa Nui language maintenance lies in the development of positive attitudes toward syncretism and ethnic solidarity. Opportune political and economic situational factors and the islanders' pragmatic approach to politics and language helped the Rapa Nui avoid the sort of deep devaluation of identity and language that has been observed in other language contact contexts. This contrasts with other minority communities in which anxiety or sensitivity to language boundaries has often been found to develop amongst speakers in ways that serve to reinforce internal social hierarchies and differentiation and accelerate language shift, as seen for example in the "nostalgic" ideology of differentiation among the Mexicanos (Hill 1993, 1998; see also Gal 1978). The Rapa Nui also avoided anxieties over the disadvantage presented by the community's loss of knowledge of their own past culture and language, caused by the profound cultural discontinuity of the population crash, and avoided overromanticizing a vision of precontact social order. Instead, they adopted syncretic Rapa Nui to embrace and enact their modern identity.

Despite more than a century of contact with Spanish and 40 years of more recent but rapidly spreading bilingualism, linguistic analysis suggests that the extent of grammatical convergence between Rapa Nui and Spanish has remained quite limited (Makihara 2001). This resonates, in an interesting way, with popular conceptions of language that distinguish the "Rapa Nui language" from its use. Rapa Nui speakers have limited the structural dependency of their language on Spanish but have not been shy to appropriate Spanish to their advantage for communicative, creative, and political purposes in interactional use of languages. The lack of a local name to describe what I call "syncretic Rapa Nui," which would draw a contrast to a more "real" or "legitimate" Rapa Nui, reflects the Rapa Nui practical consciousness which emphasizes linguistically inclusive and positive ethnic identification.

Only in recent years has purist Rapa Nui speech been introduced by local leaders, and then almost exclusively in outer spheres of interaction where they are highly conscious

of a non-Rapa Nui audience. Unlike the Mexicano case, in which male factory workers employed a purist code as a challenge to local traditional power holders, purist Rapa Nui is used mostly for the purpose of highlighting symbolic claims of Rapa Nui political and cultural autonomy in the indigenous movement. The introduction of purist Rapa Nui usage is beginning to raise awareness among the Rapa Nui of linguistic boundaries blurred in syncretic Rapa Nui interactions but, unlike the Mexicano case in which nostalgic purism contributed to polarizing social groups, the Rapa Nui have not targeted purism to create sociolinguistic boundaries within the ethnic community—at least not yet. It is not unreasonable to speculate that had purist efforts taken place earlier—before syncretism had begun to breakdown the colonial diglossia—they might have generated linguistic insecurities that would have undermined ethnic solidarity and reduced the size of the language community by excluding younger generations. The maintenance of the Rapa Nui language might then have become much more difficult. The Rapa Nui case suggests, therefore, how syncretism can become an effective communicative and political tool that serves a community to appropriate symbolic capital, reshape hierarchical social relations, and maintain its language.

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## NOTES

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1. Yves Déjean (1993) and others have since argued that Haiti, whose majority are monolingual Creole speakers, does not fit Charles Ferguson's own theoretical characterization of "diglossia." Haiti might be better described as an example of "colonial diglossia."
2. See also Hudson 1991.
3. For example, see Sahlins 1981, Wagner 1975, Williams 1977.
4. For example, see Hill 1998, Gal and Woolard 1995, Kroskrity 2000, Schieffelin et al. 1998, Silverstein 1987, and Woolard and Schieffelin 1994.
5. French Catholic missionaries converted all surviving Rapa Nui to Catholicism during their stay in 1864–71.
6. According to a linguistic diagnostic conducted by SIL resident linguists in 1997, 30 percent of 649 students in kindergarten through seventh grade held at least some degree of speaking competence in Rapa Nui (Thiesen de Weber and Weber 1998).
7. The population of Continentals on the island grew from 143 (out of 1,146) in 1965 to 538 in 1968 (Cristino et al. 1984).
8. Although some contact-induced linguistic processes are common, syncretic Rapa Nui is distinct from other linguistic systems such as creoles and "mixed languages" (Makihara 2001). Creole languages have generally moved through a process of grammatical simplification in their earlier stage as pidgins. Examples

include Hawai'i Creole English, Tok Pisin (in Papua New Guinea), and Haitian Creole French. Although much of their lexicons originate from the languages of the dominant group, the resulting creoles are structurally different from, and mutually unintelligible with, their "lexicalizer" languages. Mixed languages are developed by bilinguals and result when the grammatical systems of two (or more) languages have interpenetrated. Examples include Michif (spoken in North Dakota and Canada), Ma'a (also known as "Mbugu," spoken in Tanzania), and Anglo-Romani (spoken in the United Kingdom) (Bakker 1997; Thomason and Kaufman 1988). John Gumperz and Robert Wilson's (1971) study reports a case of structural convergence that has not resulted in a mixed language from Kupwar, India, where local varieties of three languages—Urdu, Marathi, and Kannada—belong to two separate language families (Indo-European and Dravidian). Through centuries of bilingualism and multilingualism, the three syntactic systems have converged to become structurally similar to one another, serving to facilitate intergroup communication, but vocabularies have been kept distinct, helping to preserve social group distinctions.

On Rapa Nui, *koineization* (Siegel 1985)—or leveling of the language internal variations associated with older Rapa Nui social, tribal, religiopolitical, and occupational structures—most likely took place following the sociocultural upheaval caused by the population crash and Catholic missionization during the 1860s and 1870s. The extent of prior variations and the nature of changes in the early contact years with Spanish remain unclear for lack of relevant historical documentation. See Veronica Du Feu 1996 for a grammatical description of the contemporary Rapa Nui language, and Steven Fischer 1997 for an interpretation of the origin and meaning of *ronjoroŋo* inscriptions.

9. Rapa Nui orthography is not yet standardized. Following one of the systems in use in the community, I use ['] for the glottal stop, [ŋ] for the nasal velar, and macrons for long vowels. Standard orthography is used for Spanish elements except where pronunciation significantly diverges from standard usage. Rapa Nui elements are italicized and Spanish elements underlined. Relatively well-diffused Spanish borrowings are italicized and underlined, and non-Spanish borrowings italicized and dot underlined. Translations are also italicized or underlined to reflect the original code choice. The [=] indicates interruptions. Except for Table 3, the names of speakers are pseudonyms.

Literacy was introduced in Spanish. Although in the last two decades the Rapa Nui are increasingly writing in Rapa Nui, they tend to keep the two languages apart.

10. I interpret Tiare's choice of the third-person form here to indicate that it is her guess and not how Juan would have explained.

11. Ana Celia Zentella (1997) and Leigh Swigart (1992) describe similar lack of critical attitudes toward code mixture among Spanglish and Urban Wolof speakers.

12. At the church, one of the two Sunday masses is described as being "in Rapa Nui," as many of the songs and prayers are in Rapa Nui. The local school began its Rapa Nui immersion program in 2000, and 133 students in kindergarten through fourth grade were enrolled in 2003.

13. Such in- and outgroup differences in the values of ethnically marked versions of standard language are common (e.g., Baugh 1983; Smitherman 1999; Urciuoli 1996).

14. Haoa and his wife operated one of the larger tourist inns in Haha Roa and traveled abroad often. He spoke Rapa Nui and Spanish very well and some English. He passed away in 2003.

15. Easter Island is known to most outsiders for its monolithic *moai* statues. Constructed between the 11th and 17th centuries, over 1,000 statues remain as stoic silent reminders of the past prosperity and sociocultural elaboration of the Rapa Nui's Polynesian ancestors.

16. They refer to the European ranchers who set up the sheep farm shortly after the slave raids.

17. The Rapa Nui term *tumu*, for example, refers to a tree, trunk, origin, source, family tree, and family relation. See Kathleen Riley (2001) for her interpretation of Marquesan tree metaphor for language.

18. From English *half*, borrowed via Tahitian *afa*.

19. For example, Juan Tepano (born c. 1876) spent seven years in continental Chile starting in 1899, where he served in the military and learned to speak and write Spanish. Back on the island he served as a *cacique* (American Spanish, leader) in the Easter Island Exploitation Company and as principal informant for anthropologists such as Katherine Routledge (1919) in 1914–15, John Macmillan Brown (1924) in 1922, and Alfred Métraux (1940) in 1934–35.

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