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Language activism and language policy

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Without the disrupters, campaigners and ideological pests, all noble words amount to nothing but blackboard dust. This is not to justify every activity undertaken in the name of activism but to state a plain historical truth: no noise, no improvement. Activism as such is not sufficient for improvement, but damned if it isn't necessary.

Todd Gitlin, *Letters to a Young Activist* (2003)

Activism is frequently defined as intentional, vigorous or energetic action that individuals and groups practise to bring about a desired goal. For some, activism is a theoretically or ideologically focused project intended to effect a perceived need for political or social change. For others, activism is controversial and disruptive; after all, it often manifests as confrontational activity that directly challenges the order of things. Activism is uncomfortable, sometimes messy, almost always strenuous, and it does not occur without the presence and commitment of *activists*, that is, folks who develop workable strategies, focus a collective spotlight onto particular issues, and ultimately move people into action (Gitlin 2003). As Gitlin suggests above, effective activists also make noise, sometimes loudly.

If *activism* conventionally is defined as ideologically inspired, energetic action designed to achieve a social or political goal, what is language activism? Is it advocacy or action for more linguistic diversity? What does activism look like in the context of language revitalization work? What are insider and outsider activist roles? How important is it to be a language activist (and what does that really mean)? In this chapter, we attempt to answer these questions and to provide at least a working definition of language activism, if not a definitive one. The definition cannot be definitive because language activism manifests differently at different times and in different contexts. Just who is a language activist differs as well: language policy researchers may be language activists or

they may not. A few individuals meeting regularly to study the grammar, vocabulary and pragmatics of their endangered ancestral language may also be called language activists, as could the linguist helping them. Our principal goal in this chapter is to raise additional questions about what it might mean to be a language activist. We also hope to spotlight some of the creative tension that activists must generate, that is, in the way that Martin Luther King, Jr described in his Letter from a Birmingham city jail. In this seminal work on activism, King argued that nonviolent resisters must 'create a crisis and establish such creative tension that a community that has constantly refused to negotiate is forced to confront the issue... [Nonviolent direct action] seeks to dramatize the issue that can no longer be ignored' (in Washington 1986: 291).

We locate our discussion within two somewhat disparate contexts: first, language activism on behalf of (or against) language minority groups exerted through legislation, the courts, and 'direct democracy' initiatives. Our second context concerns language revitalization efforts, specifically in indigenous communities where endangered tribal or heritage languages are at issue. This kind of activism might be advanced to benefit both a group or an individual. In the latter context especially, we argue for the need to broaden our sense of responsibility for language activism. We suggest that without increased attention to how language activism develops, is implemented and organized, minority and endangered languages are unlikely to achieve the reinforcement of official language policies which support their use and existence.

Drawing from the above definition of activism, we suggest that *language activism* is energetic action focused on language use in order to create, influence and change existing language policies. In this sense, language activists are individuals or groups who, through various means, actively defend their right to venerate and freely use their languages in multiple, often public domains. Language activism may develop as a reaction to larger, state-imposed efforts to suppress or discourage the use of non-dominant languages. In the United States, for example, those who actively oppose Congressional English Language Amendments, English-only work place rules, or state anti-bilingual education voter initiatives are language activists. Similarly, individuals who advocate for endangered Native American languages in order to forestall the shift to English count as language activists.

This characterization also means, however, that majority language speakers who focus their energies on the obstruction, suppression and eradication of minority or endangered languages also count as language activists. We might justifiably scoff at claims by restrictionist organizations like US English and English First that English speakers suffer discrimination from minority language policies, but we would be hard pressed to deny that their efforts are not a form of activism. Our definition of language activism must therefore be broad enough to include

many points of view, still actuating the notion that language activism is a force for social change which may result in changes in language policy, whether official, community or family-based.

Language activists may need to be noisy in order to be heard, as Gitlin suggests, but in fact language activism can be quiet, personal and practised in smaller, more intimate settings. If an individual commits to learning or relearning her ancestral language, she is practising a kind of language activism. To paraphrase Siskiska (Blackfeet) educator Darrell Kipp, such a commitment protects and shields her language, allowing her to embrace, use, foster, renew and teach it to her own daughters and sons. She has no need to defend her motives, her actions or her vision. For Kipp, action and results are key, and Native children who end up actively speaking the language are the ultimate goal (Kipp 2000): 'When a baby speaks our language, everybody wants one' (20). Kipp likens an active commitment to language revitalization to love and survival, and we agree. We also believe this is language activism.

Language activism does in fact influence language policy, although as stated earlier, not always in ways we might endorse. Consider the anti-bilingual initiatives promoted in several US states (California, Arizona, Colorado and Massachusetts). All of the campaigns for these measures were bankrolled by a single wealthy individual – software engineer Ron Unz – who with a handful of activists in each state portrayed bilingual education as a failed and expensive Spanish-only, academic welfare programme in which children languished for years, or as an entrenched bureaucracy seeking to preserve its financial stake (Ayala 1999; Crawford 2008; English for the Children–Arizona 1998; Unz 1997, 2001a, 2001b).¹ Unz's 'English for the Children' initiative campaign facilitated the passage of anti-bilingual education measures in California, Arizona and Massachusetts, which resulted in sweeping changes in language policies in these states.

National and regional language activism may also inspire the intervention of international governing bodies. From the latter part of the nineteenth early to the mid-twentieth century, indigenous children were forced into residential boarding schools in both the United States and Canada. Because of these coercive school policies in both nations, entire generations of students lost their ancestral languages. A large scale response to the injustices of such long-term policies was the United Nations Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples, adopted by the General Assembly on September 13, 2007.² In addition to recognizing the collective rights of indigenous peoples to their languages, the Declaration also promotes their rights to culture, identity, education, health and employment. Enactment of the Declaration was the culmination of years of activism on the part of hundreds of indigenous language advocates worldwide. While the legal applicability of the Declaration has

been called into question, there are legal considerations for the nations that signed it.

Language activism: language rights and the law

Our discussion would be incomplete without addressing a major impetus for language activism: energetic affirmation of one's legal or human right to language, though what 'legal' and 'human' mean is anything but settled. Is a language right literally a right to language in and of itself, however abstract that may be? Is it a legal right to access fundamental services through language, like voting, the legal process, education, etc.? Do governments bestow language rights individually or collectively? How does the United States recognize language rights compared to international venues?

The question of whether language rights are granted to individuals or groups exposes a philosophical and legal tension in the US legal system. On the one hand, US jurisprudence is predicated upon the idea that in a democratic state all citizens are equal, regardless of race, ethnic, national or linguistic origin (Williams 1998). This approach to law privileges individual rights over those of the group. Indeed, the Bill of Rights (the first ten amendments to the US Constitution) spells out the rights and immunities of the individual citizen. On the other hand, a system of individual rights – itself a majoritarian idea – does not adequately address the civil rights concerns of a minority group which, more often than not, finds itself petitioning for rights never requested by the dominant or majority group (de Valle 2003; Phillipson, Rannut and Skutnabb-Kangas 1995; Williams 1998). As a consequence, litigation on behalf of the group or class of people 'similarly situated' has been the favoured approach to civil rights actions.

In the United States, practically speaking, a language right is not granted to a sole individual. A single Chinese speaker may be legally entitled to government services in Chinese, but only because those services are also provided to other Chinese speakers, a benefit bestowed only after lengthy and arduous legal battles. Government services to the many over the few, sometimes compelled, is manifested over and over again in civil rights law and legislation.

Judicial tension from a legal or quasi-legal recognition of language rights, reaches beyond legal strategies that advance an individual or group rights approach. In fact, an argument can be made, and scholars have made it, that language rights *qua* rights do not exist (and never have existed). Schiffman (1996) for example, writes that 'language rights are nowhere guaranteed in Anglo-American tradition' and that the US linguistic culture 'glosses over and/or ignores any notion of specific language rights' (216, emphasis in original). González, Vasquez and Bichsel

(1988) claim that the debate about language rights, at least for Mexican Americans, is 'much ado about nothing', and that the discourse about language rights has conflated language rights with access rights. They argue that civil rights gains from the 1960s and 1970s, like the Voting Rights Act of 1965, the Bilingual Education Act of 1968, the Equal Employment Opportunity Act of 1972, and Court Interpreters Act of 1978, were meant to ensure political, educational, employment and legal access to entitlements traditionally foreclosed from powerless minority groups:

Unfortunately, because these acts identify language as a tool for promoting equal access, they have been misconstrued as 'language rights' policies. Conflating access rights with 'language rights' obscures the original intent and ultimate goal of this body of legislation, making it appear that Mexican Americans and other minority groups possess something that they do not. The clarification of these terms is essential to the intelligent resolution of the language rights controversy. We argue, therefore, that the debate on 'language rights' for Mexican Americans is much ado about nothing: Mexican Americans have no language rights. What they do have is the right of equal access to specific American institutions, rights now jeopardized by widespread acceptance of an argument founded on illogic. (González, Vasquez and Bichsel 1988: 2)

Currently in US jurisprudence, there is still no legal right to language per se, and language rights law as a separate legal field does not yet exist (Del Valle 2003). Instead, courts have tended to construe discrimination on the basis of language as a civil rights violation. Because civil rights are guaranteed by federal statute and the US Constitution, attorneys have had to argue language discrimination claims as national origin discrimination (Valdés 2001).

Federal courts have considered many cases implicating language rights, although typically these cases involve the right to access government programmes and services through language, particularly the right of language minority students to education. Perhaps the best known of these cases is *Lau v. Nichols*, decided by the US Supreme Court in 1974. The case concerned approximately 1,800 Chinese-speaking children in the San Francisco Unified School District (SFSUD) who were failing academically because they did not understand English. Because instruction in SFUSD was provided in English only, the students had little meaningful access to academic content. In a unanimous ruling, the Court declared that the students had been denied an equal education (the high court's standard in *Brown v. Board of Education*) because of their limited English skills. Writing for the Court, Justice William O. Douglas declared: '[T]here is no equality of treatment merely by providing students with the same facilities, textbooks, teachers, and curriculum; for students who do not understand English are effectively foreclosed from any meaningful education' (*Lau v. Nichols*, 414 US 563-1974). The Court's decision stopped short of determining what a

meaningful education was, asserting instead what it was not: submersion or 'sink or swim' education in which language minority students were routinely placed in English medium classrooms without any additional academic or linguistic assistance: 'Teaching English to the students of Chinese ancestry who do not speak the language is one choice. Giving instructions to this group in Chinese is another. There may be others' (*Lau v. Nichols*, 414 US 563-1974). Nevertheless, the *Lau* decision was widely interpreted as a judicial mandate for school districts to implement meaningful educational programmes for their language minority students.

Lau v. Nichols is arguably the most studied and analysed education rights case in the United States. First, it fundamentally changed the way in which school districts nationwide served English language learners. Second, the case challenged conventional notions of inequality. Prior to *Lau*, racial segregation and discrimination cases dominated consideration by federal courts. That is, courts tended to define inequality as a practice in which people who are the same are treated differently. Paradoxically, the Chinese plaintiffs in this case were linguistically different, but treated the same (Steinman 1994).³

It is important to point out that this case was a direct result of activism on the part of parents and members of the Chinese-American community in San Francisco. The case itself was brought only after other efforts to improve education had failed. In fact, going to federal court was 'the avenue of last resort after all others had been tried and exhausted', according to Ling-Chi Wang, a local community leader. Wang reports that for three years prior to the lawsuit, Chinese American parents held meetings with school administrators, conducted studies on the educational needs of Chinese-speaking children, staged demonstrations, packed school board meetings, and developed alternative programmes. Even after the Supreme Court's ruling, community members had to marshal the political and legal capital they had gained to force the school district to implement a bilingual/bicultural education model, rather than a once-a-day English as a second language class (Wang 1994: 3-5).

In cases like *Lau v. Nichols*, the top-down policies of the dominant group affect minority groups and individuals on a large scale. What about language policy and language activism at the grassroots level? Many of these larger policy issues had their roots and impetus growing out of the efforts of local activists. Let's turn to how activism and policy relate to each other in community contexts.

Language activism from the bottom up: community perspectives

We have seen remarkable changes in language policy resulting from the efforts of small groups or often single individuals who have dramatically

affected policy changes for endangered or minority languages in supportive ways. Spolsky (2009: 198) reminds us of '... Hebrew and other nationalist cases where language activism was part of a movement toward autonomy and eventual independence'. The Hawaiian language has made a remarkable comeback through efforts initiated by a small group of parents who wanted their children to have the equal advantage of education in both Hawaiian and English (Hinton and Hale 2000). At the time, the Hawaiian language was highly threatened with extinction. The resulting policy changes related to Hawaiian moved from local activism through political channels at the state level. The result is that today both Hawaiian and English are the recognized first languages of the state of Hawaii and public education supports schools where the language of instruction is exclusively in Hawaiian.

In many US indigenous communities, individuals have made an effort to have the language(s) recognized locally by tribal governments as the 'first' languages of the reservation community. Such an example where four separate tribes are officially recognized in one community is that of the Colorado River Indian Tribes in Arizona where tribal membership includes Mohave, Chemehuevi, Hopi and Navajo tribes. By resolution in 2009, the tribes declared the indigenous languages of this community to be the 'first' languages, creating policy which may eventually impact education reform in that community (Amelia Flores, Colorado River Indian Tribes Librarian, personal communication, 2009).

Language activism at the community level, while representing both bottom-up and grassroots efforts, still brings issues of language policy into focus, often right at the crosshairs of community tensions. For example, consider the contentious issues that might arise after an indigenous community established language policies through its tribal council or other governing body. Would all community members be subject to those policies at all times? Suppose the same community decided that the heritage language should not be written, but preserved and practised only orally. What if one individual from that community disagreed with the new policy and decided to publish some of the language in written form on a personal website? Whose rights are then at issue? Where does language policy begin and end?

We also need to consider who has the authority to enforce the language policy. How does the definition of language rights apply in these cases? What is the role of activism in response to this case - for or against the community or individual? This is a hypothetical scenario, but there are many real possibilities of language use and rights being at the centre of community tensions. Further, no two cases are alike. Community dynamics, histories, practices and politics vary greatly - blanket policies related to language are hard to actualize and harder to enforce.

One reason we have posited the above definition of language activism is to draw attention to thinking about the role of language activism in

relation to language policy particularly in the context of minority and endangered language work. Of the world's almost 7,000 languages, one is lost roughly every two weeks (www.elf.org). In the speaking communities for endangered languages, which are most often small, indigenous and unwritten, activism is needed. These communities also need advocates and activists in the world arena. We advocate for a more organized approach to raising awareness of the effectiveness and need for increased activism aimed at providing support for languages which become victims of rampant globalization and/or social or political oppression.

We want to reveal the strong connection between language activism and language policy by first understanding just who takes responsibility for being a language activist. Part of the effort to raise awareness about the role of language activism in relation to the smaller non-state supported languages is to consider how the term is used and understood within the current literature and how we can build upon or change the existing understanding to increase the numbers of activists and begin to shape public perceptions. Florey, Penfield and Tucker in recent work discuss the conflation of the term 'language activist' with 'indigenous community member' (2009: 2):

In the literature [on endangered languages], *language activist* appears to be distinguished from *linguist* in relation to a number of features: 1) activities: advocacy, revitalization and maintenance are in the realm of language activism whilst documentation and description are linguistic activities; 2) indigeneity: the term *language activist* is applied almost exclusively to Indigenous peoples. It is frequently modified with 'indigenous', 'local' or '(members of x language) community' to specify this restrictive usage. *Linguist*, on the other hand, most often appears to mean external to a language community or with no heritage link to a community; 3) training: we also argue that a distinction in skill level or training is embedded in our current usage of 'language activist'. While linguists are taken to be formally trained in linguistics in a university setting (often to a graduate level), language activists are commonly taken to be untrained in linguistics or trained at certificate level or in an ancillary discipline (e.g. education).

Florey (2008: 120) studied this usage and noted a number of examples (Woodbury 2003; Rau, Yang and Dong 2009; Genetti and Siemans, 2009). The effect of this distinction is to absolve the linguist (or other academics or professionals) from taking on the mantle of 'language activist'. Likewise, it places the whole responsibility for being an activist on members of the speaking community. This discrepancy is eluded to elsewhere in the literature. For instance, Nettle and Romaine insightfully claim that, '...linguists and others will have to become activists...' (2009: 200). It is critically important to realize that the casual use of this term may directly affect who takes responsibility for language activism. Those

who take responsibility are ultimately those who will most affect policy, locally and beyond.

One of our central points is to call on stakeholders to raise their own stake in activism – to recognize that they can, from where they stand, explore ways to promote language rights and argue for the retention of linguistic diversity and the protection of minority languages. Academic researchers, local educators and administrators, members of the speaking communities all have a vested interest in preserving linguistic diversity and, therefore, count as the central stakeholders in endangered language work. We assert that all of these individuals, as stakeholders, need to think of themselves as ‘language activists’.

Broadening the responsibility for language activism

Language activism can be realized on many levels and by many different people in many different contexts. Approaches to further defining the range of activism vary. We will look briefly at three overlapping views and explanations of language activism.

In their book, *Vanishing Voices*, Nettle and Romaine (2000) discuss ‘bottom-up’ and ‘top-down’ approaches to sustaining linguistic diversity. They note that bottom-up strategies relate revitalization activities at the level of the speaking community. On the other end of the spectrum, top-down strategies are largely focused on activism that sways language policies. They suggest that the first top-down strategy is, ‘...to make the preservation of languages part of the general activism on behalf of the environment.’ (ibid.: 200) This links language activism to the broader range of activism on behalf of the environment as represented by such groups as Greenpeace, Cultural Survival and the Sierra Club.

Also mentioned is the linking of language activism to language rights in the larger context of human rights as we discussed earlier (Nettle and Romaine 2000: 200). Commenting on the Universal Declaration of Human Rights, accepted by the United Nations, they note that, ‘Such legislation should guarantee that everyone has the right to identify with his or her mother tongue and have this identification accepted and respected by others and have the opportunity to learn the mother tongue orally and in writing.’

The second top-down strategy is to establish language policies on a local, regional and international level as part of overall political planning and resource management (Nettle and Romaine 2000: 200). Every nation should have a language policy that embodies linguistic human rights in the same way that it has a basic energy policy. The enactment of language policies results from language activism at the local, regional and international levels. Well known examples that support this framework include political and social changes influencing laws relating to

the use of Hebrew, Maori and Hawaiian. In each case, local and regional activism pushed national reform. We have seen in the preceding section of this chapter how federal and/or state policy has resulted from language activism in a top-down fashion.

Another way of discussing language activism and its place in relation to language policy is offered by Spolsky (2009: 204), who sees language activism as part of the fabric of language management:

Language activists are significant participants in language management. They constitute individuals and groups whose ideology is clearest in support of the maintenance or revival or spread of a threatened target language. Working at a grassroots level, they attempt to influence existing, former, or potential speakers of the language to continue its use and to persuade government to support their plans. Lacking authority, they depend on acceptance of their ideology by those they try to influence ... they are now commonly encouraged by supranational organizations and by the growing acceptance of views associated with language rights. They attempt to influence two groups - speakers of a language (or ethnic groups associated with the language), and governments who might undertake management favoring language.

In this context, language activists are in the middle, spreading their efforts both to the speaking communities and to governmental sources. This assumes an identity for language activists that might be separate from members of the speaking community. This perspective represents a considerable departure in perception of who language activists are in most literature on endangered language revitalization where they are consistently identified as community members. To further expand this stance, Spolsky adds

Language activists, then, are potentially important participants in ethnic and in national language management; their linguicism enables them to concentrate their mobilizing efforts on a single goal, the status of a language. This means also that they can act as a safety valve for separatist pressures: it is cheaper to provide linguistic recognition and even autonomy than independence. Language activists interact with the supra-governmental organization which have become the main proponents of rights for linguistic minorities... (ibid.: 205)

A slightly different, but still overlapping attempt to further understand language activism is represented by Florey, Penfield and Tucker's efforts towards establishing a theoretical framework for language activism. This research team concludes that such a framework is needed in order to understand the place and purpose of different levels of activism. The core of this framework

1) acknowledges that language documentation and revitalization bear a commitment to the maintenance of linguistic diversity; 2) recognizes

that language activism is a necessary and intrinsic component of language documentation and revitalization, and 3) locates activism as the first step, the very cornerstone, of building efforts towards documentation and revitalization in support of linguistic diversity. (Florey, Penfield and Tucker, 2009: 2)

In this approach, language activism is a continuation of enacted efforts to raise awareness and thus change policy toward a given language at many levels, beginning with the speaking community most often and growing to ever increasing circles of influence. This approach looks at activism as a responsibility of all the stakeholders in a given language and then categorizes the type of activism which might be engaged in depending on any given stakeholder's relation to the community of speakers and the language. Spheres of influence need to be identified by all interested parties before activism can be engaged in. This approach argues for the responsibility of all stakeholders to take stock of where they are in order to garner support for a particular language or languages, what their personal sphere of influence might be, and what strategies can be employed to raise awareness, given that sphere of influence. For example, a member of the speaking community may be able to do a great deal within that community but may not have outside contacts in the larger global setting. A linguist, by contrast, might have many contacts outside of the community, might be able to reach national or international media, for example, but may not be as influential at the local level. Still, stakeholders are seen as activists if they choose to use their position to raise awareness and call for policy changes.

Contained within these statements is our belief that the responsibility to confront the language endangerment crisis actively is shared across the disciplines of linguistics and language policy and between all stakeholders or partners. This belief derives both from our observation that all efforts and causes which promote linguistic diversity follow from the development of an active base consisting of either a single individual or a group, and from the conviction that taking action is at the core of all efforts to raise awareness about maintaining linguistic diversity.

Training and language activism

For a long while, language activism was an understood side effect of being involved in language advocacy of any type. As a consequence, the phrase 'language activists' invariably has been attached to community members engaged in revitalization activities. To create a paradigm shift, which would apply the 'language activists' label to a wider base of stakeholders, a small movement has arisen aimed at providing targeted training in language activism. The first such training took place at InField (The Institute for Field Linguistics and Language Documentation) in the

summer of 2008 when it was held at the University of Santa Barbara, in California. A course entitled 'Language Activism' taught by Margaret Florey and Susan Penfield was offered to all participants. InField offered the course again at the second InField (University of Oregon, summer 2010) but this time the list of instructors included community-based researchers Philip CashCash (member of the Nez Perce tribe in the US), Jack 'Kanya' Buckskin (Kurna and Narrunga from Australia) and Kennedy Bosire (an Ekegusii language activist from Kenya). Course topics included:

- the collaborative development of projects and teams
- the inclusion of activism in both documentation and revitalization activities
- methods for raising awareness of Indigenous language issues amongst the wider public, utilizing media and lobbying
- training for language activism
- ways of reaching out to youth and children to engage them in language advocacy and language learning
- the wider aspects of activism, such as belonging, recognition, financial, measurable deliverables etc., and
- how activism can work in settings which require government, community or institutional approval, recognition and or support for activities. (see <http://logos.uoregon.edu/infield2010/workshops/language-activism/index.php> for a complete course description)

The first course on language activism was offered at the 2009 American Indian Language Development Institute (AILDI) in Tucson, Arizona by Mary Carol Combs; it explored language revitalization efforts within larger political and ideological contexts and considered macro- and micro-aggressions (Romero 2008; Solorzano 1998) that inhibit tribal language and educational sovereignty as well as creative - and creatively subversive - responses from individuals, communities and schools to resist those aggressions. Students in the course focused on activism as a theoretical construct and committed 'praxis' (Freire 1970). They analysed activism as both a Western political model and an indigenous framework of ethics and politics, exploring ways in which linguistic, cultural and ethnic groups historically have challenged colonization and acculturation movements. Throughout the course, students reflected upon the role of activism in their own lives. They had different ideas about what activism looked like in their home communities, but they agreed that being active on behalf of language was critical. The sentiment expressed by Michael Carpentier (Anashnabe) was typical among class members:

I have engaged members in my community and others to get them to critically assess the situation [of language loss]. In doing so, my hope has been that the community would decide if action is necessary, and

to examine the avenues language activists might take to expand their efforts. There also is a need to provide training in language activism and support for language activists, particularly for those whose tribal and heritage languages are at risk.

The road from language rights to language policy is paved with language activism, but this journey is still poorly understood in terms of legalities, rights, responsibilities and politics. While we endorse Gitlin's comment that activism requires noise because without it there is no improvement, we nonetheless wonder what an activist risks by being noisy. How is a language activist most effective in different arenas? What is the role of media in language activism? What is the role of speakers, linguists, educators and others who consider themselves stakeholders in language minority issues?

In this chapter, we have raised more questions than we have answered, but we hope we have offered a workable definition of language activism and a sense of the issues language activism encompasses. We invite readers to become stakeholders; to transform our perhaps passive roles related to language issues into more active efforts to promote and participate in language activism and the process of making and influencing language policies.

if so, what that action should be. For us this is not activism, this is survival.

Florey has continued her exploration of language activism through her work on advocacy with CILLDI (The Canadian Indigenous Language and Literacy Development Institute). Her efforts continue to be profiled in relation to other work aimed at sustaining linguistic diversity (see the Resource Network for Linguistic Diversity website at www.rnld.org/).

Less formal examples of the focus on activism occur almost daily, often unnoticed, but they represent the building blocks for larger policy changes in the long run. For example, at the Coshatta reservation in Louisiana, the community language project publishes a newsletter for the community in the native language even though literacy in the native Koasati language is a new phenomenon. In Oklahoma, there is a Native American Youth Language Fair; more than 600 students from more than 70 schools and language programmes took part in the 9th annual event in 2011. Activities included a Language Advocacy Essay Contest for students in Grades 6-12, performances by youths in the indigenous language(s), a poster art competition, and more. Most recently, the Alaska Federation of Natives (the state's largest Native Alaskan organization) passed a resolution calling for the creation of an Alaska Native Languages Commission. Strong wording in the resolution authorizes the Commission to

politically advocate on behalf of Alaska Native languages, facilitate and promote greater cooperation between Alaska Native language stakeholders, conduct and share research and corpus concerning Alaska Native and other indigenous languages, and to research the availability of and potentially provide financial resources for Alaska Native language revitalization efforts. (Alaska Native Language Commission 2010)

Discussion

The relationship between activism and language policy *should* be obvious. After all, large scale and high profile language policy efforts occasionally take place in legal arenas and may be just as readily championed or demonized by large or powerful interest groups and organizations. Our position, however, is that the relationship is not always obvious. While language activism exists in many forms and makes possible major changes in language policy, it is an often unrecognized element in the policy-making process and has generally been alluded to rather than clearly defined or examined. Our effort to provide a definition is just a beginning; the next step is to encourage a greater understanding of how one's identity as a language activist might be enacted. There is a need