Review: [untitled]
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Reviewed work(s):
   Language, History, and Identity: Ethnolinguistic Studies of the Arizona Tewa by Paul V. Kroskrity
Published by: Blackwell Publishing on behalf of the American Anthropological Association
Stable URL: http://www.jstor.org/stable/682003
Accessed: 24/07/2010 11:56
freshes itself, gaining in complexity, intensity and vitality” (p. 153).


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In this refreshing book (no navel gazing here), Paul Kroskrity leads us inside Arizona Tewa culture. Through the looking glass of words and language we step into a unique world articulating daily with broader American culture, but also, in unexpected ways, concealed from it, and even from its Hopi surroundings.

The central theoretical focus of Kroskrity’s book is identity—ethnic identity—for which the Arizona Tewa case is especially intriguing. Most Tewa speakers (but not the subjects of this book) live in what is now New Mexico. In 1696, a small group of them fled, following the Puebloan uprising against Spanish colonial rule. They ended up on First Mesa in Arizona together with the Hopi, surrounded by Navajo. Today they are known by anthropologists as “Arizona Tewa,” and, unlike other diasporic groups from the Puebloan uprising, they have retained their language, despite newly acquired Hopi social institutions, rampant intermarriage with Hopi, and widespread multilingualism in Hopi, English, and Tewa. How did they manage this?

In a series of essays, Kroskrity explores the micromechanisms of ethnic identity maintenance—and change. Chapter 2 takes us into their own conceptions of language, where we learn that, for the Arizona Tewa, “our language is our life.” We also learn that language is not just one thing, that it is internally differentiated. “Kiva talk”—the esoteric speech employed in exclusive (no Hopi allowed) ceremonies—in particular, is the most rigorously learned, least changing portion of speech, which simultaneously forms the “local model of linguistic prestige.”

In chapter 7 we learn that Arizona Tewa have multiple ethnic identities. They sometimes speak of themselves as Hopis. However, a specifically Tewa identity is carefully preserved inside the kiva, from which outsiders are excluded. Cultural changes have resulted in the elaboration of public war ceremonies, held in the plaza, where Hopi attend. Here, novel songs are incorporated along with other aspects of First Mesa culture. However, the war songs in the kiva, from which Hopi are excluded, exhibit persistence over time and little in the way of innovation. They are the heart of Tewa “culture,” understood as primordial or handed down across the generations.

Along the way we glimpse the broad sweep of Arizona Tewa linguistic history (chapter 3), and we see the microprocesses of language maintenance and change at work in age-related linguistic differences within the community today (chapter 4). Kroskrity is sensitive to variability, not only from age group to age group, but also from individual to individual in the same generation, each partially conditioned by unique life circumstances. Chapter 5 explores the biographies of three such special individuals, two of whom, though younger, exhibit the speech patterns of elders, and one of whom, though older, exhibits the speech patterns of those younger than himself. We are reminded (on a biological analogy) of Sewall Wright’s statistical spread of traits around adaptive peaks.

A constant theme throughout the work is the relative awareness (or lack thereof) that native speakers have of linguistic elements as identity markers. Lexical differences are most accessible to awareness; hence they are most easily controlled through native ideology. But a distinctive ethnic identity can be communicated even in the distribution of grammatical particles in extended stretches of discourse. In chapter 6, Kroskrity examines the quotative particle /ba/, showing that it contributes to the overt semantic meaning of utterances, marking a stretch of discourse as a quotation, but that it also functions to narratively mark “lines,” in the ethnopoetic sense. Its proper deployment in discourse, while not especially accessible to native consciousness, is nevertheless important for the expression of identity.

Kroskrity has produced a fascinating book, technical enough for specialists in Puebloan language and culture—it is complete with intralinear translations—but accessible enough for other linguistic and cultural anthropologists. This is the kind of book that gives our discipline a good name.


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This book is a reprint of a 1964 monograph with a slightly altered title and a new preface. The focus of the original was the field data collected by Smithson in the 1950s on Havasupai religion and mythology, which she considered far from complete. Due to her illness and, ultimately, her death, she was unable to finish the work and requested that the unpublished materials be turned over to another ethnographer of the Havasupai people, Robert Euler, for disposition. Euler organized the materials and provided some comparative commentary (bracketed in the original monograph) based on his own field studies and those of others. Euler also considered the data to be notes rather than a comprehensive study; but he also felt that the materials made a valuable contribution. Mak-