



Exploring the Digital Shift in Indigenous Language Research in Yásnaya Elena A. Gil's *This Mouth is Mine*

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Abstract

*In the digital age, social media platforms like X (formerly Twitter) have become pivotal for language discourse, reshaping language research methodologies. This paper examines the innovative approach to language research in Yásnaya Elena A. Gil's *This Mouth is Mine*, where the Mixe-speaking linguist and indigenous activist challenges traditional research methodologies by incorporating her tweets alongside scholarly essays. Over a decade, Gil's active participation in online spaces reflects the evolving intersection of language, identity, and activism, using social media trends and news stories as primary sources. By doing so, she creates a dynamic, real-time reflection of linguistic and cultural shifts that traditional academic frameworks might miss. Drawing on Max Halupka's heuristic framework of the seven dimensions of clicktivism, the paper validates social media as a legitimate platform for civic engagement, expanding the boundaries of what constitutes serious language research. Gil's use of QR codes for online language resources instead of footnotes shows a truly contemporary research where the infinite archival capacity of digital platforms is used to link indigenous knowledge and modern technology. Exploring the concepts of 'clicktivism' and 'slacktivism', the paper addresses the inherent complexities of the ongoing digital shift in contemporary language research.*

Keywords: Language politics, clicktivism, indigenous languages, linguistic research, social media, internet activism.

Introduction

Research is defined as 'a detailed study of a subject, especially in order to discover (new) information or reach a (new) understanding' using known and unknown variables. In the twenty-first century, with its widespread usage of the most powerful knowledge-sharing tool, the internet, research methodologies constantly have to invent and reinvent themselves.

With the recent rise in data mining and destructive social media algorithms, manipulation has become the defining feature of the present time, making data manipulation the new normal. Max Halupka's Heuristic research on the seven dimensions of clicktivism argues that social media is a legitimate ground for political participation. The low-effort engagement found in digital spaces, often discredited



as ‘slacktivism’ (Warf), also enables widespread accessibility. Gil’s participation as a language researcher and grassroots organiser is reflected not only in her academic publications but also through her social media engagements. The essays collected in the book are only enhanced by the inclusion of the author’s social media posts.

Like any powerful tool, it is the role of scientists and scholars to define its implications. Linguistic Research, with varied goals, can make use of the new tools provided by the internet. This paper argues for a language research that is heuristic rather than solely statistical—one that prioritises interpretation, context, and meaning-making. By highlighting Yásnaya Elena A. Gil’s *This Mouth is Mine* as a model, this paper advocates for a more inclusive, critical, and community-centred approach to studying language in the digital age.

#MXlanguageactivism

Latin America is home to over 900 languages, including Quechua, Nahuatl, Zapotec, and Yásnaya Elena A. Gil’s mother tongue, Mixe. However, the dominance of Spanish—imposed through centuries of colonisation and reinforced by state policies—has severely threatened this rich multilingual landscape. The bilingual policy of Latin America is reductive, curtailing other languages and favouring only Spanish and English. Yásnaya Elena A. Gil and other indigenous language scholars argue that it reinforces linguistic hierarchies and erasure, since the government’s bilingual approach does not truly reflect the linguistic diversity of the country. True linguistic representation should assert and embrace the full spectrum of multilingualism that defines Latin America’s linguistic and cultural landscape. Social Media has become a vital ground for Indigenous self-representation. The social media ecosystem, with its bios and personal statements, is an altar for forming one’s self-identity. It can be a tool for the subaltern to speak and to be heard. This principle has been fundamental to Gil’s personal and academic projects.

In the paper Gil co-wrote with Gabriela Pérez Báez, she argues that linguistic rights are fundamental human rights, as they enable access to justice, education, and healthcare while preserving cultural

identity. The paper highlights how community-led initiatives are crucial for Linguistic Human Rights. The grassroots movements have earned results like Mexico’s Ayuujk community, which developed autonomous schools, and CEPIADET, an Indigenous-led legal advocacy group in Oaxaca. The California-based MICOP has prioritised its fight for indigenous language, equal to its fight for healthcare and labour rights. (Báez and Gil).

The statement that ‘the personal is political’ is more relevant in the digital age than ever, with the internet opening access for social justice (Hanisch). Social Media is rich ground where the personal and political can meet. In the case of Gil, it is the meeting ground for her personal and academic language (Carlson). The following tweets portray both of Gil’s clarity as a poet and her conviction as an activist.

“I hang out most days with a toddler who speaks Ayuujk. I ask her: -¿Maxu’nk mējts, kēteea? She replies: - Ka’t, ējts Nutsy. And my heart melts” (Gil)

“We could have our own community servers: communal ownership of the land, communal ownership of the internet #MXlanguageactivism” (Gil)

While many language researchers are sceptical of machine translation, Gil is enthusiastic about translation tools and technological innovations, especially when they could strike a collaborative, community-centred approach. Technology can pave the way for the truly multilingual culture she dreams of. Her book underscores the importance of Indigenous-led cultural changes, where modern technology can be used for the communal good rather than as an exploitative tool. This paper stands in solidarity with Gil’s efforts to decolonise the language and prioritise knowledge systems that are accessible to indigenous communities. Recent linguistic studies have similar alignment, calling forth a symbiotic marriage of Machine Translation (MT) and Natural Language Processing (NLP) models.

Ethics of Technosolutionism

The SAGE Encyclopedia of the Internet defines ‘clicktivism’ as the act of using social media and other online tools to promote a cause or to achieve



political or social goals. The term has acquired pejorative overtones because of its use by those who claim that signing online petitions for causes has become a substitute for on-the-ground activism. It is deeply intertwined with the rise of the internet. It is an internet-centric response to social injustice that is heavily critiqued by Evgeny Morozov. He critiques the notion that there is a digital fix for every social and political problem, and that thanks to the technologies that we group for convenience's sake', falsely proclaiming that digital movements can have meaningful real-world repercussions. (Morozov)

According to Morozov, this naive optimism reduces complex political struggles to simplistic problems that can be solved with a single click of their fingers, liking a post or signing an online petition. He also criticises that the development of the internet fosters progress. Despite Morozov's critiques, the rise of Clicktivism reflects broader societal shifts towards political efficiency, where metrics like retweets or clicks have helped shape elections and government policies. His scepticism towards the "solutionist" mindset assumes that technology is the main cause of political apathy. But social media researchers like Max Halupka argue that technology cannot be the 'be all, end all' for political change, but it can be a 'low-barrier form of political participation', and it prioritises democratic knowledge sharing (Halupka).

Despite the usefulness of technology, a digital divide gatekeepers indigenous communities whose languages and cultures are often excluded from mainstream digital platforms." (Sætra) On one hand, social media is a tool that aids indigenous people in their identity construction, but it also exposes them to hostility and exclusion. The systemic bias that exists in the real world is also extended into digital platforms. Yásnaya Elena A. Gil calls for an inclusive research and reclaiming knowledge spaces, including the internet. Social media, despite its pitfalls, appeals to her because of its democratic nature. The algorithms used to monitor and classify users and their behaviours can also be used to influence and manipulate the information they are fed without their awareness (Williams et al.). Issues of privacy, anonymity, consent, and data need to be ethically handled when conducting modern language

research that accepts social media as a credible source for study. A shift toward a "social ethics" framework is necessary when conducting such a study. Knowing both the merits and shortcomings of social media, linguistic researchers need to engage ethically with social media data and recognise these platforms as dynamic sites of both resistance and resurgence in the ongoing struggle for linguistic and cultural sovereignty (Mager et al).

The Hypertext Archives

The digital shift from traditional research towards modern linguistic research is significantly influenced by the advent of the internet. Traditional linguistic research that relied on spoken corpora, literature, or fieldwork was curtailed by human limitations. However, the internet—especially through social media platforms like X, Reddit, YouTube, blogs and forums have created a vast and infinite archive of real-time language occurrence across diverse demographics.

Modern methodologies like corpus linguistics have already evolved to incorporate web-based corpora, even in the early stages of the internet. The memory capacity of the present-day internet enables large-scale quantitative analysis of digital texts. Sociolinguistic research methodologies like discourse analysis and critical discourse analysis (CDA) benefit from social media's data of interpersonal interaction now as sociolinguistics can now track real-time language change, dialectal variation, and code-switching practices. The internet also supports multimodal analysis, where the language used for communication is not confined to the alphabet.

This Mouth is Mine integrates online sources to enrich its exploration of language and culture. Referencing a wide array of indigenous languages that its English readers might not know, the QR codes and weblinks in the books enable a truly audio reading of the linguistic research methodologies. In a chapter titled 'Lullabies from Languages from around the World', Gil collates a database of YouTube footage of lullabies from Otomi, Toba, Seri, English, Nahuatl, Lakota, Mixtec and Sephardi to help the readers contextualise the sonic nature and the linguistic diversity discussed. This helps the



readers connect academic discussion with subsequent cultural practices. This chapter is an example where traditional research merges with modern technology to do a modern linguistic study that is relevant to the way languages change in the digital world.

Conclusion

Despite many statistical studies on social media, very few qualitative studies are being conducted on data collated from social media. One reason is the infinite variables of the internet and the question of what makes a credible source for study. The heuristic framework posited by Max Halupka shows how heuristic research can capture the nuance of the internet language with its slangs, memes, ironies and specific cultural contexts that are found on the internet. A study of these nuances that are innate to Heuristic research rely on the individual researchers' interpretative tendencies and their knowledge of the pertaining socio-political context. While the statistical models of research flatten the social media into mere numbers, the complex language discourse like that of Gil's *This Mouth is Mine* demands a heuristic approach that can offer insights on how digital communities construct identity, resist power and shape public narratives.

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