Please join us for the LING Lunch on
Wednesday, January 20
12:30 p.m. REC225

“Postcolonial Theory and the Politics of Language in the Revitalization of Yucatec Maya”

Anne Marie Guerrettaz, Ph.D.
Washington State University
https://education.wsu.edu/a-m-guerrettaz/

Anne Marie Guerrettaz conducts applied linguistics research on the revitalization of Yucatec Maya, the stigmatized indigenous language of the Yucatan, Mexico, where Spanish is the dominant language. Specifically, Dr. Guerrettaz investigates the social, political, and cultural dimensions of the language planning implementation process. Her work has focused on issues of language ownership, language pedagogy, linguistic standardization, and language ecology, among other topics. (A recent press release about her research can be found in Spanish and in English.)

Dr. Guerrettaz’s presentation of Postcolonial Theory and the Politics of Language in the Revitalization of Yucatec Maya draws on the concept of postcolonial tactics, which refers to ways that marginalized agents manage sociopolitical dynamics in order to eschew stigma. It focuses on two dimensions of the politics of language in the Yucatan. First, this talk presents local perceptions of a phenomenon called jach maaya (“true Maya”). In this presentation, jach maaya is shown to be a form of strategic essentialism and viewed by maaya speakers as a prestige variety of the language. This presentation also examines changing constructions of mayanidad (“mayaness”) and the externally imposed ethnic term “Maya.” Yucatecans in the current study appropriate this ethnic term in striking and complex ways. Through these postcolonial tactics—strategic essentialism and appropriation—Yucatec Maya speakers affiliate with the glorified imaginary of the “ancient Mayas.”

The following programs and departments helped to make to make Dr. Guerrettaz’s visit possible: Latin American and Latino/a Studies, Spanish and Portuguese, and Linguistics.