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## **The Power of Sound**

### **An Exploration of Cooper's Use of Language in *The Last of the Mohicans***

Throughout James Fenimore Cooper's novel *The Last of the Mohicans* language plays an integral role in how characters communicate with one another. As a text built around complicated interactions between different races, countries, and cultures there is a wide array of languages that are presented by Cooper, and how characters understand these different languages is oftentimes vital to their survival. However, alongside this amalgamation of language there is significant use of paralanguage. Defined by the *OED* as "the non-phonemic but vocal component of speech, such as tone of voice, tempo of speech, and sighing, by which communication is assisted," in the context of the novel I categorize instances of paralanguage as such: the Indian war-whoop, music, animal calls, and all other non-verbal aspects of speech (accent, tone, etc.). Throughout the novel language is a tool of power; if a character has the ability to properly understand and communicate across different language barriers he or she is able to gain leverage within whatever kind of situation may be encountered. Several examples of this are Duncan's entrance into the enemy Indian encampment in Chapter 23 and Magua's speech to the tribe in Chapter 24. However, these kinds of language interactions can only go so far; they always require some kind of translation to take place in order to be understood. Translation itself is problematic and another example of potential power manipulation since those with the power of translation have the ability to manipulate understanding. This is where paralanguage becomes powerful in its own right. Ultimately, I argue that Cooper utilizes paralanguage as a tool within his novel to show how such a device can break across nationalistic boundaries of understanding.

There is no need for a secondary translation to take place when this kind of language is employed, and the immediate conveyance of understanding can have significant impact.

In order to properly investigate this claim I will start with scholarship centering on the use of bodies in *Last of the Mohicans*; specifically how bodies are manipulated, much like language, by nationalistic and cultural attempts for control. Next I will proceed into an analysis of how verbal language functions in the novel, of which I have briefly touched upon above. Lastly, I will enter into an examination of paralanguage in the novel, paying close attention to the use of pure sound such as the war-whoop and music. Ultimately, Cooper utilizes paralanguage to show the sheer power of non-verbal elements of communication and the capabilities of being understood despite strong nationalistic communication barriers. If this were not the case, how else would a character such as David Gamut, the oftentimes foolish singing master, successfully survive the dangers of a terrain so opposed to his characterization?

### **Identity and Bodies**

The beginning of discourse on this subject appears to start with bodies, specifically how bodies interact within the nationalistic framework of colonialism. In particular, the colonizing forces of Britain and Europe had to determine what to do with the Native American bodies they encountered upon their arrival to the New World. As Lindsey Claire Smith states in her article “Cross-Cultural Hybridity in Jams Fenimore Cooper’s *The Last of the Mohicans*”, “American Indian characters [were] emblematic of the Vanishing American convention in American literature, whereby Natives must be subsumed in order for a young America to fulfill its destiny” (527). In other words, Native bodies had to be removed from their native lands in order for colonizers to establish themselves; colonizers needed to redefine the land in their own terms.

“Ironically, while Indians were chief referents for imagining Americanness, they were also chief roadblocks to the nation’s achievement of dominion over the North American continent” and literature of the time came to reflect “Native and European contact and confrontation . . . encounters at both cultural and geographical borders” (527). Smith interestingly argues that this kind of “cross-cultural contact” has a “subtle presentation” in Cooper’s novel that evidences a kind of “reciprocity” between bodies (528). She links this reciprocity to identity formation and how characters begin to re-define themselves within their new surroundings.

For Smith, “Cooper’s character’s locate their identities in specific, environmental spaces, and when those spaces change or are transformed, a sense of loss often ensues” (531). Quoting Donelle N. Dreese, a kind of “territorialization” takes place when characters identify “a landscape or environment as intrinsic to their own conceptualizations of self (qtd. in Smith 531). In other words, one’s physical environment directly influences one’s perception of self. However, what happens when one’s physical environment is altered or taken away? This is where Smith argues that “hybridization” comes into play. There is a doubling that takes place in the second half of the novel that she suggests is a “kind of mediation or modification” that characters go through “as a result of their experiences in the woods with representatives of other cultures” (535). There is a “breakdown in demarcations of race and of components of the natural world that are perceived to be rigid” (535). However, though this breakdown could be positive in certain cases, and though it does not just apply to the Native American characters, what is mainly at stake is Native American identity and their sense of place in the world.

This sense of place and identity seems largely tied to the surrounding landscape. Continuing in the discourse of bodies and identity, Annette Kolodny in her book *The Lay of the Land* approaches this by viewing the landscape as a defined feminine body. In particular, she is

interested in examining what she calls “America’s oldest and most cherished fantasy” (4). This is the belief in “a daily reality of harmony between man and nature based on an experience of the land as essentially feminine . . . not simply the land as mother, but the land as woman . . . enclosing the individual in an environment of receptivity, repose, and painless and integral satisfaction” (4). Relating this to colonizers’ experiences with Natives, she argues this fantasy was literally projected onto the bodies of those they encountered upon arrival in the New World. Citing Arthur Barlowe’s records from his *First Voyage Made to the Coasts of America* (1584) Kolodny demonstrates how Barlowe’s writing “described the Indian woman who greeted him and his men as uniformly beautiful, gracious, cheerful and friendly . . . he initiated a habit of mind that came to see the Indian women as a kind of emblem for a land that was similarly entertaining the Europeans” (5). However, this enchantment was not to last. By the end of the seventeenth century after negative experiences with Natives brought on by forceful colonization “the tragic contradictions inherent in such experience could no longer be ignored, [and] the Indian women [were] depicted more usually as hag-like, ugly, and immoral” (5). In other words, there was a conflict of identity taking place as to how their bodies were being translated into identity, and this conflict was directly related to how the landscape was being understood. However, there was a physical aspect to this “translation” as well. As Kolodny states, “colonization brought with it an inevitable paradox: the success of settlement depended on the ability to master the land, transforming the virgin territories into something else” (7). As evidence by the transformation of perception that took place with the Native females, so too the land could and would be corrupted by the effect of colonization.

Connecting this transformation of land and bodies to power, Koldony writes “beautiful, indeed, that wilderness appeared – but also dark, uncharted, and prowled by howling beasts. In a

sense, to make the new continent Woman was already to civilize it a bit, casting the stamp of human relations upon what was otherwise unknown and untamed” (9). Her connection between gendering and power over the land is significant because it continues to draw attention to this “translation” of land and bodies. The land is inherently a surface, an objet (albeit a living object); there is nothing specifically “feminine” about it until that perception is projected onto it. However, it is one thing to make this projection onto the Earth, it is another entirely to make it onto human beings.

Arguably this interpretation of bodies happens through the means of language. One clear example of this is the issue of naming that occurs throughout the novel. As Smith notes the animalistic names of certain characters reveal information about their inherent natures (536). For example, Chingachgook’s indigenous name translates in English to “big serpent,” and quoting Hawkeye this shows that he “understands the winding and turnings of human nature” (536). In contrast to this is Magua whose name is presented in French, “Le Renard Subtil” or “The Subtle Fox” (536). According to Smith, because this was a name given to him by his “Canadian fathers” it “emphasizes European’s approximation of him, an identity that he has internalized” (536). As Cooper shows through Hawkeye’s experiences in the novel, the importance of properly naming can be directly connected to surviving a dangerous situation. In Chapter 29, after Hawkeye and the others have been captured by Magua, he and Duncan are placed into a shooting competition to determine who is really “la Longue Carabine.” Because he did not at first admit to being himself, the man notoriously known for his skill with a gun, in order to prove himself Hawkeye addresses the issue of naming:

That I did not answer to the call for la Longue Carabine, was not owing either to shame or fear . . . for neither one nor the other is the gift of an honest man. But I do not admit the right of the Mingoes to bestow a name on one, whose friends have been mindful of his gifts, in this particular; especially, as their title is a lie, “kill-deer” being a grooved

barrel, and no carabynne. I am the man, however, that got the name of Nathaniel from my kin; the compliment of Hawk-eye from the Delewares, who live on their own river, and whom the Iroquois have presumed to style the “long rifle,” without any warrant from him who is most concerned in the matter. (334)

Here in this passage Cooper is clearly utilizing Hawkeye to point out the issue of naming and translation. Like Magua, Hawkeye has had a name placed on him by another culture and language that he did not initially ask for. Also, like Magua, he is characterized by this name. While Magua is seen as devious and false, Hawkeye is perceived as a serious threat. Though these traits may not be entirely false when it comes to either character, they are not necessarily their primary traits. Both characters are capable of depth and intelligence, but, as is the case for Hawkeye in this particular passage, their literal names can prove to be a problem. Additionally, there is an issue of having multiple names, as Hawkeye makes note of by listing the three he has been given, and depending on which one is used it can create an entirely different perception of him, a perception that is not necessarily positive.

Furthermore, this issue of naming does not only have to do with characters but the land itself and how it is connected to language. As Blakemore states “Cooper connects the expropriation of the Indian’s land with the expropriation of their language,” and this can be seen “in the way he replaces the name ‘Lake George’ with ‘Horican’.” (23). Additionally, Blakemore importantly notes in his article “Strange Tongues: Cooper’s Fiction of Language in *The Last of the Mohicans*” that Cooper’s own commentary on this naming issue and his reference to how Jesuit missionaries were a part of the re-naming process of the lake. He argues that Cooper presents the information in the way he does to implicitly connect “the robbery of the land and the “robbery of the Indian’s right to name the land” (24). In this way “Cooper suggests that when the land’s (in this case the lake’s) name is changed, the land changes – it no longer expresses an Indian reality” (24). Summarizing this issue nicely Blakemore states within the novel “the Indian

word or name is inherently part of a person or thing's identity, so that any linguistic change or corruption of it suggests a fundamental violation of Indian reality" (24). Both the land and names of Native Americans are literally taken and transformed, translated into a language not their own, ultimately showing the colonizer's ever-onward march of expansion and commandeering of their place in America through the use of language and violence.

### **Language and Perception**

This issue of language and identity is also connected to overall perception of Native American culture. Giving some historical context onto how colonizers perceived Native Americans in the 1700s, John McWilliams describes in his book *The Last of the Mohicans: Civil Savagery and Savage Civility* that "to white Americans of the early national era" Native Americans were "unknown" and "troubling" (52). To colonizers "the Indian was regarded as a blocking force to further western settlement" even though "white people knew that Indians had inhabited the continent long before their own arrival" (52). He continues that most early Euro-Americans saw the Native Americans as representing "an inferior and anterior stage of human development . . . Indians, it was thought, merely lived off the land, whereas whites had the advanced intelligence required to develop it" (52). Ultimately, Native Americans were seen as lesser beings by the majority of colonizing forces. These issues, as McWilliams notes, were particularly evident within literature of the time period. "White writers repeatedly dwelled" on aspects of Native American culture that they saw as negative; Actions such as "scalping and torture rituals [were] regarded as a sign of barbarism that could not be tolerated" and these "oversimplified judgments lay the assumption that red culture was 'savagery,' white culture was 'civilization,' and the two could never peacefully coexist" (52-53). The fact that these

stereotypes were propagated within literature further demonstrates issues of language and power; because the white colonizers were in control of what was written and circulated among themselves they were able to continue projecting these negative stereotypes.

This idea of savagism was not only present in white writer's attitudes toward Native Americans, but it was also present in how colonizers perceived the Native American languages they came across. As Rosenwald notes in his article "*The Last of the Mohicans* and the Languages of America", "Native American languages were further proof of Native American savagism" (11). Quoting Lucy Maddox's article "Removals: Nineteenth-Century American Literature and the Politics of Indian Affairs" Native Americans faced a tough challenge in the real-world of Cooper's time, "there were only two options for the Indians: to become *civilized* or to become *extinct*" (qtd. in Rosenwald 10). Speaking specifically about language, "white observers consistently concluded that because of the limitations of his or her language, the most complex intellectual maneuver an Indian . . . could manage was the construction of a simple metaphor, or occasionally an analogy" (qtd. in Rosenwald 11). However, this was not necessarily Cooper's own opinion. According to Rosenwald, Cooper read and admired the writings of the Moravian missionary John Heckewelder, a writer who presented the language of Native Americans "as complex social constructs" (11). In fact, Heckewelder's goal was "to satisfy the world that the languages of the Indians are not so poor, so devoid of variety of expression, so inadequate to the communication even of abstract ideas . . . so *barbarous*, as has been generally imagined" (qtd. in Rosenwald 11). He wanted to push back the stereotype of savagism as applied to Native Americans in terms of language, showing that they were and are a sophisticated culture even if society tried to label them otherwise.



One of the ways Cooper can be seen to express this kind of belief himself is through his presentation of Magua. Though at first Magua is presented as “in a state of native wildness” with war-paint on his body that “rendered his swarthy lineaments still more savage and repulsive,” over the course of the novel Cooper depicts Magua as an incredibly complex figure (Cooper 23). Though he is of course the main villain of the narrative he is not merely a savage brute, rather, through the use of complex language, Cooper is able to show that Magua is capable of clear depth and intelligence. Perhaps the best example of this is Magua’s speech in Chapter 24. While attempting to convince the Hurons to execute Uncas he employs a serious breadth of language skills; essentially the scene itself is a battle of language and Uncas and Magua must present their respective cases to the best of their abilities.

When Magua identifies Uncas as “Le Cerf Agile” the Hurons sprang to their feet as “the hated and yet respected name was repeated, as by one voice, carrying the sound even beyond the limits of the lodge” (282). As discussed earlier, names can be a powerful tool within the novel, and here Uncas does not encounter a serious problem until the Hurons are given his name in the translation they understand. At first, Magua is a bit taken aback by the power Uncas’ name holds over the group of Hurons, all he can express as first is to say “Mohican, you die!” (282). However, while Uncas’ response is well spoken, it is too full of rash anger to get him very far. Not only does he call the Huron “dogs” but he exclaims: “My nostrils are offended; they scent the blood of a coward!” (282). This statement clearly offends the Hurons, and Magua, though inherently an angry and bitter character, is able to seize hold of this opportunity commencing “a burst of his dangerous and artful eloquence” (282). Cooper even makes sure to note that though Magua’s reputation had been injured by his previous shortcomings as an alcoholic and deserter, “his courage, and his fame as an orator, were undeniable” (283). Specifically, in order to

convince the Hurons to kill Uncas, Magua presents him as an enemy to their nation. After listing Uncas' crimes against them he lowers his voice to speak of those they have lost; appealing to their sorrow "no quality that was likely to command the sympathy of an Indian, escaped his notice" (283). In other words, he is able to manipulate how he is presenting his language in order to gain power over his listeners. "In short, he so managed his allusions, that in a nation which was composed of so few families, he contrived to strike every chord that might find, in its turn, some breast in which to vibrate" (283). He "had so artfully blended the natural sympathies with the religious superstition of his auditors, that their minds, already prepared by custom to sacrifice a victim to the manes of their countrymen, lost every vestige of humanity in a wish for revenge" (284). Through his eloquent use of language Magua is able to unite his fellow Indians to his cause against Uncas, thus showing not only his powerful command over language but the kind of power language can have.

However, as Blakemore argues, this kind of language is not always successful. Specifically, Blakemore argues that later on in the novel Magua's use of speech ironically shows the divide between languages, specifically the different Native American dialects. Using Magua's speech to the Delawares he states how this speech "emphasizes the unity of the Indian race, but it is ironically given in French" thus showing Magua's attempt to "lull the Delawares into a false sense of racial unity" (35). Though Magua's speech attempts to address the fragmentation of Indian nations as the result of white colonization, as Blakemore points out,

His speech glosses over the real reason for fragmentation: the splintering of the Ur-mother tongue and the adoption of European languages by the Indians themselves . . . It is the dominant influence of the victorious white father tongues that keeps the Indians linguistically fragmented and fallen. Hence Magua's speech contradicts what it claims; his allusion to racial unity is deceptive because, as Cooper stresses throughout the novel, racial unity is inextricably connected to linguistic unity. (36)

Providing key insights into this issue Blakemore precisely shows the problems inherent with these nationalistic language divides. Not only have the languages of the colonizers created a barrier between themselves and the Natives, but they have created barriers between the Natives themselves. Therefore, characters such as Magua, despite their ability to speak in a sophisticated manner, are limited in how they can express language. Unable to speak the language of those he is addressing, Magua must make use of the language of the colonizers, perpetuating their dominance over himself and his fellow Indians.

### **Nationalist Borders of Language**

Another character who has a great deal of interaction with navigating nationalistic language barriers is Duncan Heyward. In particular Heyward has a strong command of French that enables him to manipulate power in his favor during certain crucial instances of danger. For example, in Chapter 14 Heyward and the rest of the group come across a French soldier on patrol while they are attempting to make it back to the fort. In order to get past safely Heyward must employ his French to pretend he is a fellow French soldier taking prisoners back to camp. What is particularly striking about this scene is that Cooper chooses to write it out in French. As Rosenwald states, this differs dramatically with Cooper's portrayal of Native American language, which is often understood by characters via the use of gestures in what Rosenwald calls scenes of "magical translation" (16). However, Cooper's presentation of actual French dialogue on the page reminds readers "that bewilderment, not understanding, is the normal condition of those who listen to a language they do not know" (17). Furthermore, "Cooper's French conversations dramatize the acquired power to understand and imitate a foreign language that is the mirror-image of such bewilderment" (17). Thus, with this scene, Cooper clearly

demonstrates the power language is capable of having, especially in tense nationalistic settings. Since Heyward could present himself as speaking the same tongue as the French soldier, he was able to pass without harm.

Additionally, French also proves useful to Heyward when confronting Native Americans. In Chapter 23 Heyward disguises himself as a French doctor in order to gain information from the Hurons and help save Alice. Similar to Magua's use of French toward the Delawares, the fact that Heyward is able to use French to get past the Hurons is further evidence of the white colonizers' impact on Native Americans and their language; he does not need to know their native language in order to be successful and they are willing to accommodate him. Furthermore, in order to convince them to talk to him in French, Heyward employs clear nationalistic rhetoric. "Do none of my brothers speak the French or the English?" he initially asks in French (266). Right away his language conveys the irony of the situation, as he and the Native Americans are certainly not brothers either by blood or nationality. Cooper continues the scene as such:

'I should be grieved to think,' continued Duncan, speaking slowly, using the simplest French of which he was the master, 'to believe that none of this wise and brave nation understand the language that the "Grand Monarque" uses, when he talks to his children. His heart would be heavy, did he believe his red warriors paid him so little respect!' (266)

There are several issues that need to be pointed out in this quote. First, Heyward is criticizing the Hurons for not speaking French when he himself is clearly conveyed as not being a skilled speaker, however, his whiteness is sure to lend itself credibility to his performance of a French man. Secondly, Heyward's rhetoric continues to clearly point out issues of colonial control specifically connected to language. The Hurons come from their own Indian Nation, and yet Heyward speaks to them as if they are French subjects. His use of children and reference to the King of France is arguably demeaning in this context as well, since the Indians have their own

leaders and chiefs; they are the children of their own tribes, not of France. Ultimately, through his use of French, Heyward is able to double-cross the Hurons to infiltrate their camp. While readers are presumably rooting for Heyward, scenes such as this have an unsettling quality to them, thus emphasizing Blakemore's point that "the fall of the Indian's own language also contributes to the fall of their world" (24). Heyward is able to take control via language, and the Hurons are unable to apprehend his intentions and stop him from doing so.

### **The Power of Pure Sound**

Now that the evolution of these issues of power, translation, and language have been traced out, it is necessary to properly examine Cooper's use of paralinguistics. To reiterate, paralinguistics is "the non-phonemic but vocal component of speech, such as tone of voice, tempo of speech, and sighing, by which communication is assisted" (OED). Within the context of the novel I define paralinguistics to be expressed mainly through language that is sound focused. For example, the Indian war-whoop and David Gamut's music arguably fall within this category. The importance of this language comes through its ability to cross the nationalistic boundaries of language that I have outlined in the previous section of this paper, therefore showing communication and understanding is possible without direct translation and manipulation.

Beginning with the war-whoop, though it is unique to Native American culture characters in the novel are able to understand it despite differences of culture and language. Hawkeye first describes it as "a sort of inhuman sound; but when you once hear the war-whoop, you will never mistake it for anything else" thus denoting its transcendent power of meaning (Cooper 69). The language he has does not even properly equip him the ability to describe the phenomenon, since he states it is "sort of inhuman." It is the sound of the whoop itself that will always serve to

identity it for its listeners; they will never need to question its meaning or require a direct translation.

Cooper himself put significant time into describing the war-whoop within the novel, making sure to consistently draw attention to its unique nature. When the Duncan and the others first hear it Cooper writes:

There had arisen such a tumult of yells and cries, as served to drive the swift currents of his own blood, back from its bounding course into the fountains of his heart. It seemed, for a near minute, as if the demons of hell had possessed themselves of the air about them, and were venting their savage humours in barbarous sounds. (76)

Though of course this description is one of total savagery, there is arguably something profound about its effect, namely that it has such a chilling sound that it is capable of altering blood flow within the human body; not only does it transcend a need for translation, but it has literal impact on physical bodies. As Gamut describes hearing the war-whoop is like experiencing hell breaking loose (76). Additionally, when the massacre at Fort William Henry takes place the distinct cry of the Natives requires no translation for the victims to know their demise is forthcoming. That the Indians can convey such terror and fear with just a sound is quite remarkable.

Savagism and language are clearly issues Cooper takes on with this kind of paralinguage. Previously in this paper Magua's speech to the Hurons was examined in detail to show how spoken language can be manipulated to gain power over individuals. However, the way in which Magua was arguably successful in doing this was through tone and sound. Cooper places a great deal of emphasis on how Magua was changing the way his voice sounded depending on what he was conveying, such as when he lowered it to talk reverently about all of the Indians he and his followers had just lost (Cooper 283). Even the language Cooper utilizes in writing the passage is full of sound imagery, such as "chord" and "vibrate," conveying that Magua's speech is affecting

his listeners on an internal level. It is striking something inside of them that causes them to agree with what he is saying; through the use of sound he is able to appeal to their sympathies and manipulate them to his advantage.

Ultimately the clearest use of paralanguage is shown by David Gamut and Cooper's continued insistence on the musicality of language, particularly the language of the Native Americans. As the resident psalmist of the novel David is a character built around the conveyance of sound, specifically music. Despite his oftentimes foolish appearance, Gamut is able to utilize his musical skill to his advantage throughout the narrative. The strongest evidence of this is arguably during the infamous massacre scene. While others are being violently killed all around him, David, a character with no clear skill in weaponry or war, is somehow able to survive. Inspired by his namesake, King David, he decides "to try the potency of music" to save himself, Cora, and Alice (200).

Raising his voice to its highest tones, he poured out a strain so powerful as to be heard, even amid the din of that bloody field. More than one savage rushed towards them, thinking to rifle the unprotected sisters of their attire, and bear away their scalps, but when they found this strange and unmoved figure riveted to his post, they paused to listen. Astonishment soon changed to admiration, and they passed on to other, and less courageous victims, openly expressing their satisfaction at the firmness with which the white warrior sung his death song. (200-201)

Though just after this show of courage the three are captured by Magua, this scene shows the remarkable power of David's use of paralanguage. It is not the words David employs that stops the Indians from killing him and his companions, rather it is the sound of his voice; it requires no translation. Because the Native Americans are able to identify his actions as song via its sound they interpret it as a sign of courage inherent in a warrior. They are able to apply his actions to their own cultural framework, thus interpreting his song as one of death, but they are able to do this without literal understanding of the words. For a character whose main action, singing, is

predominantly mocked throughout the novel by the more stereotypically male characters, such as Hawkeye, it is astonishing that David's musicality is able to save his life in what is arguably the most violent scene of the novel.

Extraordinarily, this is not the only example of David's ability to survive via sound and song. When Hawkeye and Hayward reunite with Gamut post-massacre, they are amazed that he has endured as long as he has, and not only has he endured but he has gained the capability to move among the various Indian encampments. Gamut cites his success solely on his music stating "though the power of psalmody was suspended in the terrible business of that field of blood . . . it has recovered its influence, even over the souls of the heathen, and I am suffered to go and come at will" (254). Even though Gamut cannot necessarily speak the language of his captors, he is able to successfully traverse among them because of his music. In other words, he is literally breaking across the national lines of the Indian encampments to enter as he pleases.

Though this evidence shows Gamut's success via sound his survival is still surprising. As Hawkeye notes later one, "it seems to be your gift to go unharmed amid fire," which is strange since Gamut is the character that seems the most likely to die as soon as he is introduced (369). With absolutely no ability to wield weapons or engage in combat, Gamut's success at surviving the savage woods is striking. However, the reason for this potentially lies within the Native American's own expression of language, i.e. their inherent musicality. Throughout the novel Cooper draws continued attention to this idea. As Blakemore states, "there is an implicit link between the organic rhythms of the natural world and the organic nature of the Indian language" which creates "an implicit contrast between the verbal waste of white European languages and the succinct fullness of the Edenic Indian language (27). Cooper expresses this anytime he describes the Indian language as having some kind of musical quality, which is often. For



example, when Chingachgook and Uncas are conversing with one another “it is impossible to describe the music of their language” (227). “The compass of their voices, particularly that of the youth, was wonderful; extending from the deepest bass, to tones that were even feminine in softness” (227). Though this description of musicality is interpreted by critics such as Rosenwald as negative portrayal of Native American languages, I am not convinced that this is entirely accurate. Eventually Rosenwald comes to the conclusion that “Copper brilliantly contradicts himself” in his representation of Native American language by representing them “as verbally complex, culturally specific, and resistant to translation” (22). Utilizing Uncas’ war-song at the end of the novel, Rosenwald argues that it is “at odds with everything” Cooper has presented thus far. “To being with, Cooper calls Native American language not only ‘melodious’ but also ‘comprehensive; it has not only sound and music but also sense” (22). Eventually he comes to the conclusion that through instances such as Uncas’ chant, Cooper is showing the inherent sophistication of Native American language through its musicality, the very thing Rosenwald argues earlier in his article that degrades it.

Ultimately this realization does not need to come at such a late point in the novel. In fact, throughout his novel Cooper’s consistent portrayals of sound as language show that these kinds of instances are capable of breaking past any need for translation. Though one might be tempted to first read language that is predominantly sound as lesser, that is clearly not the case. The musicality of the Native American language does not take away from their portrayal, if anything, as Uncas’ war-chant and Magua’s manipulation of tone show, the use of sound adds to the sophistication of a character’s ability to be understood. The negative aspects of language are instead found in the colonizers’ control and re-interpretation of Native American language. As shown throughout this paper, not only does this create clear barriers of communication that non-

Native characters such as Heyward are able to manipulate, but it even creates barriers between the Native Americans themselves. This is arguably why David Gamut is ultimately so successful. Unlike Heyward or Hawkeye, he is not firmly rooted in either the cultures of the colonizers or Natives. He is also not rooted in the cultures of war or violence. Instead, purely through the use of his music, he is able to transcend every barrier that is placed in front of him, ultimately becoming a powerful player within the novel and surviving an environment he most certainly should have perished within. Through this survival Cooper clearly shows the power the conveyance of language can have when the need for translation is taken away; when sound and tone are the standards for conveying the meaning of language, powerful change can and will occur.

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