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Resisting and Negotiating Thanksgiving: A Sociolinguistic and Critical Discourse Analysis of Native American Public Posts on X

*Fuad Hasyim¹

¹Universitas Islam Indonesia

*Corresponding Author, Email: fuad.hasyim@uii.ac.id

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ABSTRACT

This study analyzes selected public posts on X to examine how Indigenous perspectives on Thanksgiving are discursively performed and negotiated in public digital spaces. While Thanksgiving is commonly portrayed as a harmonious national celebration, Indigenous users frequently reframe it as a symbol of colonization, historical loss, and resistance. Drawing on a sociolinguistic perspective informed by language attitudes theory and Critical Discourse Analysis (CDA), the study examines 14 publicly available posts produced by Indigenous individual users and allied organizations. The analysis identifies three recurring discursive patterns. First, dominant historical narratives are openly challenged through linguistic strategies such as hashtags, irony, and references to historical trauma. Second, Indigenous identity is asserted through code-switching, the use of Indigenous language terms, and expressions of community-centered solidarity. Third, ambivalence emerges in posts that reject the colonial foundations of Thanksgiving while simultaneously affirming personal relationships and cultural continuity.

The findings underscore the importance of attending to Indigenous voices within contested national narratives and demonstrate how digital platforms function as sites for identity negotiation, resistance, and counter-historical meaning-making. The study contributes to ongoing discussions in sociolinguistics and discourse studies on language attitudes, identity construction, and the politics of cultural representation in contemporary American society.



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Introduction

In an era when digital platforms have become primary arenas for political expression and cultural negotiation, the way marginalized communities speak online has significant effects that extend beyond individual posts (S. J. Jackson et al., 2020). Around the world, Indigenous people are using social media to save endangered languages and cultural traditions, and to challenge colonial narratives that still shape how nations see themselves (Moeke-Pickering et al., 2021). This struggle is not just happening in one place; it shows a broader global conflict between dominant historical frameworks and the counter-narratives of communities whose voices have long been excluded from mainstream discourse (Kaur et al., 2025). In the United States, Thanksgiving serves as an example of this tension. For many Americans, it represents national unity, but for Native communities, it is a painful reminder of colonization, dispossession, and the loss of culture.

Thanksgiving is one of the iconic and widely celebrated national holidays in the United States. According to the Pew Research Center, nearly 91% of Americans celebrate Thanksgiving (Gramlich et al., 2024). It highlights the widespread observance across various demographics. However, this portrayal often hides the complex and painful history of Indigenous people. For many, Thanksgiving symbolizes a history intertwined with resilience, loss, and survival (Berg, 2021). Many Native Americans recognize this day as the National Day of Mourning. It highlights the false idea of a peaceful "first Thanksgiving" and the continued hardships caused by colonial expansion and policies (Trujillo, 2022).

Thanksgiving celebrations often ignore the genocidal aspects of American history, which contributes to a narrative that glorifies the past while ignoring indigenous perspectives (Kurtiş et al., 2010). Native American literature, particularly the works of Sherman Alexie, uses humor and critical commentary to challenge this narrative. In "The Absolutely True Diary of a Part-Time Indian," Alexie uses humor to address Native American identity. In "The Lone Ranger and Tonto Fistfight in Heaven", he shows everyday Native life in ways that break common stereotypes. Together, these works show how the traditional Thanksgiving story affects Native identity and emphasize themes of resistance in indigenous communities (Feldman, 2014).

In recent years, various media, including social media platforms, have emerged as powerful tools to challenge traditional narratives and promote awareness of the true history behind Thanksgiving. Native communities often use the media, such as Instagram, TikTok, and X, to share educational content and



historical facts to challenge traditional and established narratives. For example, Indigenous activist Kelsey Ciugun Wallace used TikTok to share videos about “Truthgiving” to encourage her viewers to understand Native lands and voices and educate people about the authentic history of Thanksgiving (Yu, 2024). Additionally, FastHorse (2022) indicated that media plays an important role in shaping contemporary discourse on Thanksgiving by highlighting uncomfortable subjects like the mistreatment of Indigenous peoples, white blame, the concept of passing, and the homogeneity of Indigenous culture in the United States. It also explores the influence of stereotypes and misunderstandings in popular culture and the impact of racial identity on social interactions.

This study asks and begins to answer a question that matters deeply across disciplines: how do people who have long been silenced find their voice and what do they do with it when they do? This study speaks to a broad audience. For sociolinguists and discourse analysts, it offers new empirical evidence of how language attitudes and identity are performed in digital spaces. For educators and curriculum designers, it highlights the urgent need to incorporate Indigenous perspectives into how history is taught and commemorated. For journalists and content creators, it provides a framework for more responsible and nuanced coverage of Indigenous communities. And for policymakers, it underscores the importance of recognizing and amplifying Indigenous voices in national conversations.

Literature Review

Scholarship at the intersection of Indigenous studies, digital media, and sociolinguistics has grown substantially over the past decade. Four thematic clusters are directly relevant to the present study:

1. Indigenous Digital Activism and Political Mobilization

Recent studies focus on how Indigenous communities use digital platforms to gain political visibility and resist cultural oppression. Lindgren and Cocq (2017) showed that Indigenous activists in North America use social media to mobilize politically and build collective identities, helping their voices reach beyond local areas. Moeke-Pickering et al. (2021) found that Twitter activism, especially around the #MMIWG movement, helped highlight issues of missing and murdered Indigenous women, creating advocacy networks that bypass traditional media. Calabias (2022) extended this line, investigating Native American women’s use of digital tools for visual and personal activism, challenging historical erasure through self-representation. Similarly, Mpofu (2022) explored



how Native youth keep cultural traditions alive and challenge dominant stories through online storytelling. These studies show that Indigenous digital activism involves political action, identity affirmation, and community unity. However, they have limitations; they focus more on activism as social or visual acts rather than on specific language strategies used to express and communicate these ideas.

2. Language Revitalization and Linguistic Identity in Digital Spaces

Another group of studies addresses the role of digital media in Indigenous language revitalization and expressing linguistic identity. Hinton and Putra (2020) emphasized the role of digital tools in Indigenous language revitalization efforts, analyzing how platforms such as Facebook and YouTube are leveraged to promote endangered Native languages. Leonard (2020) took a more theoretical view, suggesting that reclaiming Indigenous language is closely tied to cultural sovereignty and self-determination, with online spaces becoming key areas for this effort. Shostak (2022) extended this perspective by examining how social media platforms serve as dynamic arenas for asserting Indigenous presence, heritage, and community through what she terms the “digital actualization of Native identity.” These studies highlight the importance of language choice in Indigenous online settings. However, they do not focus on the everyday ways Native users show their linguistic identity in real-time posts, such as code-switching, mixing language style, and using different rhetorical strategies, which are central to the social media data.

3. Thanksgiving, Colonial Narrative, and Indigenous Counter-Memory

A third important group of studies concerns how Thanksgiving functions as a site of ideological contest between settler-colonial and Indigenous views of history. Kurtis et al. (2010) showed that the usual way people talk about Thanksgiving often ignores Indigenous voices. This creates a story about kindness and national unity that hides the violent history of settler expansion. Trujillo (2022) explored how Native American communities have turned Thanksgiving into the National Day of Mourning. They use this day to reflect on historical truths instead of celebrating. Fieldman (2014) focused on literature, studying how Indigenous writers like Sherman Alexie use stories and humor to question the traditional Thanksgiving tale and offer different historical views.

These studies show how meaningful Thanksgiving is for Native communities and the various ways they challenge the standard story, from mourning to satire. However, they mostly look at formal events, surveys, and books, not the everyday online discussions where these new stories are often shared.



4. Hashtag Activism and Networked Counterpublics

Another body of work provides a concept for understanding how digitally mediated Indigenous discourse operates at the level of platform and networked communication. Jackson et al. (2020) described hashtag activism as creating “networked counterpublics”, spaces where marginalized groups share stories that challenge mainstream media. Vigil-Hayes et al. (2017) studied Native American activism on Twitter, showing how people with loose connections can support political causes without needing a central leader. Parsloe and Campbell (2021) focused on #MMIW, explaining how hashtags help Indigenous women share their experiences and gain attention in online spaces. Avelar (2015) added that hashtags are not just labels; they act as tools to form digital communities and spread messages across different groups. These studies are important for this analysis because they show that hashtags do more than organize content; they help build identities and support social movements.

Although these four research areas are important, a key gap remains. Most studies focus on activism, language revitalization, Thanksgiving, or hashtags, but few closely examine the language strategies Native American users employ on social media to express identity, take stances, and resist dominant narratives. Even fewer explore how these practices appear around Thanksgiving, a holiday marked by historical trauma and political contestation for Indigenous communities. This study addresses that gap through a sociolinguistic and CDA-based analysis of public posts by Native American users on X.

The analysis is guided by the following research questions:

1. How do public posts on X linguistically construct Native American stances toward Thanksgiving?
2. What micro-linguistic strategies are employed to express resistance, solidarity, or ambivalence?
3. How do Indigenous identity performances differ linguistically between self-identified Native users and allied organizational accounts?

Theoretical Background

Sociolinguistics of language attitudes explores how individuals perceive and evaluate different languages or language features. According to Garrett (2001), language attitudes research is not merely supplementary to sociolinguistics but is fundamental to understanding linguistic phenomena.

“The study of socially and geographically distributed linguistic variation goes hand-in-hand with the study of social evaluations and their distribution across



social and regional groups. The systematic patterns that appear in social evaluations provide us with data that is perhaps of even more importance than descriptive distributional data in the explanation of language maintenance and change, language shift, language death, and language revival.”(Garrett, 2001, p. 63)

Drawing on research by Zahn and Hopper (1985), Garrett discusses how people evaluate language varieties along three main dimensions: superiority (intelligent, rich, prestigious), social attractiveness (likeable, honest), and dynamism (enthusiastic, confident).

According to Soukup (2015), sociocultural, historical, and political contexts shape these attitudes, influencing language policies, linguistic discrimination, and personal identity formation. Language attitudes are frequently assessed using implicit and explicit measures, which reveal biases toward specific linguistic varieties (Alhazmi, 2023). This study applied the theory to investigate how Native Americans evaluate and position English (the colonial language), their Indigenous language expression, and the linguistic styles (e.g., irony, sarcasm, code-switching) used to assert identity or resistance.

1. Language and identity

Language is a central element of identity. It reflects cultural heritage, social belonging, and personal expression. Sociolinguistic studies show that individuals choose their identities. This helps them feel like they belong to a group and sets them apart from others (Holmes & Wilson, 2022). In bilingual or multilingual societies, language attitudes shape how individuals navigate their linguistic environment and determine which language they use in different social contexts.

Bourgerie (2023) explored how language choices among multilingual communities in Cambodia influence identity construction, demonstrating that linguistic preferences reflect historical power dynamics and socio-political positioning. Similarly, Kulyk (2021) examined the interplay between Ukrainian and Russian, revealing how language attitudes shape national identity in post-Soviet Ukraine, with language serving as both a symbol of solidarity and a tool of political resistance. In Native American communities, the relationship with language is deeply intertwined with history and identity. For generations, English has been imposed on Indigenous peoples through harsh policies like forced assimilation and the traumatic experiences of boarding schools. This legacy has made the fight to preserve Native languages particularly heartbreaking.

Language resistance and counter-colonialism



Language resistance is a transformative tool for confronting and deconstructing established social hierarchies and the remaining effects of colonialism (Kaur et al., 2025). Across the world, marginalized communities have increasingly turned to their native languages as a form of resistance against the pervasive forces of linguistic hegemony. These acts of resistance are not merely symbolic but are deeply rooted in the struggle for cultural preservation and autonomy. According to Esguerra (2021), linguistic resistance has emerged as a deliberate and strategic counter-colonial practice in Philippine literature. By doing this, they are reclaiming the space for these languages and highlighting the depth and significance of indigenous identities that have often been overlooked or marginalized. This practice serves to honor and celebrate the cultural heritage and complexity that these languages bring to our world.

Thus, language is not a neutral entity. It plays an important role in establishing power. Medina (2012) investigates how English and Spanish dominate American philosophical discourse, revealing broader patterns of linguistic hegemony. His work emphasizes the potential of linguistic resistance in reclaiming epistemic agency and the symbolic violence inherent in linguistic structure. Hence, the impact of linguistic hegemony extends beyond mere communication; it shapes cultural perceptions and influences social hierarchies.

2. The role of language ideology

Language ideologies are a society's views and presumptions regarding language's roles, functions, and values. These ideologies can have far-reaching consequences, as they are often employed to justify linguistic discrimination or advocate for and promote linguistic diversity. The impact of language ideologies is particularly evident in educational contexts, where they shape the experiences and identities of students. Burrell-Kim (2020) conducted a study exploring how language ideology influences student identity and how students engage in linguistic resistance within higher education. The research highlighted the challenges faced by students who consciously reject dominant linguistic norms in academic settings, demonstrating how their resistance is a personal and political act to reclaim their linguistic and cultural heritage.

In addition to education, language resistance also finds expression in various forms of media discourse, including music and literature. Banda (2023) examined the strategies employed by African musicians who incorporate indigenous languages into their lyrics to assert cultural identity and resist the historical dominance of colonial languages. Using their native languages, these musicians preserve and celebrate their cultural heritage and challenge the linguistic



hierarchies that have marginalized indigenous voices. This form of linguistic resistance is a powerful tool for cultural reclamation and empowerment, illustrating the broader role of language in social and political struggles.

Methodology

This study uses a qualitative, Critical Discourse Analysis (CDA) approach to explore how Native American users express cultural and political views about Thanksgiving in public posts on X (formerly Twitter). Applying Fairclough's (2013) three-dimensional model, it examines language through textual analysis (linguistic features like vocabulary, tone, and rhetorical devices), discursive practice analysis (post production, circulation, and the role of hashtags), and social practice analysis (contextualising discourse within sociocultural and historical frameworks of power, colonialism, and Indigenous resistance). This framework allows for a layered understanding of how digital discourse reflects historical trauma, challenges dominant narratives, and affirms Indigenous identity.

Data were collected from X during September 1 - November 30, 2024, to capture a range of discourses surrounding Thanksgiving. While 64 public posts were initially collected using keyword and hashtag filters, only 14 were selected for in-depth analysis. The selection of 14 posts from the initial corpus of 64 followed a two-stage analytic procedure. In the first stage, posts were screened for relevance to Thanksgiving discourse using keyword and hashtag presence (#Thanksgiving, #Truthsgiving, #LandBack). In the second stage, posts were purposively selected for linguistic richness, defined operationally as the presence of at least two analyzable discourse features (e.g., evaluative lexis, metaphor, pronoun positioning, irony, or Indigenous language insertions). Coding was conducted manually by the author using an analytic memo approach informed by Fairclough's textual dimension of CDA. Preliminary thematic clusters were refined through iterative comparison across posts, ensuring internal consistency rather than statistical reliability.

The dataset includes posts from two groups: self-identified Native American individuals or identity-performing Indigenous users and allied organizations, and individuals who actively support and promote Indigenous discussions around Thanksgiving. This distinction is important for transparency and methodological honesty. Self-identified Native American users were included based on explicit self-identification in their profile bios, consistent use of Indigenous cultural references and terminology across their post history, and direct expression of lived Indigenous experience in their posts.



More specifically, inclusion criteria encompassed demonstrated cultural knowledge specific to Indigenous communities, such as familiarity with tribal histories and governance structures, use of Indigenous language terms or phrases, references to culturally significant practices and ceremonies, knowledge of specific historical events affecting Native peoples such as the Trail of Tears or the Indian boarding school era, and active engagement with Indigenous-specific political movements, such as #LandBack and the Standing Rock protests.

Of the 14 posts analyzed, 9 were produced by self-identified or identity-performing Indigenous users, while 5 originated from allied organizations or non-Native activists amplifying Indigenous perspectives. Analytical claims about Indigenous identity construction are based exclusively on the former group, while ally posts are examined for their role in discursive circulation and amplification.

The identity of users in this corpus is treated as something they do, not something that is checked and confirmed. Following Marwick and boyd's (2011) framework of networked publics and Butler's (1990) concept of performativity as extended to digital contexts (see also Nakamura, 2002), this study analyzes identity as something people perform through what they repeatedly say and share, not as a fixed biological or legal identity that a platform could verify.

This study examines how Native American identity is constructed and performed on X during Thanksgiving through profile bios, Indigenous cultural references, language terms, and lived experiences. It focuses on identity as enacted in discourse, not verified ethnicity, consistent with digital discourse research (Herring et al., 2013; Baym, 2010). The distinction between Indigenous and ally posts is explicitly addressed. X was chosen for its real-time, text-driven discourse, keyword searchability, and alignment with Fairclough's CDA analysis.

While the dataset of 14 posts may appear limited from a quantitative perspective, this study follows the established tradition of purposive sampling in qualitative discourse analysis, where analytical depth and thematic richness take precedence over sample size (Patton, 2002). CDA, by its very nature, prioritizes close, layered textual analysis over broad statistical generalization, a single post can yield multiple levels of meaning when examined through Fairclough's three-dimensional model.

Additionally, this study focuses on a small set of public posts on X and adopts an interpretive approach informed by Critical Discourse Analysis. As such, the analysis does not aim to represent the full range of Native American perspectives on Thanksgiving. Instead, the focus is on examining how meanings, stances, and identities are discursively performed in specific textual instances.



Indigenous identity is treated analytically as a discursive performance publicly articulated within the platform, consistent with established approaches in digital discourse research.

Discussion

The linguistic representation of Thanksgiving within Native American communities on social media provides a rich pattern of support, critique, and ambivalence. Through the X platform, Native individuals and organizations articulate their perspectives using various linguistic features that reflect broader cultural, political, and historical contexts.

The discussions are grouped into three categories: the sociolinguistic representation of Thanksgiving, language attitudes and identity, and the rise of digital discourse and counter-narratives. The analysis highlights solidarity, resistance, and cultural negotiation through linguistic elements like code-switching, sarcasm, and Indigenous languages. This study, based on Fairclough’s model, examines how Native Americans engage with and reshape dominant narratives about Thanksgiving online. It explores linguistic features like pronouns and irony, user identity in public discourse, and social practices that challenge dominant narratives, linking to movements like #Landback and #Truthgiving.

Sociolinguistic Representation of Thanksgiving

Linguistic Patterns in Expressing Positions toward Thanksgiving

Native social media posts reveal three perspectives on Thanksgiving: supportive, critical, and ambivalent. Each perspective is expressed through unique linguistic strategies that highlight the diverse attitudes and experiences of Native Americans. These patterns convey individual sentiments and reflect broader cultural and historical contexts. It illustrates the multifaceted relationship between Native communities and the holiday.

Table 2. Thematic grouping and linguistic tendencies

Perspective Cluster	Main Stance	Common Linguistic Features	Discourse Context
Critical/ Resistance	Thanksgiving is framed as a symbol of colonialism,	Emotive language ("genocide," "burn it down"), hashtags	Reframing Thanksgiving as Day of Mourning: Calls for



	genocide, or historical trauma	(#LandBack, #Truthsgiving), historical references, activist tone	decolonization and Indigenous resistance
Pride/ Gratitude	Thanksgiving adapted into expressions of Native pride and community gratitude	Inclusive language ("we," "our ancestors"), educational tone, positive emotional appeals	Thanksgiving as a moment of unity, Indigenous cultural continuity, and reasserting Native presence
Ambivalent/ Mixed	Personal indifference, emotional conflict about Thanksgiving's meaning	Informal language, emotional blending (both critique and personal gratitude), irony, or sarcasm	Acknowledging colonial history while expressing personal resilience or solidarity

Supportive expressions often use positive adjectives like "grateful," "proud," and "thankful," fostering appreciation and a sense of belonging through inclusive pronouns like "we" and "our." Celebratory punctuation highlights joy in shared identity. A great example is @Purple75204's post: "Happy Native American Heritage Day!!!... let us continue to be thankful for one another." This message emphasizes community unity, celebrates Indigenous peoples' contributions, and encourages acknowledgment of diverse cultural backgrounds, promoting mutual understanding and respect.

A closer examination of @Purple75204's post reveals how its grammar conveys the message. The triple exclamation mark in "Happy Native American Heritage Day!!!" is not merely stylistic punctuation; it actually functions to make their message more emotional, even if they don't say it in a loud voice. This is a common strategy in digital text (Herring et al. 2013). The first-person pronoun "I" in "I am so proud" signals a deliberate shift from a collective to an individual statement, making the writer's testimony of Native



identity more believable. Then, they switch to the pronoun “we” in “let’s continue to be thankful for one another) to talk about the whole community, not just the writer. This pronoun transition authorizes a movement from individual identity declaration to community interpellation, making the reader feel like they are part of the indigenous community. The evaluative adjective “proud” carries ideological weight as it shows that the writer is happy about Native American heritage. This makes the holiday seem more positive, even though it is a holiday that many people mourn. Finally, the prepositional phrase “despite our differences” implicitly acknowledges tension but lexically neutralizes it, but they still want everyone to be happy.

These language features align with traditional discourse that frames Thanksgiving as a time of national unity and gratitude, such as Matonin and Bedina (2021) who analyzed how Thanksgiving rituals historically emphasize national identity and spiritual gratitude through symbolic language and collective imagery. However, from a cultural-critical perspective, this form of expression often reinforces a settler-colonial narrative, omitting the violent historical context for Indigenous peoples. The uncritical celebration thus becomes a form of linguistic loss, failing to account for the complex legacy of colonization.

Critical voices regarding Thanksgiving use emotive terms like “genocide” and “colonization,” along with imperatives such as “Burn it to the ground!” and activist hashtags like #UnThanksgiving and #DecolonizeThanksgiving. Posts from users like @WaytooNDN's and @SpottedElk7's aim to deconstruct the mainstream narrative by highlighting the authentic history and its impact on Indigenous communities. These contributions seek to raise awareness about the experiences of Native American peoples, fostering a deeper understanding of the holiday’s origins and encouraging respectful acknowledgment of its historical context.

WaytooNDN’s post, “Happy Thanksgiving, in memory of 12,000,000 Native Americans who were killed after helping settlers through winter in 1621,” is the most complex and powerful. The juxtaposition of a formulaic holiday greeting with a tragic genocide statistic. The mix of celebratory and mourning language creates an ideological tension called interdiscursivity. The strategy, which involves mixing different types of speech to influence people’s thoughts. The passive phrase “who were killed” disguises the perpetrators, reflecting how Thanksgiving narratives often erase Indigenous suffering from mainstream stories. The specific number “12,000,000” functions as a lexical



shock, challenging the traditional Thanksgiving narrative and bringing attention to the tragic history of Indigenous peoples in the United States.

This stance aligns closely with Ferrada (2021), who studied resignifications, where linguistic reclamation is used to subvert dominant cultural narratives. Ferrada emphasizes that reclaiming pejorative or suppressed narratives is a form of empowerment for marginalized communities. Similarly, Mpofo (2022) explored how social media allows Indigenous communities to adapt traditional storytelling into new forms of resistance, such as using Twitter for public historical correction. Cultural backgrounds and historical legacies shape language patterns surrounding Thanksgiving. Indigenous communities in the U.S., with experiences of land dispossession and assimilation, often use confrontational language as a form of protest. This reflects their lived experiences and trauma. In contrast, non-Indigenous narratives usually emphasize gratitude and national unity. Thus, a person's background significantly influences whether they view Thanksgiving as a day of gratitude or mourning.

Ambivalent expressions often use informal slang like “abt” and “bcs,” reflecting complex emotions. These posts challenge Thanksgiving's colonial roots while expressing gratitude for relationships and community, as seen in @hopsslyt's post, which balances critique and affection. They illustrate how individuals navigate conflicting feelings about Thanksgiving, acknowledging its problematic history while valuing the connections it fosters. By adopting a critical perspective, these posts encourage meaningful discussions and challenge traditional narratives about the holiday. These posts reflect what Moeke-Pickering et al. (2021) studied in Indigenous Twitter activism. They show that expressions often do not strictly oppose one another but instead explore a range of cultural feelings and identity affirmations. The ambivalence reveals how historical trauma and present-day communal bonds can coexist in Indigenous discourse. It supports the view of Hinton and Putra (2020), who found that young Indigenous users on social media often mix critique with personal cultural affirmations, balancing critical awareness with lived relational experiences.

These diversities in linguistic patterns are rooted in cultural and historical experiences. For many Indigenous communities, Thanksgiving symbolizes colonial violence and loss. Thus, critical and ambivalent expressions serve as linguistic resistance, challenging dominant narratives and asserting cultural identity.



Role of code-switching and sarcasm

The data findings demonstrate the use of measured linguistic strategies to assert cultural identity, such as code-switching between English and Indigenous languages. For example, @DhkBeau employs the Ojibwe phrase “miigwechwe giizhigad” to underscore efforts to revitalize the language. This approach is a resistance mechanism against colonial oppression, highlighting the critical role of reclaiming Indigenous languages within digital platforms. This strategy aligns with the broader movements in language reclamation, where code-switching is not simply functional but symbolic of cultural sovereignty.

At the micro-linguistic level, @DhkBeau’s use of the phrase “miigwechwe giizhigad” in an English post is a type of code-switching called emblematic switching. This type of switching uses a word or phrase from another language, not for referential necessity, but for identity-marking and ideological positioning (Myers-Scotton, 1993). The Ojibwe phrase is immediately explained in English as “our words for Thanksgiving Day,” which performs a pedagogical function. It teaches non-Ojibwe readers while also asserting linguistic sovereignty. The poster introduces the celebration in Ojibwe terms before using the English label. The possessive word “our” is especially important, as it frames the Ojibwe language as collective Indigenous ownership rather than something to be observed from outside.

The post then switches fully to English to describe pre-colonial Anishinaabe harvest ceremonies. It uses the historical present “the Anishinaabe would have ceremony”, which emphasizes continuity rather than disappearance. The phrase “would have”, instead of “had”, subtly suggests habitual practice and implies that the tradition still exists. In Fairclough’s terms, this is a form of discursive resistance: English, the dominant language, is used to affirm the legitimacy and ongoing vitality of an Indigenous language and culture.

Leonard (2020) emphasizes this in his argument that reclaiming Indigenous languages is about linguistic revival and asserting the right to cultural expression and self-determination. Similarly, Piper (2022) conceptualizes “zones of linguistic sovereignty” where Indigenous communities use language instruction, including in online contexts, to preserve and assert identity against the dominance of English. These expressions are deeply influenced by cultural context; a tribe with active language revitalization programs may show more integration of its native tongues. In contrast, historically suppressed languages might appear as



symbolic insertions. Using a phrase in Ojibwe during Thanksgiving posts transforms the context from a celebration of colonial heritage to Indigenous pride and resistance.

Sarcasm also emerges as an important rhetorical tool to challenge romanticized myths and point out the contradictions in common colonial narratives. Posts like @LaNativePatriot's reference to "tree huggin hippies" serve not merely as humor but as sharp critiques of the simplistic, often patronizing ways Indigenous histories are framed. Native users use this language strategy to encourage discussion that makes readers question fundamental assumptions and confront uncomfortable historical facts. This ironic distance helps highlight the difference between popular perceptions of Native cultures and the complex realities of Indigenous experience. It promotes critical engagement and resistance against homogenizing narratives.

@LaNativePatriot's phrase "tree huggin hippies" functions through several clear rhetorical moves. First, the dropped gerund's final consonant "-g" in "huggin" signals an informal, spoken style, positioning the speaker as an insider who speaks plainly, unlike the romanticized voices being criticized. Second, the phrase "tree huggin hippies" itself is an intertextual reference to a specific ideological formation, environmental counterculture, which stereotypes Native people as primitive ecologists. By raising this stereotype without quotation marks, the poster delivers what Bakhtin (1981) calls double-voiced discourse, using words from the romanticizing culture with sarcastic inflection, and creating a gap between the surface utterance and its implied critique.

This strategy aligns with Deutschmann and Steinvall (2020), who argue that language itself can be a site of resistance against prejudice and that rhetorical tools like sarcasm help reveal underlying social tensions and challenge superficial representations. Sarcasm in Native discourse functions as a form of double voicing, where speakers say one thing but imply another, inviting critical reflection from their audience. This is particularly effective in digital spaces like X, where brevity and wit are valued. Sarcastic remarks enable Indigenous frameworks, often embodying layered meanings, referencing communal trauma, survival, and critique of assimilation. Sarcasm becomes not just a tool of mockery but a mode of survivance. Both sarcasm and code-switching are thus embedded in historical resistance. Generations of linguistic suppression, cultural misrepresentation, and socio-political marginalization shape them. What might appear as humorous or stylistic



choices are deliberate linguistic acts aimed at reclaiming power, voice, and identity.

Language Attitudes and Identity Construction

Expressions of solidarity often stem from shared histories and collective pronouns. Tweets from users like @native_am_pride express gratitude for Native service and highlight cultural pride, as seen in the phrase “Let us thank them for their service.” This honors Native military service, often overlooked in mainstream narratives, and blends patriotism with Indigenous pride. The inclusive “Let’s” promotes collective acknowledgment, aligning with Indigenous efforts to reclaim historical presence, even during colonial holidays like Thanksgiving.

In contrast, @Amazonwatch, an environmental nonprofit organization working in solidarity with Indigenous communities, tweeted, “Today is a National Day of Mourning. While many observe gratitude, Native communities honor the resilience of Indigenous peoples who have faced colonization and environmental racism.” This message exemplifies digital solidarity and underscores Indigenous strength, connecting their resistance to broader justice movements. Hashtags like #NationalDayOfMourning, #IndigenousResistance, and #Landback serve as digital anchors for community mobilization.

At the textual level, @Amazonwatch’s post uses a contrast structure to convey the message. The word “Today” situates the message in the present, followed by renaming “Thanksgiving Day” as “National Day of Mourning,” an act of what Foucault (1972) recognizes as counter-discourse that challenges dominant narratives by offering an alternative meaning with equal grammatical legitimacy. Meanwhile, the clause “While many observe gratitude” does important work: “many” is a vague quantifier that acknowledges mainstream practice without supporting it, while the verb “observe” is neutral enough to avoid condemnation. This is in deliberate contrast to the active verb “honor” in “Native communities honor the resilience,” which conveys respect and dignity.

This practice reflects what Shostak (2022) describes as the “digital actualization of Native identity,” where media platforms, particularly social networks like Twitter, TikTok, and Instagram, serve as dynamic arenas for asserting Indigenous presence, heritage, and community. In this context, expressions of solidarity among Native Americans go beyond mere online



gestures; they operate as powerful affirmations of cultural survival in spaces historically dominated by settler-colonial narratives.

Solidarity in these stories is shaped by relationships among tribes, generational changes, and local connections. Younger Native individuals blend traditional expressions of solidarity with modern online language and memes, illustrating their adaptation to contemporary trends. Hashtags like #IndigenousSolidarity and #LandBack connect tribes and foster a shared Indigenous identity, highlighting common struggles and mutual support. Additionally, ongoing political issues, such as pipeline protests, land rights, and the crisis of missing and murdered Indigenous women, inform these rhetorical strategies.

Resistance is expressed by @WaytooNDN in a November 28, 2024 tweet featuring a powerful image and the hashtags #UnThanksgiving and #Indigenous. The graphic reads: “Happy Thanksgiving, in memory of 12,000,000 Native Americans who were killed after helping settlers in 1621.” This message shifts Thanksgiving from celebration to remembrance, challenging simplified narratives about settlers and Indigenous peoples. It also highlights events like the Pequot Massacre and connects to movements like #LandBack and #DecolonizeThanksgiving, emphasizing Indigenous grief and activism. By serving as a memorial, it reframes Thanksgiving as a day for acknowledging historical accountability.

The combination of a conventional holiday greeting (“Happy Thanksgiving”) with a narrative of genocide demonstrates semantic inversion, revealing the hypocrisy in mainstream narratives that celebrate gratitude while ignoring the violence foundational to settler survival. This tweet exemplifies digital resistance, using irony and activist discourse to challenge dominant interpretations of Thanksgiving and highlight Indigenous historical truths. It aligns with Armenta (2021), who notes that Indigenous digital activism often critiques colonial violence while asserting sovereignty. Hashtags elevate the tweet, linking it to a broader network of resistance.

Negotiated identity features linguistic hybridity and emotional complexity, as seen in @hopsslvt's tweet, which dismisses Thanksgiving as colonial yet expresses love for their community. The slang and informal tone (e.g., “abt,” “ily”) soften the critique and reflect younger Native users' identity complexity. This casual style balances political rejection of mainstream views with personal gratitude, underscoring the complexity of cultural identity.

@hopsslvt's post "i could care less abt thanksgiving bec im native american, and its just a holiday celebrating colonization nor, am i really



thankful for anything. but i hope all my mooties have a good day, and im grateful for all of you. ily all" is linguistically the most complex ambivalent post in the corpus and its complexity is enacted through deviation from standard written convention. The consistent use of lowercase, abbreviation “abt,” “bcs,” “ily,” and missing apostrophes “im,” “its” signals an intimate tone typical of peer communication. This informal register contrasts with the clear political claim “just a holiday celebrating colonization,” where “celebrating” frame thanksgiving as an ongoing as an ongoing ideological practice, not just a historical event.

The negotiation reflects findings by Luza (2023), who discusses how Indigenous identity negotiation arises from the tensions between internal cultural perspective and external societal expectations. It suggests that identity is not static but is dynamically constructed in response to cultural, emotional, and digital contexts. This type of negotiation highlights that Native identity involves more than just accepting or resisting; it includes flexible perspectives that blend critiques of systemic narratives with personal and community connections. Indigenous digital discussions are diverse, with varying emotions and intentions.

The influence of digital activism and community narratives on shaping attitudes.

Digital activism is reshaping Native American perspectives on Thanksgiving by creating platforms for community narratives that resist colonial narratives. Social media allows Indigenous voices to express disagreement, educate others, and empower their communities. For instance, in a November 28, 2024 tweet, @amazonwatch, an environmental nonprofit organization working in solidarity with Indigenous communities, refers to Thanksgiving as a “National Day of Mourning,” honoring the resilience of Indigenous peoples in the face of colonization and environmental harm. This perspective serves as a powerful counter-narrative, transforming public perception of the holiday while emphasizing Indigenous strength and unity.

Those hashtags resist colonial narratives and provide connective tissue among diverse Indigenous voices, fostering what Parsloe and Campbell (2021) identify as a “collective Indigenous identity” in response to systemic injustices. This rhetorical strategy is particularly effective because it leverages the virality and accessibility of digital platforms to bypass traditional media filters, allowing Indigenous voices to speak directly to global audiences.



Additionally, the tweet from @niwrc uses hashtags like #Truthsgiving and #NativeAmericanHeritageMonth to highlight Indigenous knowledge and truth-telling during a time often filled with false stories. By promoting “Truthsgiving,” the tweet shifts the focus from celebration to reflection, urging Indigenous and non-Indigenous people to face brutal historical truths. These community stories are not random events but part of a larger movement to regain control and address forgotten history. This post aligns with Armenta’s (2021) research, which argues that Indigenous digital activism often links historical memory to ongoing struggles such as land dispossession and environmental racism, forming a continuum for resistance that redefines national commemorations as contested political spaces.

Digital Discourse and Counter Narratives

How Native American Discourse Challenges Thanksgiving Narratives
 Native American users on social media like X employ digital discourse to actively deconstruct and resist dominant Thanksgiving narratives, which traditionally frame the holiday as a harmonious event of gratitude between settlers and Native peoples. Instead, indigenous voices use these platforms to reveal historical violence, correct myths, and assert their narratives of survival and resistance.

Posts such as @WaytooNDN’s, which pair provocative imagery with stark reminders like “12,000,000 Native Americans... killed after helping settlers,” serve as what media theorists might call semiotic resistance. This use of multimodal content, images, text, hashtags, and history, turns Thanksgiving from a celebration into a digital memorial. Hashtags like #PequotMassacre and #LandBack serve dual purposes: they provide entry points into historical education and connect individual tweets to broader social justice movements.

These posts align with Cynthia-Lou Coleman’s (2020) analysis of how Native narratives disrupt dominant frameworks by invoking alternative epistemologies centered on communal memory and justice. By naming specific massacres, these posts reinsert Indigenous pain into a space that often sanitizes settler colonialism. This act of remembrance serves not only to acknowledge the historical traumas faced by Indigenous communities but also to challenge the prevailing narratives that seek to erase or diminish these experiences. By foregrounding Indigenous voices and their stories, the posts foster a deeper understanding of the ongoing impacts of colonial violence and highlight the resilience of Indigenous cultures. In doing so, they encourage a



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more comprehensive dialogue about justice, reparations, and the need for genuine recognition of historical injustices in contemporary society.

@MKEMegaphoneWi’s, a progressive community organizing platform in Milwaukee that amplifies Indigenous perspectives, uses juxtaposition, “Happy Thanksgiving & National Day of Mourning,” highlights the tension between dominant national celebrations and Indigenous mourning. This linguistic strategy, which relies on contradiction and contrast, compels readers to question normalized assumptions. It echoes Shostak’s (2022) assertion that Native social media creates a dual-layered discourse that affirms cultural continuity while also demanding the reevaluation of national identity. Moreover, expressions like this cannot be divorced from historical and contextual realities, such as the legacy of boarding schools, treaty violations, and land dispossession. These histories provide the emotional and political weight behind such language. What might seem hyperbolic or incendiary to outsiders is, in fact, an assertion of historical truth and a call for decolonial justice.

The phrase “Happy Thanksgiving & National Day of Mourning” in MKEMegaphoneWi’s post combines two opposing ideas into a single noun phrase. The choice of “&” rather than the spelled-out “and” is significant. The ampersand usually means a close relationship (like a company name), but here it ironically forces a grammatical match between two different ideas: celebrating and mourning. These ideas are usually seen as separate, but the post suggests they are mutually connected. Additionally, the post also uses the second-person pronoun “you” in “remember the native land you stand on” to personally address the reader. This makes the reader feel like they are part of the colonial geography being described. The verb “stand on” is a spatial metaphor that connects people to land. The reader is not just thinking about colonialism from a distance; they are physically located within it, at the exact coordinates of the spot where they were taken away from their land. This is in line with what Fairclough (2013) describes as the interpellative function of discourse, language that calls upon readers to recognize themselves as specific kind of people. The post’s call to “remember” also brings up the idea of mourning and remembering the past. Thanksgiving gratitude and colonial memory aren’t seen as separate things; they’re both important moral obligations.

The impact of hashtags and online discussions on public perceptions.

Hashtags are tools for digital activism that group individual posts into larger movements. They help make Indigenous perspectives visible, support



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counter-narratives, and encourage broader audiences to show support. Among the most frequently used in the dataset are #Truthsgiving, #UnThanksgiving, #LandBack, and #DecolonizeThanksgiving, each serving a unique rhetorical and political function.

The analysis of @nva_nevada’s post, which employs #Truthsgiving, demonstrates how hashtags facilitate educational engagement. Rather than merely promoting an event or slogan, the tweet integrates links, names (Christine Nobiss), and explanatory language to drive home the historical complexity of Thanksgiving. This aligns with Avelar (2015), who argues that hashtags function as performative acts that create online ad hoc communities by shaping comment-topic structures and enabling communicative replication across user groups. Through hashtags, users enact social belonging, critique dominant narratives, and construct digital counterpublics. Moreover, Jackson et al. (2020) in their study of hashtag activism, emphasize that social media allows marginalized communities to construct what they call “networked counter publics”, spaces where alternative narratives can be developed and circulated. In this context, hashtags like #Truthsgiving do not just inform, they create a sense of community rooted in shared grievance and cultural reclamation.

The analysis shows that hashtags act as digital kinship systems, linking users like @niwrc into larger, decentralized movements. These interactions model what Vigil-Hayes et al. (2017) call connective action, in which loosely affiliated users contribute to shared goals without centralized leadership. This digital connectivity reflects a broader cultural phenomenon: the rearticulation of Indigenous identity in the digital age. Hashtags allow Native users to assert their historical visibility, ongoing presence, and agency. They create linguistic spaces for solidarity, resistance, and education beyond geographic and tribal boundaries.

Conclusion

This study has demonstrated how Native American communities on X (formerly Twitter) use digital discourse to express multifaceted responses to Thanksgiving. The sociolinguistic data revealed three dominant themes: (1) Varied linguistic stance, supportive, critical, and ambivalent shaped by tone, vocabulary, and rhetorical strategies such as sarcasm and code-switching; (2) language attitudes and identity constructions rooted in expressions of solidarity, cultural pride, and resistance; and (3) counter-narratives that disrupt mainstream historical accounts of Thanksgiving through hashtags, historical references, and visual media. Posts



employing Indigenous language or sarcastic critique served as powerful tools for cultural affirmation and social commentary.

While prior research has addressed Indigenous digital activism, language revitalization, and online identity separately, this study shows how these processes converge in a single, culturally charged discursive context. It demonstrates that Indigenous digital discourse is not monolithic. Still, it includes a range of linguistic stances, from decolonial resistance to ambivalence and community gratitude, challenging overly uniform portrayals of Native voices. Methodologically, the study also highlights the effectiveness of Fairclough's three-dimensional CDA model for analyzing Indigenous social media discourse.

This study offers valuable insights for stakeholders. It shows Fairclough's three-dimensional CDA model is effective for analyzing Indigenous digital discourse and how marginalized communities negotiate identity online. Social media, especially X, is crucial for Indigenous cultural survival, resistance, and solidarity. Educators must integrate Indigenous perspectives into Thanksgiving and U.S. history teaching. Media practitioners should use responsible, culturally informed representations of Indigenous communities. Policymakers must actively center Indigenous voices in national discourses on history and identity.

While this study offers insight into how Indigenous perspectives on Thanksgiving are articulated through digital discourse, the findings should be understood as interpretive and context-specific. Based on a limited set of posts, the analysis highlights discursive patterns and possibilities rather than statistically representative tendencies. Future research drawing on larger or longitudinal datasets could further explore how these discursive strategies evolve across platforms and temporal contexts.

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