

Language Revitalization at Home

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What an exciting conference this has been! In the name of all of us who have attended this conference, I want to thank the organizers for their hard work, for their great hospitality, for being in Hawai'i, and for giving us all this opportunity to meet with each other and learn, so much, from each other. Mahalo, Nick, Jim, and all of you wonderful folks here in Honolulu.

I am honored to be one of the four plenary talks here, in company with Nick Himmelman's plenary on modern approaches to language documentation; and Paul Newman's plenary challenging modern approaches to language documentation; and finally Phil Cash Cash's sensitive analysis, showing us all how an "insider's science" can be so effective. All three of these talks were looking at language from various points of view of linguistic science, whereas I will not really be talking about linguistic science at all, but rather language revitalization – though there is a science to that as well. With regard to the debate between Nick and Paul, from the point of view of language revitalization, I side with Nick more than Paul, about the emphasis on the collection and availability of large amounts of raw data -- it is of great potential importance to language revitalization. Not even what Nick calls primary data – that is, the transcription and translation – is as important as the raw data itself. "Primary data" may (or may not) be necessary, but it is merely a way of getting to and understanding the raw data. It is the raw data that people hunger for in language revitalization. We will return to this point later in this talk.

Most effective language revitalization is grass roots, community driven, and while the movement can certainly make use of linguists, linguistic science is rarely central to the success or failure of language revitalization.

To illustrate this, another thought-provoking conference that I had the honor of attending in 2008 was the "Native American languages in Crisis" conference, held at the Univ. of Pennsylvania, conceived by Richard Grounds (Yuchi). An excerpt from the conference description states starkly the misfit between linguistic science and language revitalization:

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"The implicit promise of support from academia for revitalizing Indigenous languages turns out to be difficult to harness directly to the urgent needs of Native communities seeking to develop new fluent speakers of their original languages. While linguists and community members can easily share a broad common goal of perpetuating Native

languages, they operate out of surprisingly separate agendas. Many of the efforts from academia rely on long-standing strengths for producing lexicons and grammars, generally in the service of the demand for scholarly publications for career advancement. But for Native communities in the very late stages of language loss, with few resources and only handfuls of elderly speakers, much of the arcane academic output may be of little use in their hands-on, urgent struggle to pass their languages to the youngest generation.” (Grounds et al, 2008).

Darrell Kipp, founder and inspiration of the Piegan Institute and the Blackfeet Immersion School in Montana, is more succinct:

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Don't hire linguists. They can speak the language but the kids won't.

(Kipp 2000, p. 4.)

I am not in agreement with Grounds' or Kipp's stance on this (I think communities can make good use of linguists), but I think it is useful to note that these two men are among the most successful people in the US in their efforts at language revitalization – Grounds having raised a young daughter who is a truly fluent speaker of Yuchi, the only one of her generation (and who also just graduated from Dartmouth); and Kipp being a driving force behind a celebrated Blackfeet immersion school.

Using Paul Newman's approach to plenaries, besides the challenging statements I just quoted about linguistics, I'll make another one about language revitalization itself – that revitalization programs and processes in most of the world have not yet succeeded in doing what could be argued to be the HEART of language revitalization – returning the language to the home and family.

In Joshua Fishman's famous GIDS (Graded Intergenerational Disruption Scale), he lists 8 stages of disruption and what steps need to be taken for revitalization of a language at any particular stage. He sees stage 6 on his scale to be the most crucial.

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“...Stage 6, consisting of home-family-neighborhood-community reinforcement...constitutes the heart of the entire intergenerational transmission pursuit...” (Fishman 1991, p. 398). "

“... if this stage is not satisfied, all else can amount to little more than biding time.” (Fishman 1991:399).

That is, the home, the family, and its extension into and support system from the community, is the most essential target of language revitalization.

Let's begin with a brief review of the internal dynamics of language loss in the family. I do not need to review here the well-known horrific experiences of the older generations, some of them here among us, in the boarding schools where eradication of their home languages was one of the major goals. As so well demonstrated by Pat Shaw in her presentations here, for many of those men and women, there was a conscious, compassionate decision not to pass on their language to their children, so that the children would not suffer as they did.

But in the middle generations, whose schooling came later when the most severe and dehumanizing practices were no longer the norm, there were still many who had learned their language, either because the parents made a different decision, or more often, because they were raised by their grandparents. These middle generation speakers are bilingual, and frequently became the main leaders of school-based language programs in the 1970's and 1980's. And yet a common pattern was that they still failed to transmit the language to their own children, even in many cases when they wanted and expected their children to learn. We will look at this more in the context of these language programs, which were centered around bilingual education.

I've been lucky enough to be a participant-observer in indigenous language revitalization in the US from the early 1970's on (though it wasn't called language revitalization yet in the early 1970's), when bilingual education was established in the United States.

Bilingual education provided great positive gains for American Indian languages. It reversed the terrible boarding school policies – and now, for the first time in the 20th century, the languages were back in schools, raising a generation of kids who have positive feelings about their heritage tongue. Many of today's language activists come from backgrounds where they received bilingual education in their communities.

However, bilingual education also had many difficulties. Some of them were due to the hostility to bilingual education by Republican administrations, and thus in general the recurrent lack of funding and training opportunities (Wong-Fillmore, 1992). Some were due to the fact that American bilingual education was designed to be replacive – the government's primary target being children who were not fluent in English, to help them learn English without falling behind in their education. Then once their English is adequate, education would proceed in English only. This of course went against the aims of American Indians and speakers of some of the immigrant languages as well, who wanted a maintenance model of bilingual education. In any case, although some bilingual education programs still exist, the era of bilingual education was essentially declared “dead” in the US during the Bush administration after renaming the Office of Bilingual Education the “Office of English Acquisition”.

The greatest failure of bilingual education is that it failed to turn around language loss for endangered languages. It did not turn around language decline in the home; and it failed to produce a new generation of speakers who would actually *use their language*

in daily life. In most places, at the same time that children were being taught in two languages at school, it was disappearing from the home environment. People even used bilingual education as an excuse for not using the language at home. Bilingual Education teachers used to mourn that families would say “Our kids will learn our language at school, so we don’t have to worry about it at home.” I even heard this in a village in upper British Columbia last year. In a village I was visiting, I struck up a conversation with two parents who I had overheard speaking in their language. I asked if their kids spoke it with them and they said “Oh no, we don’t use it at home, but they are learning it at school.”

It wasn’t just those parents, though – I also knew many bilingual education teachers who also failed to transmit their language to their children. The lack of ancestral language transmission was still sometimes purposeful (and still is); but it was also often inadvertent, perhaps through a lack of real understanding of how children acquire language. Bilingual parents, having acquired both languages at a young age, seemingly without effort, assumed their children would do the same – failing to realize that their home and community environment was not providing the degree of ancestral language input that their own childhood home had. I still remember a very striking experience in the ‘80’s, of going to a conference and hearing a young Navajo woman who had grown up speaking her language at home and also attending a bilingual school on the Navajo reservation. She was a true fluent bilingual, and she gave her speech entirely in Navajo. It was a very passionate speech, with many tears, and at the end, the only thing she said in English was that she had spoken about the tremendous importance of language maintenance, and that if we wanted to know what she said, we should learn Navajo. But later during a break, I saw her with her little son, probably about 4 years old. As they passed by I heard her say “I think the bathroom is over there, let’s go that way.” In English. Now I never saw her again, and I may be wrong, but that one brief encounter said to me that her child was not going to grow up fluent in Navajo.

The death of bilingual education at the hands of the US government need not be mourned greatly, because at the same time it was in its final decline, a revolution was taking place – the grassroots movement of immersion schools. Led by the movements in New Zealand and Hawai’i, and the Mohawks in New York and Canada, dozens of indigenous language immersion schools have developed all over North America. Unlike most of the bilingual education programs, immersion schools have been able to create fluent speakers, who have learned their endangered language at a young enough age to have it essentially be one of their first languages. These children are growing up fully bilingual, just like the Navajo woman I just talked about. The lead group is in their early 20’s now. Will they bring the language back into their home and raise their children as speakers of the ancestral tongue? Or will they be like that woman, fluent and passionate about her language, but unable to take the next step of passing the language on to her child? The immersion school generation is at the cusp of showing us which way it will go.

But one thing that is very different about the era of immersion schools is that unlike the earlier era of bilingual education, there is a strong pattern that the teachers

themselves are using their language at home. no means is this true of all the teachers, but there is a much stronger consciousness now about home language use, and a deeper awareness of how children acquire language. I don't think this is so much a product of the immersion school process as it is that language revitalization at home is something whose time has come. As always, Maori and Hawaiian lead the way with teachers and others committing to using the language at home. Other places, such as the Chinuk Wawa immersion school in Oregon, and the Mohawk language immersion schools in New York and bordering Canadian regions, also have lead families that are using the language at home with their children. I met one couple a couple of years ago who have been teaching in the Mohawk schools for years, yet they never used their language at home with their older kids. But when they were expecting their fourth, they said "Why haven't we been using our language with our children?" and committed to raising their last child in Mohawk.

In fact, in some places – such as Hawaii – the immersion school system developed from a commitment by families to the language, by families who knew that school alone could not revitalize the language – it had to be family and community that revitalized the language, with school as only one tool. These are families where one or both parents were *second language learners themselves*, and committed to using the language at home with their children.

It is these families – a generation of highly committed 2nd language learners giving the gift of that language as a first language to their children -- that I want to talk about, and honor, today. There are many such families right here at this conference, in this audience. There are lots of Maori families using their language at home; and lots of Hawaiian families as well. I re-met Henning and Kjetil Garvin yesterday who have been leaders in the Ho-Chunk master-apprentice program in Wisconsin, and have been using the Ho-Chunk language at home with their 3 year old since his birth. I'm sure there are others.

I see four pathways by which language revitalization is reaching the home:

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1. the teachers in the immersion school movement who have committed to using their language at home;

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2. Individual adult learning from elder speakers, either through one's own efforts or through an organized program, mainly the master-apprentice approach;

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3. Learning from documentation (and here we will get back to why modern approaches to endangered language documentation are useful);

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4. Newest but I think most importantly, organized programs that specifically target the home as the site of language revitalization.

Having already discussed the first pathway (teachers in the immersion school movement), I will focus on the other 3 here.

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Individual adult learning as a prelude to language revitalization. This has been going on quietly for a long time – families who, on their own, have made the conscious decision to do whatever they had in their power to do to transmit their languages to their children. The home is a private place, and until the family brings their language work into the more public space, we don't necessarily know what is going on.

To name an early example of this, in a talk here the other day I mentioned Loren Bommelyn, who's parents – not fluent in Tolowa themselves, nevertheless took Loren out of school every Wednesday so that he would be able to spend the day with the elders at the elders' lunch and social time. They gave him the gift of the Tolowa language. As he grew up, Loren became intensely self-directed toward continuing to learn Tolowa, and is now a fluent speaker, language teacher, and cultural activist. (But I have to say, like the Navajo woman, that he did not transmit his language to his own children to any great degree – until very recently, when as an adult his son Pu'eu joined him in our Master-Apprentice program.)

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Here is Loren with Pu'eu, at one of the training workshops, discussing in Tolowa a storybook without written words.

Many of you are already familiar with the Master-Apprentice approach. I belong to an organization called the Advocates for Indigenous California Language Survival, which consists of an all-Indian working board.

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Some members of the board

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California is an extremely linguistically diverse state, originally with some 100 different languages, and some 50 that still have one or more speakers; but almost none with more than a few speakers now. When we first got together, in 1992, the Master-Apprentice program was the first program we developed, trying to find ways that people could help their languages survive in this extremely diverse and critical linguistic situation.

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Here is a group shot of one of the recent training workshops in California.

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This is the manual for the master-apprentice program – our book, *How to keep your language alive*. To mimic Paul Newman, “Buy it! I DON’T get royalties!”

We have trained somewhere around 90 teams by now, I think, in some 30 different California Indian languages. Some of those groups have developed master-apprentice programs in their own communities, independent now from the Advocates. My colleagues on the board and I also train groups all over North America, and there are many master-apprentice programs now that we don’t even know about. And we heard yesterday about the one starting up in Australia now. The manual has also been translated into Portuguese for distribution to tribes in Brazil.

What we are finding now is that some of the young learners who have developed a high proficiency through this process now have children and are using their language at home with them. For example, Danny Ammon, Hupa apprentice, speaks with his daughter. Google Danny Ammon Hupa when you have a chance and you can find his website and listen to some conversations that he and his daughter recently put up on the internet.

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There is also Ellie Supahan and her husband Phil Albers, who learned Karuk through the master-apprentice approach, and are now using the language at home with their two children.

And at the same time that Pu’eu Bommelyn is learning from his father, he has committed to using the language with his own baby.

The way for these families is rocky, and the home use of the language is fragile; there are obstacles, often involving internal family conflicts and the lack of community support. But it is a start.

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Documentation. This is the third pathway is through documentation.

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The two most famous examples of people who have based their own learning on documentation are Daryl Baldwin (Miyaamia) and

Jessie Little Doe Baird (Wampanoag), both of whom had to learn their language entirely through documentation because there were no native speakers left alive. Jessie is raising her daughter in Wampanoag, who I think is about 5 years old now. Daryl has raised 4 children who are fluent in the language.

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Here is a picture, taken by Wes Leonard, of Daryl's family playing a game that involves language in their living room.

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Wes Leonard, who is here at the conference, wrote his dissertation at Berkeley on the Baldwin family, observing the family dynamics and the process of language acquisition and language use in the home. It's a brilliant dissertation and I recommend it to all of you as illuminating reading.

I should note, however, that both Daryl and Jessie have MAs in linguistics. Daryl's story is a case in point of the difficulty of learning from documentation: as the story goes, before Daryl started learning Myaamia, he was in close contact with David Costa, who was writing a dissertation at Berkeley on Myaamia grammar, basing his work on earlier documents by missionaries and Myaamia writings from an early period of Myaamia literacy. When David finished his dissertation, he sent a copy to Daryl – and in great excitement, Daryl tore open the package, opened the dissertation – and couldn't understand a word of it! So he straightway applied to the University of Montana and got an MA in linguistics, in order to understand the documentation well enough to learn the language.

Documentation is also very important to language learning even when people do have speakers around. Daryl and Jessie only had written documentation to work with, but the modern approach to language documentation that Nick outlined Thursday, where audio-video raw data is emphasized, provides an enormously important kind of documentation for language revitalization. For example, one of the very most useful set of resources to adult language learning in Hawai'i is the set of radio interviews of native speakers conducted in Hawaiian by Larry Kimura in the 1970's and '80's. That is the largest recorded corpus in existence of natural conversational speech in Hawaiian, and is immensely helpful especially for the advanced learning of prosody and intonation, conversational structure, and situational speech. So this is why I say that the approach of the current language documentation movement of broad, scattershot documentation of natural speech is so useful to language revitalization. But conversation may be the most important speech event to document, and it is also the hardest to document, especially for endangered languages, where conversations are no longer normally held in the language.

We have seen that families using their language at home are doing it on their own. Some of these families are leaders in language revitalization in their communities – Daryl's and Jessie's being a case in point, who have done enormous work for their languages in their communities. Yet where is the support FOR the families??

One thing that all three of the above paths have in common is that the generation who might use their language at home learned their language one way, but would have to transmit the language to their children in another way. The children who go to immersion schools are then expected to transfer that language to the home environment – a totally different situation from the classroom. The Apprentices learn the language through a second-language-learning model and talking only to an elder, but then we hope they can turn that into an ability to talk to a baby. The third path was learning from documentation, and then transmitting it to their children who will learn orally.

We also saw earlier in this paper that in many cases the transition to one's children fails to happen even when parents have successfully learned the language and are committed to the language.

Family language programs. All this suggests that there is a need for a support system for families. Programs that help families develop the use of the language at home; programs to train them, and provide resources, ideas and encouragement that can help them to their goals.

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We are just seeing the beginning of the development of language programs with a family language orientation, and I think they need to be paid much more attention to.

Hawai'i has just started a toddler's program, for families where at least one parent has been learning and using Hawaiian, and where the goal is supporting family language use. I hope we'll be hearing more about this in the Hilo post conference.

I've seen the delightful phrasebook put out by the Maoris, on family language use at home, where each page is about phrases that can be used in a particular situation such as taking a ride the car, or washing a baby, or changing diapers.

I hope a lot of you got to hear Rob Amery's excellent talk yesterday about Kaurna language development, which is oriented toward daily language in the family setting, where situational speech is also emphasized.

One program I'd like to talk about a little is the new Scots Gaelic language program for family language. I have yet to meet its founder, Mr. Finlay McLeoid, in person – but we have talked very frequently by telephone as he was developing this program in Scotland, and he has been emailing me materials. He complained bitterly that the Gaelic language program of the schools was less than ideal for actual language revitalization. It's oriented toward Gaelic literacy, grammar, and the study of literature, and no-one ever learns how, for example, to talk to a baby, or use the language of endearment. In his program the language of endearment and love is very central, for as he says, the language of endearment forges bonds between parent and child, and at the same time forges the bond with the language in which the endearment is being expressed.

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The Gaelic family language program is called “Bumps and Babies” (and I finally figured that “bumps” must refer to pregnancy.) A description can be found at <http://www.ti-plus.com/families.htm>. The goal is for parents (and grandparents, guardians and other child caregivers) to speak Gaelic to the children “from day 1”, and people are encouraged to start the program while pregnant or even before pregnancy as a part of their family planning. It’s a very intensive program, probably reminiscent of what Dr. Frederick Jackson talked about earlier in this conference, about the National Foreign Language Center approach to language teaching and learning –the Bumps and Babies program is advertised as bringing adults to conversational proficiency in 200 hours.

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One feature of the course is the development of a family language action plan,

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where the language tutor meets with the family to develop an understanding of their current language proficiency (e.g. is one, both or neither parent already a Gaelic speaker?), resources, obstacles, situations, and goals, and plan their pathway to using the language with each other and their child, as well as finding ways for broader support through extended family, friends, preschools and schools, community activities, etc.

The language teaching is very situation oriented –

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for example, here is the theme pack for just one situation, “baby (age 0-9 months) wakes up on their own.”

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For each theme, the tutor and parents work together to develop the needed vocabulary and phrases for the many “jobs” in the theme. This is a list of the jobs.

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And this is a chart for filling in the vocabulary and phrases associated with that job.

I find this a very exciting program with lots of potential; we should keep an eye on it and see how it goes.

The AICLS family language pilot. The Advocates for Indigenous California Language Survival are also starting a pilot program, so far with one extended family.

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The person who is leading this program is Julie Turner, a talented advanced Kawaiisu

apprentice from Tehachapi, California, who went through the master-apprentice program with her father, Luther Girardo. Julie wanted her aunt Betty Hernandez – Luther’s sister – who lives in Palm Springs, to become involved with the program as well, along with Betty’s adult children and young grandchildren. Julie partners with Laura Grant in her work, a fellow Tehachapi resident, who has many years of language revitalization experience with various tribes and has been working with AICLS over the last few years.

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We followed the Gaelic model of making a family language plan, which in this case included a statement of goals and the structure of the process. Slides 28 and 29 show a few of the points that the family worked out with us.

And because Betty is learning how to teach the language at the same time that her family is learning from her, Laura and Julie started out preparing very precise scripts which they would practice with Betty before the family arrived. The next few slides shows an excerpt from one of the early scripts.

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We are planning have Julie and Laura start working soon with a couple of other families. One will be a Tachi Yokuts family shown here;

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The mother (Lawona Jasso, left) and two adult children (Greg Ignacio and Carmen Moreno) have been part of the master-apprentice program for some time, and have already received a good deal of training. She wanted all her family involved, and so the family group has been coming to master-apprentice training workshops together. Here is the mother in more of a closeup, with one of her grandchildren.

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Each family has its own unique set of resources, needs, and obstacles, and we are still trying to figure how best to develop this support program for them. I welcome any ideas on how to shape it further.

CONCLUSIONS

From the bilingual education experience and the individual experience of successful second language learners of their endangered languages, it is clear that what seems like the obvious next step – of returning the language to the home – is not going to happen automatically. Each generation has a different language environment than the previous. Parents successful in learning their endangered language still worry about their children learning English, and the goal nowadays of most parents committed to their endangered language is to raise *bilingual* children. If they learned English at home and their endangered language at school, they may sometimes fear that bring the language home will imperil the child’s chance to learn English. Therefore, support programs must

address that problem as well – how can the children become balanced bilinguals? Can this be done at home? Or will the parents decide that they must replicate their own experience, and depend on a continued inverted diglossic situation, where English remains the language of home and their ancestral tongue the language of school?

There is actually a good deal of literature on raising bilingual children, based mostly on Europe, where many families do it. There is the “one parent, one language” method, the method of devoting part time to each language in the home context, and so on. But it is also clear that endangered languages are the languages that must be focused on the most, because the dominant language of the society is otherwise omnipresent and overpowering. All of these are just a few of the worrisome questions families must ask themselves. For people who want to make the home environment conducive to bilingual language development for their children, communities need to find some way of helping them make this happen.

Mahalo! for listening – and again, Mahalo! for this deeply inspiring conference.

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