TOWARD A METHODOLOGY FOR DORMANT LANGUAGE RECLAMATION:

DECONSTRUCTING THE PROCESS OF USING ARCHIVAL DATA FOR RESEARCH AND REVITALIZATION

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OUTLINE

- Introduction
- Need for dormant language methodology
- Proposed methodology and workflow
- Conclusion
INTRODUCTION

- Dormant (or sleeping) languages: no living speakers, yet documentation exists

- Number of languages becoming dormant is inevitably increasing

- Statistics Canada (2011) estimates that out of the 50 most ‘prominent’ Aboriginal languages, only 3 will still be spoken past this century: Cree, Inuktitut, and Ojibwe.

- Perhaps none of the Indigenous languages of U.S. and Canada will be spoken by the end of the 21st century (Mithun 1999)
NEED FOR RECLAMATION METHODS

• Steady increase of dormant languages means that we need tools and skills to reclaim and revive these languages.

• These tools must fit the needs of heritage language communities without speakers.

• How do we reclaim and revive a language without speakers? --- by using existing documentation.
CURRENT REVITALIZATION METHODS

• Master-Apprentice model (Hinton 2001)

• Language nests

• Immersion schools and programs

• Often cited as ‘successful’ models for language revitalization

• However, ill-suited and unattainable for dormant languages
CURRENT LANGUAGE RECLAMATION MODELS

• Linguistic research with archival materials → used for teaching

• Institutions:
  • Breath of Life
  • CoLang

• Teaching methods:
  • Family-based revitalization through (partial) immersion
  • Community-based language courses
EXAMPLES OF LANGUAGE RECLAMATION

• Myaamia (Algonquian; OK, OH)
  • [http://myaamiacenter.org/](http://myaamiacenter.org/)

• Wampanoag (Algonquian; MA)
  • [http://www.wlrp.org/](http://www.wlrp.org/)
  • e.g. Little Doe Baird 2013

• Mutsun (Yok-Utian; CA)
  • e.g. Warner et al. 2007
EXAMPLES OF LANGUAGE RECLAMATION

- Kaurna (Pama-Nyungan; Adelaide, Australia)
  - e.g. Amery 2000

- Wendat (Iroquoian; Quebec, Canada)
  - e.g. Dorais, Lukaniec & Sioui 2011
  - www.wendatlanguage.com (coming soon!)
WENDAT LANGUAGE RECLAMATION

- Ongoing since 2007 (SSHRC CURA grant)
- Dormant language for over 150 years
- Extensively documented by missionaries during the 17th and 18th centuries
- Reconstruction of language in archival materials repurposed for language learning and teaching
WENDAT LANGUAGE RECLAMATION

Current status of resources for reclamation in Wendake:

- Teacher training since 2008
- Restandardization of orthography and pronunciation
- Linguistic reconstruction through comparative analysis
- Development and publication of Wendat children’s books
- Wendat language lessons in primary school on reserve
- Evening language classes for teens and adults
- Language course offered for secondary school credit
- Online trilingual dictionary (Wendat-French-English)
WORKING METHODOLOGY FOR DORMANT LANGUAGE RECLAMATION
OVERVIEW

• Lack of living speakers drastically limits the options for relearning a language

• Need to repurpose archival materials for language reclamation
BUILDING SUPPORT

- Community partners and collaborations
  - local organizations or groups involved in cultural revitalization
  - wider community population (hosting gatherings to discuss reclamation issues)

- Institutional partners
  - university that resides on traditional lands of language community
  - local educational or cultural institutions

- Academic collaborations
  - (other) researchers working on same or related languages
  - academic departments
ESTABLISHING GOALS

- Evaluating feedback from community gatherings and goals of partner organizations and institutions
- Make a plan for both long-term and short-term goals
- Be realistic about what is possible, achievable in the short-term or even over one’s lifetime
ESTABLISHING GOALS

- What are the long-term goals of the language reclamation process?
  - use language as a means to enhance cultural knowledge and revive traditional life-ways
  - use language in ceremony and other traditional practices
    - use basic vocabulary, expressions and greetings
  - use language in everyday life
  - develop a new generation of speakers
ESTABLISHING GOALS

• Within a single community, multitude of both long-term and short-term goals

• Having a clear idea of goals will help to refine and focus:
  • archival research
  • creation of pedagogical materials
  • designing and teaching language courses
CONDUCTING ARCHIVAL RESEARCH

• Prioritize the materials that you need to attain your reclamation goals
• Obtain high resolution images or PDFs of materials
  • digitizing materials on your own
  • receive previously digitized materials
• Visit archives (if possible)
  • scope and content often different from what you expect from catalog
  • misidentified or poorly catalogued materials
ASSESSING ARCHIVAL MATERIALS

• Identifying strengths, weaknesses and gaps in the data

• Discovering more about:
  • why was the material created?
  • how was it created?
  • what types of relationships did the researcher have with the language community?
ASSESSING ARCHIVAL MATERIALS

• Why were the materials created?
  • Concerns for preservation
    • creating a lasting record of language use
  • Religious reasons
    • including evangelization of the target community
  • Cultural reasons
    • documenting cultural practices requires documenting certain aspects of the language
  • Practical reasons
    • documentation used for learning the language and facilitating communication
• And many others...
Identifying the primary motivation(s) for creating this documentation is useful.

It can help us understand:

- the intended scope of the materials
- the intended audience for the materials
- how the individuals collected the data
ASSESSING ARCHIVAL MATERIALS

• How were the materials created?
  • Working with one or more speakers (native, L2, etc.)
  • Working with other primary sources and adding data
  • Possibility of multiple layers of transcription
    • retranscription of original source material with or without modifications or access to originals
ASSESSING ARCHIVAL MATERIALS

• How were the materials created?
  • through elicitation?
    • typically misses the uniqueness and special qualities of the language
    • prosody of elicited words is usually very different from that found in spontaneous speech
ASSESSING ARCHIVAL MATERIALS

• How were the materials created?
  • through documenting natural speech?
    • certain aspects may only be characteristic of fast (allegro) speech
    • if there are multiple speakers → relationships and situations matter!
    • speech may only be appropriate or characteristic of certain relationships or situations
    • gender of speakers may matter (for grammar or word choice)
    • certain aspects may be genre-specific
ASSESSING ARCHIVAL MATERIALS

• How were the materials created?
  • only written transcription (pre-tech), no audio?
    • speaker may need to slow down rate of speech to allow individual to transcribe
    • depending upon the linguistic training of the transcriber, certain sounds may not be accurately represented or not transcribed at all
    • assuming that all languages change over time, without audio recordings, this snapshot of the language is hard or impossible to verify
    • may not have examples of spontaneous speech
    • certain genres of speech may be missing
    • could be a product of multiple transcribers over a long period of time (e.g. missionary documents)
Knowing more about the historical context, workflow of the researcher can make accessing the data easier and more fruitful.
Archival materials are often accessed through scans or images (formats and resolutions vary, PDF, JPG, JPEG, PNG, TIFF, etc.)

Making a database (or manipulable docs) means someone needs to transform images and scans into text.

Retranscribing materials can be long and monotonous, but in many cases a necessary step in order to work with the materials.
BUILDING A DATABASE

• Choose a database based on how you want to use the materials

• Do you want to?
  • Do a linguistic analysis of the data
  • Create language learning materials
  • Develop a dictionary
  • Write a grammar
  • Create an edited version of the materials for linguistic and cultural reasons
BUILDING A DATABASE

- Choose a database based on how you want to use the materials
- What functionalities do you want?
  - Search through the materials for certain words, meanings, etc.
  - Edit the data found in these materials
  - Sort the data according to different parameters
  - Change the orthography of the materials to current community standards
  - Interlinearize texts
  - Link audio to the written materials
  - Add notes and cultural information
  - Tag parts of speech in a corpus
  - Do comparative or historical research
  - And others...
BUILDING A DATABASE

• No current software is built for doing linguistic analysis based on archival materials

• FLEEx may be the best option right now

• Can do workarounds in FLEEx
  • using subsenses as entries from different manuscripts
  • link to digital images of manuscript pages
RECONSTRUCTING FORMS

- Archival materials vary in terms of how well the transcriber was able to capture all of the sounds in the language.

- We can sometimes use comparative information from related languages to:
  - check whether or not the transcription is accurate (esp. with respect to phonology)
  - repair or correct the transcriptions where sounds (phonemes) are missing

- This is a particular kind of language reconstruction.
ADAPTING MATERIALS TO LANGUAGE TEACHING

• Need to create language materials for:
  • Targeted language training for future teachers
  • General community-level language teaching
  • Local and non-local educational and cultural institutions (museums, cultural organizations, etc.)

• Do the best with what you have
TRAINING LANGUAGE TEACHERS

• Use (reconstructed) language to teach community members about:
  • basic grammar (eventually, more advanced)
  • vocabulary, phrases, etc.
  • second language teaching methods
CREATING PEDAGOGICAL MATERIALS

- Based on community needs, brainstorm ways to create resources for language learning:
  - worksheets for language classes
  - games and activities for language practice
  - dictionary? (online or text)
  - pedagogical grammar?
  - an app or online courses?
EVALUATING PROGRESS AND NEEDS

• What have been the outcomes of this project?
• How have things evolved?
• Present needs may not match your needs at the beginning of the project
• Hold gatherings, make surveys or create other ways for people to share their feedback and comments
LOOK BACK

• Every so often, look back to evaluate how far you and your community have come in the reclamation process:
  • a few months
  • a few years
  • a few decades

• Can help to refocus and re-energize yourself and others
TAKE CARE OF YOUR WELLBEING

- Reclamation process is an emotional process
- Even using archival materials can trigger historical trauma
- Take breaks to ‘renew’ yourself
SUMMARY OF WORKING METHODOLOGY

1. Building support
2. Establishing goals
3. Conducting archival research
4. Assessing archival materials
5. Transcribing materials
6. Reconstructing forms
7. Adapting materials to language teaching
8. Training language teachers
9. Creating pedagogical materials
10. Evaluating progress and needs
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Look back to see your progress!
Take care of your wellbeing!
CONCLUSIONS

• Further (collaborative) research needed on language reclamation methods

• Any and all methods should be adaptable for specific context and needs of heritage language community

• Ultimately, community members should be guiding and shaping the reclamation process
TIAWENHK
(THANK YOU)
REFERENCES


