

Southern Ute Grassroots Language Revitalization

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Southern Ute is a severely endangered Uto-Aztecan language spoken in southwestern Colorado by forty speakers out of a tribe of around 1,400. In 2011, a small group of adult tribal members with a strong desire to learn Ute as a second language began a collaborative, community-based, grassroots language revitalization and repatriation project on the Southern Ute reservation. This case study provides insight into language endangerment and revitalization, language ideologies, linguistic identity, revitalization pedagogy, and language as power.

During this project the group encountered challenges typical of endangered language revitalization such as lack of teaching material, the contradictory role of writing in gaining fluency in an endangered language, the transition of a speaker to a teacher, and differing views of effective language learning methods. A total of eighty-nine community members ranging in age from two to eighty-seven years participated in this project. The diversity of students created a pedagogical situation in which the range of objectives, learning styles, and interest levels required adaptation and flexibility. We discuss possible solutions to these challenges. We also provide insight into the tenacity of heritage language learners who continue to fight for linguistic self-determination and justice, even when faced with opposition from their tribal government and community.

1. INTRODUCTION. The Southern Ute Tribe, located in southwestern Colorado, is considered a leader in Native America. This impeccable reputation came from the innovative and proactive ways the tribal leaders planned for the future generations of the tribe. The Southern Ute Tribe went from hunter-gatherers to earning an AAA Finch rating (Wilkinson 2005), which is the highest credit rating possible for global finance entities. There are forty fluent speakers of Southern Ute out of a tribal membership of approximately 1,400 members (Oberly 2008). The Southern Ute Language is clearly a severely endangered language, yet before fall 2011 no adult Southern Ute language classes were offered on the Southern Ute reservation. Since 2000 Ute language instruction has been provided for 130 children, aged six weeks through sixth grade, attending the 100 percent tribally funded private Southern Ute Indian Montessori Academy (Olguin, pers. comm.). This leaves children attending public school or past the sixth grade and all other tribal members with no Ute language instruction. With so few fluent Ute speakers, there was a great need for Southern Ute language instruction and instructional materials. In 2011 the revitalization team, a small group of Southern Ute tribal members, decided to fill the need for Southern Ute language instruction and gain linguistic sovereignty. Our efforts demonstrated a model of collaborative grassroots activism that provides an excellent case study of self-determination, decolonization, and linguistic justice on the Southern Ute reservation.



FIGURE 1. Southern Ute Language class with Lillian Seibel (3rd in the 1st row), Arlene Millich (4th in the 1st row), Mary Cloud (6th in the 1st row), Lorelei Cloud (3rd in the 2nd row), Dedra White (5th in the 2nd row), Stacey Oberly (6th in the 2nd row), Thomas Givon (1st in the 3rd row), Nathan Strong Elk (3rd in the 3rd row) (Stryker 2011).

Increasingly, endangered-language communities are fighting for self-determination, indigenization, and linguistic justice. Indigenous community-member activism for linguistic sovereignty can be seen in the growth of community-based language revitalization efforts by the Maori (King 2001), Hawaiian (Warner 2001), Blackfeet (Kipp 2009), Miami (Baldwin et al. 2013), Wampanoag (little doe baird 2013), and Arapahoe (Greymorning 1999). This case study adds to the growing research on language rights and self-determination by and for a sovereign nation.

Two adult Southern Ute Tribal members, Dedra White and Nathan Strong Elk (shown in Figure 1), had a deep desire to learn the Ute language (pers. comm.). This desire was the genesis for this language revitalization effort. White (pers. comm.) had been immersed in the Arapahoe language via her husband and his family during their ceremonies. This immersive environment enabled White to understand Arapahoe. Feeling a profound sadness about not acquiring her own Ute language, White was determined to revive the Ute language in order “to create a community of speakers who could talk, text, and email each other” (pers. comm.). White believed “the Ute language is so vibrant, descriptive, and humorous that it must be revitalized because the Creator blessed the Ute people with our sacred language” (pers. comm.).

The Southern Ute language is a member of the southern Numic branch of the large Uto-Aztecan family (Givón 2011). Previous linguistic research on Southern Ute includes three dictionaries (Goss 1961, Givón 1979, Charney 1996); two reference grammars (Givón 1980, 2011); two dissertations (Goss 1972, Oberly 2008); and two collections of traditional narratives (Givón 1985, 2013). These linguistic resources were written for an academic audience and not for community members. Previous pedagogical material includes *Conversational and Everyday Ute Booklet and CDs* (Oberly & McKinley 1995), *Ute Lessons* (Charney 1997), *Children’s Ute language curricula* (Oberly & McKinley 1995, 2002, 2003, 2008), and a *Ute children’s songs CD* (Oberly, McKinley, Cloud & Bettini 2000). In social

and economic interactions with other community members, English is the dominant language. English is used in educational, business, and social settings. As a result, no Southern Ute children learn Ute as a first language. The tribal community and government were painfully aware of the danger the Ute language was in.

The present Southern Ute tribal government consists of a seven-member Tribal Council, an executive officer, department directors, and various committees. According to tribal policies and procedures, the team's request to start the Ute language class had to be approved by the Cultural Preservation Department's director. Approval was then required from the Southern Ute Language and Culture Committee, a seven-member committee charged with preserving and teaching the Ute language and culture and serving as language and cultural resources for the tribe. Finally, the Tribal Council had to approve the class. This chain of command ensured that all tribal personnel affected by the request were informed and in agreement. This administrative structure works well if all involved agree; but sometimes not all parties are able to reach a compromise. As demonstrated below, this structure was an obstacle for the team due to the differences in language ideology, issues of language as power, and racism.

White and Strong Elk decided to create a foundational class based on Givón's resources and on immersion lessons taught by fluent Ute speakers (White, pers. comm.). They believed that learning to read and write Ute by using Givón's *Ute Reference Grammar* (2013), *Dictionary* (1980), and writing system, which is the official tribal writing system, would enhance students' ability to gain fluency (White, pers. comm.). They asked Givón to teach the class. Givón agreed to voluntarily teach the Ute language class if the tribe paid a fluent speaker to assist him because he wanted the students to hear Ute spoken correctly and fluently. In 2011, White and Strong Elk met with Oberly, then the director of the Cultural Preservation Department, to discuss the class and submit a proposal for the class. The proposal was then submitted to the chairman of the Ute Language and Culture Committee, which would have to approve the class. They wanted the project to be housed within the tribe in order to establish its headquarters, a secure repository, and distribution center for the resources they would develop. They also wanted access to the tribal infrastructure, staff, and funds.

According to 1986 Tribal Resolution 86-23, "the Tribal Council recognizes the need for the Tribe to preserve its culture and its language, and further recognizes that its tribal heritage is a unique and valuable asset." Yet after several meetings with the Tribal Council and the Ute Language and Culture Committee, the revitalization project did not receive official approval. When asked why it was not approved, the Tribal administration did not reply. One possible reason for the reluctance might have been because one instructor was non-Ute. Another possible reason might have been because the class was open to the entire community, not just the tribal membership. This contrast between stated ideology and actual political support (Dauenhauer & Dauenhauer 1998) caused strife and dysfunction in the community. Tribal language efforts often experience several obstacles, some of which come from within the tribal community (Baldwin 2003).

Because the team assumed the Ute Language and Cultural Committee and Tribal Council would grant approval during its first meeting with them, which was months before the first class, we proceeded to advertise the Ute language class. Although official approval had still not been granted after months of meetings, the first class was held on August 13, 2011, to show our commitment to, and solidarity with, the language, and to establish our credibility in the community.

Since the Ute language class did not have official tribal approval, the project could not receive tribal funds to pay the tribal instructor. White and Strong Elk paid the fluent Ute instructor out of their own funds. Just before the first Ute class, the vice-chairperson of the Ute Language and Culture Committee, which was charged with supporting the tribal membership in learning Ute language and culture, approached White and demanded that the class be cancelled because the Committee and Tribal Council had not approved it. White stated that she had the right to pay an elder to teach her and as a tribal member she had the right to use the classroom space. She invited the vice-chairperson to stay, but stated that the Ute language class would not be cancelled. This incident is an example of how language ideology conflicts and language as power played out during the project.

When the team decided to continue the language project even without official approval, it caused ripples throughout the community. The number of community members attending our Ute class ranged from eight to forty-six. Class enrollment was highest—forty-six—during the week that the revitalization team met with the Ute Language and Culture Committee.

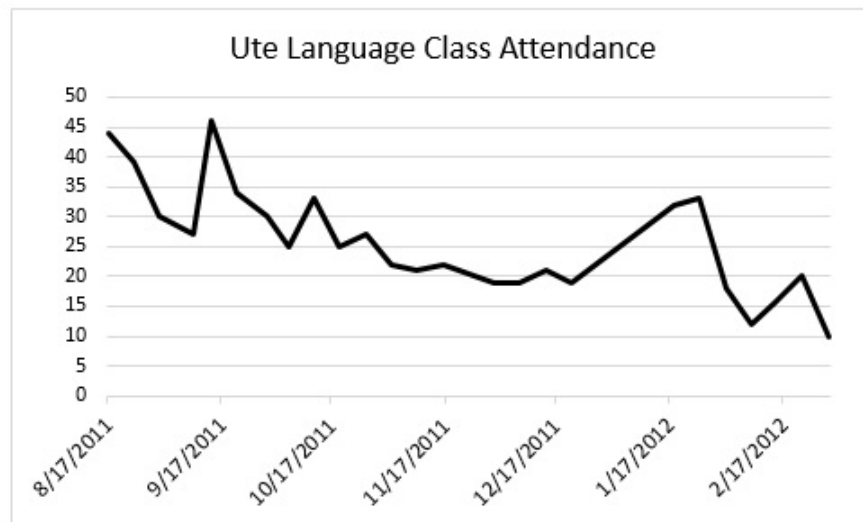


FIGURE 2. Ute Language Class Attendance for August 17, 2011–February 29, 2012

The tribal members showed their solidarity by attending the “outlaw” class. They did not understand why the tribal administration would deny them the opportunity to learn the Ute language.

Following much rallying by the team and tribal supporters, the Ute Language and Culture Committee approved the class after a very heated debate. During this meeting the behavior of some of the Ute Language and Culture Committee members was very unprofessional including verbal abuse and personal attacks on the tribal members, leading to the official disbandment of the committee in 2012. The community members had these strong emotional reactions because of the central role of the language to their tribal identity.

In October 2011, one Tribal Council member suggested that the next step was to get the writing system taught in the class approved. The Southern Ute Tribal Council officially approved the writing system in November. It was our understanding that once the team had gained official approval for the writing system the class was free to proceed. After the

writing system was officially approved, enrollment in the Ute language class decreased. It appeared that the tribal membership who had attended the “outlaw” class felt their voices had been heard.

To summarize, this project was began by two adult tribal members with a strong desire to learn Southern Ute. They secured the volunteer help of the leading expert on Ute language, paid a Ute language instructor, and organized a Ute language class that was free to the public. The team experienced many obstacles and has been working with the tribal organization to ensure that all language materials are repatriated to the tribal community.

2. SOUTHERN UTE TRIBE. Before the acquisition of horses, small Ute family bands moved in seasonal migrations to hunt, fish, gather and process seeds, roots, tubers, berries, thistles, and cactus blossoms (Osborn 1998). The Ute bands traveled on foot in Colorado, Utah, Arizona, New Mexico, Wyoming, and Oklahoma before European contact (Jefferson et al. 1972). A few Ute bands planted corn at the time of contact (Callaway, Janetski, & Stewart 1986).

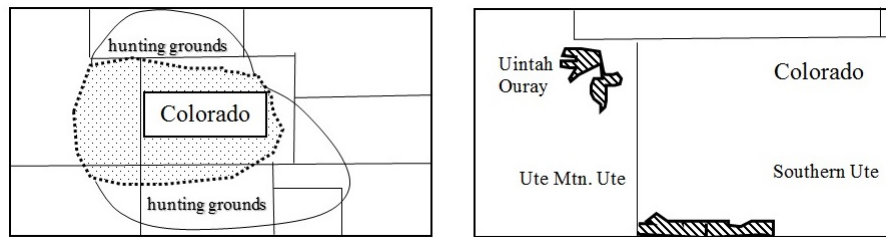


FIGURE 3. Southern Ute Traditional Territory (left) and current Ute Reservations (right) (Jefferson et. al 1972: ix).

Since a large territory was needed for survival, the size of the Ute family bands was limited. All members of the family were important for its survival. “The [Ute] family [band] constituted the primary economic and political structures” (Osborn 1998: 22). This is an important distinction between Ute society and that of mainstream America. The central role of the family is important, since Southern Ute tribal members are fiercely loyal to their families.

According to Southern Ute spiritual and cultural traditions, Ute girls were born with all the power or spiritual strength they needed to keep themselves, their family, and their tribe healthy. “From traditional Ute culture...women’s primary roles as producers, wives, and mothers gave them political, economic, and social equality with men” (Osborn 2008: 113). Women were equal members of their families and bands. Ute women “participated in councils...and provided leadership and power in spiritual matters” (Osborn 2008: 23). Aside from Dr. Givón, the Ute language linguist and instructor, the revitalization team consisted of Ute women.

When the three separate Ute reservations were established, the Mouache and Capote bands begin residing on the Southern Ute reservation in Colorado; the Weeminuche band on the Ute Mountain Ute reservation, also in Colorado; and the Tabeguache, Grand River, Yampa, and Uintah bands on the Uintah-Ouray reservation in Utah (Jefferson et al. 1972). Current Ute speakers can identify which band a speaker is from by their pronunciation or dialect (McKinley 2008). Charney (1996: x) claims “different dialects [resulted] from a time when the Utes were spread widely over a vast territory”. These dialects are a

challenge for language revitalization and documentation since all dialect speakers believe their pronunciation is correct and needs to be revitalized and documented.

The Southern Ute tribe is the largest employer in La Plata County, which gives it considerable economic power and political influence (Southern Ute Tribal Website 2015). The tribe operates the Sky Ute Motel and Casino, Red Willow Gas Production Company, Tierra Custom Homes, Frontier Field Services, Growth Fund Private Equity Group, and the Southern Ute Community Action Program as well as several tribal departments (Southern Ute Tribal Website 2015). The Southern Ute Tribe is a leader in Native America with its innovative economic planning which enables it to better serve its membership and local community.

3. REVITALIZATION TEAM. The revitalization team consisted of a tribal member coordinator and three co-teachers: a fluent Ute speaker, a volunteer non-Ute linguist with over fifty years of experience studying Ute, and a Ute linguist with twenty years of experience teaching the Ute language. The team's mission was "to document and revitalize Ute by offering classes and language resources that would enable interested community members to speak, read, and write Ute" (Millich, pers. comm.). Including community members helped "build a strong foundation for a supportive and vibrant Ute-speaking community" (White, pers. comm.). The Southern Ute Revitalization team's motto is shown below in (1).

- (1) Southern Ute Revitalization Team's Motto
 tavunikai' nuúwaighavaro
 tavuni-kai' nuú-waigha-varo
 wake.up-PL Ute-speak.PL-FUT
 'Wake up, let's speak Ute'

This motto was chosen because we feel that the community, like many indigenous communities around the world who have suffered the disempowerment of colonialism for far too long, needs to wake up from apathy and fight for linguistic sovereignty (Millich, pers. comm.).

The team felt it was their duty to share and teach what they have learned.

3.1 PROJECT COORDINATOR. Dedra White, was the volunteer coordinator of this language revitalization project. For years, White attempted to learn Ute from existing Ute language resources. White's goals were "to speak fluently in Ute with all the humor that fluent speakers use, and to pray in Southern Ute" (pers. comm.).

White has an M.A. in counseling psychology and served as the division head of Tribal Social Services for almost nine years (White, pers. comm.). Her administrative experience and education well equipped her to see through the political drama and work for what is best for the tribe as a whole. The project coordinator advertised the class, provided snacks, coordinated class times, reserved classroom space, communicated with the revitalization team members and the tribal administration, distributed class materials, recorded the class, the study group and fluent speakers in the sound booth, maintained attendance logs, and revised project material.

3.2 TRIBAL INSTRUCTORS. The fluent instructors were able to make the transition into teaching smoothly because of their years of experience working for the tribe and being actively involved in cultural activities. They were supported with material development

and interactive learning activities by the entire team. Alden Naranjo is an elder fluent Ute speaker who taught part of the language course in 2011. Naranjo taught orally using visual aids in a hands-on, activity-based format.

Naranjo agreed to be a Ute instructor because he felt “as a Ute elder, he had the responsibility to maintain the Ute language, culture, and history of the tribe” (pers. comm.). Since his elders had taught him, he was committed to doing the same. He was concerned that “as a tribe we needed to take action soon because of the small number of fluent speakers” (Naranjo, pers. comm.). His goal as a Ute instructor was “to ensure that his students had the ability to speak, read, and write the Ute language as well as understand the history and culture of the tribe.”

Mary Cloud was another elder fluent Ute instructor. She studied language documentation, immersion, and grant writing at the American Indian Language Development Institute. She was trained in the Accelerated Second Language Acquisition Approach (ASLA) with Dr. Greymorning. ASLA was developed to teach endangered languages using oral immersion techniques with pictures (Greymorning 2008). She earned an AA degree in Arts. M. Cloud taught Ute at the Southern Ute Indian Montessori Academy in 2003 and her work as an administrative assistant to the executive officer of the Southern Ute Tribe for ten years which provided her with considerable understanding of the inner workings of the tribal administration.

M. Cloud grew up speaking Ute and “has a deep desire for the language to thrive and be documented for future generations” (M. Cloud, pers. comm.). Because of her unfailing commitment to the language, she has become a dedicated leader and role model.

3.3 LINGUISTS. Thomas Givón is a professor emeritus of linguistics and cognitive science at the University of Oregon. In the 1970s and 1980s, Givón worked with the Ute Language Committee to write the *Ute Dictionary* (1979), the *Ute Reference Grammar* (1980), and the first collection of *Ute Narratives* (1985) while he directed the Southern Ute Language Program (Givón, pers. comm.). Givón understood that the Southern Ute speakers, most of whom have passed on, truly loved and treasured the Ute language. He felt the elders had gifted him with something precious and sacred when they shared their language.

Stacey Oberly, Southern Ute, is an assistant linguistics professor at the University of Arizona. While growing up, Oberly heard Ute spoken but did not learn it as a first language. In 1988 Oberly began learning Ute. Oberly taught Ute in the Ignacio Public schools and at the Southern Ute Indian Montessori Academy. Oberly is trained in the Accelerated Second Language Acquisition Approach (ASLA). Using ASLA, Oberly and McKinley, Director of Ute Curriculum and Design at SUIMA, developed and taught several years of Ute language pedagogical materials. Oberly trains endangered language community members in linguistics, language revitalization, and documentation at the American Indian Language Development Institute at the University of Arizona.

Learning and teaching Ute have been central to both Oberly’s professional and personal lives. When White and Strong Elk suggested the Ute language course, Oberly was enthusiastically supportive and ready to be part of the revitalization team. In 2012 Oberly left her director position with the Southern Ute Tribe to take a research fellowship from the National Science Foundation’s Documenting Endangered Language program to video-document naturally occurring Ute and personal narratives with M. Cloud. Oberly has served as a volunteer instructor and consultant for the revitalization team since 2012.

3.4 TEAM MEMBERS. The rest of the team consisted of tribal members who dedicated themselves to the project's mission.

Arlene Millich, a Southern Ute elder, grew up hearing Ute but understood more than she could speak. She now understands Ute to a greater degree. As a result of our class, she is more willing to speak Ute even if it is not strictly correct. Millich (pers. comm.) joined the team as a way to support her daughter White's quest to revitalize Ute. She served as one of the project's two secretaries, she conducted research, and composed vocabulary lists and class notes. Millich has an MA in Guidance and Counseling and has 16 years of experience directing and teaching. Millich was the Director of the Southern Ute Education Department and helped hire Givon as the tribal linguist.

Lilian Seibel, a Southern Ute elder, grew up understanding the Ute spoken in her home but did not speak it. This immersive environment at an early age formed a strong foundation for learning Ute later. After three years of attending Ute language class, Seibel speaks Ute with confidence and says she understands the "structure of the language" thanks to Givón's lectures (Seibel, pers. comm.). Seibel earned a BA degree, has been involved in Ute ceremonies, and was a Tribal Council member for fifteen years (Southern Ute Tribal Website 2015). Her experience and diplomacy in politically charged situations helped move our Ute language activism forward in a respectful manner.

Lorelei Cloud is a Southern Ute tribal member and M. Cloud's niece. L. Cloud was raised by her maternal grandmother, Sunshine Cloud Smith, who was one of the Ute speakers with whom Givón worked in the 1970s and 1980s. L. Cloud heard Ute while growing up but did not speak it. Her mission is "to communicate in Ute with the elders and her children" (L. Cloud, pers. comm.). L. Cloud is responsible for audio recording, note taking, contacting instructors, and distributing class materials.

Crystal Ivey is a Southern Ute tribal member who heard Southern Ute spoken by her paternal grandmother, Mary Santistevan, who is a Ute language teacher at the preschool Head Start program. Ivey wanted to become a fluent Ute speaker because "it is important for her self-identity as well as the identity of the entire tribe" (Ivey, pers. comm.). Ivey is a Ute language guide at the Southern Ute Indian Montessori Academy for children aged three to nine. She also teaches a Ute language class for families. She has trained in the Accelerated Second Language Acquisition Approach (Greymorning 2008). Ivey earned a master's degree in bilingual curriculum and design. She is currently earning a Montessori certificate in early childhood education.

3.5 PROJECT STUDENTS. A total of ninety-eight students attended the Ute language class. The students consisted of enrolled tribal members, tribal descendants, tribal employees, and community members, as shown in figure 4.

The age of the students ranged from two to eighty-seven years. The attendance of the class ranged from eight–forty-six, with the average around ten. Some fluent Ute speakers attended class to hear and speak Ute with others. A number of fluent Ute speakers from the Ute Mountain Ute and the Northern Ute reservations attended the class.

To summarize, this project's mission was to create a supportive community of Ute learners and speakers. The project team consists of a project coordinator, two linguists, a fluent language instructor, four other team members, and the students. The project activities include offering a Ute language class, and a study group, language repatriation, language documentation, and resource development.

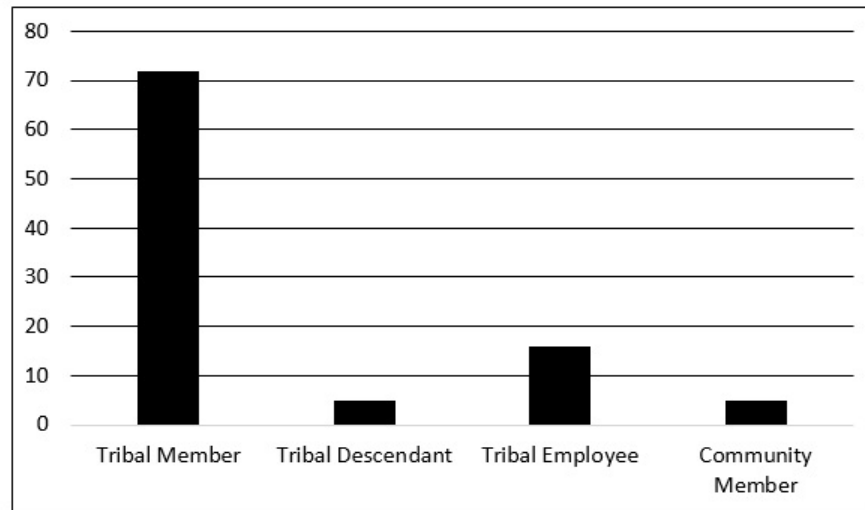


FIGURE 4. Student Composition of the Ute Language Class

4. PROJECT DESCRIPTION. This language revitalization project first began as an evening Ute language class free to the community. The language team then started a Friday Ute language study group in order to practice speaking Ute in a small, informal group. The Friday study group met during lunch at a local restaurant and was open to the public. The team began the language repatriation of the audio recordings of Ute narratives from the 1970s. After receiving the audio recordings, the team successfully lobbied the tribal administration to assist in re-mastering, digitizing, and distributing the recordings. These digitized and re-mastered recordings are free to any requesting tribal members. Currently the revitalization team is transcribing the *Conversation and Everyday Ute* booklet into the official 2012 writing system. Specific descriptions of the components of this project are discussed below.

4.1 UTE LANGUAGE CLASS. The format of the Ute language class was a fifty-minute lecture by Givón on the 2011 Ute Reference Grammar, a twenty-minute hands-on activity by Oberly, followed by a fifty-minute partial-immersion lesson by the fluent speaker using visuals based on the Accelerated Second Language Acquisition Approach (Greymorning 2008). The lectures were conducted by Givón, with fluent Ute speaker Naranjo ready to provide examples as necessary. There were several difficulties with the grammar portion of the class. First, the *Ute Reference Grammar* (Givón 2011) was written for trained linguists, not endangered-language community members. The linguistic jargon made the *Ute Reference Grammar* and lecture inaccessible to tribal members. Second, most community members had no knowledge of any Southern Ute writing system. In other words, this portion of the class was linguist focused (Leonard & Hayes 2010) because students' questions were not addressed, linguistic jargon was not defined, and difficult linguistic concepts were not simplified.

The following two parts of the class were community focused (Leonard & Hayes 2010). The twenty minutes of hands-on activities introduced the Ute writing system in a fun, interactive way, using flashcards and games. Oberly translated the linguistic jargon into

nonlinguistic terms or plain English, and provided hands-on practice on the topics discussed in Givón's linguistics lecture.

The fifty-minute partial-immersion lessons by the fluent speaker became the most anticipated part of the class for several reasons. First, the topics were generated by the class in order to meet their language needs. Second, the topics were based on Ute culture. For example, during the spring when the tribe holds its annual Bear Dance, one of the most important ceremonies, M. Cloud taught phrases commonly used during the Bear Dance. Third, the lessons focused on conversational Ute. She emphasized the need to know not just words and phrases, but the tempo and prosody of Ute as well. Additionally, M. Cloud incorporated humor, an important aspect of Ute culture, into her lessons. For example, one lesson focused on how to ask for a cigarette in Ute. This request would be met with a request to know who you had last slept with. This required an appropriate comeback, such as, "Ask your man."

4.1.1 UTE LANGUAGE CLASS MATERIAL. The class materials for the linguistic lecture consisted of the *Ute Reference Grammar* (Givón 2011) and *Ute Texts* (Givón 2013). Givón covered his entire *Ute Reference Grammar* (2011) during 2011–2012, an excerpt of which follows.

(2) Excerpt from Ute Reference Grammar

Similar labialization and palatalization are also found with the locative and irrealis suffix /-va/, as in, respectively: ma-vaa-tu, 'there' (vis.); tʉvʉ-pʉ-vaa-n, 'on earth'; 'u-vwaa-tu, 'there' (invis.); 'i-vææ-tu, 'here.' (Givón 2011: 31)

As discussed above, this grammar is filled with linguistic terms such as labialization, palatalization, locative, and irrealis. This jargon is a barrier to most Ute tribal members who want to learn their language but are not well versed in linguistics or its terminology. During 2013 the Ute language students read out loud and discuss his collection of *Ute Texts* (Givón 2013), which exposed them to various linguistics structures. This enabled them to practice their pronunciation. When they completed the *Ute Texts*, the revitalization team reviewed the *Ute Reference Grammar* in order to understand it better. Givón (pers. comm., 2014) acknowledged that using these linguistics resources with community members was a less-than-ideal situation.

For the hands-on and partial-immersion portions of the class, Oberly worked with Naranjo and M. Cloud to develop visuals (pictures of vocabulary items), word lists, worksheets, flashcards, and games. This portion ensured that the learners were actively involved in their language learning and fully engaged. An example of a worksheet on the kin terms is shown below.

The Ute kin terms taught were: me, my younger sister, my older sister, my younger brother, my older brother, my son, my daughter, my baby, my mother, my father, my maternal grandmother, my maternal grandfather, my paternal grandmother, and my paternal grandfather. These terms were used in the formal Ute introduction. The most-demanded class material was the Ute writing system flashcards. One flashcard is shown in figure 6.

There was one letter on the front of each flashcard. On the back of the card was either an example word from English or a description of how to make the sound and several Ute words with that sound in them.

Once Oberly left Colorado, M. Cloud continued oral language lessons by developing practice dialogues and short stories based on important cultural topics. This teaching style is

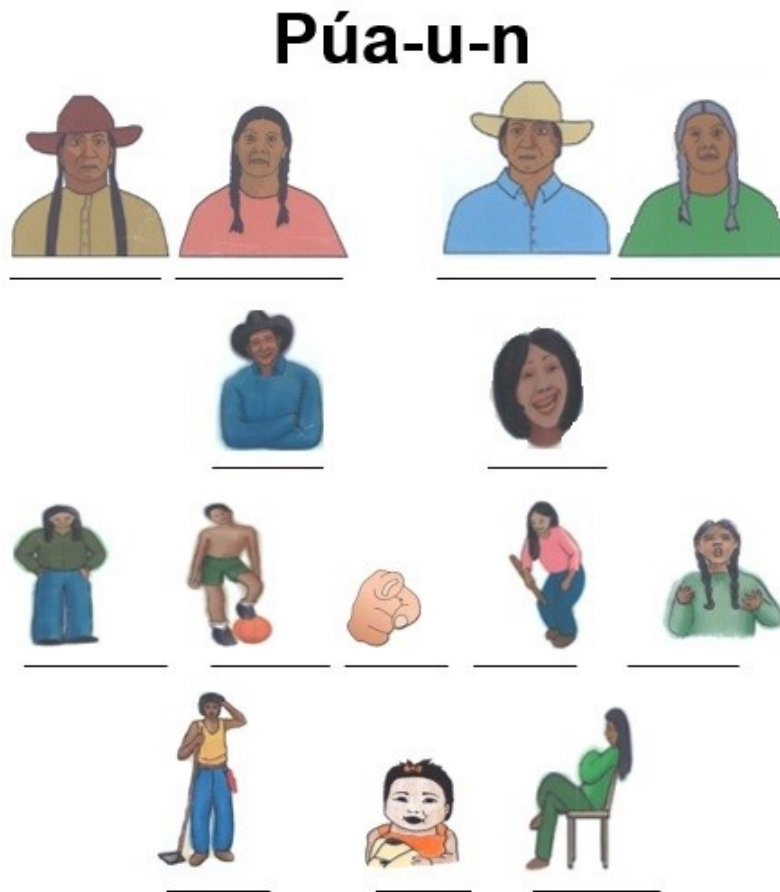


FIGURE 5. Southern Ute Kin Terms Worksheet

similar to the whole language approach with its focus on everyday useful language. With community needs in mind, Oberly made all instructional materials, including word lists, worksheets, flashcards, and games, freely available to requesting community members. Next the team organized a study group which is discussed below.

4.2 UTE STUDY GROUP. The revitalization team decided that they needed more time and practice in order to master the class topics and materials outside the evening class. They formed a study group to provide a safe, informal place to practice speaking Ute over lunch. The topics of the study group were based on the students' interests. The attendance at study group ranged between two and nine. The revitalization team recorded the study group and distributed the recordings to interested tribal members via email. Over ninety-six hours of Ute class and study group recordings were compiled by White and L. Cloud (White, pers. comm.; L. Cloud, pers. comm.).

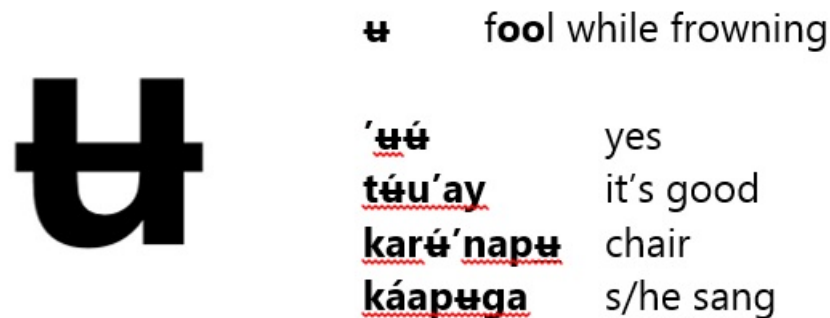


FIGURE 6. Ute Sound Flashcard

4.3 UTE LANGUAGE REPATRIATION. Smith (2012: 16) argues that Indigenous activists strive “to engage in continuing knowledge-sharing processes” as a means of empowering their own communities. Because White and Strong Elk were raised with the traditional Ute value of working toward the greater good of the tribe, they understood that any work that is worth doing must benefit not only themselves but also the entire tribal membership. This deep commitment to the greater tribal good was demonstrated when the revitalization project activities expanded from a free evening Ute language class to language repatriation and then language resource development.

Upon completing the 1985 *Ute Traditional Narratives* collection, Givón gave copies of his recordings from the 1970s of Ute speakers telling traditional narratives to the tribal administration, but these recordings were lost. In 2013 Givón shared five audiocassettes with the revitalization team. The quality of the recordings was not high, but the Ute language content was priceless. In 2013 the revitalization team lobbied the tribal administration to contract a professional audio company to remaster and digitize these recordings. The tribal administration agreed and covered the remastering and digitizing costs. These digital recordings, now on five CDs, are available at no cost to tribal members who request copies from the Southern Ute Cultural Preservation Department.

The transcriptions of the stories on these audio recordings are included in the 2013 *Ute Text* (Givón). This is an important contribution to the Ute membership since it is now possible to hear the stories while reading the narratives. Ute language learners thus gain important exposure to both written and spoken Ute. These resources include the old, longer words that are no longer used due to language shift. This is linguistic self-determination through repatriation, not only for the language revitalization team but for the entire Southern Ute community. The team documented their revitalization efforts in order to create a Ute language repository for the tribal community, which is discussed below.

4.4 UTE LANGUAGE DOCUMENTATION. The goal of documenting the Ute language class and study group was to provide multimedia Ute language information to help Ute language learners now and in the future.

During 2011, Oberly video recorded all Ute language classes using a head-mounted wireless microphone to capture high-quality audio using a video recorder. Simultaneously, Oberly used the internal microphone of a Marantz digital recorder as a back-up recorder. The quality of the Marantz recorder was not as high quality as the video audio, due to ambient noise such as chairs moving and students talking. Since 2012 classes have been video recorded with a departmental video camera and a Marantz digital recorder with a stand-alone microphone placed in front of the instructors. All the recordings were given to the tribe for safe-keeping. The goal was to create a secure Ute language repository.

To serve the greater tribal community, the revitalization team decided to make all recordings freely available to the membership but when the team requested access to the recordings the tribe would not release them. The revitalization team has been negotiating for the release of the recordings. The team first submitted a memo to the tribal administration requesting access to the recordings. Next, the team met with the tribal chairman, who authorized a tribal attorney to write a media release form to be signed by the instructors. The team has received only a few audio and video recordings. The negotiations continue because the team believes that all project recordings must be repatriated to community members.

Sadly, during 2012 all of the video and audio recordings were lost. Once the team realized that there were political and administrative obstacles in regard to gaining access to the project recordings, the team decided to audio record the Ute language class and study group with their iPhones. Audio recordings are then emailed to interested community members. The team strived for local control and sovereignty over the recordings. Next the team decided to fill the need for more Ute language resources which is discussed in the next section.

4.5 UTE LANGUAGE RESOURCE DEVELOPMENT. The revitalization team expanded their work to include developing Ute language resources to help support the revitalization efforts.

4.5.1 REVISED UTE DICTIONARY. In 2013 M. Cloud and two fluent Ute speakers, Vida Peabody and Pearl Casias, volunteered to assist Givón in updating the forthcoming Ute dictionary “out of a deep desire to document the Ute language for future generations” (Cloud, pers. comm.). Next they successfully lobbied for the distribution of the revised *Ute Dictionary* to each household head (M. Cloud, pers. comm.). This is an example of the tenacity and patient determination of Ute speakers who grew up with the Ute language as an integral part of their identity, something they want for future generations as well.

4.5.2 CONVERSATIONAL AND EVERYDAY UTE REVISIONS. In 1995 McKinley and Oberly, two Ute experienced Ute language teachers, developed the *Conversational and Everyday Ute Booklet* (1995) with two audio cassettes. The cassettes were digitized onto two CDs. The booklet was written in the 1979 official writing system and an unofficial writing system developed by Oberly. Oberly made this resource available to the tribal membership at no cost. This user-friendly language resource was very popular with the Southern Ute community. Since 2011, the revitalization team has distributed copies of the *Conversational and Everyday Ute* CDs to each person who attended the Ute language class in order to provide high-quality Ute language audio that focuses on common phrases and daily vocabulary.

The team did not distribute the *Conversational and Everyday Ute Booklet* because they did not want to cause confusion by introducing different writing systems. The revitalization team is revising the booklet into the official tribal orthography in order to provide the Ute membership with useful Ute language resources in the current official writing system.

To summarize, this project started as a language class and progressed to include a study group, language repatriation, language documentation, and resource development in order to best meet the needs of the Southern Ute membership. It speaks to the power and tenacity of a small group of committed tribal members. Next we explore the challenges we encountered as well as possible solutions.

5. CHALLENGES AND SOLUTIONS. This section presents some of the major challenges encountered by the revitalization project, together with some possible solutions.

5.1 LANGUAGE IDEOLOGY. Throughout the duration of this language revitalization and repatriation project, it became clear that there is a great need for clarification of language ideology of all people involved.

For example, in 2012 when meeting with the language revitalization team in regard to supporting their efforts, one fluent Ute tribal employee stated that she did not believe that the tribe should support our efforts because “you should have been taught Ute by your families when you were children instead of as adults.” She also felt that only enrolled, full-blooded Ute tribal members should attend the class because her grandfather told her that “the Ute language has power and the whites will steal it as they have done with everything else the Utes had.” These comments sent two very discouraging messages. First, it was too late to learn Ute so why try. Second, only full-blooded Utes should attend the class. These comments were made with two non-Ute tribal employees in attendance. These employees had spent over a year learning Ute, and were using the Ute they learned with the tribal elders they served. Their use of Ute language in their departmental duties made the elders feel comfortable and welcome. Although the revitalization team believed the Ute language should be learned by anyone interested, the two non-Ute tribal employees stopped attending the Ute class soon after this meeting; however, they remain strong supporters of the revitalization efforts.

5.2 LANGUAGE AS POWER. As the Southern Ute language moves from being spoken by the entire tribe to only spoken by a few, it is seen as power. Some fluent speakers share this precious language openly and generously such as the speakers who volunteered to update the dictionary; others hoard the language. For example, one speaker commented that “no one can learn Ute. It is too hard. It is too late. Just let it die.” These differing views of the language cause conflict in the tribal community.

5.3 TEACHING STYLES. After Oberly left the Southern Ute reservation to take an academic position at the University of Arizona, White, the project coordinator, observed, “Since you left, I realized how much we really learned using your immersion, hands-on style of teaching. Our learning was moving forward when you were here” (White, pers. comm.). Based on the Accelerated Second Language Acquisition Approach (Greymorning 2008), Oberly’s teaching focused on a limited set of vocabulary that teaches a linguistic structure in many different ways in order to provide enough repetition to allow mastery. Writing was not used during this portion of the class because the student would rely on their notes as a crutch. Oberly would not move forward until most learners had mastery of the vocabulary and concepts. Progress was assessed by presenting a picture of the vocabulary item and asking the learners to respond. If the learners responded quickly with a low rate of error, they had mastered the vocabulary and were ready to move on. By focusing on teaching linguistic

structures, the students were able to understand how the Ute language creates words, phrases, sentences, and questions. This means that when the learners learned new vocabulary they were able to immediately create original utterances with it.

As a retired professor accustomed to teaching graduate students, Givón admits that his lectures that focused on his *Ute Reference Grammar* (2011) and *Ute Texts* (2013) did not proceed in the gradual, step-by-step manner necessary for beginning students to truly understand how the Southern Ute language works (Givón, pers. comm.). These texts are largely inaccessible to community members untrained in linguistics. This lecture style of language teaching is similar to the grammar-translation approach which produced students who could read and write but struggled to speak. Recall that a project goal was to read and write in Ute because the team believed that writing would help achieve fluency. The team came to a compromise with an equal balance between the two different styles of teaching.

5.4 LINGUISTIC PURISM. During our project, we encountered three types of linguistic purism. Linguistic purism “divides people into two groups: insiders and outsiders: those who speak the (allegedly clearly defined) standard and those who do not...as a result, the hostility level rises, and open conflict may result” (Janicki 2006: 155). The first type of linguistic purism occurred when the linguist compared current fluent speakers’ speech with the speech of speakers from the 1970s. This comparison was detrimental because it did not acknowledge the effect of language shift.

The two other kinds were fluent-speaker purism and family purism. Older speakers showed linguistic purism toward less-fluent speakers, which was very discouraging. As discussed earlier, some Ute families have different dialects. Certain families have their own way of pronouncing words and, because Southern Utes are very loyal to their families, insist that any other pronunciation is “wrong.” In addition, the word order in Southern Ute can vary based on topic/focus (Givón 1980, 2011). This resulted in a wide variation of spoken Ute. These factors combined to create a volatile language revitalization situation. Families who felt their version of Southern Ute was the real Ute demonstrated family purism. To overcome these issues, we emphasized that our differences are a sign of the health of the language and that we can learn many different ways of saying the same thing. The team emphasized that languages are ever-changing and evolve naturally over time.

5.5 SPEAKER AS TEACHER. Moving from a speaker of an endangered language to a teacher is a challenge (Suina 2004). According to our fluent speaker instructors, heritage language instruction must be based on learners’ wants and needs, focused on the language used during important traditional or ceremonial events with ample opportunities for repetition and speaking, and use scaffolding in which progressively more-difficult material was taught while offering support. The use of visual aids, common exclamations, everyday props, and Total Physical Response (Asher 1969; Asher and Adamski 2003) advanced language acquisition most effectively. It is also important that instruction does not focus only on the present, since the new generation of speakers needs to understand and use all tenses. Endangered language instruction was focused on what makes the Ute language different from English. For example, Ute demonstratives vary based on number, visibility, distance, and animacy. The learners needed to master the demonstratives in order to achieve fluency. By building on what the students know instead of skipping around to different topics, the instruction provided enough master for them to create their own sentences and questions.

The fluent instructors strived to create a positive learning environment filled with natural speech by offering a good amount of praise in the language in a supportive, welcoming

manner while actively involving the students in speaking instead of sitting quietly and listening. They found that sharing a meal enhanced learning and built the trusting relationships necessary for the use humor which created a fun, supportive language-learning family.

5.6 HERITAGE LANGUAGE ADULT LEARNER. According to Baldwin (2003), adult heritage language learners prefer to talk about the language, want to have things explained, and want to see the language written while young learners prefer to use the language in games and active ways. He states “it is through using the language where learning actually takes place” (Baldwin 2003). The team found that the adult language learners who memorized the language instead of relying on their notes were better able to break down the words and sentences in order create new words and sentences. Learners who practiced frequently and focused on ways to support self-learning, such as flashcards and listening to recordings over and over, were better able to recall the information immediately which greatly improved their learning.

The most successful learners were able to build a support system of like-minded individuals such as mentors, speakers, learners, family members, and leaders which enabled them to advance their learning. They avoided critical or negative people but were also prepared to handle negative comments in a constructive way. One learner stated that if a speaker laughs at you when you speak don’t give up, instead determine why they laughed. They found that some speakers felt so happy to hear a new speaker that they laughed with joy. Other successful learners attended community events where the language was spoken in order to increase their comprehension, practice speaking, and learn from more than one speaker which ensured that a variety of ways of speaking Ute was learned. Speaker who stayed true to their vision of becoming a fluent speaker and who were patient with themselves were successful.

5.7 WORKING WITH TRIBAL ADMINISTRATION. Keown (2010) argues that building personal relationships while respecting cultural differences and tribal sovereignty establishes the trust necessary to develop an effective relationship with a tribe. In order to build these personal relationships, the team met with each administrator to update them on the project’s mission, goals and accomplishments before upcoming meetings. They also discussed the threat of language loss including the number and age of speakers, and the important role that the endangered language had to the entire tribe and its identity. The team’s policy was friendly but persistent advocacy. Community members and elders rallied the tribal administration regarding language and cultural shift which was essential to the success of the project. Some students from the project demonstrated what they have learned informally with the tribal administration, which Kipp (2009) calls “show don’t tell.”

As shown above, the team attempted to create a stable project headquarters and secure repository within the tribe only to encounter ongoing political obstacles. This problematic relationship speaks to the wisdom that effective revitalization efforts must remain outside federal, state, local and tribal programs in order to stay true to the mission of creating the next generation of speakers (Kip 2009) because grappling with language death was a big enough challenge in and of itself. The team was considering collaborating with an institution outside the tribe such as the local non-profit museum or the local college in order to avoid the obstacles created by the tribal administration which is what other revitalization efforts have done (Baldwin 2003).

5.8 WORKING WITH TRIBAL MEMBERS. Some community members, even fluent speakers, did not support the language revitalization efforts for various reasons. This illustrated the rich diversity of ideologies within one tribal community. Although they were members of the same tribe, they each had the right to choose what they would or would not do with their language. This speaks to the complex issues of language ideology, language as power, dialect differences, and family purism.

In order to overcome these issues, the team rallied community support by visiting with supportive fluent speakers, and elders in order to build and nurture a support system which provided language input, gentle correction, and encouragement. The team often gathered input on what language revitalization efforts were needed which ensured that community members' voices were heard, and also created a stronger support system for the efforts. Language revitalization was not only about language, it involved community-building, reversing years of "being psychological coerced into believing that being Indian was something to be ashamed of" (Baldwin 2003: 18) and raising the prestige of traditional values, beliefs and cultures. This was and continues to be vital to the wellness of endangered language communities.

5.9 ROLE OF WRITING. The revitalization team was conflicted regarding the role of writing in language learning. Givón focused heavily on writing; M. Cloud and Oberly did not, preferring the effectiveness of immersion. The team felt writing is essential for documentation and self-directed learning. The class notes, compiled by White & Millich, were very helpful to the learners. An example is shown in figure 7 below.

Time Words

a long time ago	wíitava'ura
again	'úupas
after a long time	wíitavachikya'ayku
all of a sudden	'úniguni
already	wíitus
always, every day, every time	túsapa

FIGURE 7. Ute class notes

The team agreed that all materials would be written in the official orthography. Since there was no Ute dictionary written in the official orthography, the class notes composed by the team were corrected by Givón because the team wanted consistent spelling and did not feel their writing skills were advanced enough to share with the community. This system led to a delay in releasing class material because only one person could proofread the material before distribution. Many community members grew impatient with this delay which damaged the project's credibility.

As times the use of writing caused issues for the project, for example whenever an instructor spelled a word a different way during class, it distressed the students. One student interpreted the use of a different spelling as a sign of utter disregard stating, "How can you

write Ute any-old-way? It disrespects all the time and hard work I have put into learning to read and write Ute.” This speaks to the passion and commitment of our students to the official writing system. Since that incident, it has been the policy to use consistent spelling.

We discovered that tribal members were also conflicted about the role of writing in learning Ute. Most fluent speakers were not interested in learning to read and write Ute, but the younger generation felt that writing and reading were essential to their language learning. For them, writing supported retention, understanding, and fluency. Adult endangered language learners prefer seeing the language written because they have a “visual connection with language” (Baldwin 2003). There were several tribal members who wanted to learn Ute by listening and speaking instead of writing. They did not attend the Ute language class after they learned that it was focused on writing.

To summarize, this section discussed conflicting language ideologies, language as power, differing perceptions of effective teaching methods, three types of linguistic purism, opposing views about the role of writing in language learning and teaching, transitioning from an endangered language speaker to teacher, adult heritage language learners, and working with tribal administration and communities. Possible solutions were also discussed.

6. CONCLUSION. In 2011 a small group of adult tribal members with a strong desire to learn Ute as a second language began a collaborative, community-based, grassroots language revitalization project on the Southern Ute reservation. The need to become fluent in Ute was based on spiritual and cultural needs. The first component of the project was a Ute language class free to the public. Revitalization efforts expanded to language documentation and repatriation in order to achieve the mission to document and revitalize Ute by offering classes and language resources that enabled interested community members to speak, read, and write Ute. Before 2011, there were no adult Ute language classes. Now there are three such classes.

During this project the team encountered challenges typical of endangered language revitalization, such as lack of teaching material, the contradictory role of writing in gaining fluency in an endangered language, transitioning from being a speaker to a teacher, and differing views of effective language-learning methods. A total of eighty-nine community members ranging in age from two to eighty-seven years participated in this project. The diversity of students created a pedagogical situation in which the range of objectives, learning styles, and interest levels required adaptation and flexibility. Possible solutions to these challenges were discussed. We also provided insight into the tenacity of heritage language learners who continue to fight for linguistic self-determination and linguistic justice, even when faced with opposition from their tribal government and community. The revitalization team had plans for their efforts. They plan to host introductory Ute classes and immersion camps, create multi-media Ute lessons, visit with fluent speakers on the two other Ute reservations, train in audio and video editing, immersion techniques, and linguistics. They plan to write grants in order to fund future efforts. This case study provided insight into language endangerment and revitalization, language ideologies, linguistic identity, revitalization pedagogy, and language as power from the community perspective.

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