

Developing documentary resources in contexts of critical endangerment



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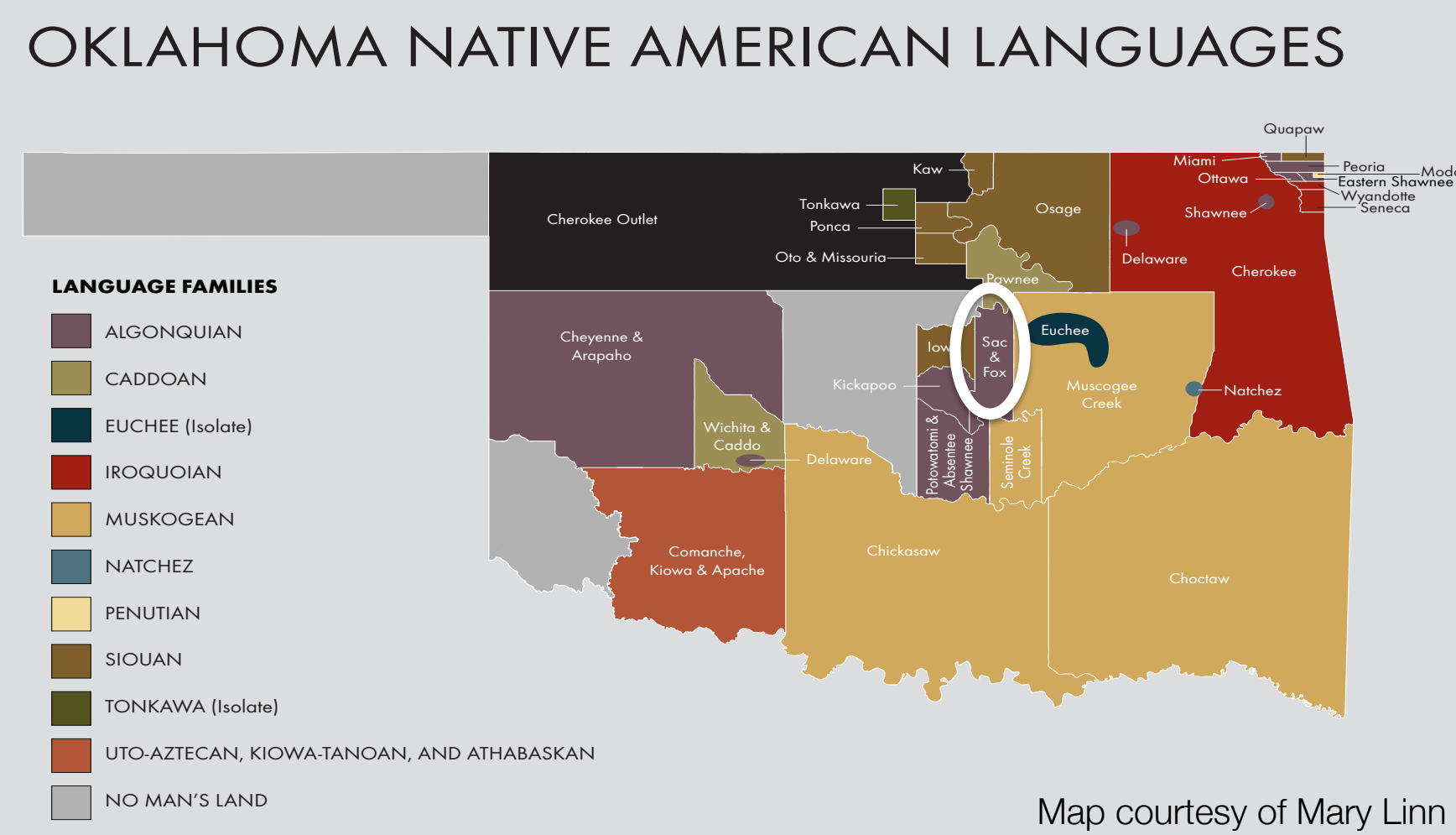
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BACKGROUND

Sauk language (*Sac and Fox; ISO 639-3: sac*)

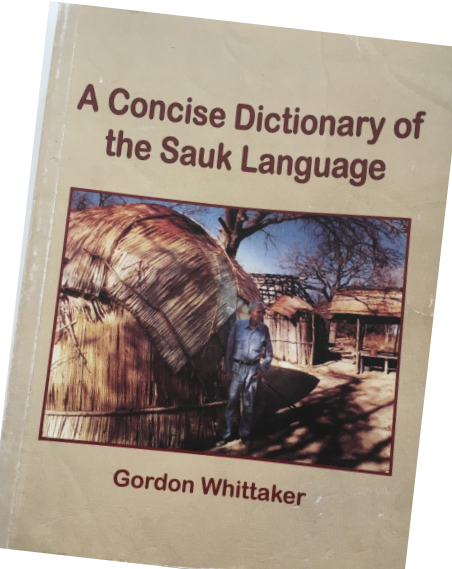
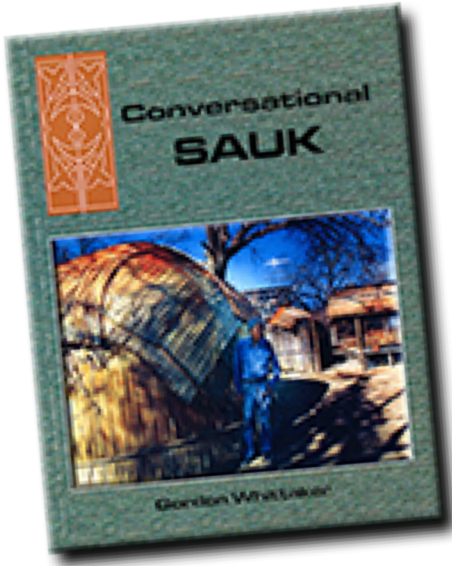
- Language of Sac and Fox Nation of Oklahoma (4,000 enrolled tribal members)
- Algonquian language, closely related to Meskwaki and Kickapoo
- Critically endangered:** <5 L1 speakers, handful of L2 learners



PREVIOUS DOCUMENTATION

Published materials

- Two academic articles (one on orthography, one on phoneme inventory)^{1, 2}
- Pocket-sized phrasebook³
- Concise dictionary (~1,400 words)⁴
- MA thesis on Sauk neologisms⁵
- Community-based materials:
 - Primer, in-house audio and pedagogical materials
- Scholarly materials on Meskwaki (Fox) and Kickapoo
- No reference or pedagogical grammar
- No published Sauk textual materials at time project began**



Unpublished materials

- Some extant documentation, but largely inaccessible:
 - Not assembled or developed
 - Stuck in older formats

DIGITIZATION, TRANSCRIPTION, AND PUBLICATION OF SAUK NARRATIVES (NSF/DEL; 2014–2019)

Motivations

- Disuse and inaccessibility:** The little extant documentation is not going to any apparent use, risks becoming completely inaccessible
- Need for exposure:** With active language program, advanced learners need more opportunities to hear and use the language (esp. male speech)

Goal: Preserve and develop historical recordings of first-language speakers of Sauk

PROJECT MATERIALS

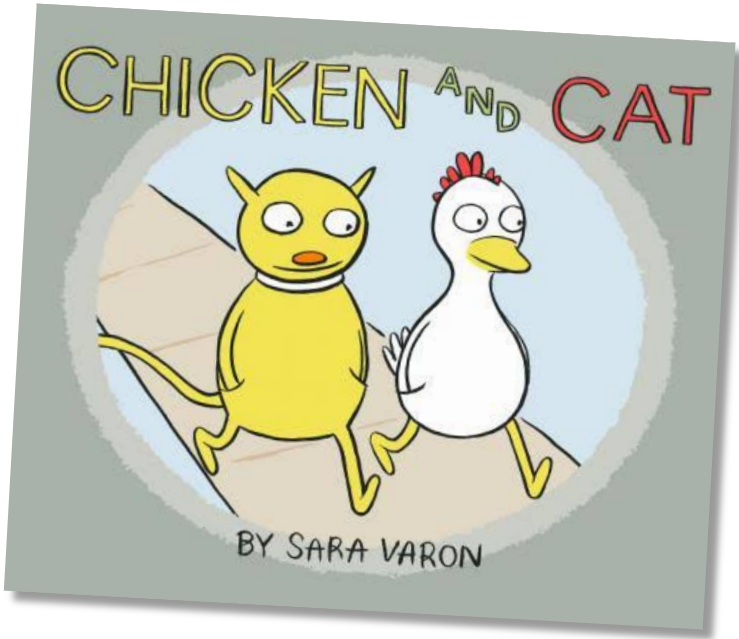
Recording type	Dates recorded	Number	Duration
Legacy recordings	1990s	10	7h03m
Contemporary recordings	2005–2013	47	13h57m
Total:		57	21h00m

Legacy recordings from documentation projects:

- Contents:** Interviews, oral histories, and narratives told by members of the last generation of individuals raised in Sauk-speaking households
- Topics:** personal narratives of growing up in traditional Sauk homes during the 1920s and 1930s, account of the Sauk migration to Oklahoma, descriptions of traditional Sauk practices and values

Contemporary recordings from community-based revitalization programs:

- Contents:** 48 Sauk-language narrations of wordless storybooks, one two-speaker conversation (53 min.)



“Transcribing recordings of the Sauk language provides the experience of listening to fluent speakers that are no longer living. The benefits of transcribing are numerous and the practice of listening to Sauk recordings multiple times and obtaining meaning and translating it in an accurate way rivals the benefits of a Master-Apprentice program.”

-Katie Thompson

WORKFLOW

- 1 Assemble and digitize all materials
- 2 Organize digitized recordings and create metadata
- 3 Produce oral and written annotations in Sauk and English using SayMore and ELAN software
- 4 Review transcripts and enter into FLEx database for analysis
- 5 Publish and disseminate texts in an accessible format
- 6 Archive project materials

DISCUSSION

Challenges and responses

- Perceived lack of materials → incorporation of “grey” literature
- Geographic distance → oral annotations, involvement of learners
- Availability of speakers → oral annotations
- Quality of legacy recordings → planned digital “cleaning” of selected recordings
- Language ability of annotators → targeted consultation with speakers, division of tasks among project team members

Themes

- Importance of “grey” literature
- Documentation can support language revitalization efforts:**



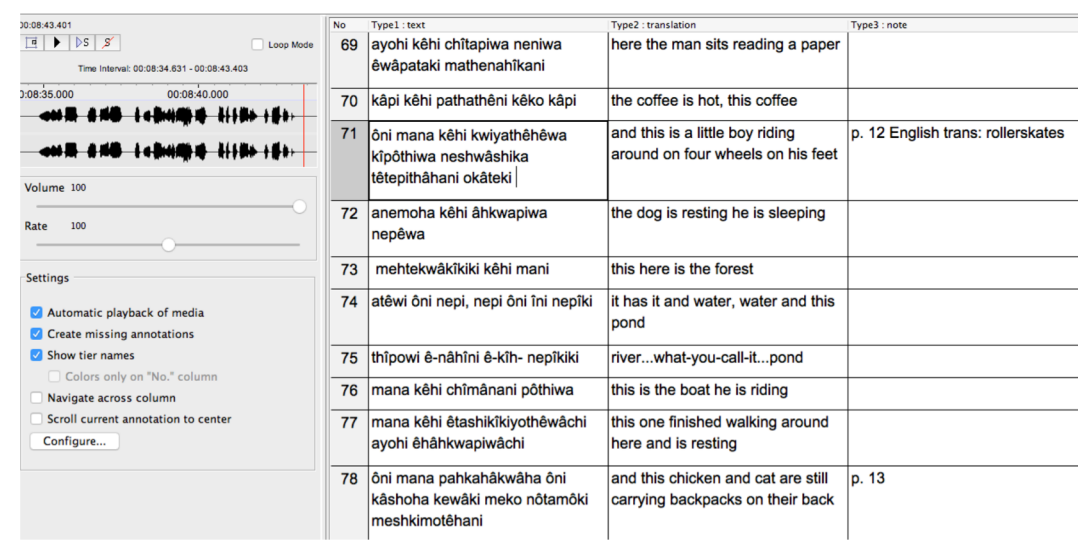
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- Provides exposure to meaningful language for learners
- Tools that are available now minimizes burden on Elders, while still reflecting their knowledge and being useful for pedagogical applications
- Ability to involve team members with differing levels of language proficiency

Even in a highly endangered context, with unknown amounts of documentation, few speakers, and minimal resources, corpus development is feasible and beneficial.

Applications and next steps

- Continue annotation, analysis, and review
- “Clickable stories” on www.talksauk.com
- Published text collection
- Potential expanded Sauk dictionary



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