

**Recording real conversations for language learning and analysis.
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Numbering below refers to slides in <Taff ICLDC 3-09.ppt>

1. Introduction:

Tlingit-

Alice Taff yóo xat duwasáakw. – I am called Alice Taff.

Germanx áyá xát. My mother was of German descent.

Welshx siteeyín ax éesh. My father's side is of Welsh descent.

New Jerseyx kuxdzitee. – I was born in New Jersey.

Aukw kwanx yéi xat yatee. – I live on Auk^w clan land.

Haida-

Xaada 'láa isis -- Good people

Aat'an hl is ahl díi guudangáay 'láagang -- I am happy for being here.

Alice hín uu díi kya'áang. – My name is Alice.

Deg Xinag (Ingalik Athabaskan)-

Alice si'ezre. – My name is Alice.

Unangam Tunuu (Aleut language)-

Asang Sasulinax^ akux^. – My name is “the one who bothers us.”

Mahalo to the people on whose land I am standing for allowing me to visit here.

I'll be talking about making videos of spontaneous conversations with time-aligned bilingual texts for documenting and revitalizing small languages.

2. I'll be speaking from the perspective of an academic. Academia is not to be confused with,

3. Macademia, nut-scholars-nuts-scholars.

4, 5, 6, 7. Scholars are careful about definitions so here is the definition of Language that I'm working from: A language is an agreement among a community of speakers that certain symbols (sounds/signs) have certain meanings.

What does it take to learn a language? What's the simple answer?

8. Sufficient exposure: Sufficient exposure to everyday conversation is crucial for language learners to become fluent; that is the simple answer to language learning. Sufficient means time and understanding in context. If learners don't have sufficient exposure from the fluent speakers, that's where documentation can come into play. Darryl Baldwin, Illinois Miami, down to 0 speakers, learned his heritage language from documentation.

How do we produce quality language documentation of spontaneous conversation? (Here “spontaneous” = unscripted.) The simple answer is,

9. Relationships: Establishing trust among all the parties in a documentation project comes before any technical hardware-software considerations. Just as a language itself is an agreement among the language community members, documentation is an agreement among the project team; conversants, camera people, transcribers, linguist, and others. Language is about relationships. We see this with historical language relationships as languages travel through geography and time.

Ideally we are able to engage the whole community in our projects, establishing partnerships among the university, school district, tribes, councils, cities, and individuals. In this slide we see attendees at the March 2009, Ketchikan, Alaska Language Summit Meeting. The school district rep. and the council member are talking; the French teacher and the Tlingit Language director are talking.

10. I'll illustrate my comments with projects in Alaska:

*Endangered Languages Documentation Programme project, “Unangam tunuu (Aleut) conversations”, 2003-2006

*National Science Foundation Documenting Endangered Languages project, “Deg Xinag and Lingít”, 2007-2010

*National Science Foundation Documenting Endangered Languages project, “Documenting Tlingit (TLI) conversations in video and time-aligned text”, 2009-2012

There are 20 or so languages indigenous to Alaska. Of these, 7 languages cross international boundaries. The number of speakers of Alaskan languages ranges from 0-10,000. Central Yup'ik is the most robust. The last birth speaker of Eyak passed on last spring.

11. Working with elder speakers: Plan time to get your project focus understood. Consider going, without equipment or notebooks or computers, to visit the elders to explain yourself. People may have their own ideas about what they want to record or expectations about what they think you want recorded. Know what researchers preceded you and what they recorded. Find this out from language community members. Previous researchers may have been botanists, historians, journalists, archaeologists... People may think that you want the same thing. Spontaneous conversation seems particularly difficult to explain. Why would anyone want to record just everyday speech? My answer is, for learners to have examples to learn from. Show potential recordees other recordings as examples. If necessary, I record first whatever people want to record and then get around to conversation. Have patience. Develop relationships of trust. Be trustworthy.

Video is more intrusive than audio so it may take more time to prepare people to have their picture taken. Maybe family members can make better video than the outsider can.

Some cultures prohibit conversation between certain kinship relations or other social categories. Learn what the prohibitions are in order to set up respectful and effective recording sessions.

12. Shooting: make sure light shines on the subjects, duh. Test the audio. Have both people in the shot unless one is on a long monologue. Shoot from the torso and up to record both hand gestures and faces (unless you have a good reason to do otherwise.)

Be doing something: Have the conversation pairs doing something while they talk. Embed the language in activity. Same strategy as for language learning. Make the language peripheral. Make sure it is a QUIET activity. In this slide Evelyn and Marsha are working with wool.

Quiz yourself about this process of making the language peripheral. In a few days see how much of this presentation you can remember from seeing the pictures, from linking the pictures to the ideas they represent.

13. What to record: Ask language community members and linguists what they want recorded. Learners will likely want certain topics or settings. For Tlingit some requests are; singing songs at a party, protocols for use of songs, humor, place names, clans, at.oo, traditional sayings, honor the slamon, preparing dryfish, spirituality, our beliefs , koo.éex, self pride, know who you are, falling in love, playing paper dolls, Nora and her exercise group, sewing and weaving, introduce your cousin, talk to babies, talk about babies, talk about weather, I lost a tooth.

Linguists may want examples of certain grammatical forms. “There are forms of grammar that never come up unless they are in dialogue,” said University of Alaska’s President’s Professor of Alaska Native Languages and Culture, Richard L. Dauenhauer. “This (unscripted dialogue) shows the most common grammatical patterns.”

How to get people to start talking: offer a suggestion for a topic; Weather is a safe topic since it’s always there and no one can be held responsible for it. I offer topics in English but this should be done in the target language to stimulate language use. So far, in 6 years, no one has taken me up on my topic suggestions. Maybe they would if a language community member were asking.

14. Get good equipment. Use smaller handy equipment when necessary. Teach videography to the camera folks. The slide shows my “prosumer” (between “professional” and “consumer”) Sony 170 which records in DVcam. I also have a smaller video setup, a consumer camcorder that uses miniDVs and has an audio input jack for an external mic,

15. Audio: Only an excellent mic will record excellent sound. With the Sony 170 I usually use 2 remote mics. Study audio techniques.

16. When I have 3 people conversing I use a table-mounted cardioid microphone which picks up sound in front and on the sides of the mic but not behind it. Plus, the mic stand baffles security people, always amusing.

17. When traveling, CARRY YOUR EQUIPMENT YOURSELF. NEVER, NEVER, NEVER, NEVER CHECK IT. Just a suggestion, of course. Fit your camera, mics, etc. all into a carry-on. Plan for extra time at the security check area.

18. Transcribing and translating: This is where big magic happens in my projects because it requires elders and learners to work together, focused on specific language tasks. Valuable language exchange and transmission takes place between speakers and learners as they transcribe and translate; they each know what the other person knows related to the particular recording they worked on, they can draw on language from that document in future conversations, and they have permanent storage of that bit of language to go back to to listen, and they know where to find the recording because THEY worked on it. In this slide Andronik Kashevarof and his daughter Beverly Kashevarof Mierzijek translate their language Unangam Tunuu (Aleut). In this process, the documentation project becomes a forum for language transmission.

The project creates NEW opportunities for language use and for weaving the generations together in language transfer.

This is GUILT FREE work. There's enough bad feeling going around about language loss that it doesn't need to be brought into the project. If people aren't ready to record, that's OK. If they don't get their translations done by a specified time, that's OK. I have to constantly remind myself of this too. We just keep paddling ahead.

19. Transcribing and translating (t/t) continued: I started working with t/ters who would look at the sound wave in PRAAT and write the text in Word. They just used PRAAT to play and replay chunks of sound and to get the time coding for the text. The next wave of t/ters entered text into PRAAT textgrids then I'd transfer the PRAAT TextGrids to ELAN for ease of text editing and for Text output. Currently, the t/ters are writing in ELAN tiers.

Regarding workflow for transcription and translation: for the languages with which I work, it's MUCH easier to get translation than transcription; all the elders are bilingual and all the learners are good English writers. Sitting with an elder with the recording in ELAN, it takes me 1 HOUR to enter a broad English phrase translation for 10 minutes of Tlingit recording.

Transcription is harder because most of the elders don't write Tlingit and neither do the vast majority of the learners. Even when the learners enter the Tlingit as best they are able, only 2 people can do the correcting and final proofing. For me, working with Ununagam tunuu (Aleut) or Deg Xinag Athabascan, sitting with an elder with the recording in ELAN, it takes me 1 hr to transcribe 1 MINUTE of those languages plus enter the broad English phrase-level translation, rough draft.

With the goal of doing their t/t work IN the target language, the pair develops a target language phrase repertoire to use during their work. Language learning takes place during recording sessions, translation/transcription sessions, thus documentation is happening not only in the electrons of the computer,

20. but also in the electro-chemical and anatomical make-up of the people doing the work.

Electro/chemical activity has to happen to form memory. Repetition of input or highly emotionally charged input produces myelinization of neurons, "fixing" the memory. Myelin speeds brain activity and use of memory. They say myelinization happens during sleep. Myelin is made of.....FAT. Good news for chocolate lovers?

Amanda Bremner of Yakutat, AK, videotaped then t/t'ed Tlingit elders describing the impacts of climate change on local large mammal distribution. "This project has laid the ground work for me to truly understand the Tlingit language," said Bremner. "I have noticed my ear is better tuned for hearing specific sounds and words. I have improved drastically in my Tlingit transcriptions. It has also given me vital linguistic experience by allowing me to learn first hand how to break down sentences while translating into English." While doing transcription/translation We are working WITH our bodies, the neural structures. The repetition required for transcription/translation "translates" to personal memory.

21. Workflow: Here's a very simplified graphic of parts of the language documentation process.

Draw a design of your workflow and who takes care of each point in the flow. Bottle necks happen; be aware of this and solve bottlenecks as they occur to keep up smooth operations in the workflow. Many of us have projects spread over a large geographic area; working from a distance can make it difficult to keep people focused on the project and productive. Maintain constant communications among the group.

22. Workflow in our projects:

- a. Capture unscripted conversations on Dvcam-formatted videorecordings
- b. computer processing in iMovie, reformatting as .mov and .wav
- c. Open .wav in PRAAT to observe good waveform and formants and t/t (show PRAAT sample 7.7DX) excellent for acoustic phonetic analysis.

OR

- d. Open .wav and .mov in ELAN to observe video as well as audio. (Can also import PRAAT TextGrid to .) ELAN is good for bilingual annotation or morpho-syntactic analyses and production of interlinear texts and other formats for text output. (show [NSF/TlingitConvers/LingitConvers1/RuthNora.eaf](#) and [NSF/TlingitConvers/LingitConvers1/RuthNoraVerbsTxt.doc](#))

- e. Export ELAN text tier to make subtitled QuickTime videos for language learning (show [inField/presentations/Steps 3/ArchieGeorge/ArchieGeorge5-4.mov](#))

OR

- f. Cuped makes HTML files from ELAN, which play video/audio and show time-aligned t/t. This makes materials available for web use or local (CD) dissemination.

- g. Linguistic analysis for publication.

23. Metadata: We track in a spreadsheet the media as it migrates from one format to another and one person to another.

(Show TlingitConversMetadata.xls) As far as possible, our headings conform to DCMI Dublin core metadata initiative and OLAC recommendations but we added Tlingit ancestry terms for the use of descendants using the databases.

Your metadata is always out of date but TRY your best to keep it up. At least make one person in the project in charge of it so that you have someone to blame. (But of course they're not Guilty.)

24. Archiving: In this slide Victor Underwood listens to Saanich recordings in the U of Washington Ethnomusicology Archives. Your recordings are invaluable and will be used in ways you cannot even begin to imagine. Researchers one generation ago had no idea that descendants of the people they recorded would be using their tapes and notes for language revitalization. Store your originals and copies in reliable, secure, but accessible archives.

When possible, make copies of your collected recordings and house them in libraries for people to use.

We're giving out disks of the raw, unedited recordings for people to use as 'ambient' sound in the home or classroom, like music playing in the background (Hinton, How to keep your language alive). In the past 2 weeks we have distributed 50 recordings of the 4 conversations in our Tlingit Conversations pilot project.

25. Software training long distance: Training dispersed team members in the many details of several software programs can be challenging. One way to do this is to have the trainer and trainee work over the telephone, both wearing ear phones, both with the same computer software open on screen. They can open, see, click, type, and discuss the same file. Some software programs allow users to log into a site where they can view each other's desktops.

26. In Alaska, for 95% of our languages, we have 10 crucial years while birth speakers are with us. In the next 10 years we need to document these elders as much as possible.

27. The work we are all doing is repairing genocide. Through these projects language healing is taking place.

An individual who has earned the highest regard in our field says, without telling other people what to do, for a language community with only a handful of speakers, "Document the shit out of it."

28. Did Haida come from Hawai'i? Her chanáa told Skil Jaadéi (pictured) that the Haida migrated from Hawai'i to Alaska.

Around here you have to make do with snorkling and surfing and lolling on the lanai, playing golf and ukuleles. I want to show you how we have real fun in Alaska (show /BoomsBites.mov, dachshund chases and attacks snow sliding off roof.)