A stylized, light blue illustration of a plant with several leaves and a cluster of small, round buds or flowers, positioned on the left side of the slide.

LANGUAGE REVITALIZATION IN NORTHERN CALIFORNIA: AWAKENING THE WAPPO LANGUAGE

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Introduction

- The Wappo people are the Indigenous inhabitants of eastern Sonoma County and western Napa County in northern California, an area that is now known as the California Wine Country.
- The current Wappo population lives principally in and around the city of Santa Rosa, California, in Sonoma County, as well as parts of the Russian River Valley and the Alexander Valley, between Clear Lake and Napa

The Wappo Homeland

Four dialect bands in the
Alexander Valley

One dialect band at Clear
Lake

data from Sawyer 1965



Introduction

- The Wappo language is a member of the Yukian language family, found only in California.
- The other members of the family are Yuki proper, Coast Yuki, and Huchnom, which comprise a “core” branch of Yukian separate from Wappo.
- The linguist Paul Radin worked with Wappo speakers in the 1920s, collecting narrative texts (1924), and writing a grammatical description (1929)
- Jesse O. Sawyer of UC Berkeley worked with Mrs. Laura Fish Somersal, one of the last fluent native speakers of Wappo, in the 1960s and 1970s
- He published an English-Wappo dictionary (1965), and several articles on Wappo vocabulary and grammar (1970s-1980s)

Introduction

- Sawyer also recorded some 40 hours of elicitation and conversation with Laura Somersal and other Wappo speakers in the late 1960s
- These recordings provide a valuable resource on the phonology of the Wappo language, as well as vocabulary not published elsewhere
- The linguists Sandra A. Thompson and Charles N. Li also worked extensively on the Wappo language, principally in the 1970s
- With Joseph Sung-Yul Park, they published a modern reference grammar of the language in 2006

Status of the Wappo Language

- Laura Fish Somersal was considered the last fluent native speaker of Wappo (e.g. in Thompson et al. 2006:xiii)
- Since her passing in 1990, the Wappo language has been generally considered to be extinct by linguists and anthropologists
- Both Wikipedia and Ethnologue list the language as extinct
- Thompson et al. (2006:xiii) state that in the late 1980s, they could find no other speakers of Wappo besides Laura Somersal
- However, participants in the Wappo Language Project have reported several passive speakers in the community in 2013, including one of the participants' grandfather
- There could be as many as 5 passive speakers in the Wappo community currently, most of them tribal elders

Okel - The Wappo Language Project

- In March 2012, I met Wappo community member Desirae Harp, a student at San Francisco State University
- She and her mother Christi Gabaldon had been using the Sawyer dictionary to learn Wappo words and phrases
- With the encouragement of California Native language activist L. Frank Manriquez, a friend of Desirae and Christi, the three of us began to study the Wappo materials
- Within a few months, we had learned the working orthography for Wappo employed by Sawyer (1965), and had begun to learn some of the basic grammar of the language as presented in Thompson et al. (2006)

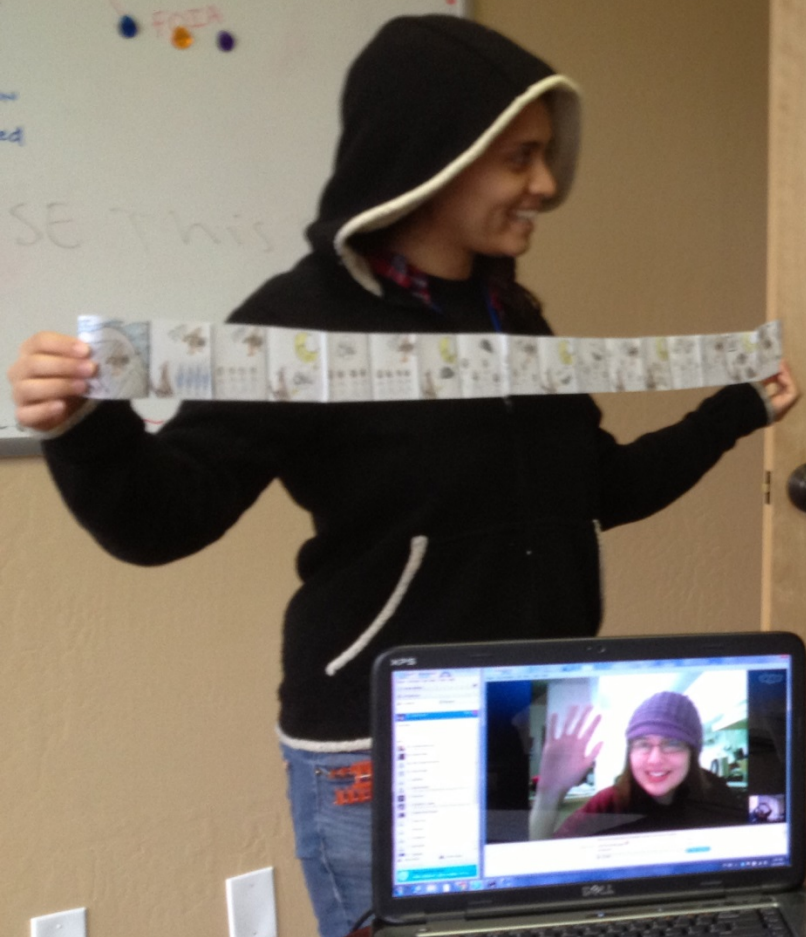
Okel – The Wappo Language Project

- In June 2012, we participated in Breath of Life, a week-long workshop that brings together California Native community members and linguists to explore UC Berkeley’s archival material and to work on language learning and other cultural activities
- We found the workshop to be a great experience, in which we connected with and shared with other Native Californians and the UC Berkeley linguistic community
- In the summer of 2012, I decided to make my dissertation the creation of a new, comprehensive reference grammar of the Wappo language, using all available published and archival material
- At the same time, Desirae Harp’s cousin, Joanne Torres, a student at UC Davis, joined the project
- We decided to name the project *Okel*, which means ‘word’, ‘voice’, or ‘language’

Okel – The Wappo Language Project

- In October 2012, the three of us presented a proposal at the Wappo Tribal Council meeting for a Wappo language class that would be open to the community
- For the proposal, Joanne Torres prepared a visual presentation of the Wappo creation story, including the Wappo names for the main figures involved, especially **huTh** – Coyote
- With the support of the Tribal chairman, we initiated the Wappo language classes in November 2012

Challenges
- Why wasn't Adnan kicked out of prison?
FOIA
SE THIS



The Wappo language class

- The language class currently meets every Saturday morning at the Tribal headquarters in Santa Rosa, CA
- Desirae, Joanne, and I are responsible for each week's lesson, drawn mainly from Sawyer's dictionary and from Thompson et al.'s reference grammar
- Along with these three participants, there are 3 to 5 other individuals currently attending the class on a regular basis
- Several other community members have expressed interest in joining the class in the future



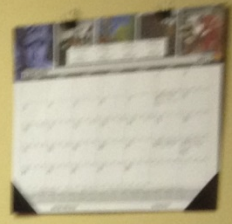
The Wappo language class

Each class session consists of:

- a prayer to the Creator asking for blessing and assistance
- a vocabulary review from the previous session
- a grammar review from the previous session
- speaking and listening practice, involving one-to-one and one-to-group questions and responses
- introduction of new vocabulary and/or new grammatical structures
- speaking and listening practice with the new items
- a game session or art activity that utilizes the new items

The Wappo language class

- Material covered so far (up to the February 16 session):
- The sounds of the Wappo language, with special focus on the ejective sounds *p'*, *t'*, *T'*, *ts'*, *ch'*, *k'*, as well as the difference between dental *t* and retracted *T*, and between plain and aspirated stops (*k* vs. *kh*), and plain and glottalized sonorants (*m* vs *m̥*)
- Basic phrases, including 'hello', 'what are you called?' 'I am called ____', 'thank you', and 'good'
- The oblique pronouns *i*, *mi*, *te* (1st, 2nd, 3rd singular), which are used as the subjects of the copula *tse*e**, e.g. *i tse*e** 'I am', and with inalienably-possessed nouns to mean 'my', e.g. *i na*a* 'my mother'
- The Wappo kinship terms, which form an elaborate system that specifies the relative age of one's siblings, as well as matrilineal and patrilineal uncles, aunts, and grandparents, and their spouses
- We have also learned the names of some animals, e.g. *tonchi** 'cat', *ts'its'a* 'bird', *k'eshu* 'deer', *t'akala* 'bat', *ch'ale* 'bug'; and some human labels, e.g. *met'e* 'woman', *k'ew* 'man'



(c) Yanket
Yanket?

The Wappo working orthography

- Radin (1929), Sawyer (1965), and Thompson et al. (2006) all used individual working orthographies in their scholarly descriptions of the Wappo language
- Sawyer and Thompson et al. used standard Americanist symbols, such as *c* for [ts], *č* for [tʃ], and *š* for [ʃ]
- For our language class, we wanted to create our own working orthography that would conform to the following three criteria:
 - 1. It could be easily typed on any computer without the need for special characters
 - 2. It would be a consistent, shallow orthography, with one symbol for each sound, and one sound assigned to each symbol
 - 3. It would be intuitively interpretable by people with an English-speaking background, to the extent possible while still conforming to the first two criteria

The Wappo working orthography

- We decided to replace the Americanist symbols used in Sawyer with the following:
- *c* was replaced with *ts*; *č* was replaced with *ch*; and *š* was replaced with *sh*
- the underdotted t – *ṭ* – was replaced with a capital *T*
- the middle dot – *V·* – used to indicate long vowels, was replaced with a colon – *V:*
- the glottalized sonorants are now indicated with an underline instead of an apostrophe – *m'* was replaced with *m*
- finally, the glottal stop *ʔ*, being an unfamiliar symbol, was replaced with the asterisk ***. The usual choice for glottal stop, an apostrophe, was felt to be too like a punctuation mark (and thus easily overlooked), and the asterisk was felt to be somewhat iconic of the 'pop' of a glottal stop

The Wappo working orthography

- One potential ambiguity in our working orthography is the sequence t-s-h, which could be parsed as ts-h, or t-sh, depending on the word; we have not found a satisfactory resolution to this yet, other than to memorize the particular value for a given word. Fortunately, the sequence t-sh is quite uncommon in the language.
- The use of capital T for the retracted stop will likely need to be changed at some point, to allow for the use of capital letters in the language; however, a suitable replacement that does not require special characters has not been forthcoming



Future Plans

- In the short-term, we plan to continue the language classes, and encourage additional enrollment from other community members
- The core group that has been attending the classes plans to increase their language skills, and has already been sharing basic vocabulary with family members and friends
- One group member has been checking our dictionary-derived vocabulary with his grandfather, a passive speaker
- The grandfather confirmed the accuracy of the materials we've been using, with the exception of the phrase *ikhálikhi* mi** - this was glossed as “how are you?” in the Sawyer dictionary, but the grandfather explained that this would be better translated as “what’s wrong with you?”
- Consequently, we have been using the dialectal variant *ikálikame* as our standard greeting, a word that was passed down to Christi Gabaldon from Wappo-speaking relatives

Future Plans

- In the medium term, we are working on teaching materials for an expanded language program
- Joanne Torres, a talented visual artist, is working on a children's book that will impart traditional stories and will be entirely in Wappo
- Desirae Harp, an accomplished singer, is working on educational songs for Wappo classes, including an alphabet song. She also created an original prayer entirely in Wappo for use as an invocation in ceremonies and public functions – this prayer was offered at the 2012 Breath of Life
- I will be creating a new reference grammar for my PhD dissertation in linguistics, synthesizing existing written materials and writing a description of Wappo phonetics and phonology based on the Sawyer recordings of Laura Somersal
- All three of us, as well as other participants, will be creating a new comprehensive bilingual English-Wappo/Wappo-English dictionary, as well as a Wappo language text book and exercise books for use in future Wappo-language classes in local schools

Future Plans

- In the long term, once a critical mass of competent speakers is created, full-immersion classes and groups are planned
- Desirae Harp, who has extensive experience working as a mentor for urban youth programs in San Francisco, would like to eventually initiate immersion youth camps
- These would consist of young community members acquiring the language in an immersion environment, while simultaneously learning about traditional cultural practices and spiritual beliefs through performing culturally-appropriate service to the Tribal community
- Desirae believes that this will be the best way to simultaneously involve youth in language acquisition, to secure the future of the Wappo language, and to catalyze cultural regeneration through youth service to the Tribal community

Wayde McCloud – *Hutúkulu*



Joseph Pina – Meyna:wíme



Desirae Harp – *Tsimi:To*



Hiyaka!

A faint, light-colored illustration of a plant with several leaves and small flowers is visible in the background on the right side of the page. The overall background has a fine, textured pattern.