

# Towards an interdisciplinary bridge between documentation and revitalization: Bringing ethnographic methods into endangered-language projects and programming

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This paper addresses the gaps between language documentation and language revitalization. It is intended for several audiences, including field linguists interested in supporting endangered language sustainability efforts and participants of all kinds in language revitalization courses, programs, and infrastructure. The authors contend that ethnographic methods have transformative potential for contemporary language revitalization practice. Using anthropological tools, linguists and/or speech community members can enrich documentary efforts, mobilize linguistic data for more effective revitalization programs, and improve assessments of language revitalization projects. Beginning with a discussion of ethnographic methods and their connection to existing linguistic practices, this paper moves on to address the impact of language revitalization planning and infrastructure on endangered language use. It then outlines key ethnographic concepts that were identified as particularly useful in two pilot ethnographic methods classes run by the authors in 2015 and 2016, each of which can be operationalized using the basic tenets of participant observation. These concepts present ways of re-evaluating understandings of “communities”; considering language ideologies, ideological clarification, and language socialization; recognizing the nature and implications of different social roles and identities of those involved in revitalization projects; and attuning to genre and intertextuality in the development of resources. The incorporation of both basic ethnographic methodologies and of conceptual frames like these can supplement a field linguist’s or a language revitalization program’s tools to help them better collaborate across differences, support and assess language programs, and understand the obstacles that may exist between them, their collaborators, and sustainable language vitality.

**1. Introduction** Over the last several decades, the academic field of language documentation has developed alongside the goal of language revitalization, such that describing and producing materials in endangered languages is often situated as a component of language planning efforts directed at increasing the knowledge or use of these languages. There remains a gap, however, between even the most well-done

documentation and the actual emergence of revitalization activities – the move from writing the language down to bringing it off the paper and into the lives of speakers/learners is not a straightforward one. A component of this challenge is the degree to which the skills of field linguists are not necessarily the same ones that are needed for revitalization, since, at the core, documentation is a linguistic challenge, while revitalization is a social and political one. For both seasoned and new field linguists and students, the process of turning documentation into revitalization requires substantial effort and consideration (Hinton & Hale 2001; Grenoble & Whaley 2006; Penfield & Tucker 2011).

More recently, the topic of language revitalization and its social implications has emerged as an important question within anthropology, and an increasing number of ethnographers have been dedicating their efforts to describing the “cultural basis and significance of language revitalization as a social activity” (Schwartz & Dobrin 2016:90). These forms of research are, in many ways, well suited to developing an understanding of the challenges and barriers to revitalization that remain unseen in more straightforward linguistic approaches, but the path to applying these insights may not be explicitly identified within anthropological work.

Ethnography can be applied in ways that improve scholarly and community understandings of a given language’s state, but it can also be used to raise questions about how the discourses and practices of revitalization themselves are established, transmitted, and reformulated in the process of interaction among the various parties engaged in language revitalization projects and programs. An increasing number of linguists, graduate students, linguistics training programs, and funding agencies have come to direct money and time towards language revitalization efforts. As such, a strong understanding of their implications and outcomes is vital, but poorly developed. Assessment mechanisms focus mainly on linguistic information (e.g., number of native speakers or levels of fluency), alongside a few sociopolitical indicators such as domains of use or degree of political recognition, but the ways in which a language’s context changes as a result of revitalization planning is complex and rarely considered.

Ethnographic methods have transformative potential for contemporary language revitalization practice. Using anthropological tools, some of which we will highlight in this paper, linguists and/or speech community members can enrich documentary efforts, mobilize linguistic data for more effective revitalization programs, and improve assessments of language revitalization projects. The examples we select here constitute ethnographic points of entry we have observed from our experiences as ethnographers and as teachers of ethnography for revitalization institutes; we consider these to be only the most basic of ideas that can be used to better understand the social dynamics of what is taking place in endangered-language communities, and attempt to offer a wide range of references to anthropological literature that can be consulted for additional insights.

Language documentation and revitalization work is a site in which power is unequally shared by language speakers and academic practitioners. Recent studies of language revitalization have generated a variety of models that “sympathetic out-

siders” can use to improve their culturally situated endangered-language work. Examples include the role that academic linguists can play in providing technical training to those community members working directly with the language (S. Rice 2011), and the call for increasing interdisciplinary involvement in all levels of language revitalization (Cope & Penfield 2011). On the whole, many models emphasize “collaboration” and “participation” as primary guidelines for community involvement, in order to bridge the gap between the technical goals of academic linguists and the practical needs of speakers (or would-be speakers) of endangered languages (K. Rice 2011; Czaykowska-Higgins 2009).

At the same time, it is perhaps ironic that much of the work on how to collaborate on language revitalization has been written by non-Indigenous scholars (including the authors of this paper). Indigenous critiques of frameworks for language work present additional, vital concerns. Perley (2012), for example, reflects on how linguistic research treating the language as a “resource” can easily move towards an extractivist, exploitative set of practices, while Leonard & Haynes (2010) emphasize how “collaboration” continues to prioritize the needs of academia while treating community goals as, at best, an add-on. Barbra Meek (2011) argues that rhetorics about endangered languages consistently present barriers and challenges; Davis (2017) builds on this point to reveal the underlying colonialist dynamics and suggest a new set of questions on which to establish a foundation for the work of language documentation and description. We contend that these concerns are central to effective language revitalization work in the 21st century, and that ethnography constitutes one of the most powerful frames for understanding the social dynamics that are relevant in endangered-language situations (Granadillo & Orcutt-Gachiri 2011). Thus far, however, these methods have been taken up only in limited ways in relation to language revitalization.<sup>1</sup> We will offer some brief case studies of institutional efforts to connect ethnographic methods to endangered language work, then outline a set of key concepts that we suggest are invaluable for developing and evaluating effective revitalization programs.

**2. Ethnography, participant observation, and linguistics training** Different individuals often come to language revitalization either from academic linguistics or from language teaching and/or advocacy within an endangered-language community. Neither of these routes habitually includes training that addresses, for example, the motivations that bring students to the classroom, that contribute to the use of the language in the community or the home, or the unspoken barriers, cultural expectations, and personal histories that influence people to adopt or reject the use of the minority language (Shulist 2016; Pharaoh Hansen 2016). Ethnographic methods are central to

<sup>1</sup>Storytelling and personal narratives from community members about the experience of language loss and revitalization are examples of tools that have been incorporated into linguistic efforts fairly extensively, as for example in Leanne Hinton’s (2013) collection *Bringing Our Languages Home*. Chew (2015) points out that these stories exemplify an “auto-ethnographic” approach, through which Indigenous scholars demonstrate the value of an “epistemology of insiderness” (156). Both the elevation of these forms of knowledge, and the increasing application of conceptual frames discussed here, create space for insights and arguments that are otherwise more difficult to find.

sociocultural and linguistic anthropology, but they are also used in a wide range of other disciplines, including sociology, human geography, and social psychology. It is, however, important not to overgeneralize about what forms of research constitute ethnography, as the term has frequently been used to refer to almost any form of qualitative investigation, including limited inclusion of interviews and/or focus groups.

At the core of ethnography is the practice of “participant observation” and the commitment to long-term, relational involvement with groups of people.<sup>2</sup> An ethnographer takes a holistic approach to analysis, is attentive to context, and is aware that detailed contextual record-keeping may only reveal its value with time. The ethics of exhaustive data collection are, however, a topic of debate within the discipline of anthropology. The scope and boundaries of a researcher’s participation may be most appropriately guided by informants. Furthermore, attentiveness does not necessitate that every comfortable, familiar interaction become a recorded ethnographic case for the fieldworker’s own academic advancement. Rather, ideally, attentive participation involves opening oneself to new understandings, and allowing those understandings to transform oneself, documentary products (be they ethnographic or linguistic), their use, and the institutions that support them.

Despite the slippery nature of the term, because documentary linguists tend to engage in field stays, to attune to different patterns of language in everyday use, and to form strong bonds with particular speakers and their families, participant observation does seem appropriate as a potential methodological tool in this case. Indeed, the frequent presence of significant cultural differences between academic researchers and their collaborators has long led linguistic scholars to advocate for ethnographic documentation techniques’ inclusion in language documentation work (Hill 2006; Franchetto 2006; Collins 1998). Undoubtedly, many linguists are already doing some form of participant observation, in that they are participating in revitalization efforts and conducting in-depth observation of the language itself. Observing a language, however, is not the equivalent of ethnographic research because it leaves open the possibility of many types of social and cultural information going unnoticed. As the primary goal remains *documentation*, the types of observations that could contribute to better understanding linguistic sustainability and *revitalization* are not necessarily being written down, though good linguists are often making note of them.

In what way, then, can a linguist become more of a *participant observer*? While language documentation work is now often directed at revitalization, it is not the case that this has to be so. The linguist must recognize where they are situated as a participant – likely, as someone doing documentation, and possibly training, which

<sup>2</sup>Participant observation has been a core component of ethnographic methods since the discipline of anthropology moved “off the verandah”. It was initially pioneered by early scholars such as Bronisław Malinowski (1922, in particular), and Franz Boas, along with their students. The tradition of a privileged anthropologist participating in and observing the culture of a colonized “other” has been thoroughly interrogated by waves of feminist, Indigenous, and postcolonial theorists, among many others. Numerous authors have actively problematized this model by turning the anthropological gaze on their own contexts, “studying up” (Nader 1972), or interrogating and replacing colonial research paradigms (e.g., Tuhiwai Smith 1999; Wilson 2009). In this paper, we emphasize the importance of incorporating a large degree of reflexivity (or awareness of self as an interpreting subject) as one of the key elements that makes participant observation an effective tool for improved connection, collaboration, and communication in an ethnographic study.

are tasks that connect in various ways to revitalization efforts underway in the community. Dobrin & Schwartz (2016:256) highlight the need for field linguists to assess the often unquestioned efficacy and appropriateness of academy-valued terms like “research”, “documentation”, and “collaboration”, and offer participant observation as a way to deeply and genuinely interrogate one’s role and responsibilities in different ethnographic contexts. They further offer a useful description of participant observation for field linguists as working “to have positive social relations with community interlocutors *across difference* by trying, in so far as is possible, to understand what good relationships look like from their consultants’ perspectives” (260). Questions that pertain to discovering the nature of those good relationships may include:

1. What are the personal and linguistic dynamics specific to the context of research – including the study topic, community makeup, duration, resources, and purpose (e.g., doctoral dissertation work, ongoing long-term work by a professor, etc.).
2. What networks and institutions are linguists and consultants embedded within?
3. What do consultants think and feel about the diversity of potential research and documentation outcomes, from pedagogical products, to the translation of media or religious texts, to contributions to the discussion of standardized orthographies?
4. With whom does a field linguist come into contact – and by extension, with whom do they not come into contact – in their work? Who is involved in language revitalization in every community. Sometimes it is primarily teachers and educators, other times a language and cultural center exists, or a branch of government takes responsibility for some of this work. Some are paid to serve in these roles, and others do them as volunteers. In some cases no one is formally involved through their place of employment or volunteer organizations, and the work of language revitalization is being done more sporadically by individuals driven by sheer passion.
5. What are the long- and short-term language goals of consultants and their networks? Such aims should be documented in any kind of project planning endeavor, and their guiding role should be visible throughout.
6. What goals and products might consultants want to establish that are not intuitively in line with the linguist’s goals as a researcher?

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While practical tools such as field notes, journals, or new media (such as blogs, photography, and film) can be used to facilitate participant observation, different methods work for different researchers, and the most important part of the concept is an iterative evaluation of roles and responsibilities in fieldwork, with an aim to understand consultant perspectives (Ahlers 2009; Ahlers & Wertheim 2009; K. Rice 2006; Wertheim 2009; Yamada 2007).

Our aim here is both to emphasize the potential role of participant observation in language revitalization research and training, and to provide conceptual tools (linguistic and ethnographic) for refining the documentation process. These tools should turn intuitions and subsurface observations, the kind that often occur in the field, into concrete ideas that can be used to support language revitalization efforts. To begin, we move to a conversation about language revitalization training institutions and the role of ethnography as a subject and as a tool for evaluation.

**3. Language revitalization infrastructure** The skills that linguists possess are, almost by definition, well suited to language documentation, and quite difficult to develop without academic training in the discipline. This has motivated the creation of community-oriented training institutes like the American Indian Language Development Institute (AILDI), the Canadian Indigenous Languages and Literacy Development Institute (CILLDI), Breath of Life, the University of Victoria's Certificate in Aboriginal Language Revitalization, and the Institute on Collaborative Language Research (CoLang). As work with threatened languages has become a more significant part of the discipline, the framework of how we do this work has also become a topic of analysis. Genetti & Siemens (2013) assert that while *language documentation* and *language revitalization* activities form two components of this process, *training* should be considered an independent, third aspect of work in this field. The former two components have received a substantial amount of critical attention, including the development of guides, analyses of best practices, and consideration of the power dynamics involved. Training and capacitation, however, has not been given the same degree of attention. Our work teaching ethnographic methods in language revitalization institutes has highlighted how training centers socialize community members into specific roles, relationships, and ways of engaging in revitalization "culture". In other words, our examination here also reflects our ethnographically rooted consideration of the institutes in which we have taught, and considers the place of ethnography in language revitalization infrastructure.

Language teachers and activists from minority language communities attend training institutes like those listed above in order to obtain specialized training in language documentation, including linguistic terminology and concepts, technological tools for documentation and analysis, and language planning strategies. Despite the technical focus of most courses, complex and messy questions about social processes, political debates, and ideological disagreements underlie students' uncertainties about how to apply these lessons in their home communities. In an attempt to productively formalize these conversations, the authors of this paper developed and ran a course on ethnographic methods in language revitalization at CILLDI in July 2015, and at CoLang in June 2016. Two distinct and complementary experiences informed the development of this class: while Shulist was an experienced field linguistic anthropologist working in Amazonian language revitalization, Rice was an anthropology graduate student and the long-time program coordinator for CILLDI, a position that shone light on the complexity of running a language revitalization program within a university setting. Our reflection on these classes (including perceptions of which

anthropological concepts our students saw as most useful), previous participation in various roles within these institutes, and our own ethnographic field experiences in endangered-language communities all inform the discussion presented here.

CILLDI traditionally recruits Indigenous language teachers and activists from across Canada, primarily Alberta, Saskatchewan, and the Yukon and Northwest Territories. Many of its students are established Indigenous language teachers seeking new qualifications to garner further support and resources in their homes and schools. A CILLDI student may acquire training in documentation, teaching, policy, and activism, and many finish their program by coming back for three or more years to earn the six-course Community Linguist Certificate (CLC) from the University of Alberta. Others participate in an education stream of professional development courses that can lead to a Master's of Education for students who already have an undergraduate degree. At CILLDI, our course on ethnographic methods was an elective attended by three primary groups of students: individuals who had completed their CLCs and were returning for further training, individuals who were attending for the first time and had not yet settled on a CILLDI course track, and undergraduate students (mostly in anthropology) taking the course as an ethnographic methods requirement. Many CILLDI students and staff return to the program each year, creating a familial atmosphere where students spread across a great geographic distance get a chance to annually reunite with friends and teachers.

CoLang (originally known as InField) began in 2008 with the goal of providing collaborative training to both community and university-based language activists, promoting best practices, and building skills in language documentation, maintenance, and revitalization. In contrast to CILLDI, which predominantly recruits professionals working in language education or activism,<sup>3</sup> CoLang participants include many graduate and undergraduate students completing university degrees, usually in linguistics. Because CoLang is hosted at a different academic institution every two years, the makeup of the student body tends to vary, especially with respect to geographically proximate Indigenous community members. While a few students may attend multiple institutes, or return as instructors in later years, CoLang students are frequently a new group with each institute, in contrast to CILLDI students, who return each summer for several years. In the next section, we suggest that recognizing the ways in which these groups of students responded to the ethnographic conceptual frames we taught can help to initiate reflexive consideration of how these programs currently function.

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<sup>3</sup>The ethnographic methods class is a notable exception in that it is also offered for standard university credit in an anthropology undergraduate program, and therefore includes both Indigenous community members seeking CILLDI training and undergraduate students working toward degrees. This class was the first in CILLDI's linguistics stream to use a hybrid credit model, and the changing makeup of the student body had a complex impact on the learning environment. While beyond the scope of this paper, the experiences suggest that valuable insight may be gained from further attention to how the structures of revitalization institutes create constraints and possibilities for teaching and learning about these topics.

**4. Reflexivity and language revitalization: Evaluating the efficacy of existing programs** The first pilot of an Ethnographic Methods for Language Revitalization class the authors ran was at CILLDI 2015, during the three-week intensive summer school. The students collaborated on a final “ethnography of CILLDI” project, where each person conducted fieldwork, developed a topic of interest (e.g., “recruitment” or “obstacles”) and then wrote a reflection about what they found. The familial, often informal atmosphere of CILLDI made this easy to implement, and it resulted in students observing the Director at work, sitting in on other classes, and examining the system in which they were participating. Several students ended up writing about how uncomfortable they felt in the University of Alberta setting, how the institutional surroundings reminded them of residential schools, and how the program continued to inadvertently leave barriers to entry for Indigenous students. They went on to make recommendations, such as developing a budget to support resident elders, having a personal orientation to the city of Edmonton for students who had not been there before, and having an open door policy at the CILLDI main office (which at the time was a small room in the linguistics department behind a hallway with a keycode). Finally, many of them reflected on their colleagues’ resilience, and the great work they achieved at CILLDI once they had acclimatized to the awkward post-secondary setting.

Most institutions of CILLDI’s kind have simple feedback mechanisms. However, a difference occurred when students were in the role of “ethnographer”, with the mandate (and authority) to think about the program holistically. The project resulted in a nuanced, thoughtful assessment that showed more depth than the usual paper survey delivered at the end of the course. Importantly, the students’ reflections pointed out the need for systemic changes, but were not the kinds of evaluation that might result in a budget increase, highlighting the paradoxical situations in which programs like CILLDI – institutions within institutions within institutions – find themselves.

CILLDI, CoLang, and other institutions of their kind form a part of the increasing language revitalization infrastructure that includes linguists, linguistics training programs of varying lengths and levels, training manuals that are in common use (e.g., Hinton & Hale 2001), language classrooms, archives, community programs, and funding agencies. This infrastructure is still in development, but its rapid expansion has created an abundance of efforts with thin assessment, so that many different grants and projects duplicate others’ labor without careful attention to the efficacy of any given language revitalization model. Having participated in many language revitalization programs in the past, the authors know that this is not due to carelessness; rather, it is often regarded as a victory to have any program or funding for language maintenance at all. Careful assessment may seem like a less important step when so much energy is directed at making sure a program can simply survive. One challenge that exists within this infrastructure is the degree to which the expected and actual outcomes of language work remain poorly defined; this means not only that assessment is challenging, but also that funders or institutions are able to step in and measure results by their own yardsticks (enrollment, revenue, positive public attention, or GPA, for example) and the survival of a program depends on its ability to



measure up to incommensurate criteria. Quantitative deliverables (such as number of speakers, students, and graduates) are requested by granting agencies and their home institutions; however, quantitative figures often tell us little about the real efficacy of each program. Student surveys can similarly be used to add or cut classes and topics, but an in-depth assessment of impact in the home communities of students has never taken place.

Prominent critiques of the “discourses of language endangerment” (Heller & Duchêne 2007) have highlighted enumeration as a pernicious feature of this discourse (Hill 2002; Moore 2006; Dobrin et al. 2007; Davis 2017), precisely because it reproduces a colonial logic that imposes boundaries on variation and erases the complexities of everyday language-in-use (Muhlhausler 2003). The view that both languages and speakers are countable and can be discussed in numerical assessment charts situates them in a Foucauldian matrix of competitive logic – the languages are ranked, assessed, and compared against one another, while the messy human realities of how languages are used, and the politics of how speakers are identified and counted, disappear (Dobrin et al. 2007). Given the limitations of these quantitative methods, developing a body of ethnographically informed assessments of linguistic vitality and responses to endangerment becomes an important task for communicating the merits of revitalization activities to granting agencies and the general public. Many critics of language revitalization programs, in fact, point to the limited number of new Indigenous language speakers as an indication that funding is being wasted.<sup>4</sup> A narrow focus on enumerated factors does present an image of minimal “bang for buck” in these programs. However, a more nuanced discussion of what language revitalization programs *do*, much of which is social and qualitative rather than linguistic and quantitative in nature, is possible only through increased attention to ethnographic concerns.

Ethnographic methods offer some tools for qualitatively describing positive impact of revitalization programs. As an example, Davis (2016) discusses how language promotion has led to a shift in the social value of speaking the Chickasaw language. While there are few new fluent speakers being created as a result of this programming, there has been a distinct and tangible shift in the social meaning of the language within the Chickasaw Nation, which is not currently captured in any of the measurement mechanisms. Even the inclusion of “language attitudes” in assessing linguistic sustainability – generally accomplished through the use of surveys – leaves aside shifts like the one Davis describes, which can only be seen in people’s subtle behavioral and discursive shifts and may not rise to the level of their own awareness. Ethnographic methods applied to the form and function of language revitalization infrastructure can evaluate and refine the efficacy of language initiatives within their particular contexts. Furthermore, it is our hope that increased frequency and quality

<sup>4</sup>For example, when the Assembly of First Nations (AFN) national chief Perry Bellegarde called, in 2015, for granting official status to all of Canada’s currently spoken Indigenous languages (of which there are approximately 60), a Calgary Herald article dismissed this idea not only because of the “astronomical” cost of implementation, but also because “[t]he programs and institutes Bellegarde is calling for already exist, and tremendous sums of money are spent annually on revitalizing and preserving aboriginal languages...The question is whether anyone is actually bothering to participate in them” (Lakritz 2015).

of language revitalization assessment will create a body of scholarship that can improve holistic knowledge (including social, cultural, political, and technical aspects in concert) of best practices in endangered language preservation.

We have thus far suggested that the inclusion of ethnographic training in language revitalization training institutes can provide students with the tools to better evaluate the organizations around them, and that qualitative investigations can provide a more nuanced and fruitful presentation of the effectiveness of language revitalization programming writ large. We now turn to a discussion of training content. While participant observation was a core theme in each of our ethnographic methods for language documentation classes, we discussed several tools and concepts to frame the purposes and goals of participant observation and ethnography. In other words, while it may be valuable in and of itself to have a detailed sociocultural record, what things does it pay to be attentive to? What patterns, assumptions, or discourses are useful to look for, articulate, and apply?

The concepts we outline below are guided in part by what our students found most useful. CILLDI students, most of whom were on the front lines of language revitalization work, benefited most from discussions of social roles, techniques for documenting language use patterns, and mapping methods (the latter not discussed in this paper for the sake of brevity, but a significant topic unto itself). The CoLang class, which included many more who were primarily involved in documentation projects, found discussions of language ideologies particularly useful. Both groups related to the subject areas of power and institutional context.

## 5. Concepts

**5.1 “Communities” in linguistic anthropological contexts** In his article on common pitfalls that occur in language revitalization programs, Lindsey Whaley (2011) draws particular attention to the tendency to reify the concept of “the community”. As he observes, while the impulse to include “the community” in revitalization efforts is rooted in the desire to support local control and autonomy, the dynamics of inclusion and exclusion in this category are rarely clear (2011:340). Communities are highly heterogeneous, overlapping, and dynamic, and community members are variously interested and implicated in the outcome of different projects, both linguistic and otherwise.

In documentary linguistic work, “the community” is often invoked uncritically, in terms like “community-based research”, or in descriptions of collaborative practice. In so far as many documentary linguists are *a priori* committed to language preservation, their view of “community interests” often erases the voices of those who, for various reasons, have limited or no interest in language revitalization. As Whaley notes, in addition to being inaccurate and imposing an outsider’s view on the constitution of “the community”, this approach is ineffective because it fails to address the complex interests of the people involved. The central point here is that a “community” is not a pre-existing, static category that can be easily identified by an outsider; rather, affiliation and boundary-formation constitutes a dynamic and observable process that is

relevant to how revitalization can be implemented and supported (Irvine & Gal 2000; Avineri & Kroskrity 2014). The definition of “community” is, in fact, a methodological issue – as Irvine (2006:689) contends, this essential topic “concerns where to locate and focus one’s research...Where should one look, to see how language takes form as social action?” Conceptual formulations of “language community”, “speech community”, and “community of practice” each illustrate these examination entry points in particular ways.

First, the term “language community” may be most closely associated in contemporary scholarship with an idealized conceptualization of a group of people who share the same (first) language, with which they all identify, and which is characterized by a degree of homogeneity at some (local, regional, or national) level (Irvine 2006:690). Michael Silverstein (1998:402) describes “language [or linguistic] community” in terms of a population’s affiliation to the code, and their view of it as “their” language. This point is crucial to the role the concept of “language community” can play in endangered-language contexts. While a group of users of an endangered language is by definition quite small, and the roles of semi-speakers, learners, or non-speakers in this community may be tenuous, the central unifying notion is that there is such a thing as *their* language. This constitutes a powerful discursive force in revitalization advocacy, but, importantly, moves away from working as a “language community” in the prototypical sense, since it includes both speakers and non-speakers. A more recent intervention that expands on this notion in ways that are especially relevant to endangered-language settings is Netta Avineri’s (2014) concept of a *metalinguistic* community, which emphasizes a shared relationship to a language, expressed through metalinguistic commentary rather than through the use of the language itself, because of variability in levels of linguistic competence among members.

“Speech community”, by contrast, considers multiple codes within the linguistic repertoires of a given group of people. This concept recognizes the likelihood that a “community”, as well as the individuals within it, may include varying degrees of multilingualism, and that specific codes will be associated with particular subgroups of people, contexts, purposes, and social meanings (Irvine 2006). The frame of speech community may lead a researcher to examine how differently situated people use language without assuming fluency or strong identification with any one linguistic code. This approach is particularly relevant in endangered-language contexts; it highlights the social and ideological forces involved in the meaning of individual and societal multilingualism, as well as in the boundary-making practices that are deployed in community formation (Jaffe 2013; Avineri & Kroskrity 2014). This term is a useful one for examining both the permeability and the practical construction of communities and boundaries between them.

“Community of practice” is a third useful variation on methodological approaches to the relationship between language and group identification. The idea shows how particular ways of speaking and interacting (including vocabulary items, turn-taking practices, grammatical norms, and social expectations) emerge based on *practice*, and are shared among people who associate with one another *for particular purposes and around particular activities* (Lave & Wenger 1991). Weinberg & De Korne (2016)

offer an analysis of an endangered-language-learning classroom using a community of practice approach; this allows them to demonstrate how linguistic identities and ownership of endangered languages can be established through interactions among teachers and learners, including those who do not come from the ethnolinguistic group with which the language is identified. Jane Hill (2006) argues that documentary linguistics needs to be understood as its own community of practice, characterized by learned norms that may create emergent forms of endangered languages. The presence of a documentary linguist introduces the new interactional structures of elicitation sessions, narrative recordings, and filmed conversations. Additionally, a new category of speaker – adult second language learner – comes into being, and expectations about when, how, and to whom these people may use the language develop in context. Language revitalization infrastructure – including training institutes, graduate programs of study, and project implementation processes – could equally be considered its own series of communities of practice with terminological, semantic, and pragmatic norms.<sup>5</sup>

Ethnographic methodologies help fieldworkers understand “community” participation and emergent sociolinguistic practices in a number of ways. First, they demand that the researcher attune to the dynamics of participation and interaction. Who do they speak with in the field, habitually, and who do they avoid? Second, if the researcher’s goal is to understand and work against language loss in the community, it is vital to listen to those who are *not* participating about what barriers exist for them. Mangus Pharao Hansen (2016) uses in-depth life histories to illustrate how different individuals face different opportunities and challenges based on their decision to adopt or not adopt use of the minority language. Listening to and embracing heterogeneous positions within “the community” presents a vital way of understanding these diverse positions and motivations. It is also worth considering how a distinction emerges between “communities” (especially in Indigenous contexts) and urban areas.<sup>6</sup> As Avineri & Kroskrity (2014) show in a special issue of *Language*

<sup>5</sup>For example, CILLDI has an internship program that provides volunteer support in classes. CILLDI attendees have become used to the presence of these interns, and turn to them for guidance in navigating the often unfamiliar spaces and practices that characterize the university. Our ethnographic methods class at CILLDI was the first in which a community linguist graduate returned to volunteer as an intern, and at the same time included three non-Indigenous undergraduate students taking the class for traditional university credit. As the course unfolded, we realized that these undergraduate students were being referred to as “interns”, and classmates interacted with them in ways that assumed they were there to provide support, rather than to learn the material themselves; the Indigenous intern, by contrast, became frustrated, as she was not recognized as an intern or provided a clear role that would allow her to use her expertise. Racialized patterns of participation, then, created a set of terminological and interactional norms that resisted complication. Conscious attention to *how* language is being used in documentary and revitalization situations demonstrates what kind of expectations are being socialized.

<sup>6</sup>To cite one example, Sally Rice (2011:333–334) describes the CILLDI program as aimed at people who “have come to an urban center for training, but who intend to return to their home communities”. This kind of framing locates the linguistic communities in specific (presumably rural) territories and contributes to an erasure of both urban Indigenous people and of the mobility of many community members in and out of urban areas (Patrick 2007; Shulist 2013). This erasure has practical as well as rhetorical impact. Shulist (2013) outlines how her attempt to conduct research on language revitalization in an urban area presented a conundrum – while local Indigenous political organizations had implemented systematic community-based approval for research in the region, there was (and is) no specific organization which could offer this consent for research in the city itself.

& *Communication*, boundary-making becomes a vital process in situations of language endangerment precisely because “the community” constitutes such a powerful discursive force. Researchers must contend with the messy complexities of people’s motivations, interests, and relationships in determining how to support “community-based” revitalization projects. Specifically, recognizing that these communities are the product of ongoing social processes requires that language revitalization activists (including those originating from within the community as well as from outside of it) attune to these boundaries and to what might be beyond them.

**5.2 Ideologies and ideological clarification** The concept of language ideology is one of the most productively used in contemporary linguistic anthropology, and has, with relative frequency, made its way into the discussion of endangered languages (Collins 1998; Dorian 1998; Heller & Duchêne 2007; McEwan-Fujita 2010; Meek 2009). A range of definitions for the term have been offered, including, most broadly, the idea that it encompasses “shared bodies of commonsense notions about the nature of language in the world” (Woolard & Schieffelin 1994:57). “Language ideologies”, as distinct from the more surface-level study of language “attitudes”, allow researchers to study a language in terms of its specific social meanings, including relationships of power, identities, social structures, and cultural practices. Gal & Irvine (1995) provide a framework of semiotic processes that contribute to language ideology construction, which has proved useful for other scholars; for example, Meek (2011) draws on these ideas to illustrate how the connection between language and identity comes to function as naturalized and iconic for Indigenous and minority languages, and the implications of this construction.

Language ideologies involve locally relevant conceptualizations of language not just as language, but as part and parcel of the fabric of social existence, and as inevitably connected to beliefs about gender, race, kinship, religion, education, etc. As Woolard & Schieffelin (1994:56) observe, “inequality among groups of speakers, and colonial encounters *par excellence*, throw language ideology into high relief”. As colonialism is deeply implicated in language endangerment, and because deep and wide power imbalances characterize these situations, the ideological ground is rich with meaning. For the most part, however, ideologies about language remain below the level of conscious recognition, in presumed “common sense” beliefs, rather than in clearly held intellectual positions that can be ascertained through direct questions. For example, asking someone to articulate on a scale of 1 to 5 how much they value their language will not produce clear insights into the interconnected systems of meaning that inform their selection, nor will it explain why someone might choose a 5, but still devote little to no time to working on improving their language’s situation.

Methods for examining ideologies include examining not just what is said but also what is done in practice and how the two differ. Debates and conflicts about language may emerge, and people take positions and/or make metalinguistic commentary (comment on their own and other people’s language use). This last source of information about ideologies is relatively easy to identify, and in fact is often a part of field linguists’ informal observations already, as, for example, commentary

about what constitutes “purism” or who knows the “real language” is often a part of elicitation sessions (Rießler & Kavovskaya 2013). A field linguist can begin paying conscious attention to such patterns in any way they find useful and habitual – using field notes and personal reflections to identify trends over a long period of time is one traditional method of doing so. The actions and commentary listed above reveal not just how people feel about the language, but also about its relationship to other socially important ideas, such as respect and how it is manifested, comfort or discomfort with certain kinds of change, and the roles of different forms of literacy and media in revitalizing their languages.

Language ideologies have proven productive for explaining both the causes of language loss (Dorian 1998) and the implications of this loss (Field & Kroskrity 2009), as well as for understanding the challenges and conflicts involved in implementing revitalization programs (Meek 2011; Debenport 2015; Shulist 2018). A central point to understand in considering language ideologies is that the scientific linguistic attitude about language – what it is, how it is produced, and why it matters – is in itself an ideological, rather than a neutral, position (Collins 1998). In approaching language revitalization work, then, it is vital to remember that our role as researchers is not to illustrate how community members are *wrong* about language, even when their positions do not match our academic understandings. For example, regardless of whether digital technologies have proven to be an effective way of engaging young people in language learning processes, if the general perspective among speakers of a given language (often older) is that language must remain connected to the land, or to orally transmitted knowledge, an app is not going to be an appropriate way to preserve a particular language. Expectations and beliefs about language learning processes, categories of appropriate contextual language use, and the meaning of cultural change emerge from complex sociopolitical histories that involve various institutions (for example, churches/missionaries, schools, and local governments), tensions between “insiders” and “outsiders”, and often, individual particularities and opinions.<sup>7</sup> Working on a language never emerges from a position of neutrality or from an easily simplified set of shared goals about supporting the language. Even defining what “the language” is cannot be achieved from a purely objective linguistic viewpoint; outsider linguists in particular may need to attune to their own assumptions and expectations about this question.

Ideological clarification – the effort to bring these beneath-the-surface beliefs, and in particular, points of conflict, into conscious conversation and discussion – has been advocated as a means of supporting revitalization efforts. Dauenhauer & Dauenhauer (1998) suggest that this process is a necessary early step in revitalization planning, in order to avoid significant conflicts and ongoing frustrations based on incompatible ideologies. Kroskrity (2009) illustrates specific ways of completing this clarification process, with the ultimate goal of achieving a “a tolerable level of disagreement that would not inhibit language renewal efforts” (73). Important elements

<sup>7</sup>Several analyses illustrating these complexities have been applied specifically to the Apache language and constitute a useful case study for this type of observation – see, for example, Samuels (2006); Nevins (2004, 2013); and Adley-SantaMaria (1997).

of ideological difference may only become apparent after a project has begun and tension has been identified. Among other things, ideological clarification allows for a clear understanding of the emotional and personal barriers to revitalization efforts for the people who are not involved or are only minimally involved. While clarifying them cannot, of course, remove the barriers, it is more useful to the revitalization process to accurately recognize what the barriers are than it is to uncritically accept people's claims about their goals and motivations, or to equally uncritically dismiss their hesitancy to become involved as demonstrating "lack of will".

In the authors' ethnographic methods courses, ideological clarification became one of the most fruitful topics of discussion, and was highlighted as among the most useful by students. Both endangered-language speakers and linguists identified different ideologies they held and engaged in productive dialogue about why it may be hard for a residential school survivor to feel comfortable speaking language in a classroom, why a linguist might not understand the connection of language to identity in the same way as an endangered-language speaker, or how an explanation of a language's utility might be advantageous in a grant application to funding agencies which may work within different ideologies than the applicant.

**5.3 Language socialization** Related to questions of language ideologies and the documentation of different types of linguistic practice, the idea of language socialization is vital to understanding how language revitalization programs can succeed or fail. The processes at the core of revitalization – teaching new speakers, improving the language skills of existing speakers, and creating new contexts for language use – ultimately hinge on the question of language socialization. "Language socialization" is a methodological/theoretical framework that focuses on *how* language and linguistically mediated practices are acquired and transmitted through social actions – centrally, it moves away from viewing the process of language learning, use, and change as primarily *psychological* and situates them as rooted in the social/interactional realm (Schieffelin & Ochs 1986; Duranti et al. 2011).

Ethnographic approaches to language revitalization have attuned to the ways in which practices of parents, elders, teachers, and peers intersect with existing ideologies, policies, and forms of social organization and constitute structuring forces in the lives of learners, potential learners, or other community members. In other words, certain forms of linguistic practice, especially those emanating from specific roles and social positions, serve to socialize others into expectations about the maintenance or contestation of more general linguistic practices. As Garrett & Baquedano-López (2002) observe in their overview of the topic, examining bilingual and multilingual social contexts includes an examination of how the variously present linguistic codes are indexed to different social meanings, values, and identities; the socialization of children and other new members includes teaching them (sometimes directly, but often indirectly) how to understand these meanings and deploy the linguistic resources they are aware of (350). Just as language shift can be understood through the lens of socialization to the multifaceted ways that people experience pressure to move toward the dominant language (Kulick 1997; Garrett 2011), revitalization and resur-

gence can be seen and strengthened through attention to the transmission of beliefs, values, and indexical connections associated with the endangered language. Wyman (2009), for example, examined the practices within a Yup'ik bilingual school and illustrates how educators ultimately undermined the goal of bilingual education by communicating negative attitudes and beliefs about the Yup'ik language to youth; she argues that language planners, educators, and community members must consciously engage with the “contingency in young people’s language practices” (348) and strategically use site of language learning (especially schools) to foster beliefs and ideas that strengthen, rather than disrupt, heritage language use.

At the same time, the dynamics of endangerment and revitalization are situated within complex sets of ideologies emerging from both Indigenous cultural systems and colonially imposed power dynamics, and beliefs about language learning and linguistic roles can be difficult to re-organize. In the Northwest Amazon, the deeply rooted connection between patrilineal identity and the ability to both speak and claim a language has implications for how children are taught to use and relate to the language(s) they can speak (Chernela 2004; 2013). Further, the role of language in defining kinship and maritability has meant that it is extremely important to police the boundaries of the languages, preventing phonological shift and forbidding borrowing from neighboring languages, which risks having the languages become indistinguishable and losing the ability to define the social order (Aikhenvald 2003). While prior to colonialism, the idea of a person who could not speak his or her own language was unimaginable, there are now many such people; efforts to strengthen and revitalize these languages, however, are made more challenging by socialization processes in which mispronunciations and errors are viewed in an extremely negative light, and assessments of authenticity are deeply tied to linguistic knowledge (Shulist 2016). As Hill (2006) points out, revitalization is almost invariably the first context in which the existence of the category of “adult second language learner” emerges. There is therefore no immediately apparent social role for these people; rather, these roles are emerging through socialization processes and practices that require attention from language planners in order to ascertain how they may influence opportunities or barriers to learning and use. For Tukanoans, there is no word for a learner of one’s own language – in a system that distinguishes between a language that one *speaks* (one’s own), and a language one merely *imitates* or *borrow*s, this is a meaningful lexical gap, indicating that this “adult learner” category has yet to become fully enabled within local revitalization movements.

Revitalization, then, depends upon understanding how language learning is situated within and relates to local ideologies; in addition, however, it must be consciously understood as a site of socialization in itself, in which linguists and other language workers, particularly outsiders, are performing work that shapes views of how, when, and by whom language can and should be taught. The emphasis on intergenerational transmission as a central measure of revitalization work, for example, leads to prioritizing the teaching of children; in many contexts, existing social structures mean that



this leads to an emphasis on schools as revitalization sites.<sup>8</sup> It is no coincidence that schools are a topic of extensive examination by scholars of various types – they are extraordinarily complex, and extraordinarily powerful, social institutions. This complexity has multiple implications of revitalization. First, language revitalization activists have to consider the merits of classroom-based language learning (Hornberger 2008), as well as the degree to which making the language “homework” can influence how children feel about using it and developing their knowledge of it outside of class. Second, and equally importantly, they also have to examine how situating Indigenous and minority language learning within state-based curricular structures affects not only the specific details of language learning, but also the framework in which revitalization is understood. Additional examination of how language revitalization involves socialization practices that contest or reinforce existing cultural practices, such as gender roles, child-rearing strategies, and relationships between youth and elders, allow for a focus on how these sites of language planning are also sites of social change (Ahlers 2012; Cavanaugh 2004).

**5.4 Participants, roles, and identities** In addition to using participant observation to outline the dynamics of community construction and to observe ideological patterns within a community of practice, an ethnographic perspective will also recognize the different roles and identities of people who are involved in fieldwork. Some of these are obvious, and patterns among them are frequently discussed in language revitalization circles – for example, women take on most of the responsibility for language revitalization (indeed, our methods class at CILLDI was comprised almost entirely of female participants).<sup>9</sup> Depending on the demographic makeup of the population as a whole, most of the fluent speakers are likely from the grandparental generation or older, which means that these are the people with whom linguists are most likely to interact.

Categories like age and gender are obvious points of differentiation among participants, but it becomes important to unpack *why* and *how* these differences come to matter. In other words, what features of social expectation and economic role distribution place responsibility in women’s hands, and what are the broader implications of these underlying realities for revitalization? How do practices of gendered socialization intersect with contexts of endangerment and revitalization (Cavanaugh 2012)? Patterns of participation can be analyzed in order to introduce efforts to change them - for example, what pragmatic and ideological factors are making it difficult for men to become involved in revitalization efforts, and are there ways to work

<sup>8</sup>While this paper has focused on the role played by people working within the discipline of linguistics (broadly defined), the field of education, including organizational boards, teachers and administrators, and university-based faculties of education, is also heavily involved in language revitalization work. An additional factor to consider in critical examination of language revitalization practices, then, relates to the implications of situating these efforts within fields of study that explicitly focus on only one type of context for language learning.

<sup>9</sup>Class discussion about why women attended and men did not turned to the socio-economics of gender, and the different types of labor women and men were expected to undertake. The inclusion and exclusion of nonbinary gender identities, including Two Spirit identities, within revitalization programs is an area that deserves additional attention.

around those barriers? At the same time, an ethnographic approach also involves becoming attuned to the ways in which these categories are constructed through practices relating to revitalization. Henne-Ochoa & Bauman (2015) illustrate how a generational divide, which is often presumed in descriptions of language endangerment, is in fact reproduced through discourses relating to language revitalization. Their analysis of a speech competition in which students were asked to articulate the importance of their language – and in which various elders or local leaders commented upon their usage and judged these performances – illustrates how generation can best be thought of not as a pre-existing entity, but as a particularly important *performative* category that takes on meaning in relation to revitalization.

Ethnographers must also consider the possibility that a wide range of unconsidered and overlapping facets of identity exist, and that they are relevant to language revitalization in ways that may not immediately be apparent. Given the importance of prestige and of increasing positive associations with an endangered language, we must be prepared to understand and discuss how prestige and status come to matter in fieldwork contexts; this is not always a straightforward binary in which a dominant regional language has prestige while a minority language does not. In the Northwest Amazon of Brazil, for example, where Indigenous multilingualism was historically the norm, language shift has involved a reduction in the number of Indigenous languages spoken by various groups of people, not merely a wholesale replacement of Indigenous languages with Portuguese. Through the course of complex historical and ideological processes, some Indigenous languages have come to occupy positions of higher status than others (Shulist 2016). This elevation then interacts with local ranked clan relationships in which clan membership is marked with some salient and recognized linguistic differences. Nearly all Tariana people have shifted to the use of Tukano in Indigenous contexts (as well as to the use of Portuguese in additional contexts), since Tukano is one of these higher-prestige Indigenous languages, and since the only remaining speakers of Tariana are low-ranking within the clan hierarchy. High-status Tariana people are unmotivated to learn the Tariana language as it is currently spoken, because they have no exemplars of how their clan should speak it, and they resist using the version that is marked as low-status. Given these relationships of prestige and identity, revitalization of the Tariana language is not a very hopeful prospect.

The ways in which new identity categories and relationships to ethnolinguistic identity are being created within processes of language revitalization is a further consideration in examples like these. Understandings of authenticity, implications of linguistic knowledge (or lack thereof), and considerations of how language learners fit into these frameworks, are among the unintended (and largely unexplored) outcomes of revitalization projects. While linguists are not in control of the discourses that circulate about endangered languages, they certainly contribute to them, and their projects change the terms of those discussions. Awareness of and attention to the shifts that take place, and the meanings that are being altered or constructed, become important ways of considering what revitalization processes are doing.

**5.5 Genre** Genre is a concept that has been present in linguistic anthropological literature for many decades;<sup>10</sup> it has been variously defined, but may be thought of simply as a “type” of communication like a joke, a moral instruction, or a play (Hymes 1974), or more procedurally as an organizing principle that allows groups of people to categorize a speech event, develop expectations about it, express culturally nuanced or specific meanings, and associate it with other events and/or texts (Bauman & Briggs 1990; Briggs & Bauman 1992). Speech and language communities, as well as communities of practice, build and recognize genres by referencing former oral and/or written texts and creating recognizable patterns. While it is often useful to arrange texts into categories and frameworks, to do so with no cultural information is now regarded as an obvious error by many; genres such as place names (Basso 1996; Schreyer 2016) or poetics and performance (Webster 2009) may be unfamiliar to a researcher attempting to categorize them.

It is important to note differences in genre for the sake of documentation depth and quality, both as a tool for research and as an asset for developing appropriate and useful resources for language revitalization. A dictionary, for instance, is a commonly used genre in endangered-language work. As Debenport (2015) points out, the value of dictionaries is based in a view of language as predominantly (or at least strongly) referential, rather than language-in-use. She further argues that this search for referential regularity is rooted in both the influence of Western language ideologies and the likelihood that, as the uses of the language diminish in presence, such lexicographic information remains the most practical way of gathering data that is rapidly disappearing (60). If we regard the tools of language documentation themselves as belonging to a genre, or category, that may or may not be familiar to a community of practice, we can ask ourselves if our work is as accessible, relevant, immediately useful, and thorough as it could be. Participant observation is valuable as a field method in part because it allows a collaborative, iterative approach to the production of any kind of language resource. New genres that a researcher had not considered may present themselves through ethnographic fieldwork, and a collaborative, relational research stay permits experimentation and user testing with documentary products. Initiatives such as place name mapping (Schreyer et al. 2014), language apps, video games (such as the 2014 *Kisima Injitchuṅa, Never Alone*, developed by Upper One Games and the Cook Inlet Tribal Council), endangered-language hip hop (Hornberger & Swinehart 2012; Barrett 2016), and translated films or media programs (Jaffe 2007; Shulist 2012) are examples of projects playing increasingly with genre in an effort to interest all potential speakers.

Genre frequently intersects with language ideologies. Lexicography may, for instance, encounter language ideologies that resist standardized spellings (Rice & Saxon 2002). Hip hop may be regarded as an inappropriate use of language by some in the same community of practice (Barrett 2016), or curricular tools like an alphabet may be seen as the incorrect way to teach an originally oral language. Developing apps and internet-based language programs is currently a popular response to language en-

<sup>10</sup>Edward Sapir (1909, xii) was one of the first to apply genre to linguistic anthropology by identifying five genres: myths, customs, letters, supplementary texts, and non-mythical narratives.

dangerment; however, some students in our classes expressed frustration with such strategies, since they preclude in-person, intergenerational learning. According to these perspectives, reducing the language to what can be seen within a smartphone – which again, is best at capturing referential meanings and simplified word-meaning links removes much of what is vital within these languages. Linguists can bring genre and ideology to the surface of their work in combination, and think about the ways in which endangered-language projects produce materials that are useful, accessible, and relevant. These ideological positions about genre and about the complexities of language-in-use, especially in relation to technological possibilities, are sometimes dismissed as behind the times or puristic, as urgent innovation overtakes a more considered and complex approach. While a surface-level understanding of the reasons for these “puristic” anxieties and points of resistance would suggest that they are barriers to overcome, the more in-depth anthropological approach reminds a field researcher to reconsider how revitalization strategies function within the cultural context in question.

**6. Concluding thoughts** Even as endangered-language documentation receives more support, attention, and better-trained practitioners, transforming documentary efforts into revitalization remains an elusive process. Experienced advocates for endangered languages are well aware that their programs are unlikely to result in everyday, active language use, and that progress remains difficult to quantify. Many programs attempt to revive language in the classroom, for example, but, with only a few rare exceptions, teachers often lament that students do not walk away as speakers of the language. Linguists, teachers, and advocates may generate new language materials, run training programs, obtain funding from government or corporate sponsors, and make their languages official, but still be left with a generation of children who use the dominant language almost exclusively, and who know and use at most a few words of the Indigenous language. In short, when compared to the decades of scholarship and activism devoted to endangered-language work, the number of new fluent speakers being created remains quite small.

This description may appear pessimistic. Nonetheless, we suggest that the work involved in revitalization strengthens endangered languages in ways more nuanced than a count of fluent speakers is able to demonstrate. We have argued here for the increased inclusion of ethnographic methodologies and concepts in language work for two reasons: first, ethnography can identify and illuminate the actual, complex impact that revitalization programming has within communities. Second, ethnography can bring to the surface the inherently social, political, and cultural components of shifting linguistic practices. One of the central insights of anthropology is the degree to which specificity and particularity matter. No two situations of endangerment are exactly alike, not even for different groups or communities in which the same language is spoken. Indeed, while beyond the scope of this article, the idea of “culture” in relation to endangered languages is often both underdescribed and overdetermined. That is to say, one could find countless examples of advocacy for endangered-language revitalization that centers on the need to protect and preserve

languages because they are vital and constitutive of cultures, much of which elides the ways in which those cultures are themselves dynamic and complex (cf. Errington 2003; Graham 2002; Heller & Duchêne 2007; Kroskrity 2009).

Consequently, as with all aspects of endangered language revitalization, there is far more work that needs to be done than there are scholars and locally based language advocates available to do it. We have suggested that training institutes for language revitalization, as well as graduate programs in linguistics, can provide training in ethnographic methods in order to provide field and community-based linguists with additional skills for developing and evaluating revitalization projects. A set of concepts, from the authors' experiences teaching this type of course, are included as a sample of useful ideas for this purpose. These build on the ideas and advocacy offered, for example, by Jane Hill (2006) and Bruna Franchetto (2006), who demonstrate the value of ethnographic methods in ensuring thoroughness and accuracy in language documentation. We want to emphasize that while these concepts and strategies for applying them may help linguists to move forward in their efforts, this brief overview should not be taken as a substitute for the possible contributions of anthropologically trained participants in revitalization, but rather as a complementary strategy to help advance these projects as thoroughly as possible.

Language documentation and revitalization scholarship has advanced considerably in the last few decades, and given the commitment that the discipline has to creating a strong response to an urgent situation, the development of a set of approaches and best practices makes sense. At the same time, however, these approaches risk oversimplifying and overgeneralizing the process of revitalization, which, although it is almost exclusively a social rather than linguistic phenomenon, has become absorbed into the disciplinary culture of linguistics. The current moment includes a growing public appetite for language revitalization, particularly in Canada, where the publication of the Truth & Reconciliation Commission report on the impact of residential schools includes language as a central tenet of all efforts to create a new relationship with Indigenous peoples. Increased attention brings increased scrutiny, and an opportunity to reflect on how well revitalization infrastructure is accomplishing its goals. Answering this question adequately and crafting effective revitalization responses to the wide range of language situations necessitates analysis of the complex web of social beliefs and relationships underlying these efforts. Ethnographic methods constitute a necessary addition to the linguist and language revitalization advocate's toolkit, whether through increased collaboration across disciplines or through strengthened training programs within revitalization infrastructure. Too many efforts are running up against barriers they don't understand, or even achieving successes that do not neatly fit into the rubrics for assessment provided by auditing agencies. To participate and communicate well enough to understand across differences – of heritage, ideology, or methodology – may be the most important part of making sure any language revitalization program sees and works with “obstacles” to create effective language renewal.

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