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SEAN O'NEILL & SAUL SCHWARTZ

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Recirculating and revitalizing words: Lexical legacies in Native American language preservation

Sean O'Neill
University of Oklahoma

Saul Schwartz

Abstract

While scholars often stress that language consists of much more than words, words may nevertheless be the most salient unit of analysis and action for speakers, learners, and other community members involved in language preservation. The prominence of words in metalinguistic awareness shapes how community members respond to language shift and can inform locally relevant goals and methods for language maintenance and revitalization. Developing previous research on the significance of words and names in Native America, we argue that words draw their importance from how they are used in social life as well as from the metalinguistic discourses and stories associated with them. In the Plains Apache, Hupa, and Ponca cases described here, words serve as markers of social relations, keys to historical experiences and worldviews, and signs of collective identity. Promoting the use and knowledge of words and their stories may be a more meaningful revitalization goal than increasing the number of fluent speakers in communities where members view their language primarily in terms of words and are concerned particularly about cultural fluency. Lexically-focused language revitalization activities also have the potential to give new relevance to legacy wordlists and texts.

1. Preface

Several the papers published in this special issue were presented during a panel on the "Social Lives of Linguistic Legacy Materials" at the 2017 American Anthropological Association Annual Meeting. Saul Schwartz organized the panel, and Sean O'Neill presented on his experiences collaborating with Native American communities to repatriate archival

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materials. In listening to O'Neill's presentation, Schwartz was struck by a theme that he had observed in his own work on Chiwere (Siouan) language documentation and revitalization (see Goodtracks et al. 2016: 147–151): many consultants have a particular interest in culturally significant words as opposed to other aspects of language. The focus on words can feel counter-intuitive for linguists whose own interests center on grammar or larger discursive units like conversation and narrative. Linguists know that language is so much "more than words" and that this insight is part of what distinguishes academic expertise on language from the naïve "popular view" that "a language is merely a fixed stock of words […] as if nothing matters about languages but their lexicons" (Pullum & Scholz 2001: 367). But what happens when this "popular view" is held not by a faceless general public but by our consultants themselves? Surely, as Speas (2009: 25–26) suggests, our role in such situations is not to "disabus[e] members of Native communities of their 'misconceptions' about language" but rather to listen to what they say, work to understand their perspectives, and strive to support their linguistic goals.

In this paper, we use examples from O'Neill's work with Native communities in Oklahoma and California to develop the observation that words as such may be compelling for many communities experiencing language shift. A lexical orientation to language can shape how community members understand, communicate about, and respond to language shift and may inform activists' goals and methods for language preservation. Since words may have stories or elaborate metalinguistic discourses associated with them, they can hold complex social and cultural meanings for consultants and communities. Words can serve as markers of social relations, keys to historical experiences and worldviews, and signs of collective identity. Knowledge of words without grammatical competence may not be a focal value for academic and community linguists who are understandably concerned with increasing the numbers of fluent speakers of endangered languages. But our experiences suggest that knowledge of words, their social and cultural significance, and their associated stories may in itself be a meaningful, if modest, goal for language revitalization, especially in cases where cultural rather than linguistic fluency is the primary motive for learning a heritage language. Lexically-focused language revitalization activities can also imbue legacy materials, from wordlists to texts, with new value.

2. Introduction: Why words? (Schwartz)

In order to have an adequate picture of language preservation, it is important to discover what language *is* and *means* for communities with endangered heritage languages. While language shift, documentation, and revitalization are in many ways global processes, they are also always embedded within local cultural contexts and experienced by individuals and groups who under-

stand and respond to language change in ways that are profoundly shaped by their own cultural assumptions (Dobrin & Sicoli 2018). In a number of cases, seemingly promising Native American language maintenance efforts have foundered because they failed to take into account what the broader community valued about their heritage language or what they expected would happen as a result of participating in language classes or other programs (Schwartz & Dobrin 2016). While the cultural meanings of language are often particular to specific communities, one way in which local concepts of language may differ systematically from linguists' assumptions is a product of the widespread tendency for people without academic linguistic training to see their language primarily as a collection of words. Previous research has documented the prominence of words in the metalinguistic awareness and discourse of many Native American speakers and speech communities, which can shape how they understand language loss and reclamation. This body of scholarship also illustrates the multifaceted significance of words and names, which can play important roles in connecting people to kin, land, cultural values, and narratives.

The word is something that stands out as a discernible unit in the flow of speech. As noted by Silverstein (1981), the word is one of the most salient units of analysis for speakers, in part because most words have a prominent referential function and are easily segmented in discourse. Silverstein credits Whorf with developing the insight that speakers' metalinguistic awareness tends to focus on segmentable lexical units, especially ones whose meanings appear to correspond in a one-to-one fashion with referents in the world. Sapir (1921: v) also observed that "the word has a real psychological existence" as "the primary unit of existent speech" (Sapir 1921: 33), given its status as the primary object of conscious inspection among speakers. Niedzielski & Preston (2000: 266) refer to words as "the folk linguistic object par excellence" in light of the intense philosophical and philological traditions that surround the interpretation of words and their etymologies in many speech communities.

The widespread tendency to think and talk about language primarily in terms of words has implications for how communities experience language contact, loss, and preservation. Classic ethnographic studies of language contact, for example, illustrate how the purist aim to keep languages from "mixing" in order to maintain ethnolinguistic boundaries and identities, often results in the policing of lexical borrowing rather than avoidance of grammatical convergence. Despite 250 years of multilingualism in the Arizona Tewa community, for example, Kroskrity (1993: 73) found only two out of 4,500 Arizona Tewa words that appeared to be Hopi loans. Because speakers show a greater awareness of words than grammar, Arizona Tewa speakers managed to minimize lexical borrowing, while grammatical convergence with Hopi goes unrecognized (Kroskrity 1993: 72–74). In their study of Mexicano-Spanish contact, Hill & Hill (1986: 122) also found that

purists who believe that "bad things are happening to Mexicano because of 'mixing'" would focus on the etymological origins of words rather than paying attention to grammatical patterns. "Lexical purism tends to focus on a few shibboleth words", and in some cases purists give other speakers "vocabulary tests" that employ their own folk etymological standards for whether words are Mexicano or Spanish in origin to evaluate the authenticity of others' speech (Hill & Hill 1986: 123–124). Hill & Hill (1986: 154) met one woman from elsewhere who married a local man; in order to be accepted, she "worked very hard to learn Mexicano, staying awake at night and reciting vocabulary words to herself in the dark". There is even a special category of speakers, "rememberers", whose reputations rest on stereotyped performances in which they recite lexical items associated with Mexicano domestic life, such as terms having to do with cooking and firewood (Hill & Hill 1986: 142). The extensive literature on purism in Maya language revitalization reveals similar dynamics. So-called "mixed" Maya is characterized by the use of Spanish loanwords, while "pure" Maya speakers employ neologisms or archaisms to avoid loans, even to the point of making the language difficult to understand for other speakers (e.g., Armstrong-Fumero 2009; Rhodes 2020). Purist Maya language ideologies are another case where "due to its accessibility, the lexicon is the level of language on which speakers can focus more easily", and purists observe and police lexical borrowing more easily than grammatical convergence (Cru 2015: 377).

In addition to shaping how communities respond to language contact, lexical awareness also affects how communities understand language loss. In an article on Wasco-Wishram language loss in Oregon, Moore (1988) describes how younger speakers and semispeakers have a tendency to lexicalize inflectionally complex stems. Linguistic analysis reveals that what such speakers struggle with is the inflectional system, but their understanding of language shift "fetishizes verbal and nominal stems and their specific denotations, seeing 'language loss' as the process by which such lexical forms are forgotten" (Moore 1988: 462). Moore traces this understanding of language shift to cultural notions of wealth and value. Like personal name-titles, which are culturally salient units of wealth, words are treated as inherited objects that can be validated through appropriate display, for example in linguistic elicitation sessions. Because semispeakers cannot parse complex inflections, previously prosaic words have "a culturally valued connotation of 'hidden, archaic meaning'" that gives them special value (Moore 1988: 467). Wasco-Wishram community members are thus inclined to see language shift as a process of losing valuable words rather than a process of diminishing facility with inflection.

In a similar vein, words often find a prominent place in local preservation efforts. In his account of his fieldwork documenting Tolowa language in northern California, Collins (1992: 408) notes that consultants' responses to his attempts to elicit grammatical paradigms revealed "a consistently different

orientation to language. Simply put, they were interested in words, not grammar". In contrast to his own research on grammar, Tolowa language activists focused on collecting words, especially "old words" or "lost words" gathered through kinship networks and other close social relations (Collins 1992: 408–409). Tolowa elders brought "old words" to members of the language program to be written down and thereby preserved, and language activists shared stories about "'lost words' being recalled, confirmed, or corrected by aunts and uncles" (Collins 1992: 409).

Words also figure prominently in non-immersion school-based language classes, which rarely produce fluent speakers but often lead to learners being able to incorporate heritage language words into otherwise English utterances. In her work on efforts to revitalize Kaska, a Northern Athabaskan language spoken in the Yukon, Meek (2010: 76, 93–94) noticed that children and young adults often code-mixed, speaking predominantly in English but replacing some English nouns with Kasksa ones. "Remarking on their children's or grandchildren's utterances", Meek (2010: 93–94) observed, "adults would say 'he knows the easy words' or 'she knows the simple words', indicating the less morphologically complex words forms, and usually not verbs". This observation ties into Meek's (2010: 126) overall argument that language revitalization programs often "reduce aboriginal languages to a compilation of nouns and token phrases […] thereby diminishing their sustainability as complex systems of and for communication". Meek (2010: 58) suggests that language classes are creating a new "school style" of Kaska that is recognized within the community as being, in effect, a different register than that used by adult speakers. However, Meek's observation is articulated somewhat differently by community members, who instead measure competence based on whether someone can produce difficult or complex words.

Meek's (2010: 87) study of an emerging school style of Kaska, a product of (among other factors) institutional language classes consisting of object identification and the "endless repetition" of words and phrases, reflects what Cowell (2018: 13) describes as a tendency toward "nominalization" in situations of language shift and loss: "The language is used less and less for everyday communication, by fewer and fewer people, but the high-saliency linguistic practices continue as much as possible. In the extreme case, the language can become largely a series of names: nouns, words with translatable meanings, often in reified forms such as recordings, print, signs, emblems, and the like". In other words, what is most salient to community members about a heritage language may be its words and names, which language learners can relatively easily incorporate into their communicative repertoires and which may serve important symbolic and performative functions for learners who are not (and perhaps never aspire to become) fluent speakers (see also, e.g., Ahlers 2006; Muehlmann 2008; Moore 2012).

A vivid illustration of the significance of words to community members who may not be fluent in their heritage language is provided by Webster

(2016: 23), who notes that "Over the years, a number of Navajo poets have told me about Navajo words that they are particularly fond of […]. Not all these poets were fluent in Navajo, but each had a felt attachment to specific Navajo lexical items". These attachments stem from pleasure in the sounds and sound symbolism of words, social relationships that specific words evoke, or aesthetic imagery expressed in polysynthetic words that feels more expressive than their English translations (see also Gómez de Garcia et al. 2009: 115–18). Navajo poet Laura Tohe provides one example: "I love that word in Navajo *nihik'inizdidlááđ* which […] means you know this light just poured over us or among us and there's this relationship you have with the light, but in the English it seems a little flat when you say 'luminescence all around', it's just like reporting about what happened and there's none of that personal connection to light" (Webster 2016: 25).

In addition to their affective and aesthetic dimensions, words are important in local understandings of language contact, loss, and preservation because they index social relations, cultural traditions, and stories. As we saw above, for Tolowa language activists, old words are connected to the relatives who recovered them. This phenomenon is also observable in other contexts. For example, building on their traditional cultural appreciation for creative naming, Western Apache readers of a bilingual dictionary "repersonalized" the text by identifying words coined and contributed to the dictionary by their relatives (Nevins 2013: 218). When members of the Moody family read the dictionary, "family members could recognize words that Neal Moody contributed because they remember these as terms he coined and as his favorite expressions" (Nevins 2013: 218; see also Debenport 2015: 68).

Words are connected not only to stories of particular people, but also to stories embedded in the landscape, a phenomenon that is particularly evident in studies of place-names. Inviting comparison with Basso's (1996) work on Western Apache place-names, Collins (1992: 409) explains that words are especially significant for Tolowa people. This is because they are connected to the elders who contributed them, and also because they are "indexes of stories and situations […] embedded within and associated with the art of remembering" historical narratives connected with geographical features in the landscape. An overview of anthropological research on place-names similarly finds that they are "powerful linguistic symbols that evoke a wide range of poignant associations", which include "narrative, story, and other forms of verbal art and everyday speech" (Thornton 1997: 221–222; see also Samuels 2001; Webster 2009: 185–217; Mark et al. 2011; Kari & Fall 2016; Webster 2017; Holton & Thornton 2019). Place-names, names in general, and neologisms are thus categories of words where social and cultural connections to people and stories may be especially evident. As Cowell (2018: 13) observes,

> when Arapaho speakers talk *about* their language, they tend to talk about personal names and place names or about conceptual meta-

> phors, and folk etymology is the genre par excellence of talking *about* language. Neologizing is also a key point of reflection about the English and Arapaho languages. These are all domains of the language where individual words have not only uses and meanings but actual stories about them and how they came to be. The words have overt histories, in the oral tradition.

For all these reasons, then, words repatriated from legacy materials can be powerfully evocative for community members, sparking memories and emotions associated with their families and cultures. Ultimately, repatriating documentary records in collaboration with community members is key to better understanding how words and related stories may still be useful in the process of language renewal today. Elaborating on this theme, we turn now to the significance of words and their stories for consultants O'Neill collaborated with in the Plains Apache, Hupa, and Ponca communities.[1]

3. Wordlists, neologisms, and shibboleths: Stories of lexical significance in three Native American communities (O'Neill)

From my earliest days as a linguist, repatriating historical records with knowledgeable elders has been one of my primary professional activities. As the elders and I looked back at the history of research on their heritage languages, my core question was always: how can these resources be used to reawaken languages that have since become endangered and pursue culturally relevant goals, breathing new life into the legacy documents? This question forces academics and community members alike to consider the many purposes to which legacy resources may be put, and the answer often means focusing on words, how they were used, and the stories or other discourses associated with them.

3.1 Plains Apache

In working with the Plains Apaches of Oklahoma from roughly 2006 to 2013, I found that the elders generally expected me to show up with a list of words in English for us to translate into Apache. Sometimes they even brought their own wordlists from home. This expectation emerged from a long historical exchange with outside researchers going back over a century, to the time of

[1] Plains Apache: ISO 639-3 apk; Hupa: ISO 639-3 hup; Ponca: ISO 639-3 oma. It should be noted that the ISO 639-3 identifier and language name for Ponca assume that Ponca is a dialect of the Omaha-Ponca language. As discussed in Section 3.3, this is a characterization that Ponca speakers firmly reject.

Albert Gatschet as well as the late William Bittle (1963), whose work focused not only on documenting grammatical paradigms but also culturally significant words in major areas of life (Jordan 2008). The Plains Apache language was severely endangered at the time of my fieldwork, and when the last fluent speaker, Alfred Chalepah, passed away in 2008, only a handful of semi-speakers were left, perhaps fewer than twenty. These semi-speakers had partial, though impressive, command of the language and were also deeply versed in the traditional culture, including vocabulary, stories, and songs.

In my weekly sessions with the elders, they would generally ask me to read a numbered list of words in English. Being able to finish translating the list without getting distracted by all the stories associated with the words was always a mark of achievement. In time, I learned that these wordlists had taken on a life of their own in the community. Many of the elders were in the habit of writing words at home on napkins or other scraps of available paper to discuss with family and friends later, and the Tribe's archives in Anadarko, Oklahoma, were filled with inventories of vocabulary, which were collected by community members and deposited in the archives as heirlooms for future generations. Sometimes these lists originated from elders who met at the Tribal headquarters to contribute to community language projects. Most of the elders kept personal records of these sessions as mementos of the experience. They noted the date of the session, listed of the speakers and semi-speakers present for the meeting, transcribed the words, and sometimes made an accompanying recording on cassette tape. Some of those cassette tapes have since been transferred to CDs and made available for home listening. Those community-based word-lists and related audio recordings will perhaps one day outstrip all the efforts of the linguists combined, given that they are driven by desires internal to the community, based on things they desire to learn from one another, while also thinking about their collective past and their duty to share this vocabulary and heritage with future generations.

3.1.1 The "gopher" in the archives: Finding words in Plains Apache legacy materials

Given the Plains Apache tradition of producing and archiving wordlists locally, it may be unsurprising to discover that community members are also interested in what they can learn from legacy wordlists collected by previous generations of researchers. Like many linguists, I occasionally get requests, by phone or text, to serve as a "gopher" and pore over the archives in search of words, stories, and information on related cultural practices.

One of the most practical reasons for these requests is for help finding names that could be used in contemporary naming ceremonies, an important rite of passage for many Plains societies (e.g., Fowler 1987; Cowell 2018). Having a name in Plains Apache is enough to establish one as a legitimate

member of the community – an important function for the language to serve, especially in a time when there are few speakers left. To this day, many Plains Apache families hope to bestow Apache names upon their children as a rite of passage and personal symbol of heritage when coming of age. The name marks the recipient as a lifelong member of the community and also gives them a direct personal tie to the traditional lifeways that are connected to the word from which the name is drawn. In response to requests, I would return to the community with wordlists archived by Gatschet, Bittle, Harry Hoijer, and other linguists that contained words that could be used for Apache names by the current generation.[2]

Anthropologist Peter Whiteley (2009: 174) laments that cultural change and language loss have led Hopi name-givers to consult an archived "written database of names recorded in the 1930s", saying that as a result names "now risk becoming recycled literary forms" rather than compelling "images that refer to [social and cultural] aspects of Hopi experience and practice". In the Plains Apache case, however, turning to legacy materials for names does not entail that names have lost their meaning and significance. Rather, naming ceremonies and the names themselves continue to be important markers of social identity and ties to cultural traditions.

While the role of "gopher" can often be gratifying, word-search errands in the archives are not without their perils for the outside researcher. In part, this is due to wordlists' decontextualized nature. Wordlists often present a one-to-one correspondence between words, things, and associated concepts, which are presumed to be equivalent even across unrelated languages. We might call this unwitting philosophy – which assumes that different languages just have different names for the same things – an "ideology of transparency" or "lexical realism" (see Kaplan 2017, for example, on the ideology of "universality" underlying the Swadesh and other lists used in comparative-historical linguistic research). This ideological orientation on the part of past investigators is often mirrored by community members, who may view their language primarily as collections of words, with the concomitant understanding that language loss is a process of forgetting words. From a community perspective, there is often a great deal of interest in restoring vocabulary, a goal that legacy wordlists can help facilitate, even though they potentially lack important background information about pragmatics and communicative competence (Hymes 1972) and are difficult even for professional linguists to use for phonological description or other purposes beyond their intended use in glottochronology and lexicostatistics (Dockum & Bowern 2018). Since

[2] It would not be appropriate for me to share further details about Apache personal names here. My intent is only to give readers a general sense of the importance and functions of names in Plains Apache cultural life.

information about socially appropriate or inappropriate language use is rarely documented in wordlists, researchers need to act with care when returning these legacy materials to communities.

For example, in 2013, towards the end of a period of sustained fieldwork with the Plains Apache elders, they asked me to look up the Plains Apache word for the human face. The semi-fluent speakers remembered that it was something they had heard their elders say throughout their early years, but they had since fallen out of daily practice with the language and requested a refresher from the archives. When I returned to the records, I pored over documentation left behind by William Bittle (1963), who had worked with the Tribe for many decades, and eventually found a definitive answer. In one of the documents Bittle deposited, housed in the Western History collections at the University of Oklahoma, I found a fading piece of paper that had been run though a mimeograph machine too many times with a word that seemed to answer the elders' question. Curiously, the translation was given in a plural-form, namely, "faces", not the more familiar, singular "face". This is especially uncommon in Athabaskan languages, as plural marking is not obligatory on nouns. Still, I was delighted to have found a near-match to share with the community.

After stumbling on the form, I rushed back to present the results of my search. Much to my surprise, as I read the form aloud, I was met with deafening silence and fallen faces. Absolute astonishment filled the room – terms like "horror" or "shock" would not be far off. Still not taking this in, I read the form again aloud, hoping it was just a mispronunciation on my part. Feeling deflated by the confusing dead-end, I dropped the matter. But the mood quickly lifted as we moved on to other matters.

After our meeting, I drove one of the elders back home, and along the way, she told me, in so many words, that we had stumbled across a verbal taboo. The word I delivered referred to "feces", not "faces"! But it was hard to see that in the old mimeograph. As it happened, the matter of defecation was not an appropriate topic for discussion among siblings of the opposite sex within a family setting. In other words, it was a taboo to discuss bodily functions or sexual matters across gender lines within the family. Of course, the document I found in the archives simply recorded a Plains Apache word and an English equivalent – it said nothing about the contexts in which the word should or should not be used according to Plains Apache cultural standards. Not only did I not find the Apache word for 'face', I lost some of my own in the process of searching for it in the archives.

3.2 Hupa

When I began my fieldwork with the Hupa elders of Northwestern California in the late 1990s, many of the most distinguished linguists in the history of

North American scholarship had already visited the region, including the first person to earn a doctorate in linguistics in the United States, Pliny Earle Goddard (1869–1928), as well as Edward Sapir (1884–1939) and, later, the distinguished scholar Victor Golla (1939–2021). Each produced and archived their own collection of materials (see Goddard 1903, 1904, n.d.; Golla 1996; Jackson et al. n.d.; Sapir's Hupa texts were published in Golla & O'Neill 2001). By the time of my fieldwork, there were only a handful of fluent speakers left, perhaps no more than six. The Hupa language had precipitously declined around the time of the Great Depression, when economic hardship increased pressures to assimilate. Previous generations had been sent to boarding schools, separating children from their families and breaking the transmission of language in the home. I primarily worked with the elders who met at the Hupa Tribal Language Center, along with their students, including neophytes and semi-speakers who actively participated in the program on a weekly basis. Many of the materials I left behind are still in use, and I hope they will continue to benefit the community for generations to come (Carpenter et al. 2016). While the language is still critically endangered, there are now ongoing efforts to teach the language in classrooms, immersion camps, and master-apprentice programs.

The following sections focus on two types of words whose importance were impressed upon me by Hupa elders during my fieldwork. The first is neologisms, new words for objects or technologies, which are coined using longstanding templates and thereby update Hupa's vocabulary for speakers and learners. In the course of repatriating legacy materials, we discovered that they contained old neologisms, words that were coined in the 19th century and provide insight into Hupa experiences of colonization and resulting cultural changes. The second type of word that Hupa elders found significant were long, polysynthetic words that could be used to provide instruction in Hupa cosmology and worldviews. I describe an example that I encountered when discussing a legacy text with a speaker, who used Hupa grammatical categories of animacy to teach me a lesson about relationships between humans and other beings.

3.2.1 Hupa neologisms, new and old

As Cowell (2018: 201–241) found in his research on Northern Arapaho language politics, neologisms – including strategies for coining them and commentary upon them – can be a topic of considerable interest for speakers and learners involved in language maintenance and revitalization. Due to the timing of language shift in the Hupa community, there were not words for many aspects of daily life in the era following the Second World War, including objects like radios, televisions, and computers, so when I would meet with the elders at the Tribal headquarters even simple gossip required

the people in the room to update their vocabulary by creating new words. I once asked an elder if there was ever a word for the radio. He told me that he did not remember one, though he had no trouble coming up with a new one, following the formulas laid down by his ancestors. The templates for Hupa neologisms are straightforward, based on associating some salient act with the referent that is being named, in the form of a polysynthetic word that singles out the referent as a unique and identifiable actor in the world. The Hupa language is, in this sense, filled with metonymy, like many polysynthetic languages in which things are named for the actions associated with them (Ahlers 1996; Basso 1996; Hinton & Ahlers 1999; O'Neill 2008: 235–254; Spence 2016). It was evident to my consultant that a radio could be called *`adaa-ch'ixinewh* 'the one that talks by itself'. Over the course of my stay in the Hupa community, we had ample time to discuss many neologisms as they came up on the course of our daily translation work.

In addition to these neologisms, whose development I observed during my fieldwork, the elders and I also explored old neologisms – words that were coined or modified by earlier generations to communicate about their experiences of colonization. Given the extensive records generated by previous research on Hupa, my work with the elders often involved revisiting legacy materials. In the course of my fieldwork from 1998–2001, I would read narratives collected by previous researchers aloud for the elders to consider. As true experts in their heritage, the elders were often critical interpreters, as they listened to the words of their ancestors, transcribed by outsiders and reanimated in our sessions. In going over the texts collected by Goddard (1904), a clear stream of old neologisms emerged from the records. These pertained to the coming of Europeans in the mid-19th century, with the sudden onslaught of the gold rush.

Early European settlers, for instance, were first described with the word *teł'aach'*, 'a pack train came', built on a verb that would normally be used to describe the motion of non-human actors, as a lower form of life (Goddard 1904: 200). The word for Europeans themselves reflected a traditional Hupa worldview, as these disruptive newcomers were dubbed *yimaan'dil*, or 'the ones who come from across the waters', which at the time was conceived of not as an ocean, but as a great cosmic river circling around Northern California as a disc at the center (see O'Neill 2008: 121–123, 248). The Europeans were seen as coming from the edge of the horizon. Understanding the meaning of this word, and its original sense, therefore embedded an oblique reference to a traditional worldview.

In addition to precipitating contemporary neologisms, the arrival of Europeans also ushered in an era of semantic shift as existing words came to apply to new technologies that were supplanting traditional ways of life. By the late 19th century, the age-old word for a traditional Hupa semi-subterranean house came to be applied to modern dwellings, while memories of the old ways faded. The word for house, *xontah*, derives etymologically

from the noun *xon'* 'fire' together with the postposition *-tah* 'around', referencing a time when the household was built around a fire at its center. Then, in the late 20th century, a new wave of neologisms emerged: the old word *xontah* now referred exclusively to the modern dwelling of everyday experience, while the neologism *xo'ji-xontah* came to be used to refer to the traditional or *xo'ji-* 'true' dwellings. So in the 1990s, when reading a narrative collected in 1901–1902, we had to keep in mind that *xontah* referred to a traditional dwelling, not a modern one. The 1990s word for a traditional house, *xo'ji-xontah*, followed the pattern of a series of neologisms in more recent times, with the traditional reference being cast as the "original", "old", or "true" variety of a particular cultural feature. From this new perspective, a traditional house was a "real house", while the unmarked form referred to the modern house. In this way, then, the Hupa words for 'house' are both old and new at the same time.

Reading the Goddard texts with the elders was an exercise in recovering lost layers of meanings in words, from delving into the cultural and historical significance of old neologisms developed to describe experiences of colonization, to learning how old words took on new meanings, while new words were coined to describe traditional cultural practices. Thus, new lessons can sometimes be learned from revisiting old materials in collaboration with living speakers, both in terms of rediscovering the past and reimagining the future, as a language undergoes renewal and new words are developed from old templates.

3.2.2 Cultural worlds in the translation of words

Something as simple as a translation can sometimes be philosophically revealing because it involves passing not just between languages but between associated traditions in culture. For example, I once asked a distinguished Hupa elder named Jimmy Jackson how to translate a simple phrase from one of the classic narratives in the Goddard (1904: 314–16) collection, entitled "Formula for Going Dangerous Places in a Canoe". The narrative featured a character known as Sandpiper, a mythical bird that can still be seen today, traveling by canoe and creating a medicine to protect humans when traversing white water rapids and other rough waters. The medicine is the text of the narrative itself, which could be recited for protection. At first, the translation seemed like it would be straightforward. In English, I asked him how to say: "He or she landed a boat", which is expressed as one word in this polysynthetic language. I expected an easy transition from my prompt into Hupa, with the same grammatical roles of subject and object – with the rower of the boat occupying the role of the agent, or conscious instigator of the event, and the lifeless vessel, the canoe, the mode of transport, in the gramma-

tical role of the patient. Yet, instead of simply translating the prompt, the elder chose to reframe the story, telling the version he knew from childhood.

What my consultant said surprised me, and the elder even seemed to take delight in the sense of shock he delivered in that moment, asking me to listen carefully to what he had said and to report back to him with a translation the following week during our next scheduled meeting at his home. When listening to the recording, it soon became clear that the Hupa expression departed in significant ways from the simple English phrase that launched our discussion. Here, I thought, we had a simple scene: a living being landing a lifeless boat. Yet the Hupa translation suggests a very different analysis of the scene, a complete reframing, which reminded me of Boas's (1911) insight that mental imagery shifts a bit as we pass from one language to the next, where people may have built up different mental habits. The form the elder gave me was:[3]

(1) *xołmeenandiGeed*

xo-ł=	*m-ee-naa-Ø-n(i)-di-Geed*
3POSS.ANIM-with=	3POSS.INAM-to-ITER-3SBJ-ASP-REFL-shove.stick.like.object
'with him/her'	'a stick-like object shoves itself back to (the shore)'

Translating this long polysynthetic word was no easy feat, given the complex structure that the elder spontaneously delivered in response to my prompt.

The elder's perspective on the seemingly straightforward English phrase "he or she landed a boat" was quite different than mine based on the English expression. In Hupa, as in other Athabaskan languages, the central idea, the root, is usually the final part of the word, appearing only after a long string of prefixes and other kinds of supporting material. The root *-Geed* suggests movement of a long object, such as stick, an arrow, a cane, or in this case, a canoe. The *di-* element before it adds a reflexive meaning, creating a verb base which signals that the stick-like object propels itself along. Immediately before this base, the temporal prefix *n-* indicates a motion that has come to a halt, as signaled by the conclusive aspect. The absence of an overt subject marker (*Ø-*) indicates a default third-person actor, not particularly high in animacy, again referring to the boat, which is propelling itself along. The iterative prefix *na(a)-* suggests motion that returns to some place, having been there once before. The positional prefix *me(e)-* indicates an action that heads towards something inanimate, here the shore. Finally, the passenger, the subject in the English expression, is identified in Hupa only as an afterthought with the proclitic element, *xoł=*, which loosely translates as 'with some third

[3] The following abbreviations are used in examples: 3 – third person; ANIM – animate; ASP – aspect; INAM – inanimate; ITER – iterative; POSS – possessive; REFL – reflexive; REL – relative; REV – reversative; SBJ – subject.

person object', along for the ride, so to speak. In this last respect, at least, the elder's form resembled the word in Goddard's (1904: 315) text from nearly a century earlier, which also presents the canoe as actor and the human rower as object:

(2) *xołmeenundilaadiêy*

xo-ł=	*m-ee-naa-Ø-n(i)-di-laad=êy*
3POSS.ANIM-with=	3POSS.INAM-to-ITER-3SBJ-ASP-REV-float=REL
'with him/her'	'(the canoe) floated (itself) back (to shore)'

Having translated all of the word's parts, though, there was still a great deal to uncover about its meaning. Why was the presumptive agent, the rower of the boat, reduced to the role of mere passenger by both Goddard's consultant and my own? Why was the boat itself in charge of the situation, carrying itself back to shore with the passenger on board, merely along for the ride? And what did this word have to do with the broader text itself, a "formula", to employ the term that Goddard (1904: 93) used for this genre, "for want of a better name"?

As it turns out, there were underlying religious concerns to explore regarding the relationship between humans and other life forms. After verifying my translation, the elder asked me to consider a small model of a canoe that he had built. As he held it up, he asked me if I thought it was living or nonliving – "alive or dead?", I think he said. Of course, as an English speaker, my gut feeling was that the boat was inanimate. This wooden vessel was just a physical object and no longer alive, even if it was fashioned from a living thing. "Wrong", he said. From a Hupa perspective, the boat is a living thing, he informed me. It's "animate" in part because the tree from which it was fashioned was once a living thing. This much we shared, as a starting point, as any English speaker would agree that the tree itself was once alive. Yet he maintained that the boat continued to house a spirit even after it fell, in part because it has been fashioned into a canoe. The canoe, like a living thing, though unlike the once-living tree, had body parts, going beyond its original form when it was still a tree, unshaped by human hands and souls. In Hupa terms, the canoe had a *mitehs'ay'* or 'nose' in the front. In the back, the seats were called 'kidneys', as Boas (1934: 28–30) once noted in his work on self-paddling canoes among the Kwakiutl of British Columbia, as well as vessels fashioned after animals, such as the wolf. The whole canoe, in Hupa, was in fact fashioned to look like a living being, and it was treated as such even verbally (see MacLaury 1989; Basso 1990: 14–24; Levinson 1994 for accounts of body-part meronymy in other Native American languages).

As we talked more about the meaning, the wisdom imparted by this expression became clear. In effect, there was something to learn from viewing the boat as a living thing and demoting the paddler to the role of passenger.

On the open water, a person can never be completely in control. Even today, passengers are caught off guard as they are overtaken by the dangerous currents on the open waters, particularly in turbulent spots known as the "holes", dangerous riptides on the sea. Those holes can sweep you away, pulling you into the undercurrents where are you are rolled around in the water until you drown. In Hupa cosmology, there were water monsters down in those holes who did the dirty deeds, catching passengers off guard, creating a powerful mnemonic rooted in traditional narratives for remembering to stay vigilant when traveling on the dangerous white waters. In the elder's expression the boat has more control than the person doing the paddling, and his story encourages the listener to work mindfully alongside the other powerful agencies in the scene, such as the force of water and its undercurrents. As the elder instructed me, one should say prayers before venturing out on the waters since there were spirits there who demanded respect.

Similar to a prayer, Goddard's "formula" is in fact a discursive means of mediating between the powerful agencies that can protect or threaten those traveling by boat, since by reciting the account of Sandpiper's journey across the waters circling the world, the reciter could thereby draw the attention, goodwill, and favor of Sandpiper (Goddard 1904: 93; see also O'Neill 2016: 62 on Hupa ideologies regarding the spiritual power invested in the Hupa language). My approach to the text failed to do it justice, and so the elder decided to respond to what I thought was a simple exercise in translation to give me a much broader lesson in how traditional Hupa views of the world are embedded in words themselves.

3.3 Ponca

Turning now to my more recent work with the Ponca community in Oklahoma, I explore how seemingly minor lexical differences between two related languages can become important identity markers, or shibboleths, for speakers, especially when deeply felt historical and political factors motivate community members to differentiate themselves from another group with whom they have often been (in their view, unjustly) equated. Beginning in at least the 19th century, if not before, Poncas worked to establish an independent political identity separate from the linguistically and culturally related Omaha community as well as to assert their claims to land that Omahas ceded to the United States in 1854. As a result of the long process of political separation from what is now the Omaha Tribe of Nebraska and Iowa, speakers from the Ponca Tribe of Oklahoma emphasize lexical differences between what they consider to be distinct Ponca and Omaha *languages*, varieties which most linguists have thought of as *dialects* of a single language called Omaha-Ponca. These language politics shape how Ponca speakers engage with legacy materials today, since previous research did not always

adequately distinguish between Ponca and Omaha, from the community's perspective. In the case of a recent community-based Ponca dictionary project, Omaha-Ponca legacy materials were valuable for refreshing speakers' memories and provided clues about differences between Ponca and Omaha in the 19th century. Ultimately, however, the project's priority was not to recover historical knowledge from Omaha-Ponca legacy materials, but to document Ponca as a distinct language based on the knowledge of speakers today, including their current awareness of lexical differences between Ponca and Omaha that could be used to support a message of national differentiation between the Ponca and Omaha peoples.

3.3.1 The politics of words: Omaha-Ponca or Omaha and Ponca?

As most linguists would readily acknowledge, the boundary between a "language" and a "dialect" is a slippery one, often amounting to an exercise in personal judgement. The distinction is difficult to sustain because it is often unclear what differences in either grammar or vocabulary would qualify related varieties to be classified as different languages, rather than as dialects of the same language. The situation is also complicated since scholarly pronouncements about whether two varieties are languages or dialects may have political implications, and communities themselves often have strongly held beliefs about whether they speak a dialect of a more widely shared language or their own independent language. As discussed above, words tend to be the most salient unit of language for speakers and can be tied to broader narratives through which speakers interpret linguistic, social, and political groups and their boundaries (see Hill & Hill 1986; Kroskrity 1993 discussed above). Thus, it is not surprising that contrasting words for the same referent may play a prominent role in a community's sense that they speak their own distinct language rather than a dialect of a language shared by others.

Over the years, I witnessed some of these tensions surrounding shibboleth words – words that people consider to be indicative or diagnostic of a linguistic variety and/or a speaker's identity – in my work with the distinguished Ponca elder Louis Headman. Starting in 2012, the Ponca Tribe of Oklahoma initiated a project, directed by Headman, their most fluent speaker, aimed at producing a dictionary for the community to consult as a resource for the home and for Ponca language renewal programs. In conjunction with a Council of Elders, we completed a community-based *Dictionary of the Ponca People* (Headman & O'Neill 2019) as well as a reference grammar. The Ponca language of Oklahoma is critically endangered. There are only a handful of speakers, including Headman and the elders who contributed to the dictionary project. Headman, along with several of the surviving Council members, now teach community language courses at the Ponca Tribal Headquarters in White Eagle, Oklahoma. Efforts are also underway to teach the language through

gospel music, using materials that Headman collected on the language, culture, and history of the Ponca community starting in his teenage years (Headman 2020).

The *Dictionary of the Ponca People* relies heavily on existing documentary materials, which the speakers used to refresh their memories of the words and meanings, along with their grammatical properties, such as the conjugation patterns. Ultimately, however, the Ponca Tribe of Oklahoma very much preferred to work with materials they developed for their own Tribe, based on work with their own elders. One problem speakers of today had with the legacy documentation was that it did not always reflect the current vocabulary of the language or the ways in which Ponca differed from a closely related variety, Omaha.

Previous generations of linguists and anthropologists often collapsed the distinction between the Ponca and Omaha peoples, following a tradition that the Ponca were a clan of the Omaha before their separation (Ritter 2002). The split between the Ponca and Omaha, along with their associated languages and revitalization programs in the present-day states of Oklahoma and Nebraska, respectively, can be traced back to at least the late 19th century, when the Poncas were forcibly removed from Nebraska, though according to oral history the groups had already separated several centuries before that and were only briefly reunited several times afterwards. Even prior to removal, in 1854 Omahas ceded approximately 500,000 acres of land also claimed by Poncas to the United States. Poncas immediately challenged what they saw as an illegitimate Omaha cession of Ponca land and sought redress (though without success) in a series of court proceedings that lasted until 1968 (Ritter 2020). Headman notes that the claim that the Ponca "were only a part of the larger Omaha Tribe" was used against the Ponca to discredit their land claims during these proceedings: "Such rubbish and ridiculousness was presented to the U.S. Claims Commission to centralize the Ponca in [and limit their land claims to] their last and final stronghold […]. These statements, according to the elders, were derogatory, slanted, and without grounds" (Headman 2020: 10).

Given the long history of controversy over land and little regular contact between the Ponca Tribe of Oklahoma and the Omaha Tribe of Nebraska since removal, it is easy to understand why the Ponca have been at pains to distinguish themselves from the Omaha, which causes speakers to accentuate the perceived differences between their languages (on this phenomenon more generally, see O'Neill 2008; Gal & Irvine 2019). Despite the fact that Omaha and Ponca "are considered distinct languages by their speakers", legacy materials and more recent linguistic research present Ponca and Omaha as dialects of the same language that "differ only minimally" (Rudin & Shea 2005: 25). Such research suggests that both Ponca and Omaha belong to the Dhegihan group of Siouan languages, and within the Dhegihan group Omaha-Ponca constitutes a single language, with perhaps an emerging dialect

continuum among the communities spread across the Plains from Oklahoma to Nebraska.

This classification was proposed by James Owen Dorsey, a missionary-turned-scholar who worked for the Bureau of American Ethnology to document Native languages in the late 19th century. Drawing on the philological tools of his seminary training, Dorsey wrote out thousands of words, collected dozens of texts, and kept careful records of elaborate grammatical paradigms. His extensive records (e.g., Dorsey 1888a, 1988b, 1889, 1890, 1891) are a critical resource for renewing Dhegihan languages in the present era, when only a handful of fluent speakers remain. However, Dorsey's (1890: xv) notion that the Omaha and Ponca speak different "dialects" of a single "Dhegiha language" is not accepted by either the Omaha or Ponca communities today.

Dorsey did record some lexical differences between Omaha and Ponca in his slip files. Sometimes the attribution of a word to Ponca rather than Omaha was a tentative identification made by an Omaha consultant (most of Dorsey's consultants were Omaha). For example, one of the slips contains the note, "L. S. [an Omaha consultant] denied the use of this word among the Omaha, but he said that it might be a P[onca] word"; another slip includes a note that an Omaha consultant told Dorsey that the headword listed was either a mistake or "else a P[onca] word" (Rudin 2011: 2–3). Thus, while we do not know whether Dorsey's consultants agreed with him that Omaha and Ponca were dialects rather than languages, we do know that they recognized lexical differences between Omaha and Ponca, to the point where Omaha speakers attributed words that they did not recognize to the words being Ponca.

However, Headman's dictionary draws no attention to the lexical distinctions between Omaha and Ponca that Dorsey identified in the late 19th century, even when the same distinctions are present today, nor does it recover what are by now archaic Ponca words that Dorsey recorded as being in use at the time of his fieldwork. Some of the lexical differences that Dorsey identified between Ponca and Omaha are preserved in the present: Dorsey records the Ponca word for 'Spaniard' as *shpaiúna* and the Omaha word as *héshpaiúna* (Rudin 2011: 5), a difference reflected in more recent dictionaries, though Headman does not draw explicit attention to the contrasting Omaha form (Swetland 1977: 161; Headman & O'Neill 2019: 142). In other cases, a distinction between Ponca and Omaha words has been maintained even though one of the terms has changed. For 'sword', for example, Dorsey identified *máhi^{n} wézhahe* 'stabbing knife' as the Ponca term and *ma^{n}ze wet^{h}i^{n}* 'metal for striking' as the Omaha term (Rudin 2011: 5). Omaha has preserved the latter word (Swetland 1977: 168), while Headman includes the current Ponca word for 'sword', *mą́hi t'ągà* 'big knife' without mentioning *máhi^{n} wézhahe*, the now archaic Ponca word that Dorsey recorded (Headman & O'Neill 2019: 115). In yet other cases, the Ponca and Omaha terms have converged. For 'sheep', Dorsey gives *tatshúge wanágthe* 'tame antelope' as

the Ponca word, and *haxúde* as the Omaha word (Rudin 2011: 5). Headman's Ponca dictionary lists only *haxúde* (matching the Omaha word) as the current word for 'sheep', which apparently no longer derives from *t'ačú'ge* 'antelope' (Headman & O'Neill 2019: 91, 329). In other words, rather than seeking to recirculate what are by now archaic Ponca shibboleths like *tatshúge wanágthe* Headman's dictionary compiles the current Ponca lexicon, including whatever differences between Ponca and Omaha are salient to speakers today. For the Ponca community, it is current Ponca speakers who are the relevant authorities on the Ponca language, certainly when compared with Dorsey's "Dhegiha" (that is, Omaha-Ponca) documentation from a century earlier.

When it comes to differentiating the Ponca and Omaha languages, the dictionary includes a list, reproduced here in Table 1, illustrating what Headman and the Ponca elders consider some of the "fundamental differences in vocabulary, pronunciation, and meaning" that have arisen as a result of a "long-standing geographical and political separation" between the Omaha and Ponca communities (Headman & O'Neill 2019: 38).

Table 1. Locally salient lexical contrasts between Ponca and Omaha (Headman & O'Neill 2019: 38)

English	**Ponca**	**Omaha**	**Nature of Difference**
auto	*k'ipínągè*	*k'inánąge*	vowel quality, nasalization, accent
forearm	*á'hidè*	*áusnì*	contraction, vowel quality
frost	*xéwągé*	*áxewà*	contraction, loss of nasal
jail	*ugánąhąpazè t'i'*	*t'ibút'a*	different neologisms
North Star	*miká'e škąažì*	*mikáe mądíážidà*	different neologisms
school	*wagąze*	*t'ápuskà*	different neologisms
Thanksgiving Day	*zizík'a wadatè*	*ąba wék'išnà*	different neologisms
wagon	*žąínągè*	*žąnąge*	different stress and vowel quality
very good	*údą áča*	*udáč'*	contraction, stress
Where are you going?	*áwaket'a néa*	*ákt'a néa*	contraction (with conservatism in Ponca)
pelican	*hudáte*	*bdéxe*	semantic shift: a small crane is *bdéxe* in Ponca.

In addition to this list, some dictionary entries identify further lexical differences between Ponca and Omaha. For example, the entry for 'green' lists the Ponca *č'ú'* as the headword, while a note mentions that an Omaha term for green is *péžit'ù* (Headman & O'Neill 2019: 62). Similarly, the entry for 'morel' lists a Ponca headword and then includes in the notes an alternate

form that is "believed to be of Omaha origin" but primarily refers to part of a bison's stomach in Ponca. The surface of morels, an edible fungus, resembles stomach lining; the entry implies that Omaha has one term whose semantic extension includes both 'morel' and 'stomach lining', while Ponca has two distinct terms, one for 'morel' (the entry's headword) and one for 'stomach lining' (cognate with the Omaha term) (Headman & O'Neill 2019: 121).

Lexical differences between Ponca and Omaha often reflect neologisms for referents of Euro-American origin, as well as sound changes, simple contractions, or the loss of phonetic features such as nasalization. Such differences may strike some observers as relatively minor, but even minor lexical contrasts can serve as shibboleths of group membership when one group seeks to differentiate itself politically from a historically associated group – as the saying goes, languages, as opposed to the dialects, are the ones "with the separate armies". In practical terms, the Ponca Tribe is not comfortable basing a language revitalization program on legacy materials nor on recent materials developed for the Omaha community when they have capable speakers within their own Tribe who also speak a more contemporary form of the language than Dorsey documented a century ago and which includes a different set of lexical items whose differences from their Omaha equivalents are salient to Ponca people today.

4. Conclusion (Schwartz)

Whatever the linguistic richness and complexity of the documentary materials we inherit from our predecessors, heritage language communities often see those materials as collections of *words*. As we saw in this paper, the Plains Apache tribal archives are filled with vocabulary items collected by community members as heirlooms for future generations. The Hupa elder O'Neill worked with disaggregated the text he was explaining into culturally – even cosmologically – significant words. The primary documentation that the Ponca Tribe of Oklahoma recognizes as being specifically about *their* distinctive heritage language (as opposed to Omaha) is a dictionary. In light of these experiences, it is not hard to imagine that the future of language revitalization in these and perhaps many other communities may focus on words.

This presents a very different picture of what language revitalization involves from the one linguists most commonly assume. As Hinton (2010: 38) puts it, "the primary goal in language revitalization is, almost by definition, the development of new speakers", and there is often an implicit or explicit assumption that the best kind of speaker is a native or fluent one. For example, the popularity of early childhood immersion programs is in part a result of their apparent success in cultivating oral fluency and restoring intergenerational transmission for languages like Māori and Hawaiian. Because they have the greatest chance of success at producing fluent speakers,

"most linguists and educators would agree that total-immersion programs are the best option for revitalizing a language" (Grenoble & Whaley 2006: 51). Although many linguists have observed that increasing the number of fluent speakers isn't the only goal of language reclamation programs, "the absolute number of fluent speakers of a language remains the most discernible factor that is tracked and measured" when assessing the vitality of endangered languages (Pine & Turin 2017: Section 2.2). And while many stakeholders acknowledge a variety of goals as valid outcomes for language revitalization, all too often the assumption is that success is measured by the number of speakers, their fluency, and the domains in which the language is used (Leonard 2011: 138–139).

The notion that increasing the number of fluent speakers is the most important outcome of language revitalization has led some speakers and linguists to criticize or discount efforts that lead to students learning words without becoming fluent speakers. For a lesson designed to teach Apache literacy, for example, Nevins worked with a speaker to record sound files for a list of words. After they finished, her consultant "recited them back […] incredulously: '*bįįh, chizh, ch'ah, dįį'í, dlǫ, dził, góchi* ('deer, firewood, hat, the number four, bird, mountain, pig')" and asked, "Is this really what it's supposed to mean to know the Apache language?" (Nevins 2013: 55). Flores Farfán & Olko (2021: 98) argue that "new speakers are very important, often essential, for language revitalization projects" and rather judgmentally contrast "'symbolic' speakers […] with no real intention of recovering the language, who use only a few formulaic words and phrases for political reasons" to "new speakers who are really committed to recovering their mother tongue". Goodfellow (2003: 42) points out that while learning grammatical structures is difficult for students of Native American languages who are accustomed to speaking English, "learning vocabulary is easier" and "if they do begin to be able to speak their language, it's in a 'pidginized' form that often combines English grammatical and phonological structures with vocabulary from the Native American language". The problem is that since this variety "is not considered to be the 'real' language, we constantly hear of the failure of Native language programs to produce 'fluent' speakers" (Goodfellow 2003: 42; see also Speas 2009: 25–26). In a similar vein, Meek (2011: 52–53) notes that languages and age groups are often "rank[ed] by fluency" in government communications and other media, which privileges one kind of speaker (the fluent elder) over others (younger language learners) and contributes to a "dominant discourse of failure surrounding Native Americans" as numbers of speakers and fluency decline.

In contrast to standards of success focused on fluency, many linguists have argued that standards for success should be determined by community goals (Leonard 2011). Fitzgerald (2017: e286–e287) argues that "determining the success or failure of language revitalization will be reductionist (and inadequate) insofar as it only looks at number of speakers and performance on

an idealized version of the Indigenous language" and fails to consider community-based notions of success, which may focus on what *myaamia* community linguist Daryl Baldwin calls "cultural fluency" (Leonard 2011: 140) rather than grammatical competence, linguistic fluency, or intergenerational transmission. In line with an emphasis on local standards for success that may not involve fluency as a primary goal, Perley (2011: 186), observing the failure of Maliseet revitalization to produce new speakers, concludes his book by presenting "alternative vitalities" for Maliseet, "creative Maliseet language, culture, and identity projects" such as paintings that incorporate Maliseet words, oral traditions, prayers, and landscapes.

One way in which language revitalization can promote cultural fluency or alternative vitalities is by helping learners engage with culturally significant words and names rather than producing fluent speakers. One Chinuk Wawa (Chinook Jargon) teacher notes that learning culturally-relevant vocabulary through stories and songs strengthens learners' self-esteem and their connection to culture, place, and history (Underriner et al. 2021: 255). Another program focuses on "develop[ing] personal 'language bundles' […] collection[s] of Anishinaabemowin words" that can be integrated into everyday life as a way of creating connections and community among language learners (Bergier et al. 2021: 271–272). As one participant puts it, "We might not be speakers […] but we can weave the new words into the fabrics of our lives with gratitude for the meaningful relationships we created with each other and with the place where we work and learn" (Bergier et al. 2021: 272).

While many community language teachers and learners are aware that lexically-focused language revitalization is the best fit for their goals, the scholarly literature on language revitalization has yet to fully recognize that learning vocabulary while developing a sense of social and cultural connection may be what language revitalization *is* in many contexts. There are a few exceptions. For example, Grenoble & Whaley (2006: 50) note that some communities have opted to focus on teaching "songs, culturally significant terms, and ceremonies", a form of revitalization that is "not geared towards fluency" but still "reinforces highly symbolic uses of the language". Interestingly, while the focus on measuring language vitality by the number of speakers and domains of use seems to derive from the Reversing Language Shift framework, Fishman himself was pluralistic when it came to the goals of RLS. Describing a program to teach an Aboriginal language in Australia with few remaining speakers that promised that students would learn how to incorporate "Bundjalung words and phrases in […] everyday (English) conversation", Fishman (1991: 257) remarks: "This, indeed, is a type of Reversing Language Shift, but it is RLS of the last possible and most urgent kind. The fact that it can no longer lead to proficiency (not to mention intergenerational proficiency, which now seems to be an unobtainable goal for Bundjalung and scores of other Aboriginal languages) makes it no less important and, possibly, no less contributory to identity and self-concept".

In conclusion, while there is clearly more to language than words alone, it is sometimes surprising how meaningful words can be for communities who have experienced language loss and/or are engaged in language revitalization. This is connected both to the prominence of words in metalinguistic awareness as well as the ways in which words are linked to stories, historical experiences, socio-linguistic identities, and more. The process of repatriating linguistic legacy materials to consultants who have a special interest in words gives new value to archival materials such as relatively decontextualized wordlists as well as texts, which can also be disaggregated in community members' hands into culturally significant words. By recontextualizing archival documentation in the ongoing social and cultural life of communities, profound and locally meaningful insights can be recovered from legacy materials like vocabulary schedules or text collections that have been removed from the settings and scenes of everyday life for many years. Considering contemporary language revitalization and cultural reclamation efforts, the pressing concern today is to return these materials to the original source communities – repatriating words, along with all of the associated linguistic and cultural legacies that can be restored from these historical archives. In this context, community-based projects focused on preserving and promoting knowledge of significant words and names rather than creating fluent speakers may not match everyone's expectations for what an ideal form of language revitalization looks like, but lexical knowledge should be considered a legitimate and meaningful language revitalization goal in its own right.

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