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Documenting language and discerning listenership: Fluent speakers' evaluations of Dakota's oldest legacy texts

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Documenting language and discerning listenership: Fluent speakers' evaluations of Dakota's oldest legacy texts

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Abstract

This paper follows ethnopoetic tradition by combining close linguistic analysis with ethnographic scrutiny in order to shed light on the social production of the oldest legacy data on the Dakota language, a set of biblical translations published in 1839. Semantic calques from the French-language source text are ubiquitous in the translations, which subsequently became enregistered as "theological speech" through their use in Dakota religious services for nearly two centuries. Despite the morpho-syntactic aberrance of this legacy material and the interpretive problems it poses, contemporary Dakota speakers express very high praise for the text. I account for this surprising evaluation by describing Dakota ideas related to skilled speaking, discerning listenership, and the autonomy of persons. In particular, I show that the semantically and grammatically unorthodox biblical translations satisfy Dakota expectations about skilled speakers' habit of producing oblique discourse that allows autonomous listeners to practice careful discernment. Within the Hymesian tradition of textual analysis, uncovering the poetic patterns latent within legacy data culminated in a more meaningful text by displaying the individual voice of a skilled narrator. This paper instead highlights the collective listenership of the descendant community and the cultural values that animate their appraisals of legacy material.

1. Introduction

Engagement with existing legacy materials is an important prerequisite for contemporary language documentation and description. Even after conducting field research, linguists and anthropologists alike regularly pore over literature produced by academic predecessors, hoping to gain insight from what has been said about genetically or typologically related languages. While these inherited

materials offer the welcome potential of enriching our thinking and writing, their distant provenance may raise problems in addition to hoped-for answers. The ready interpretation and usefulness of legacy materials is often diminished by outmoded theoretical paradigms, tired cultural preoccupations, and shockingly discriminatory rhetoric about cultural others. The problems presented when attempting to make sense of legacy materials may provoke annoyance and even contempt from contemporary scholars. But familiarity with these problems also cultivates a reflexiveness – and perhaps insecurity – about the eventual reception of our own work, painstakingly collected and archived to ensure its inheritance by future readers.

The problems presented by legacy materials on endangered languages are amply illustrated by the ethnopoetic research on Native American languages of Dell Hymes (1981, 1998, 2003). In his analyses of Penutian languages (Clackamas, Wasco-Wishram, and Takelma) and narrative traditions, Hymes worked extensively with texts collected by earlier Boasian anthropologists like Sapir (1909, 1922) and Jacobs (1959, 1960). He labored to demonstrate the problematic nature of the materials themselves and ongoing understandings of the speech events they distilled. In particular, Hymes argued that Boasian fieldworkers mistakenly interpreted the speech events they recorded as narratives, rather than performances of narratives. This assumption led them to elide the poetic patterning of original performances by encoding them as prose. Hymes framed ethnopoetics as a recuperative project that unearthed the poetic structure of original performances in order to repatriate sociolinguistic records to descendant communities (Blommaert 2006).

For Hymes (1980: 10) the recuperative potential of ethnopoetic research hinged on an attunement to the original voice of individual narrators:

> We are doing more than documenting a cultural pattern. We are revealing something of the expressive purpose of a particular place and time […]. Analysis of this kind can bring us much closer to the weighing and balancing of words, the rhythms and emphases, of *the original voice* [emphasis added].

As this quote suggests, in addition to uncovering the expressive intent of individual narrators, Hymes aimed to uncover the broader socio-cultural variables that informed the production of narrative performances. In his essay "Breakthrough into performance", Hymes (1981) shows how poetic patterning is manifested only when the social conditions are appropriate for the speaker to assume responsibility for a full performance. Careful linguistic scrutiny of legacy materials therefore offers insight into the social circumstances motivating and shaping the original narrative.

This paper follows ethnopoetic tradition in combining close linguistic analysis with ethnographic scrutiny in order to portray the social production of legacy material that resulted from the first large-scale documentary work on

Dakota (ISO 639-3 dak). In particular, I argue that the linguistic properties of the legacy material itself shed light on the participant roles (Goffman 1974) and speech events (Hymes 1974) which lie behind its production. Such an approach helps us orient to inherited legacy data as something more than a repository of lexical inventories and grammatical patterns. It opens pathways for us to see legacy data as a distillation of particular interactional moments between fieldworkers and consultants, and to see how those interactions shaped the content and form of the resulting records (Webster 1999).

This paper also builds on Hymes's (1980) longstanding concern for the descendant community's reception of legacy materials and the cultural logics they draw on when interpreting them. However, I depart from Hymes's emphasis on individual voice by instead foregrounding the collective listenership of the descendant community. The interpretive postures and practices of listeners has received relatively little attention in ethnopoetic scholarship (Kroskrity 1985; Webster 2013), or in the literature on language documentation. To make sense of Dakota people's surprisingly high evaluations of legacy material that many linguists would understandably deem problematic, my analysis focuses on Dakota language ideologies pertaining to skilled speech and discerning listenership. Ideas about speaking, listening, and the communicative process are informed by much broader cultural values surrounding human sociality and the kinds of persons who engage in it (Kulick 1992). My analysis therefore turns to Dakota ideas about personhood, with particular focus on the moral significance of respecting and expressing autonomy during the communicative process.

2. Conflicting receptions of legacy data

This paper scrutinizes competing evaluations of the legacy material that resulted from the first large-scale documentary work on Dakota, which was undertaken by two English-speaking Protestant missionaries and a fur trader who was fluent in both French and Dakota. The text which resulted from their collaboration, a sample of biblical translations published in 1839, departs from colloquial Dakota in significant ways that are highly salient today. The publication is filled with calques from the French source text; the calques, also known as loan translations, involve the borrowing of semantic expressions from one language to another (e.g., English *blue-blood* borrowed from Spanish *sangre azul* as an idiom meaning 'of noble birth'). Because calques often yield peculiar morpho-syntactic patterns, academic linguists have devalued this legacy material as an impure translation contaminated by French. For example, during a language conference in summer 2015, one linguist emphasized that "the biblical translations contain grammatical constructions that you would never hear when listening to authentic discourse". Other linguists responded to

my informal inquiries about the merit of this material by asserting that the fur trader in question could not possibly have been a fluent speaker of Dakota.

Although the assessments described above have not been articulated in published literature, they are expressed during conferences and online dialogues. These scholarly appraisals of the legacy data, which give priority to the morpho-syntactic properties of the text, are not particularly surprising. After all, engagement with legacy materials is increasingly motivated by efforts to reverse language shift (baird 2013; Baldwin et al. 2013). If language revitalization constitutes an attempt to reverse the shift from an indigenous language to a European one, drawing on legacy data that bears the imprint of a European language could undercut revitalization efforts. As a linguist, this is certainly a perspective I sympathize with, and it is not my intent to suggest that morpho-syntactic considerations have no place in assessing the data produced by our predecessors. But comments about the grammatical impurity of Dakota biblical translations and the inauthenticity of the translator cannot be accepted uncritically. As this paper aims to demonstrate, interpretations of inherited texts – even grammatically aberrant texts – reveal conventional ideas about the communicative process and the types of persons who engage in it.

During my field research on Dakota language revitalization over 16 months between 2016 and 2019, I encountered very different evaluations of the legacy material from fluent speakers of Dakota. This research was centered on the Lake Traverse Reservation in northeastern South Dakota, where I partnered with the Sisseton-Wahpeton Tribal College to carry out language documentation research and to conduct an ethnography of language revitalization efforts. Of the 14,000 enrolled members at Lake Traverse Reservation, there are approximately 50 people recognized as "fluent speakers" or "fluent elders" by the local community (both terms are used interchangeably). Dakota definitions of fluent elder consistently reflect two essential criteria. First, while fluent elders possess varying degrees of proficiency with the heritage language and expertise in different genres of discourse, they are all capable of holding extended conversations in Dakota. Second, while fluent elders may possess knowledge related to a broad range of cultural domains, contemporary Dakota people prioritize knowledge of traditional kinship protocols when determining whether or not someone is a fluent elder. The prominent place of kinship in Dakota definitions of fluency points to a major finding of my ethnographic research: Dakota language revitalization practices are fundamentally directed towards addressing broader community concerns about the breakdown in family systems and the kinship protocols which constitute them.

Given that the Dakota language is metonymic for broader concerns which preoccupy tribal members at Lake Traverse, I was eager to hear fluent elders' assessments of the biblical translations and to discern the evaluative criteria such assessments draw upon. Attendance at the seven Episcopal and Presbyterian Dakota churches on Lake Traverse Reservation has steadily

diminished in recent decades. But contemporary elders vividly remember the days when these small churches functioned as focal points for social life on the reservation. They frequently share fond memories of the beautiful and booming sound of Dakota hymns filling small church buildings. They wistfully recollect long visits with relatives during summer potlucks and feasts that followed services. One elder expressed the significance of the local church during his childhood in the following terms: "When we were growing up, houses were too small to gather. Anything that happened, it happened at the church". The importance of the Dakota churches is similarly signaled by the commonly heard refrain, "When we were children, every family had at least one Dakota Bible".

Elders today thus offer nostalgic commentary on the past significance of church life and the vibrant social gatherings where a Dakota community was visible. Though these recollections reflect sentimentalism about bygone days, elders articulate honest assessments about the merits of the Dakota Bible. Like linguists, fluent speakers recognize that these translations depart significantly from everyday speech. They also emphasize that those departures diminish the immediate intelligibility of the text. As one elder explained, "It's theological language, way different from how we talked at home".[1] Yet despite the difficulty of interpreting the calque-filled text, fluent elders are unanimous in their high evaluation of the translations. After referring to the translations as "beautiful Dakota", one speaker offered the following comment: "If you can learn to read the Bible, then you'll truly be a speaker. Not just anybody can understand it". Similarly, another elder offered the following assessment with an approving smile and proud chuckle: "The Bible uses the same words as we do, but it uses them differently. It's hard to understand sometimes, isn't it?" In this commentary, contemporary speakers are not simply acknowledging that the legacy material departs from idiomatic speech; they are simultaneously applauding the translations precisely because they differ from everyday speech in ways that challenge comprehension.

In what follows, after describing the social production of the Dakota Bible (Section 3), I describe the linguistic properties which distinguish it from colloquial speech (Section 4). Section 5 offers an ethnographic account for the unintuitive ways in which contemporary Dakota speakers evaluate the translations. This account centers on an analysis of Dakota ideas about skilled speech, discerning listenership, and the individuals who use language. These

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[1] I do not provide names when quoting fluent elders in this paper. Dakota speakers are often uncomfortable with the prospect of an anonymous readership of *Wašicu* ('White people' or 'Non-Natives') knowing their names and opinions. This potential discomfort is heightened by the fact that the paper examines evaluations of a religious text. Because Dakota people maintain that consideration of religious or spiritual matters calls for a high degree of discretion and humility, it would be culturally inappropriate for me to provide specific names.

ideologies challenge common understandings of language documentation and suggest that awareness of cultural models for listenership may be an overlooked resource for linguists and communities engaged in language documentation and revitalization.

3. The history and social production of the *Extracts*

Unlike many endangered languages of North America, Dakota is fortunate to have a rich and relatively old documentary record. The first large-scale efforts to produce Dakota texts began in the 1830s, when several missionary families made contact with the Santee bands of Dakota living in present-day central Minnesota. Shortly after arriving in the field, Thomas Williamson and Stephen Riggs, both missionaries under contract with the American Board of Commissioners of Foreign Missions (ABCFM), visited the home of a local fur trader named Joseph Renville. The son of a French fur trader and a Dakota woman from Little Crow's *Mdewakʰaṭʰuwą* band, Renville operated a trading station situated alongside a widening of the Minnesota River known as Lac qui Parle. Renville's competency in both French and Dakota was an invaluable asset to early missionization efforts. The initial visit to Lac qui Parle soon evolved into a productive collaboration between the ABCFM missionaries and Renville. The result, among other things, was the 1839 publication of *Extracts from Genesis and the Psalms, with the third chapter of Proverbs, and the third chapter of Daniel, in the Dacota language* (Williamson & Renville 1839).[2]

The *Extracts* is just one of many publications authored by Williamson and Riggs during more than forty years of missionary work among Dakota people. This first text was soon followed by additional Bible translations (Williamson et al. 1842; Riggs 1871; Williamson 1872; Williamson & Riggs 1887), hymn books (Renville 1842; Riggs & Williamson 1869), catechisms (Riggs 1882), grammars (Riggs 1852; Riggs & Dorsey 1893), and other devotional materials for Christian readers (Renville et al. 1864; Riggs 1892). The *Extracts* constituted an ur-text for the prolific documentary corpus that followed. The missionaries counted themselves exceedingly fortunate to have Joseph Renville for a partner in the production of this foundational work. As Riggs (1887: 64) expressed, "Besides giving these portions of the Word of God to the Dakotas sooner than it could have been done by the missionaries alone, these translations were invaluable to us as a means of studying the structure of the language […].

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[2] This document is henceforth referred to as *Extracts*. For secondary sources that provide insight into the production of the text and biographical information about the contributors, see Riggs 1869, 1887; Pond 1893; Ackermann 1931.

[W]e always felt safe in referring to Mr. Renville as authority in regard to the form of a Dakota expression".

Renville was born in 1779 and raised by his mother and her dense network of *Mdewakʰatʰuwą* kin near the confluence of the Minnesota and Mississippi rivers, close to present-day St. Paul, Minnesota (Ackermann 1931). When Renville was ten years old, his father, a French fur trader of moderate influence in the region, arranged for him to receive instruction from a Roman Catholic priest in Canada. Yet this exposure to the French language and Catholic religion was relatively brief. He returned to his mother's village following the death of his father, which occurred sometime "before he had attained to manhood" (Riggs 1869: 154).

After entering his father's profession, Renville became renowned throughout Minnesota and adjacent territories as a skilled and diplomatic interpreter. Williamson described Renville's linguistic and social adeptness in the following terms: "He […] had a remarkable tact in discovering the meaning of a speaker, and conveying the intended impression […]. These qualities fitted him for an interpreter, and it was generally admitted that he had no equal" (quoted in Riggs 1869: 164). Military officers and government officials echoed the missionary's praise of Renville's linguistic virtuosity, and his services were frequently solicited by Euro-Americans wishing to hold conferences with Dakota leaders.[3]

Renville's generous reception of diverse audiences at his impressive home on Lac qui Parle secured him considerable influence throughout the region. Joseph Nicollet, the French scientist and explorer, offered the following praise: "The liberal and untiring hospitality offered by the [Renville] family, the great exercise exerted by it over the Indians of this country in the maintenance of peace and protection to travelers, demands, besides our gratitude, some special acknowledgment" (quoted in Riggs 1869: 159). Renville's warm hospitality won him significant prestige among Dakota audiences as well as Euro-American ones. Thus Riggs (1887: 40) describes the following scene typical of the reception room at "Fort Renville", as the fur trader's abode was designated: "Here the chief Indian men of the village gathered to smoke and talk. A bench ran almost around the entire room on which they sat or reclined. Mr. Renville usually sat on a chair in the middle of the room".

Historical descriptions of Joseph Renville thus portray him as a truly remarkable individual whose regional prominence followed from a unique linguistic sensitivity and diplomatic tact, and the ABCFM missionaries enthusiastically accepted an invitation to the reception room where tribal leaders and colonial agents were so frequently entertained. Though Williamson

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[3] In 1805 General Zebulon Pike, a foundational figure in Minnesota state history, recommended Renville for the post of United States interpreter (Riggs 1869: 156).

and Riggs possessed considerable knowledge of Biblical Hebrew and Greek, both were monolingual speakers of English. Therefore, immediately after arriving at Lac qui Parle in 1835, Williamson began studying French in order to facilitate dialogue with Renville and the eventual translation of scripture. Riggs (1869: 162), who arrived at Lac qui Parle in 1837, provides a detailed description of the peculiar workflow that characterized these early visits.

> Mr. Renville […] sat in a large chair in the middle of his own reception room [with the other missionaries and me] seated at a side-table with our writing materials before us. When we were all ready, Dr. Williamson read a verse from the French Bible. This, Mr. Renville, usually with great readiness, repeated in the Dakota language. We wrote it down from his mouth. If the sentence was too long for us to remember, Mr. Renville repeated it. When the verse was written, someone read it over, and it was corrected.

This procedure yielded the translations contained in the *Extracts*, as well as Williamson's (1839) subsequent translation of Mark.[4] Unsurprisingly, the translations resulting from this opportunistic workflow show conspicuous departures from colloquial speech. In the following section, I provide an analysis of the properties of these texts that pose interpretive challenges for contemporary speakers of Dakota. The analysis presented below is the product of a broader examination of all four biblical books contained within the *Extracts*. These include Genesis (Chapters 4 and 22), Proverbs (Chapter 3), Psalms (Chapters 33 and 51), and Daniel (Chapter 3).

4. Linguistic properties of the text

As described above, academic linguists and fluent speakers of Dakota both recognize that the translations found in the *Extracts* differ considerably from colloquial speech patterns. Here I provide an analysis of the linguistic properties that elicit skepticism from linguists and pose interpretive challenges for fluent elders. The *Extracts* contain numerous unfamiliar semantic formulations that demand careful scrutiny of adjacent discourse. While archaic words are some-times the source of puzzling semantics, the vast majority of cases involve

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[4] The introduction to Williamson and Renville's *Extracts* mentions that the French Bible published by the American Bible Society served as the source text for translations. The 1818 Annual Report of the American Bible Society describes a donation of stereotype plates (in lieu of money) received from the British and Foreign Bible Society (Strickland 1820). The report also indicates that the BFBS plates reflected Jean-Frédéric Ostervald's 1724 French translation. The American Bible Society subsequently used these plates to print Bibles that were distributed throughout French communities in North America.

semantic calques of the French source text. At the very least, such loan translations yield unidiomatic semantics. But, in many cases, loan translations alter grammatical structure as well, producing discourse that is technically ungrammatical. Renville's translations often exhibit a preference for dependent-marking strategies that are characteristic of Indo-European languages like French, as opposed to head-marking patterns that Siouan languages like Dakota typically use (Nichols 1986; Helmbrecht 2001). In other words, grammatical distinctions in the *Extracts* are often expressed within noun phrases instead of within verbs, the more expected typological pattern for Dakota. I conclude the section by putting this analysis into diachronic perspective, arguing that Renville's calque-filled translations have over time become enregistered (Agha 2004; Fishman 2006) as "theological speech" within the Sisseton-Wahpeton community.

4.1 Archaic words

The *Extracts* volume was produced more than 180 years ago. Since its initial publication, Dakota-speaking communities have endured violent displacement from their traditional lands in present-day Minnesota and forced assimilation via government-sponsored boarding schools, among other oppressive settler colonial policies that have undermined intergenerational transmission of the Dakota language. It therefore comes as no surprise that the *Extracts* contain many lexical items which contemporary speakers find archaic.[5] Many of these archaic terms show particular morphological properties. As can be seen from the three examples provided in Table 1 below, the archaic words often display only a moderate degree of compositionality, i.e., the morphemic constituents clearly contribute to the meaning of the whole, but the exact lexical meaning cannot be predicted from analysis of a word's component morphemes.[6] For example, in the third lexical item presented below, *cʰạteptạyeyA* (lit. 'to overturn someone's heart'), knowledge of the morphemic constituents may also

[5] Dakota reservations are scattered widely across the Northern Plains. It is often the case that speakers in one community have continued using a particular word even though the same word is no longer commonly used in other communities. The inventory of archaic words may therefore differ considerably in other Dakota-speaking communities.

[6] Abbreviations used are as follows: 1SG.A – 1st-person singular agent; 1SG.P – 1st-person singular patient; 2.A – 2nd-person agent; 2.P – 2nd-person patient; 3PL.P – 3rd-person plural patient; ADVZ – adverbializer; APL – applicative; BEN – benefactive; CAUS – causative; CNTR – contrastive focus; DAT – dative; DEF – definite; FSC – final stem component; HAB – habitual; HORT – hortative; INDF – indefinite patient; IRR – irrealis; ISC – initial stem component; NEG – negator; NMZ – nominalizer; PL – plural; RFL.POSS – reflexive possessive.

suggest conventionalized lexical meanings like 'to flirt with someone' or 'to embarrass someone'.

Table 1. Sample of archaic words from the Extracts

Lexical item	cʰat-o-hnakA	cʰat-iyahde-yA	cʰate-ptạye-yA
Morpheme gloss	heart-inside-place	heart-endure.hard-ship-CAUS	heart-over-turned-CAUS
Free translation	'to have tender compassion for someone'	'to offend someone greatly'	'to infuriate someone'
Reference	Psalm 51:1	Daniel 3:13	Daniel 3:13

Correct interpretation of these words requires careful attention to adjacent discourse. Example (1) contains the archaic word *cʰateptạyeyA* 'to infuriate someone'. King Nebuchadnezzar is instructing his servants to punish the Jewish protagonists for disobeying his orders. Readers who are acquainted with Nebuchadnezzar's narcissism and who can infer that he would become furious (rather than, say, embarrassed) upon learning that Jewish captives have refused to worship before the statue he erected are able to discern the precise meaning of the word, but the combination of agglutinative morphology and moderate compositionality exhibited by archaic words imbue the text with a poetic difficulty. For contemporary speakers, it is as if Renville produced a text that poses significant interpretive challenges while also leaving readers with sufficient clues to discover his intended meaning.[7]

(1) *Pʰetağa   kị   cʰokaya   expe=wicʰa-ya-ya-pi   kta.*
     coals   DEF   center   be.left=3PL.P-2.A-CAUS-PL   IRR
     'You will throw them in the center of the coals.'

     Nína   cʰate-ptạye=ma-ya-pi.
     really   heart-overturned=1SG.P-CAUS-PL
     'They have really infuriated me.' [Daniel 3:13, p. 66]

Making sense of ambiguous discourse is something that fluent elders delight in. As I describe in Section 5 below, the interpretive experience of reading the Dakota Bible resonates deeply with Dakota ideologies related to skilled speaking, specifically, and the communicative process more generally. For Dakota elders, skilled speaking is constituted by the capacity to veil meaning

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[7] In this example and others that follow, I provide the page number immediately after the biblical reference. The page number indicates where the exemplified verse can be found in the *Extracts*.

in ways that open up interpretive space for one's interlocutors to apply their linguistic prowess. Rather than being felt to present an undue burden, such interpretive challenges are welcomed as an acknowledgment of the listeners' capacity and freedom to exercise discernment. Before describing this ideological grounding in more detail, the following subsections analyze other textual characteristics that pose interpretive challenges for contemporary readers. Understandably, these peculiar textual properties have provoked skepticism among some linguists about Renville's fluency, leading them to hold the opinion that the *Extracts* and similar translations are inauthentic documents that evince the intellectual signature of Euro-American missionaries rather than a Dakota-speaking translator.

4.2 Semantic calques and dependent marking

Archaic words were described above in order to illustrate the interpretive challenges that contemporary readers find in the *Extracts* and also to point towards the culturally-particular interpretive frame that informs fluent elders' positive evaluation of those challenges. However, archaic words do not constitute the most frequent or even the most conspicuous textual property that departs from colloquial speech and diminishes ready interpretation. Instead, semantic calques, i.e., loan translations from the French text, are ubiquitous in the *Extracts*. While they can be found in almost every verse, semantic calques are especially conspicuous when they involve figurative language. Example (2) provides a straightforward illustration using the translation of Genesis 4:1, in French, *Adam connut Eve sa femme* 'Adam knew his wife, Eve'. As might be expected, the Dakota verb *sdonyA* 'to know' is not typically used as a euphemism for 'to have sex with'.

(2) *Adam   tʰawicu   Ewe   sdonya.*
     Adam   wife   Eve   knew
     'Adam knew his wife, Eve.' [Genesis 4:1, p. 17]

(3) *Wakʰa-tʰaka   wa-ki-yušna-pi   he   wicʰo-ksape*
     mystery-be.great   INDF-DAT-drop-PL   DEM   NMZ-be.wise
     kí-ca-ksa-pi.
     DAT-by.impact-be.broken-PL
     'That which is offered to God is a broken spirit.' [Psalm 51:17, p. 47]

Example (3) provides a more elaborate illustration of loan translation. The relevant passage is from Psalm 51, a prayer of repentance in which David confesses guilt and seeks a renewed status before God after committing adultery and murder. Here Renville calques the French expression *esprit brisé* 'broken

spirit' in verse 17: *Le sacrifice agréable à Dieu c'est un esprit brisé* 'The sacrifice pleasing to God is a broken spirit'. The first clause in the Dakota contains a relative clause, the right boundary of which is marked by the demonstrative pronoun *he*. The verb within this clause, *wakiyušnapi*, means, 'they offer things to him'. The second clause contains a noun, *wicʰoksape* 'human wisdom', and a verb, *kícaksapi* 'they break it for him', which together form a single complex predicate that means, 'to be a broken spirit'. The issue here centers on the unorthodox use of the verb *kícaksapi* 'broken for someone' as a metaphor for humble contrition and sincere repentance. In other words, Renville borrows a figurative usage of *brisé* 'broken', which results in an unidiomatic translation that is more peculiar than poetic for contemporary speakers.

While the examples above involve unidiomatic semantic formulations that are (at least initially) confounding for fluent elders, the grammatical structure itself remains unaffected. In (3), Renville's use of a noun and verb together as a complex stative predicate is perfectly grammatical; the issue lies in the semantic metaphor expressed by the predicate. However, in other cases Renville's borrowing of translations from the French source yield what might be termed ungrammatical sentences. The impact of semantic calques on grammatical structure is particularly evident in sentences that involve possessed body parts. As with many Native American languages, Dakota encodes possession in two primary ways: internal vs. external possession (Payne & Barshi 1999). The internal/external status of a possessive construction is determined with respect to the noun phrase. A possessive construction is internal if it is expressed inside the noun phrase and external if it receives expression in the predicate. In example (4) below, the possessive relationship is expressed by the independent word *mitʰawa* 'my', and the right boundary of the noun phrase is signaled by the definite article *kị*.

(4)   Internal possession construction
       Wicʰaụpi   mi-tʰawa   kị   yu-bdaza-pi
       shirt   1SG.P-possess   DEF   by.pulling-be.torn-PL
       'They ripped my shirt.' (shirt not significant to possessor, possessor relatively unaffected)

(5)   External possession construction
       Wicʰaụpi kị   ma-ki-yu-bdaza-pi
       shirt   DEF   1SG.P-DAT-by.pulling-be.torn-PL
       'They ripped my shirt.' (shirt significant to possessor, possessor affected)

With external possession constructions, however, the possessive relationship is predicated in the main verb and thus outside or external to the noun phrase. It involves a non-argument participant (e.g., a genitive or dative participant which is otherwise embedded within noun phrases and postpositional phrases)

that is promoted to argument status (Payne & Barshi 1999). In example (5), the first-person possessor is promoted to primary argument status and therefore encoded with a dependent verbal pronoun. Importantly, the distribution of these grammatical alternatives is semantically motivated. Internal possession is reserved for situations in which the possessor is not significantly affected by the event, while external possession encodes the affectedness of possessors by promoting them to argument status (Ullrich & Black Bear Jr. 2016).

(6a) *Wó-wašte*   *mi-cʰᶏte*   *o-ya-ki-yake.*
      NMZ-be.good   1SG.P-heart   ISC-2.A-DAT-tell
      'You spoke goodness/wisdom to my heart.' (internal possession)
      [Psalm 51:6, p. 46]

(6b) *Wó-wašte*   *cʰᶏte kᶖ*   *o-ma-ya-ki-yake.*
      NMZ-be.good   heart DEF   ISC-1SG.P-2.A-DAT-tell
      'You spoke goodness/wisdom to my heart.' (external possession)

    Example (6a) portrays another line from Renville's translation of King David's confessional prayer in Psalm 51. In verse 6, the Psalmist comforts himself by remembering God's faithfulness, saying in French, *Tu me feras comprendre la sagesse dans le secret de mon coeur* 'You will make me know wisdom in the secret of my heart'. Interestingly, Renville chose to use an internal possession construction when translating 'my heart'. This internal marking of possession is infelicitous because it suggests that it is merely the Psalmist's heart which is affected by the predication, construing the Psalmist himself as unaffected. The abnormality of this rendering is heightened by the fact that the possessive relation involves a body part. Dakota makes a fundamental distinction between things which are inalienably possessed (i.e., body parts and kin terms) and those that are alienably possessed. This dichotomy functions to emphasize the close attachment between possessors and certain classes of possessions, an attachment which is contradicted by the internal encoding of possession in this case. The result is a feeling that the heart in question is somehow disembodied and irrelevant to its possessor! Example (6b) above provides an alternative, and more colloquial, rendering of this idea, which encodes the possessive relation within the predicate via a bound pronoun from the patient series. This sentence was produced in consultation with a contemporary speaker at Lake Traverse Reservation, who affirmed that it sounds more natural: "It's more like the way we typically talk".
    Renville's unconventional use of internal possession marking is one instance of a more general phenomenon observed when analyzing the *Extracts*: Many translations rely on dependent-marking strategies characteristic of Indo-European languages like French as opposed to the head-marking patterns that typify Siouan languages (Nichols 1986; Helmbrecht 2001). Another instance of this pattern of encoding grammatical complexity around dependents involves

cases in which a body part fulfills the role of semantic agent. Like many Siouan languages, Dakota contains a rich inventory of instrumental prefixes that increase verbal valency by introducing a semantic agent and specifying the means for accomplishing the state expressed in the verbal root. A list of instrumental prefixes and their most common translations is presented in Table 2 below.

Table 2. Instrumental prefixes and common translations

Prefix	Gloss
yu-	'by hand'
pa-	'by pressure'
ya-	'by mouth'
na-	'by foot'
ba-	'by knife'
bo-	'by shooting'
ka-	'by impact with instrument'

In everyday speech, fluent elders employ this class of prefixes to express meanings like 'by mouth' and 'by foot' within the clausal head instead of using overt possessed nouns that reference a semantic agent. Example (7a) illustrates Renville's translation of Proverbs 3:23, in French, *Ton pied ne heurtera point* 'Your foot will not stumble'. The verb in (7a) contains the instrumental prefix, *na-* 'by foot'. Thus *wanahnayA* literally means 'to miss or to fail at something by action of the foot'. The semantic distinction contributed by the *na-* prefix therefore makes the independent noun, *siha* 'foot', redundant. (7b) provides a more idiomatic expression of the idea conveyed in Proverbs 3:23. This sentence was produced in consultation with a contemporary fluent elder who I worked with on a more "everyday" version of (7a).

(7a) *Ni-siha kį wa-na-hnaye kte šni.*
    2.P-foot DEF INDF-by.foot-miss IRR NEG
    'Your foot will not stumble.' [Proverbs 3:23, p. 62]

(7b) *Wa-na-ya-hnaye kte šni.*
    INDF-by.foot-2.A-miss IRR NEG
    'Your foot will not stumble.'

Example (8a) provides the translation produced for Psalm 51:14, in French, *Ma langue chantera hautemant ta justice* 'My tongue will loudly sing your righteousness'. This sentence is especially revealing of how Renville's semantic calques result in grammatical structures that depart from everyday speech

by using dependent-marking structures, i.e., encoding information using independent nouns instead of verbal morphology. In (8a), possession of the semantic patient is marked with an internal possession construction, suggesting that the second-person possessor is largely unaffected by the predication. Moreover, Renville translates *ma langue* ('my tongue') using an independent noun and internal marking of first-person possession. (8b) offers a head-marked alternative. The verb *yatą* literally means 'to make proud/honor someone by mouth'. The prefix *ya-* 'by mouth' thus replaces the independent noun, *i* 'mouth', found in Example (8a). Possession of *wóopʰe* 'law/righteousness' is expressed by a benefactive prefix on the verb, and the affectedness of the second-person possessor is encoded by a bound pronoun prefixed to the verb, i.e., by promoting the second-person to primary argument status.

(8a) *Wóopʰe   ni-tʰawa   mi-i   kį   i-dową   kta.*
      law   2.P-possess   1SG.P-mouth DEF   APL-sing IRR
      'My mouth will sing (in honor) of your law/righteousness.'
      (internal possession) [Psalm 51:14, p. 47]

(8b) *Wóopʰe   kį   cʰí-ci-ya-tą   kta.*
      law   DEF   1SG.A>2.P-BEN-by.mouth-be.proud IRR
      'I will praise your law/righteousness with song.'
      (external possession, instrumental prefix)

   As I have demonstrated, in many cases Renville's use of semantic calques yields dependent-marking strategies that are, at best, unidiomatic. Often the effect of such calques is significant enough to yield ungrammatical sentences that initially confound contemporary readers. This occurred as Renville iteratively glossed one word or phrase after another so that morpho-syntactic, as well as semantic, structures were borrowed from French, i.e., both semantic expressions and grammatical structures are borrowed throughout the *Extracts*, as the examples above illustrate. The following section puts this analysis in a diachronic perspective.

4.3 Enregistering loan translations as "theological language"

In her work on language contact and contact-induced change, Thomason (2001: 143) reports that a Montana Salish speaker "translated several English sentences into Salish with sentential calques – deliberately, because he thought the linguist wanted something as close as possible to the English sentences" (see also Thomason 2008). Thomason (2001: 142) refers to this as the "negotiation mechanism", a process which "is at work when speakers change their language (A) to approximate what they believe to be the patterns of another language or dialect (B)". The Dakota data presented above, when examined

alongside Thomason's observation, foreground the importance of attending to the particular speech situations (Hymes 1974) and participant roles (Goffman 1974) that characterize the documentary materials we produce, circulate, and interact with. Renville's role as bilingual Dakota expert, on the one hand, and the speech situation of Bible translation, on the other, undoubtedly influenced the linguistic structure of the *Extracts*. It is not difficult to imagine the missionaries gravely exhorting Renville to produce "exact translations", without any deviation from the source text. Nor is it difficult to imagine Renville responding to such an injunction by iteratively calquing one word or phrase after another.

As linguists, we often envision and approach documentary materials as a repository of lexico-grammatical patterns. While the materials we tirelessly produce undoubtedly contain linguistic structure that demands careful attention in its own right, our understanding of the linguistic data is enriched by scrutiny of the social and cultural context of its production. In recent years, Webster (1999), Dobrin (2012), and Moore (2013) have combined ethnopoetic methodology with rich ethnographic inquiry to reveal how the documentary records we produce are structured by the interactions they distill. By interrogating the non-referential formal devices (e.g., code choice, pausing, discourse particles) that structure documented speech events, these authors demonstrate that narrative data is shaped by the broader interactions which encompass it. Dobrin and Moore, in particular, illuminate how narrative data is actually structured by their consultants' desire to comment on the social identities and characteristics of the fieldworkers with whom they are interacting. They thus call for linguists to give "sustained attention to the ethnographic [or documentary] encounter as a cultural episode in its own right" (Moore 2013: 34), an approach which "provide[s] a window into an enduring document's historical source in a transitory [but] consequential interaction" (Dobrin 2012: 21).

This way of thinking about documentary materials suggests that they are not primarily – or at least not only – records of language. They are also records of social interactions between fieldworkers and consultants. Because of their enduring character, legacy materials have the potential to shape future communicative practices, since the discourse they document may over time become enregistered within a community as a distinct variety characteristic of certain people, practices, or places (Agha 2004: 37). The trajectory of Renville's Bible translations within Dakota communities foregrounds how "the historical social relationships of people in contact can come to be enregistered in a language" (Sicoli 2010: 547).[8] As the fur trader's calque-filled translations

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[8] Sicoli (2010) has shown how prosodic registers (e.g., falsetto, breathy, and creaky voice) may become associated with the participant roles that characterize particular speech events. He argues that the widespread distribution of this phenomenon

became enregistered as "theological language", a new diglossia emerged through their frequent and ongoing use in Christian services. Because language documentation is socially produced, interactions between fieldworkers and consultants are not merely the precursor to documentary data. Instead, those interactions are constitutive of the material itself, and they may even become constitutive of the communicative repertoires of those who inherit the material in the future.

5. Skilled speaking, discerning listenership, and autonomous individuals

The present section accounts for the surprisingly high evaluations of the *Extracts* expressed by fluent speakers of Dakota. As I described above, contemporary speakers recognize that Renville's translations contain marked departures from colloquial speech. They also emphasize that the text's idiosyncratic characteristics make interpretation difficult. Why then are Dakota speakers so unanimous in their approval of Renville's translations? I argue that the interpretive challenges they present actually fulfill Dakota expectations about skilled speakers and the discerning listenership their speech helps cultivate. *Listening* is a major theme in ethnographic accounts of Native American communities. More specifically, Native American elders and caregivers often socialize young people into desirable moral postures through discourse that encourages prolonged and penetrating listening. The connection between discerning listenership and moral personhood is a theme that runs through analyses of Native American storytelling (Scollon & Scollon 1981; Basso 1992, 1996), poetry (Webster 2013, 2019), and language teaching (Bunte 2009; Meek 2012; Nevins 2013). In what follows, I analyze elders' volunteered commentary in connection with two very different speech genres: *hitʰukaka oyakapi* 'telling traditional stories' and *óweháha wókicʰihdakapi* 'joking conversations'. Despite their differences in formality and tone, both genres involve the production of ambiguous and indirect speech that demands discerning listenership. I conclude by arguing that the interpretive challenges posed by skilled speaking are understood to allow listeners to exercise their autonomy, a crucial dimension of moral personhood for Dakota people.

As in other Native American communities, storytelling is a highly valued and culturally salient method for socializing young people into the protocols and practices that characterize Dakota life. *Hitʰukaka* form a large class of

throughout Mesoamerica suggests that these prosodic voices became enregistered in diverse languages as interlocutors attempted to navigate particpant roles in moments of language contact.

stories, which elders traditionally shared with young children and adolescents during winter evenings. While knowledge of *hitʰųkaka* has steadily diminished over the last several decades, many of the fluent elders who participate in language programming have retained knowledge of the content, form, and function of these traditional narratives. Just as Basso (1979, 1992, 1996) demonstrated in his work on Western Apache narrative practices, traditional stories indirectly admonish youthful audiences for improper behavior and exhort them to conduct that is more in line with the community's moral standards.

For example, during a weekly language gathering in the autumn of 2019, I heard an elder share a *hitʰųkaka* about a rabbit's vain attempt to impress a coyote by displaying his energy and endurance. After frantically running through the forest for several hours, the rabbit returned to the coyote, who asked, "Where did all that running take you?" After informing the audience that he received this story from his grandfather, the elder offered the following commentary:

> *Ųkąnawayeg yupʰiya wóyaka ce'. Iyopʰemakiye gaš tʰéhą sdodwakiye šni.*
>
> 'My grandfather told stories skillfully. Even though he reproved me, I didn't know it for a long time.'

These closing remarks clearly signal that the elder's grandfather narrated this story as an expression of disapproval for something he had done. In this meta-communicative commentary, the elder equates skilled speaking with the ability to veil meaning: His grandfather's narrative skill was displayed through the subtle concealment of admonishments hidden within stories.

The coyote and rabbit story was shared after the elder was asked to translate numerous English sentences. The concluding comment suggests that he told the story as a way of expressing his concern that reliance on translation routines is simply motion without progress, i.e., it provides language learners with many sentences but not depth of knowledge. Just as his grandfather told the *hitʰųkaka* to indirectly admonish him for some (unstated) misdeed, so too the elder shared this story to indirectly admonish his young interlocutors for their overly hasty attempt to gather Dakota words by translating English sentence after English sentence. Frustrated with this approach to language instruction, the elder later suggested telling *hitʰųkaka* to learners, who should subsequently "spend a long time thinking about the story, maybe even discussing it together, and then share their own interpretation of what it means".

As the quote above suggests, *hitʰųkaka* do not conclude with an overt didactic coda that explicitly reveals the narrator's purpose. As another fluent speaker once told me, "The good storytellers don't tell you what they're up to. They just get up and walk away when they're through". Rather than unearthing the intent behind the narrative, the accomplished storyteller physically departs, giving the young audience space to interpret the narrative for themselves. In the

spring of 2019, I was sitting with a fluent elder and several language learners in their mid-20s. The learners had posed numerous questions about particular *hitʰukąką* and also asked about several well-known speakers who were reputed to be talented narrators. Concerned that the young men were placing an inordinate or unbalanced emphasis on the communicative role of speaker, the elder said:

> *Tkʰa niš tąyą anayağoptą kte iyécʰeca. Tąyą anayağoptą kįhą watohąni ayabdeze kte.*
>
> 'But as for you, you should listen well. If you listen well you'll figure it [the meaning] out eventually.'

Because skilled speaking is associated with concealment and indirection, Dakota elders emphasize the importance of discernment and patience on the part of the listener. This emphasis on scrutinizing listenership and the active unveiling of implied meaning is not restricted to traditional or formal genres of interaction. Rather, this paradigm of communication informs even the most informal and outwardly frivolous conversations. During *ówehą́hą wókicʰihdakapi* 'joking conversations', fluent speakers frequently produce subtle puns which crescendo with boisterous laughter. In the conversation from which example (10) was taken, two men who were longtime friends sat drinking coffee and casually conversing. One of the elders, who was wearing a rather thick sweater, announced, "It's warm in here". The second elder immediately responded with the sentence below.

(9) *Hau, tʰąhąši. Hed o-kʰad-yena   nąke   scece*
     yes   cousin   there in-be.warm-ADVZ   2.A\be.sitting   seem
     'Yes, cousin. It seems like you're sitting there all warm inside.'

The pun above centers on the word *okʰadyena* 'all warm inside of something'. Because of the ambiguity concerning what exactly the *o-* prefix 'inside' refers to, this utterance has at least three interpretations. Given the first speaker's comment, the unmarked interpretation is (a) 'all warm inside [one's clothing]', i.e., 'you're dressed too warmly'. However, *okʰadyena* could also be interpreted as 'all warm inside [one's body]', in which case it would refer to someone who is either (b) feeling warm because they have been drinking or (c) experiencing a menopause-related hot flash. The first speaker quickly discerned the hidden intent beneath this ostensibly mundane remark about his clothing, and the two friends enjoyed a hearty and sustained laugh together.

As with traditional narratives, the indirection and veiled meaning produced by sophisticated speakers during playful conversations demands perceptive listenership. As one man told me, "The good speakers, the ones that really know what's going on, they add extra meanings in there. When they talk Indian you've really got to think". By producing discourse saturated with implicit and

ambiguous meanings, skilled speakers place an interpretive burden on listeners (Samuels 2001, 2004). Yet the interpretive challenges posed by their discourse are not grudgingly received as an unwelcome difficulty. Instead, interlocutors respond to sophisticated speech as an invitation to display their own insight and acumen (Webster 2010, 2013). Interactional ambiguity and indirection thus resonate with a foundational cultural axiom, *hé i̜š iyé*. This common idiom, which elders generally translate as 'it's his/her decision', gives voice to deeply held ideas about the autonomy of individuals. Indirection is thus welcomed because it opens up interpretive space for autonomous listeners to discern and decide for themselves what an utterance means and why it was said.

As the discussion above shows, fluent Dakota speakers are acclimated to encountering perplexing discourse that calls for perceptive and patient listenership. This is especially true of *hitʰukạkạ*, where elders will sometimes describe not having arrived at a penetrating interpretation until several years after the original telling. Of course, the linguistic mechanisms that yield interpretive hurdles are not the same for traditional narratives, joking conversations, or Renville's translations. What remains constant across all these diverse genres and modes of communication, however, is the cultural value placed on challenging discourse and the sincere enjoyment Dakota speakers find in unraveling the mystifying meaning it contains. Renville's linguistically unorthodox translations thus fulfill Dakota expectations about the communicative competency possessed by skilled speakers and the welcome demands they place on discerning listeners. From a Dakota cultural perspective, it is only appropriate that the highest form of religious language should have these valued qualities.

6. Conclusion

The high praises that contemporary Dakota speakers express for Renville's calque-filled translations raise important questions for documentary linguistics. What exactly do documentary and legacy materials contain? Are they primarily repositories for lexical inventories and morpho-syntactic patterns? Do they essentially display the linguistic competency possessed by speakers of endangered languages? This paper argues that documentary materials are fundamentally repositories of human interactions between researchers and the consultants they work with. Moreover, these interactions are conducted and evaluated in accordance with communicative competencies, which extend beyond linguistic competency into broader cultural patterns that shape human interactions (Hymes 1962). Indeed, the social and cultural aspects of interaction (i.e., the kind of speech event and the participant roles occupied by interlocutors) may even become enregistered in language, problematizing any boundaries that would distinguish communicative competency as a matter of purely linguistic knowledge.

   In this paper I have followed ethnopoetic tradition in combining close linguistic analysis with ethnographic inquiry in order to shed light on the "expressive purpose" of the original voice enduring within Dakota's oldest legacy material. However, this paper also departs from Hymes' emphasis on individual voice by instead foregrounding the collective listenership of the descendant community. After all, while Renville's translations do satisfy his descendants' expectations about skilled speech, this probably has little to do with the expressive purposes motivating the original voice. The morpho-syntactic peculiarities found in the *Extracts* were, in all likelihood, produced unwittingly. At the very least, we can expect that Renville was more concerned with fulfilling the missionaries' requirement of exact translation than he was with meeting fellow speakers' expectations about the interpretive challenges posed by skillfully constructed speech. Regardless of the original motivation or catalyst, Renville's translations satisfy contemporary Dakota peoples' expectations about sophisticated speakers and their habit of cultivating opportunities for autonomous listeners to delight in the discovery of obscure meanings. These animating cultural ideas extend beyond theories of communication into ideas about personhood (Kulick 1992). For Dakota speakers today, Renville's translations affirm the autonomy of individuals by opening space for them to discern and decide for themselves.

   These observations should prompt us to consider not just the collective voice personified by an endangered language or the individual voice that emanates from a recording, but rather the interpretive postures and practices of those who listen (Kroskrity 1985; Dobrin 2008, 2012; Webster 2013). Discerning the cultural values and practices surrounding listenership for descendant communities is important for documentary linguistics today. Efforts to document and revitalize indigenous languages consistently draw a diverse array of differently positioned contributors, both from within and without indigenous communities. In addition to academic linguists who derive their expertise from Western institutions, documentation and revitalization initiatives involve fluent speakers and teachers who acquire their authority from indigenous domains. These efforts are thus informed by divergent and sometimes incommensurable ideas about language, sociality, and the people who engage in it. Such ideological disparities are frequently manifested in recurring conflicts about appropriate methods, rhetorics, and even the goals of language work (Morgan 2009; Meek 2012; Nevins 2013; Debenport 2015; Schwartz 2015; Schwartz & Dobrin 2016).

   As we have seen with the *Extracts*, incongruent ideologies may also inform competing assessments about the merits of legacy materials and the legitimacy of those who produced them. At first glance, such conflicting assessments seem to constitute yet another problem surrounding language revitalization. But the problem of conflicting assessments also presents a unique opportunity to understand the cultural values and criteria that descendant communities draw on when evaluating documentary and descriptive work. To understand these

community evaluations, and the cultural priorities behind them, requires some form of participant-observation, a research method not typically associated with documentary linguistics, even in its collaborative versions (Dobrin & Schwartz 2016). While this interpretive approach raises questions and challenges that may be unfamiliar to many linguists, it also offers the delightful potential of discerning other ways to listen to the materials we produce.

Acknowledgments

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