Community Partnerships: Best practices for Indigenous Language Documentation

Susan D. Penfield, Ph.D., Angelina (Chtareva) Serratos, Benjamin V. Tucker
University Of Arizona

Amelia Flores, Gilford Harper, Nora Vasquez, Johnny Hill, Jr.
Colorado River Indian Tribes

(Contact: Susan Penfield sdp@u.arizona.edu)
Mohave, a member of the Yuman language family: Approximately 30 speakers today at CRIT [Colorado River Indian Tribes].

Chemehuevi, Chemehuevi is a southern Numic language of the Shoshonean branch of Uto-Aztecan: Fewer than 5 fully fluent speakers at CRIT.

Our project builds on previous work at CRIT which involved training tribal members in the use of technology related to language learning.
Colorado River
Indian Reservation
Chemehuevi: Johnny’s Story
Mohave: Oral history (1969)

http://audacity.sourceforge.net/
Techniques for Collaboration
“Action Research”

• Teams must be carefully chosen!

• Tribal [CRIT] team does data collection;
  University of Arizona team assists

• University of Arizona team does electronic documentation;
  Tribal [CRIT] team assists

• Dissemination:
  – tribal members train others/set protocols for online use
  – UA creates a training manual, a website and offers course for The American Indian Language Development Institute (AILDI)
The Challenges: Planning, Training, Archiving

- **Planning**
  - Conceptualizing
    - What is documented?
    - Who does it?
    - What is taught?
    - Who teaches and how?
    - What are the effects on collaborative projects and training models?
  - Background data
  - Travel
  - Distance communication
  - Financial considerations
  - Community support
Challenges

• **Training**
  – When/ where/ how
  – Equipment
  – Language education

• **Archiving**
  – Local
  – Electronic
  – Establishing protocols
Language Education

- Understanding what linguists do
- Community education:
  - descriptive linguistics, language acquisition, dialectal difference, language attitudes, bilingual education, training them to be researchers, explain linguists’ motivation…
  - AILDI (and other native language institutes) as a resource

- Documentation as part of revitalization:
  - What can be done?
  - What kind of materials are needed?
  - The best practice is to document for the purpose of revitalization.
What is the relationship between revitalization and documentation?

- What is documentary adequacy from a community perspective?
  All things that support the revitalization/pedagogical goals: grammars, dictionaries, pragmatics, conversation, and discourse.

- For communities, revitalization and documentation are inseparable --- they energize each other.

- Technology can enhance both documentation and revitalization.
Technology-Enhanced Language Revitalization

- Recent explosion in interest and techniques
- Websites:
  - Technology-Enhanced Language Revitalization: http://projects.ltc.arizona.edu/gates/TELR
  - Indigenous Language and Technology Listserv http://www.u.arizona.edu/~cashcash/ILAT.html
  - Online Language Environment www.ole.arizona.edu
  - E-MELD: http://emeld.org/index.cfm
  - OLAC: http://www.language-archives.org/
  - AILLA: http://www.ailla.utexas.org/site/welcome.html
OLE!: Online language environments

- Fieldwork is central -- both onsite and online

- The OLE board technology (OLE) – a voice, video and text environment for asynchronous communication
Progress so far: Chemehuevi

Evidence of Language Loss
Beginnings of Language Revitalization
In the older texts taken from Harrington’s field notes we find vibrant agreement morphology in the form of enclitics:

Tell-mom-pres-3sg/anim/invis husband-obl-own dead-get-nomin 
She told her about her husband’s death.

(2) haita-’ungwa ma’üpütsi-ungwa ‘an-ampaga…
then-3sg/anim/invis old woman-3sg/anim/invis mom-speak
Then the old woman spoke…

(3) ya’ai-kwai-ka-ni küsavita-’ukwa küanukwi-va.
dead-become-RES-1sg hawk-2sg.imper marry a relative of a deceased spouse-fut
When I die, you will marry my relative Hawk. 
(“The Horned Owl’s Feet Frozen with Snow”)
In the samples collected in 1970s by Press, we also find agreement clitics, however she mentions that they are optional, and gives an example of two possible versions of the same utterance, one with independent pronouns and the other with agreement enclitics:

(4) a. Ann ung pagüci nüü-ni maga-vü
   Ann that fish 1sg-obl give-past

   b. pagüci-a-ung-n maga-vu Ann ung
      fish-obl-3sg-1sg give-past Ann 3sg
      Ann [that one] gave me a fish.

   (Press 1979:121)
In our consultant’s speech, we consistently find independent pronouns, not enclitics:

(5) *Manga-k* ma’üpütsi (h)ambagar-ka-t
    3sg/anim/vis-cop old woman speak-past-prt
    The old woman spoke.

(6) *Nüü-k* *manga*-y huwütu-tü-ya.
    1sg-cop 3sg/anim/vis-obl sing-caus-pres
    I am making her sing.

(7) *Nüü-k* *umi*-ya monokos tünia-sumai…
    1sg-cop you-obl all tell-remember
    I’d like to tell you a story…

On-going research: conduct an in-depth study of a longer discourse
Transitive sentences in Chemehuevi

When there are two participants in an action, the verb is accompanied by two nouns. The first one usually describes the person who initiates the action, the second – the person or the object to which the action applies. In Chemehuevi, the verb follows both nouns, so we first mention the participants of the action and then the action itself.

Mangok maapütci  kania  patcagant.
That  woman  (the) house  cleaned.

Mangok aipatci  sünaavia  punikikat.
That  boy  coyotes  saw.

Mangok na’üntcitci  tasonia  patcaga.
That  girl  socks  (is) washing
Intransitive sentences in Chemehuevi

Some sentences have only one noun and one verb, where the noun is a person performing an action or an object undergoing an action. In Chemehuevi, the verb (the word describing an action) always comes last. The English is, am and are are not used in Chemehuevi, that is why they are in brackets.

Nüük nukwiya.
I (am) running.

Mangak nukwiya.
He (is) running.

Mangak aipatci nukwiya.
That boy (is) running.
What constitutes ‘Best Practices’ for documenting languages in the community context?

• ‘Best Practices’ are still being defined in the context of working within a community…going far beyond just knowing how to collect quality linguistic data.

• Will include minimally:
  – Permissions …on many levels
  – Needs analysis / language planning
  – Finding consultants…team building
  – Checking the adequacy of existing documentation
  – Documenting with an eye toward revitalization
Towards a theory of language documentation for Indigenous Communities

- Collaborative effort
- On site training
- Documenting toward revitalizing
- Community based protocols for use of materials