

# 7. Language Endangerment I

Introduction to Language (Ling 201)

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# Discussion:

- What makes a language healthy?
- How does a language survive?
- What makes a language unhealthy?
- What social conditions contribute to a language's health?
- What natural conditions contribute to a language's health?
- What are endangered languages?

Note: These questions were discussed out loud in class – we didn't use slides for this discussion, but the questions are posted here as a reminder or study guide for those of you referring to these slides for the Final Exam.

# Language Endangerment

“most of the languages spoken in the world today—nearly 90 percent, some think—may be lost by the end of this century.” (R&H 107)

- Why?
- Is this a problem?
- Why?
- Can this problem be addressed?
- Should it be?
- Who gets to decide?

In groups, do Activity 1.



Frances Densmore of the Bureau of American Ethnology and Mountain Chief (Blackfoot), 1916

Search an address or use the toggles and dropdowns to explore the map.

Search your address

- Territories
- Languages
- Treaties

Search territories

Search languages

Search treaties



# Generational Transmission

“The languages described and listed in [*Encyclopedia of the World’s Endangered Languages*] are all at least to some extent under threat of extinction within the next two generations of their native speakers. The ultimate reasons for their decline are many, but the most immediate reason is a simple, stark truth: knowledge of the language as a tool of everyday communication is not being passed from one generation to another.” (p.viii)

# Language Documentation

“Training of linguists in language documentation is a crucial issue for the future, and courses like the one offered in London are a valuable and all too rare asset, if the task of reclaiming disappearing languages is to be met.” (EWEL x)

- What is language documentation?
- Why would this be important?
- How can this be done?
- What ethical considerations should be made?



1639 "Manatus Map"

- Where is this?
- Which way is north?
- What language is the map written in?
- Why?

Aanwijzing der voornaemste Plaetsen op de  
**MANATVS**

1. Comp. Bouwvlyng mit Een Troffel legh Huys	20. Bouw van Twieller in't heylge	37. Plaet van Gevegeygen
2. vyff verwallen Bouwvlyng vanden Comp die'selck traen waer van nu C. 1639 weder 3 bouwen van	21. Bouw van Swickert	38. 2 Plaets van gevegeygen
7. Plantage van Thomas Linder	22. Bou van Antoni de Troek	39. Plaet van Elias norman
8. Plantage van Ant. van	23. Bou van Jan Chretien	40. Bou van Dierck de norman
9. Plantage van Jan Pieterfs	24. Plaet van David de Portier	41. Bou van Celyn
10. Plantage van Twieller	25. Plaet van Hendrick huyder	42. Blygden Bou van Pieter Pieter in syn bouw de 2 geftepe 11 van Rivier om 2 hoogt land
11. Plantage van Peter kackker	26. Plaet van Thoen Jansz	43. Blygden bou van Janus Perneck
12. Plaet van M. Jell de Nie's	27. Bou van van doofse	44. Plaet van Pieter Schoonheer
13. Plaet van Janus Dets	28. o	45. Plaet van huyder
14. Plaet van Jan van Rotterdam	29. Bou van Jan Corvot	A. 2 Tor Amfsterdam
15. Plaet van Hendrick Pieterfs	30. Plaet op de Lantwerfhoek	B. Coeren Moelen
16. Bouwvlyng van Peter Backer	31. vry Plaet op Puiet's Hoek	C. Saeg Moelen
17. Plaet van Jacob Cellaar	32. Plaet van Maegden's	D. 2 Saeg Moelen
18. Bouw van Cornelis van Thien hoorn in	33. Plaet van David de Breyer	E. 2 Quartier van de Swart de Comp. Maer
19. Bouwvlyng van Jan onrengel	34. noete Eylan mit Ein Plan van Twieller	
	35. twee luyt in 3 Plaet van Lantwerf kackker	
	36. 2 plaet in 2 bou van doofse vriest 3 mit 2 van luyt Craep	



- What other languages are on the map?

Munsee placenames are documented here.

- Why?

- Around 1634, a Dutch explorer, Harmen Mendertsz Van den Bogaert, wrote one of the earliest wordlists in Kanien'kéha (aka Mohawk).
- It consists mostly of nouns, with a few verbs as well.
- How do you think he elicited the words?
- Most of his wordlist is very valuable, and one modern scholar wrote that he “deserves high praise for recording a vocabulary of such quality.”

Gunther Michelson, in Gehring & Starna (eds) *A Journey into Mohawk and Oneida Country, 1634-1635*.



- Is gesturing linguistic?
- He wrote that the Kanien'kéha word for 'scraper' was *canagoesat*. But *canagoesat*, which is *ohnakénhsa* in modern Kanien'kéha, means 'deer hide.'
- He also wrote that the word for 'salmon' was *ghekeront*, which is *kaké:ron* in modern Kanien'kéha, and means 'they lie on the ground.'
- Why? What's going on?

The inhabitants of this country are of two kinds: first, Christians—at least so called; second, Indians. Of the Christians I shall say nothing; my design is to speak of the Indians only. These among us are again of two kinds: first, the Mahakinbas, or, as they call themselves, *Kajingahaga*; second, the Mahakans, otherwise called *Agotzagen*.<sup>1</sup> These two nations have different languages, which have no affinity with each other, like Dutch and Latin. These people formerly carried on a great war against each other, but since the Mahakanders were subdued by the Mahakobaas, peace has subsisted between them, and the conquered are obliged to bring a yearly contribution to the others. We live among both these kinds of Indians; and when they come to us from their country, or we go to them, they do us every act of friendship. The principal nation of all the savages and Indians hereabouts with which we have the most intercourse, is the Mahakuaas,<sup>2</sup> who have laid all the other Indians near us under contribution. This nation has a very difficult language, and it costs me great pains to learn it, so as to be able to speak and preach in it fluently. There is no Christian here who understands the language thoroughly; those who have lived here long can use a kind of jargon just sufficient to carry on trade with it, but they do not understand the fundamentals of the language. I am making a vocabulary of the Mahakuaas' language, and when I am among them I ask them how things are called; but as they are very stupid, I sometimes cannot make them understand what I want. Moreover when they tell me, one tells me the word in the infinitive mood, another in the indicative; one in the first, another in the second person; one in the present, another in the preterit. So I stand oftentimes and look, but do not know how to put it down. And as they have declensions and conjugations also, and have their augments like the Greeks, I am like one distracted, and frequently cannot tell what to do, and there is no one to set me right. I shall have to speculate in this alone, in order to become in time an Indian grammarian. When I first observed that they pronounced their words so differently, I asked the commissary of the company<sup>3</sup> what it

<sup>1</sup> Mohawks and Mohicans.

<sup>2</sup> Mohawks.

<sup>3</sup> Presumably Bastiaan Jansen Krol, who had been at Fort Orange most of the time from 1626.

meant. He answered me that he did not know, but imagined they changed their language every two or three years; I argued against this that it could never be that a whole nation should change its language with one consent;—and, although he has been connected with them here these twenty years, he can afford me no assistance.

- Where do you think this person is describing?
- The man who wrote this passage was a Dutch preacher in New York, in the vicinity of present-day Albany.
- What trouble was he having?

They have also naturally a very high opinion of themselves; they say, *Ihy Othkon*, (“I am the Devil”) by which they mean that they are superior folks. In order to praise themselves and their people, whenever we tell them they are very expert at catching deer, or doing this and that, they say, *Tkoschs ko, aguweechon Kajingahaga kouaane Jountuckcha Othkon*; that is, “Really all the Mohawks are very cunning devils.” They

From Johannes Megapolensis Jr.'s (1644) *A short account of the Mohawk Indians*

# Language Revitalization

“Language rescue cannot be imposed from outside; and it is not usually the business of linguists to interfere in political processes. Ultimately communities must help themselves, with informed decisions and the perspective of more than one generation. But before the community can help itself, the language must be codified – set down in some permanent form. Initially this process may require outside help, but not always. Let us not forget Sequoia, inventor of the Cherokee syllabary in the nineteenth century, who made it possible for his fellow-speakers to read and write their own language.” (EWEL xiii–xiv)



D <sub>a</sub>	R <sub>e</sub>	T <sub>i</sub>	Ꭰ <sub>o</sub>	Ꭱ <sub>u</sub>	i <sub>v</sub>
S <sub>ga</sub> Ꭰ <sub>ka</sub>	F <sub>ge</sub>	Y <sub>gi</sub>	A <sub>go</sub>	J <sub>gu</sub>	E <sub>gv</sub>
Ꭲ <sub>na</sub>	P <sub>he</sub>	Ꭳ <sub>hi</sub>	F <sub>ho</sub>	Ꭶ <sub>hu</sub>	Ꭷ <sub>hv</sub>
W <sub>ia</sub>	Ꭴ <sub>le</sub>	F <sub>li</sub>	G <sub>lo</sub>	M <sub>lu</sub>	Ꭹ <sub>lv</sub>
Ꭺ <sub>ma</sub>	Ꭰ <sub>me</sub>	H <sub>m</sub>	Ꭺ <sub>mo</sub>	Y <sub>mu</sub>	
Ꭵ <sub>na</sub> Ꭲ <sub>hna</sub>	Ꭱ <sub>ne</sub>	H <sub>ni</sub>	Z <sub>no</sub>	Ꭰ <sub>nu</sub>	Ꭳ <sub>nv</sub>
T <sub>qua</sub>	Ꭰ <sub>que</sub>	Ꭴ <sub>qui</sub>	V <sub>quo</sub>	Ꭱ <sub>quu</sub>	E <sub>quv</sub>
Ꭶ <sub>sa</sub> Ꭰ <sub>s</sub>	A <sub>se</sub>	B <sub>si</sub>	F <sub>so</sub>	Ꭲ <sub>su</sub>	R <sub>sv</sub>
Ꭾ <sub>da</sub> W <sub>ta</sub>	S <sub>de</sub> Ꭲ <sub>te</sub>	J <sub>di</sub> J <sub>ti</sub>	V <sub>do</sub>	S <sub>du</sub>	Ꭳ <sub>dv</sub>
Ꭰ <sub>dla</sub> L <sub>tla</sub>	L <sub>tle</sub>	C <sub>tli</sub>	Ꭳ <sub>tlo</sub>	Ꭴ <sub>tlu</sub>	P <sub>tlv</sub>
G <sub>tsa</sub>	V <sub>tse</sub>	k <sub>tse</sub>	K <sub>tso</sub>	J <sub>tsu</sub>	C <sub>tstv</sub>
G <sub>wa</sub>	Ꭰ <sub>wre</sub>	Ꭱ <sub>wi</sub>	Ꭱ <sub>wo</sub>	J <sub>wu</sub>	G <sub>wv</sub>
				G <sub>yu</sub>	B <sub>yv</sub>

Now do Activity 2.

# For next time:

- Read pp.1–9 in the *Encyclopedia of the World's Endangered Languages*. There will be a quiz on this reading at the start of class.
- Remember, we'll next meet on 4/13. There's no class on 4/6. Have a great Spring Break!