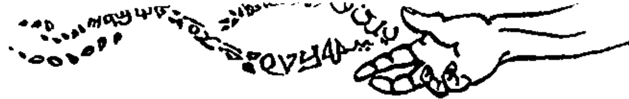

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Endangered Languages

What Role for the Specialist?

Proceedings of the Second FEL Conference

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Endangered Languages - What Role for the Specialist?

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Beyond Expertise: The Role of the Linguist in Language Revitalization Programs

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Abstract

We linguists see ourselves as the knights in shining armor of the language endangerment issue, while the Natives, especially those who do not speak the endangered language, see us at best as a necessarily evil. They are quick to criticize our work, and sometimes even litigate to keep the "foreign" experts under control. Why this gap? First, there is misunderstanding about what linguists do. Second, linguists cannot help with those aspects of the language program that are most crucial from the Natives' viewpoint. Finally, our inclusion in programs entails a loss of community control and autonomy. The socio-political agenda can easily override the urgency of the work. Understanding differences in viewpoint can help foster an environment of mutual respect, leading to a successful project. The linguist must learn to function as part of a team, and the community must learn to get the most out of their linguist in order to attain the shared goal—the revitalization of the language.

1. Background

This is a report on my efforts to help revitalize the Halkomelem language, a Salish language of south-western British Columbia, Canada, with about 400 speakers, most of whom are aged sixty or older. When I was approached by Native communities to help with research and curriculum development, I was delighted with an opportunity to give back knowledge of the language I had learned to love to the grandchildren and great-grandchildren of the elders that had so graciously trained me. I had considerable expertise, based on twenty years of working on the language in the old-fashioned way, sitting with elders and asking questions. So I had developed adequate transcribing skills, detailed knowledge of syntactic constructions, an encyclopedic knowledge of the morphology, and an esoteric vocabulary. I had, like many linguistic researchers, only limited conversational ability and only fleeting exposure to relevant cultural contexts. I quickly discovered many shortcomings in my training and came to realize that I really knew very little about the language. Fortunately, I had strong support from other members of the research team—the elders, teachers, administrators, native speaker linguists, artists, and film students. I also relied heavily on other linguists studying Halkomelem, other Salishanists, and an ethnobiologist.

The research team has successfully produced a plethora of materials that are used by teachers and learners in kindergarten to grade 12 and post-secondary classes. The materials we have produced include a phonics book, a 250-page teaching grammar, and a 310-page 3500-word dictionary, all with accompanying audio or video tapes. Also, we have produced a variety of supporting materials, from bingo games to animal posters to a computerized talking dictionary. Nevertheless, there is a continuing specter of malaise and dissatisfaction surrounding our program. Some of this probably would have been there anyway due to old family feuds, political agendas, pressing social issues, bad working conditions for the teachers, etc. However, I have come to the conclusion that some of the distressing unpleasantness originates with me, the cultural outsider with the academic baggage. This paper tries to survey some of the pitfalls for a linguist, based on my own and other's experiences.

Put simply, linguistic expertise is not sufficient for successful participation in a language program. The linguist must develop social and political skills to be an effective member of a language revitalization team. My hope is that my candid discussion will not only provide some forewarning for linguists starting work on endangered languages, but also generate some response from more experienced researchers, who may be able to offer their advice on these matters. In addition, I hope that a frank discussion of the linguist's viewpoint can help lead to understanding on the part of the communities, universities, and governments. The linguist finds the work extremely difficult, time-consuming, and emotionally draining. The work is made less difficult when there is a supportive environment at work and at home.

I start the discussion with some comments on what linguists can contribute to language revitalization projects. Linguists take this information for granted and are perplexed by the reception they receive from Natives, which is often mixed or even hostile. I explore some of the shortcomings of the modern linguist that lead to difficulties. Next, I briefly explore what communities want. Their viewpoint is often different from the linguist's, producing a conflict in goals, priorities, work rhythms, and methods. The linguist, who sees the project from a top-down perspective, thinks first of major reference materials and academic publications. The community sees the project from a day-to-day viewpoint. Their priorities include supplying materials for the teachers for tomorrow's class, teaching community members a few words and phrases, and giving the elders a chance to meet and use the language. It quickly becomes apparent that the linguist cannot and

should not take on the daily work needed by the community. Thus, the linguist is most useful as part of a language revitalization team. This is a difficult role for an academic to assume, since competitive, individualistic efforts are fostered and rewarded in the university setting. Furthermore, it is difficult for Natives to relinquish enough control to linguists to allow them to proceed with the work. Only through compromise can the work progress in a fashion that is satisfactory to all sides and that produces worthwhile short-term and long-term results.

2. What are linguists good for?

In this section, I discuss the need for a linguist in the language revitalization program. We linguists not only think of this as a foregone conclusion, but we tend to value our work more highly than other aspects of the project. However, from the point of view of the Native community, it is far from obvious that a linguist is wanted or needed. A perusal of reports on language education issues by government and aboriginal agencies reveals that linguists and the academic materials they produce are seldom mentioned.[1] Therefore, it is worthwhile to outline some of the contributions a linguist can make.

What a linguist can do depends of course on their talents, training, and experience. Here is a list of the most common activities that linguists engage in with respect to endangered languages:

- write reference materials and other scholarly works
- collect and archive materials
- help secure funding
- help produce educational materials
- train other linguists, including Native linguists
- help train teachers
- help teach the language
- serve as mediators between Natives and universities
- act as advocates for Native language programs
- serve as researchers or expert witnesses on matters involving language, including place names for land claims, genealogies for treaty research, ethnobiology for land use studies, and labels and translations for museum exhibits.

From the viewpoint of the field of linguistics, the most important work that a linguist can do on a project is write reference materials. Dixon (1997) calls for the linguistic community to mobilize around the issue of endangered languages. He would like to see reference materials for half of the world's languages produced in the next few years, before it is too late. He estimates that it takes three years full-time and US $200, 000 to support a linguist and pay expenses in order to write a descriptive grammar, a dictionary, and a collection of texts. However, in-depth studies of really significant aspects of the language may take many more years. Moreover, an audio-visual archive must be created to go along with the printed works. So a more reasonable estimate would be fifteen years and two million dollars. This would yield quality products that come from someone with real insight into the language and allow time to help train native speaker linguists and teachers. Of course, this time frame could be greatly accelerated if a team of linguists and other experts are working on a language together.

Perhaps Dixon's point is that we should get at least basic information on as many languages as possible. But members of a community take little solace in the fact that other languages are also dying or extinct. The explicitly stated goal of most language programs is full revitalization. Fishman (1991:395) discusses steps for reversing language shift—the process of a new language coming in and supplanting the original one. The first step is trying to reconstruct the language based on historical documents and research with the remaining elders and then teaching it to adults in the community. This takes a robust amount of material, especially when the language is unwritten and only a handful of elders speak it. Typically, basic reference material does not include the type of conversational or audio-visual material necessary for preparing educational materials. So the linguist's role in a community seeking to revitalize its language is much more complicated than simply writing up a sketch of the language and then leaving.

Linguists can help programs in other ways as well. Three major problems consistently identified by respondents to a survey concerning language programs were lack of funds, lack of curriculum material, and shortage of trained instructors (First Nations Languages and Literacy Secretariat, 1992:27). A linguist with a well-established reputation can help secure funds for a project. Many granting agencies are impressed by the inclusion of an academic in the team and by connections to a university. Professors can offer in-kind time to serve as matching funds on a grant proposal. Also, the linguist can often secure funds for research projects. This is discussed further in section 5 below.

Developing curriculum materials usually falls on Native language teachers, who often teach at several different grade levels and at several different schools each day for a fraction of the salary of a regular teacher. More is expected of the Native language teachers than of regular teachers, even though their training may be extremely limited and their literacy skills in the language may be poor. Imagine a French teacher or an English as a Second Language teacher being required to invent all of their own materials for several grade levels each day without the help of reference materials or popular cultural media. The linguist can help produce materials by supplying transcribed language data, proof-reading, and making suggestions about how to orient the curriculum from the point of view of the Native language. Well-meaning educators that do not speak the Native language try to take materials in the colonial language and then have them translated into the Native language, often with disastrous results. The difference between morphological, syntactic, and semantic

[1] See, for example, Green (1987), First National Language and Literacy Secretariat (1992), and Standing Committee on Aboriginal Affairs (1990).

patterns in the Native language and the colonial language makes this task difficult. Furthermore, since one goal of the program is to illustrate Native culture, it is pointless to write the material from the viewpoint of colonial culture.[2] For more advanced students, especially at the secondary or post-secondary level, the linguist can write curriculum, especially in conjunction with native speakers and teachers. In addition, the linguist can help produce multi-media support, including audio-video and computer materials.

A linguist, especially one with significant knowledge of the language, can train people in the structure of the language. A linguist can also help with literacy skills. Even if an oral method is used in class, teachers must read well enough to consult reference materials. If they are going to produce their own materials, then they should have excellent writing skills. As Kirkness (1998:47) notes: "A major problem continues to confront Indian people as they attempt to have Indian languages taught in schools. The ability to speak a language does not necessarily imply the ability to explain a language. Therefore, training for language teachers must be conducted and expanded. This requires linguistic study of the language." Craig (1992:22) notes: "The third key element in the Rama Language Project is its team of professional linguists. A key factor in the failure of the two previous attempts was the lack of professional training of the persons on whom the linguistic analysis fell."[3] We see then that linguists can provide important technical support for the Native language teachers.

Linguists can also be of assistance in teaching the language. Many times native speakers are expected to lead a course without materials, teaching experience, or training. A linguist who is a good teacher can be of great help in this situation. Many of the university-level language courses taught through Secwepemc Cultural Educational Society and Simon Fraser University involve a team of a linguist and a native speaker. Usually after one or two semesters the linguist becomes unnecessary, as the native speaker becomes comfortable directing the class and using the materials. In some cases, a language may be so far gone that no native speaker teachers are available. A linguist with conversational skills in the language can be of great help in this situation. The linguist can help run a course, preferably with the aid of elders, to teach adults the language. These adults in turn can help teach the children. Linguists must be careful in this situation to match the cultural style of the learners and to avoid putting too much emphasis on linguistic structure and phonetics as opposed to conversational ability. An important goal must be to train a community member to take over the course as soon as possible.

We see then that a linguist, especially one willing to spend the necessary time to become expert in the language, can make significant contributions to the Native community and can play an important role in a language revitalization project.

3. Why are linguists misunderstood?

One might think that the role of linguists would be self-evident, that their contributions would be obvious. However, in point of fact, the role of the linguist is often misunderstood and sometimes controversial. Furthermore, it is constantly being scrutinized and redefined. There are many reasons for this.

First, Natives may be suspicious about what motivates linguists to work on their language. After all, linguists are usually members of the culture that colonized the Natives, the culture that made overt attempts to suppress the language and in some cases even had a systematic policy of genocide. It sometimes seems ironic that the linguist is so eager to study the language now, and some hidden financial gain is suspected. However, career advancement is seldom a motivation for researching endangered languages. Field linguists are by-passed in the job market, and expertise in a Native language, unlike major languages such as French or Japanese, rarely leads to a position. Most linguists begin work on a language out of sheer curiosity. They find the study and analysis of a language that is very different from the European languages that they speak and have studied to be extremely challenging and interesting. Dixon (1997:134) summarizes this nicely:

"It is hard to convey the sheer mental exhilaration of field work on a new language. First, one has to recognise the significant analytic problems. Then alternative solutions may tumble around in one's head all night. At the crack of dawn one writes them down, the pros and cons of each. During the day it is possible to assess the alternatives, by checking back through texts that have already been gathered and by asking carefully crafted questions of native speakers. One solution is seen to be clearly correct—it is simpler than the others, and has greater explanatory power. Then one realises that the solution to this problem sheds light on another knotty conundrum that has been causing worry for weeks. And so on."

But what starts as an interesting puzzle often quickly turns into a matter of commitment to the elders and their community. Fieldwork is an intense experience for both linguists and speakers and can often lead to a bond of respect and friendship, which is sometimes resented by family members or community workers.

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[2] Nature words, colors, numbers, and shapes are usually the first things English-speaking teachers want to translate into Halkomelem. These are problematical because of the lack of generic terms in Halkomelem for concepts like 'animal', 'plant', and 'bird', the non-correspondence of English and Halkomelem color terms, the use of classifiers when counting many objects, and the lack of words meaning 'square', 'rectangle', or 'triangle'.

[3] There is sometimes resistance to the involvement of linguists in teacher training. Dauenhauer and Dauenhauer (1998:84) point out that some teachers refuse help because they see a loss of face in taking instruction from someone who does not speak the language well, especially if that person is white and/or female.

The elders' deep commitment to preserving the language and to passing down wisdom to the younger generation rubs off on the linguist, who is entrusted with the mission of helping to save the language.

Often, the community does not understand what linguistics is and what linguists do. This is not surprising given the general lack of public knowledge about the field. We are used to being confused with polyglots or philologists. The field of linguistics has not been very successful at making inroads into arenas other than post-secondary education. Some may think our work centers on transcription or recording, not understanding the job of analysis that lies behind the research. Furthermore, they may see transcription as an easy or trivial task, having never tried it themselves.

Most people do not take the time to observe the linguist at work. After all, there are always administrative matters and urgent social problems to attend to. Mostly the work is done in private with a few elders and the occasional teacher involved. And sometimes observers have no point of reference for understanding the work in the context of an overall project. I am always delighted when younger family members attend the field session and listen to the elders pronouncing the language, but they seldom return a second time, having found our sessions too difficult to follow. Sometimes they drop by and misunderstand the nature of the work. In one group session, I was going over previously-collected vocabulary for cultural items that have not been in use for over twenty years. The elders found this to be an interesting process because sometimes words that they had not heard for decades came forth. A report came back to me later that the visitor had complained to the education officer that I was putting words in the elders' mouths.

Sometimes the project is slow to produce work, as the linguist struggles to get everything exactly right. In the meantime, the program may be underway and the teachers may be hurting for materials. The funding may have been exhausted with little actual product to show. Sometimes there is a finished work but no time or money to duplicate it for distribution. The elders involved in the research and their families are not given copies. Other times it is produced but sits on shelves waiting for an implementation budget to help train teachers in the use of the material.

When the project produces work, especially reference work, it is often "over the heads" of its intended audience. Native speakers find it difficult to use, even if they have some literacy skills. And non-speakers find it impenetrable. It was reported back to me that one education officer, who was not a speaker, criticized our teaching dictionary because she couldn't read it. Halkomelem has a formidable inventory of consonant phonemes, many of which have no English counterparts.[4] It also frequently uses consonant clusters not permitted in English and tends to have long, polysynthetic words. What is difficult to understand is why anyone would assume they could read a language of this type without some kind of training.

Also, the difference between doing research and actually speaking the language is misunderstood. If the linguist is not fluent in the language, how can they write it down or analyze it? If they are unable to converse in the language, then how can they prepare teaching materials or help teach the language? If they do speak it, then they are regarded with suspicion and jealousy by Natives that do not speak. They are sometimes criticized for their accents or their grammatical errors by the native speakers. If they are corrected in front of non-speakers, the word can spread that they are not good in the language and materials they produce become suspect. There is really no excuse for a linguist who is studying a language not to speak it, at least at the level of simple conversation. It is hypocritical to expect others to do what we are unwilling to do ourselves.

Some younger linguists, under pressure to publish theoretically-oriented papers, may dwell on data that are fairly esoteric and not perceived as useful for general educational purposes. The papers they produce are often tedious for other linguists to read, let alone a native speaker or educator. Sometimes younger scholars can be very disrespectful of previous descriptively-oriented work and overly enthusiastic about current theory. On the other hand, the older linguists may have done their research in the 1960s and 1970s, during the heyday of structuralist descriptive grammars. The linguists had strong relationships with consultants who are now deceased. They may not have good relationships with current elders and band administrators.[5]

Also, ties between the fields of anthropology and linguistics have broken down. Many younger scholars have little or no training in topics of cultural relevance, such as kin terms or the structure of texts. They may be inexperienced at research on place names, genealogy, and ethnobiology, or other topics that are of central importance to the community. In fact, many young scholars are not even trained in linguistic field methods. Or their field methods training is extremely shallow.[6] Linguistics programs have abandoned ear training and the study of linguistic analysis in favor of theory. Dixon (1997:128-138) discusses this point in detail.

However, the most important failing of modern linguistics limiting the usefulness of the linguist to a language revitalization program is the fact that it has almost totally abdicated its interest in language teaching. Knowledge of second language acquisition research and language teaching methods used to be

[4]At least our practical orthography is systematic, without the nuisance of ambiguous pronunciation or silent letters.

[5]I have actually heard linguists mention that today's elders are not worth working with because they do not know the older, purer form of the language.

[6]I recently attempted to have the local Native language used in a field methods course, but it was considered too difficult, so Tagalog was selected instead.

considered an essential part of a linguist's training. Many linguists earned their livelihoods by teaching languages or by teaching linguistics in language departments. Linguistics was seen as an important subject for future teachers to train in, since it was believed that understanding the structure of the language would help one teach it. Then the trend in language teaching switched away from grammar and phonics and toward communicative approaches to language teaching. The emphasis was placed on whole language, total physical response, and immersion, and on student-generated materials. These methods were developed to address the problem of lack of conversational ability under traditional language teaching methods. Proponents of these theories claim that languages can be learned without tedious memorization, repetitions, or explanations, if a natural situation mimicking first language acquisition can be set up. Ironically, these methods have had only limited success. They require the right combination of dynamic teaching, motivated learners, community support, language use outside the classroom, and robust resource materials that help to bring the world into the classroom. Also, immersions and intensive courses may be difficult to mount in communities that lack native speaker teachers. Further research on these approaches, their accomplishments, their shortcomings, and their adaptation to endangered language revitalization is necessary before we can assess their effectiveness. In the meantime, Dauenhauer and Dauenhauer (1998:71) suggest: "What is needed is training in various teaching methods; in how to use existing materials and adapt them to one's own teaching style, personality, community setting, and grade level."

In summary, we see that, while linguists have much to contribute to language revitalization programs, their work can be made difficult both by shortcomings in their own training and experience and also by lack of knowledge on the part of the community about what linguistics is and what linguists do.

4. What do communities want?

I start this section off with apologies to Verna Kirkness, Professor Emeritus and former director of the First Nations House of Learning at the University of British Columbia, who is reported to have said: "Every time a white person stands up to talk about Indians, I get knots in my stomach." (Haig-Brown, 1992:96) But to get a better picture of the gap between the Native and the linguistic perspective on language programs, we need to try to understand the goals of the Native community. I have listened to many discussions of this topic, and the points that come up first and recurrently are the following:

- They want their language and culture back.
- They want control of all aspects of education and research.
- They want autonomy. They want to do the work themselves without help from foreign experts.

The first goal may be unattainable for some groups at this point. Certainly the culture has already changed under the impact of colonialism to the degree that it would be impossible to ever return to a pre-contact life style. Also, the languages may be too far gone to become viable again in their former state. Nevertheless, most communities do not want to give up without some effort at preserving their language, helping to maintain the fluency of their speakers, and reintroducing the language to community members.

Community control over education is essential for the massive effort that is needed to bring back the language. It is very clear that occasional, sporadic teaching of the language in the public school is not going to create generations of fluent speakers of a Native language any more than it produces speakers of French or Spanish. Only if the curriculum is totally rebuilt around the issue of language and culture can progress be made within the schools. Even then, the whole community must get behind language revitalization. Fishman (1991:395) lists stage three of the process of reversing language shift as: "promotion of family, neighbourhood and community reinforcement to restore the normal pattern of intergenerational transmission." According to reports on two successful North American programs involving the Rama (Craig, 1992) and the Mohawk (Jacobs, 1998), the chief ingredient for success in these projects was the involvement of the community.

When the needs of the language program are examined, it is clear that the linguist usually cannot do anything to help address the most urgent problems.

- They cannot do the grassroots work necessary to get the community involved.
- They cannot be cultural mentors or Native role models.
- They cannot provide the motivation students need to do the work of language learning.
- They usually cannot devote full time to a projector live full-time in the community.
- They are usually not fluent enough to teach the language immersion style, which is seen as the preferred language teaching method.

In other words, linguists cannot help with the aspects of language programs that are the most crucial if revitalization is to succeed. Seen from this perspective, it is not surprising that linguists are considered to be interfering outsiders or as an extravagance that the program simply cannot afford. Any involvement of a linguist, after all, involves relinquishing control and autonomy.

However, as England (1992:33) reports, during a recent conference a Maya panelist asked the question, "Do we need foreign linguists?" and answered, "Yes, unfortunately." Reports on both the Rama (Craig 1992) and the Mohawk (Jacobs 1998) programs noted the importance of the linguist or team of linguists and the materials that they produced or helped produce as an essential element of the program. In these cases the services of the linguist were essential to the success of the program. There simply was no time to either train a Native linguist or to undertake the work necessary to provide tokens of analyzed language and the necessary reference materials to launch an all-out effort.

A negative resolution to this problem, that is, excluding linguists from the project in favor of doing the linguistic work themselves, is encouraged by some Natives on socio-political grounds. Or sometimes, in their effort to avoid linguists, communities turn to other foreign experts such as teachers or computer specialists. Since these people, even if they are native speakers, are not trained to deal with the complexities of the Native languages, the results are sometimes disastrously primitive or error-ridden, despite large budget expenditures. In the end, very little useful product is placed in the hands of the teachers or the community.

We see that the goals of the community create a paradox. On the one hand, the community wants to make the best possible effort at revitalizing the language, and this means making use of a foreign expert. But on the other hand, it wants to do so without loss of control or autonomy that bringing in a linguist would entail. The situation calls for compromise. The solution is to include linguists in the language project, at least until the language is recovered enough to rely upon native speaker linguists, but to have the linguist work as part of a language revitalization team that includes elders, teachers, and administrators. The team can work under the auspices of a language committee or language authority, which will consolidate language revitalization efforts and help win the cooperation of educational and governmental organizations.[7]

5. Getting the most out of your linguist

We have seen that for many programs, especially those dealing with languages that are spoken by a handful of elders, use of foreign linguistics experts may be unavoidable. I now turn to the question of how to make best use of the linguist. Deciding which of the functions discussed in section 2 should be given top priority is a matter for the language program committee to decide. In order to engage in in-depth research, a linguist will need:

- access to elders
- a place to work
- funding
- time
- administrative support

Access to elders is not always a straightforward matter. Illness and family needs may make the work difficult or impossible. Elders tend to have busy schedules participating in many activities for the community, including religious ceremonies, healings, cultural ceremonies, political meetings, police commissions, and educational committees. Many also function as dignitaries, making welcoming speeches, offering prayers, naming buildings, etc. Many are artisans often called upon to utilize and teach their skills. One elder commented to me that he has been working a whole lot harder since he retired. It is sometimes difficult for these busy elders to find time to work on the language. The language work is often seen as something that can be rescheduled for later, while other matters, such as working with troubled youth, young offenders, addicts, and young parents, take priority. Basically, there are too few elders to help with all the work that the community needs.

Sometimes it is very difficult to find a place to work that is comfortable for the elders and also has the right acoustic and visual properties necessary for sound and video-recording. Many communities are very thoughtless about the working conditions of their elders. Chief and council may have beautiful, new, air-conditioned chambers, while the elders work in a cold, dingy basement with stairs to climb to get to the washroom.

While it is generally agreed on the part of the bands, the academics, and the government that language maintenance is of utmost importance, language programs are often the last funded and the first cut. The resources are often limited. Lack of funding is usually the chief reason given for the failure of a program. Fortunately, most linguists can apply for academic grants that pay for expenses, honoraria for elders, and salaries for native speaker research consultants. The funds may be contingent upon academic publication of the results of the project, however, and this brings up the issue of intellectual property, which is discussed in the next section. Linguists may have access to computer and audio-visual equipment. The university professor may also bring students to participate in the research and help with the work.

Time is often a problem, since the linguist may be holding down a full-time university position or other job, often far from the community. Fortunately, most universities allow a significant amount of a professor's time to be directed toward research. Some universities allow buy-out, where a grant or funds from the community or school district can pay the university for the professor's time, allowing them to focus more time on the project. Sometimes the professor can be temporarily relocated to a college or university near the Native community. If the language program feels that a full-time non-Native linguist is essential, then sometimes a doctoral student from a linguistics department can come live and work in the community. The student can often find funding to support dissertation research. The community may help in return by providing work space, accommodations, and a small salary. This was a common pattern in the seventies and eighties, though now many Native communities prefer to spend salary dollars on native speaker linguists or on young community members training in the language. The ideal situation, of course, is when a native speaker or at least a community member is willing to train as a linguist and can take linguistics courses at a nearby university. In this case, the foreign linguist and native speaker linguist should be given an opportunity to work side-by-side, at least for a transition period.

[7] See England (1998) for a discussion of the Mayan language Academy.

Community administrators can do much to assure that the linguist's time is used well by providing the administrative support fora project, including helping to schedule elders' meetings, booking space, administering funds, keeping the linguist informed of community decisions, and helping to coordinate the work of language project team members. They should think carefully about involving the linguist in administrative meetings. Sometimes it is very effective to invite the linguist to part of a meeting so that issues surrounding the language project can be addressed with all parties present. In some projects I have been involved in, I feel that my questions and viewpoint never got passed onto the decision-makers. Often I was left out of the loop, finding out decisions by hearsay. I would be desperately seeking funding to complete a project while some administrator would be sitting on funds that could have been directed to that purpose. In another project, it seemed that endless meetings were being held, when a phone call or a memo would have sufficed. In fact, the meetings, which often did not involve a single native speaker of the language, took over as the main reason for the project's existence. What linguists have to keep in mind is that many participants at the meetings are paid to be there and they feel it is their obligation to work through every detail of the program. But what communities have to realize is that when the meeting is over, the language team still has to do the work. In fact, every hour of meetings means one less hour interviewing the elders or writing materials.[8] The right administrative equilibrium must be reached so that the project team can work diligently and make progress without burning out. I have had the joy of working on some excellent projects, and in each case an administrative genius was quietly working behind the scenes to enable us all to do our best. On the other hand, one project I worked on was totally undermined by heavy-handed, disrespectful administration.[9]

In summary, if communities want to take control of their language revitalization projects, they should make sure linguists are used effectively. They should provide linguists with opportunities to work as much as possible on the language in order to become competent enough at it to be of real use to the community. A little attention to the needs of the linguists can make their work easier, producing quicker and better results.

6. The Intellectual Property Issue

There are many issues that divide Natives and linguists. But the ones that most directly and seriously affect linguists center around intellectual property. This is the issue that most often causes the work to get completely derailed. Here are a couple of imaginary exchanges between an administrator for a Native language program and a linguist to show you how bad it can get. The first exchange illustrates a stand off on the issue of data. The second illustrates the thorny issue of dissemination of results.

The data debate

The band administrator: They come, they get the data, and they leave. Where are they? Where is our data? The white man has robbed us of our masks, he has burned our longhouses, and he has almost killed our language through systematic policies such as removing children from the home and placing them in residential schools. We are not going to sit back and let you steal our language from us. We want our data back. We want it now. We'll go to court if necessary to get it. We need these data to make materials to help educate our children in the language.

The linguist: I have spent all my holidays and sabbaticals doing fieldwork on the language. The data are mine. I collected them. I transcribed them. I paid for the elders' time. I have a commitment to the speakers who taught me, but not to the political unit of the band. I have accumulated enough data for a grammar and a dictionary. I'm in the process of analyzing these data and writing reference works, which I'll probably be able to complete when I retire. You will get the data back then. I've given back data before and the band never even thanked me. They complained that they couldn't use it because people don't speak like that today or it was in an orthography they couldn't read. They used it in strange ways, dumbing it down, making mistakes in transliterating it into practical orthographies. They never credited my participation. Go ahead and let them sue. I'd rather burn the data than let them have it.

The dissemination issue

The band administrator: We have the legal right to totally control who sees and hears our language and, frankly, we don't want anybody outside our group to see it. Furthermore, the words of the elders have monetary value, but only if we don't let anyone see them. You are producing work that is totally useless to us because we cannot understand it or use it for educational purposes. You are making a lot of money off our language. We are disappointed in you and would rather bring in someone else that we can have better control over, even if they know nothing about our language. Or we will just do the work ourselves. It is more important for us to have the last say on this issue than to have the language worked on.

The linguist: I donate my time and energy to working on your language. I could be working on a language with millions of speakers and without the constant hassles. I have to publish to get and keep a job and to advance to a decent salary level. The linguistic community already places little value on field linguistics. I have a second-rate job compared to theoretical linguists, many of whom have never done primary research on a language. My academic colleagues are able to publish without interference and they spend their time sitting and writing while I am out

[8] It also usually means that one other hour of work associated with the linguist's university job has been postponed onto the evening or weekend.

[9] Ironically, the administrator was probably doing her best to make sure the money was spent effectively, but the rancor she created caused me and the elders to quit the project and finish the work through other avenues.

travelling, doing field research, attending protocol meetings, and trying to make myself useful to your language revitalization program. I will miss publishing opportunities if I can't work quickly. My publication record serves as the basis for the grants I apply for. These provide the funds I use to pay your elders for their time. Funds are increasingly competitive and constantly getting cut back. I have to make each cent and each minute count. I cannot afford long delays or large meetings for you to approve my work. The educational materials that I produce for your program are not considered scholarly product and I am not given academic credit for them. The university administrators are disappointed with the amount of service time I am spending away from campus and think I am taking altruism too far, to the detriment of my teaching, my career, and my health.

What these exchanges show is a tremendous gap in understanding between the band administrator and the linguist. You may think I am exaggerating, but ask any linguist that has worked on a Northwest Coast language for more than two years and they can come up with horror stories of abusive, obstructionist behavior on the part of some band administrator. These include litigation to try to get data returned or to try to keep data from being published, for example in the form of a doctoral dissertation, and blocking access to speakers by instituting permit systems with lengthy screening processes.[10]

The intellectual property issue is crucial whether the linguist is employed by the Native community or bringing in his/her own funds. If the linguist's intent is to use some of the data collected from community elders in academic publications, then permission from the community is necessary, regardless of the source of funding. This can be given in a research agreement laying out certain conditions or it can be given one publication at a time, sometimes under the scrutiny of a language committee. The first approach is most convenient for the linguist and is in fact sometimes required by the linguist's university or the granting agency. It is especially suitable if the community has confidence in the linguist's abilities in the language. In addition, language committees usually have more pressing matters to attend to. Sometimes the community may like to have some control of the cultural content and data in a paper, even if they have little interest in the analysis.

Sadly, some Native communities have tried to block the publication of a linguist's research. Sometimes trouble arises because there is confusion over how much of the work results from employment with the band and how much results from the donated time of the investigator.[11] Why would a community try to block publication? One reason might be that Natives misunderstand the finances of scholarly publishing. They may think that some financial advantage may accrue from the publication. One way to address this issue is to make sure that all royalties are turned over to the Native language committee. Also, they may feel that letting the data be published means they lose control of it. Fortunately, most publishers, universities, and education ministries have come to understand the importance of ownership of data and allow the copyright to be held by the Native community. Finally, Natives do not want outsiders to see the data. As Dauenhauer and Dauenhauer (1998:91) note: "There is a real and legitimate fear of traditional ethnic materials being appropriated, exploited, trivialized, or desecrated by outsiders. . ." However, they point out that ownership is just half of the equation. The other half is stewardship. In my experience, the elders that speak the language are eager for it to be written down, recorded, distributed, learned, and used. The people most concerned with dissemination are what Kirkness (1998:9) calls the sandwich generation—the adult non-speakers that make up the band councils, school staff, and work force in the communities. Sometimes extreme feelings of anger, loss, and bitterness underlie their opinions on dissemination. No person that is not a member of a group whose language and culture have been supplanted by colonialization can begin to understand the depth of these feelings. Nevertheless, rather than equating language with items of material culture that have been taken away by collectors and researchers, I find the advice of Hukari and Peter (1995:ii) more relevant: "A language is like a muscle; it must be used regularly if it is to stay healthy." Getting written and audio-visual material into the hands of whoever is interested in the language is one way to exercise this muscle. Dauenhauer and Dauenhauer (1998:92) put it succinctly: "We appreciate the fear of desecration, but we believe that the risks of sharing information are less dangerous at the present time than the risk that it may otherwise be lost forever."

Given the mistrustful and disrespectful attitude of band administrators and the proprietary, self-serving attitude of linguists, it is not surprising that the exchange can deteriorate to an unpleasant stand-off. The situation is reminiscent of a divorce where the parents are sniping at each other to the detriment of the children. In this case it is the language program that suffers while the parties nurse bruised egos or start hiring lawyers. The question is how to lay aside mistrust and anger and reach some compromise position for the good of the language program.

Here is how the first exchange above regarding the return of data to the community could progress if the parties show some mutual understanding and respect.

The band: We are undertaking a project concerning X and would greatly appreciate your participation. In particular, we need data of type Y and hope you will come and bring us data of this type, discuss these data

[10]One summer, I waited six weeks for a research permit, receiving it just a few days before I had to return home.

[11]I know of one instance where a band took a linguist to court in Canada. The ruling was in favor of the linguist being allowed to publish.

with our elders group, and give a lecture about the data to our curriculum developers. We'll show you how we intend to use the data. And later, if you are available, we will let you review our product before it is produced. When can you get the data ready and come visit us?

The linguist: That sounds like a very worthwhile project and I appreciate your including me in it. I will try to have the data organized in a month. I look forward to meeting with your elders and your curriculum developers.

Here's how a compromise can be reached concerning dissemination of results.

The band: We are glad to enter into an agreement with you to allow you and your students to do research on our language. Here are our conditions: we want copies of all field notes and audio-visual materials deposited with our band archives, we would like two copies of any work you publish, and we would like you to keep us appraised of all funding that you apply for and receive to do your research. Our education officer can assist you in making appointments with the elders.

The linguist: Those are excellent conditions. In addition, I will make proper acknowledgments to your elders and others for assistance in this research, and I will always check with your education officer for guidance on what an appropriate honorarium and method of payment is for each elder I work with. Also, I will make myself available to your curriculum development team to assist in anyway I can. Whenever possible, I will try to employ and train members of your community to help with the projects. Feel free to use my name and credentials in your efforts to secure funds for the project.

7. Conclusion

Dixon (1997) and others have called for linguists to drop everything and concentrate on fieldwork on endangered languages before it is too late. Young scholars should be warned, however, that, while endangered language research may seem like noble and interesting work, they will be faced with a hornet's nest of socio-political issues. The languages most in need of archiving are probably also the ones where the political situation is least hospitable. The good-old-days of popping in, doing some fieldwork, doing the analysis, going home, and publishing are gone forever. Communities, if they open their door to linguists, expect them to work toward their language revitalization plan. As Grinevald (1998:151) notes, linguists who continue to function on an individualistic basis with the chief purpose of furthering their own careers are not welcome.

The linguist will be expected to work as part of a language revitalization team and will be given a variety of jobs to do, including writing reference materials, preparing curriculum materials, helping with teacher training, and even teaching the language. Many of these jobs may not come easy to linguists, especially if their training has focused on theoretical linguistics. The community will want audio-visual and computer materials to support their language project. This will be a new area for most linguists. Furthermore, the academic world is slow to give credit or recognition for this kind of applied work, especially since it does not lead to a profit. This puts the field linguist at risk in an already difficult job market.

A linguist working on an endangered language must submit to the authority of the community administrators. At every turn, the linguist will have to compromise long-range scholarly goals to meet the community's immediate needs. Although revitalizing the language is always mentioned as a top goal of the community, it is often the last program funded and the first dropped. Many more urgent social problems take precedent. In fact, sometimes it seems that the language program is uninteresting or even annoying to administrators, who are unlikely to be speakers themselves. The language team usually has to secure its own funding. It will have to work diligently to make progress on quality reference and educational materials with accompanying audio-visual and computer support material. At the same time it should produce small, quick products, keep elders meeting and speaking to each other, help train teachers, teach the language to adults and children, and help the community with legal research. For some linguists, this work will be in addition to a full-time university position.

Once linguists accept the principle that the Natives themselves must control the language research, a paradox is created. What if the community decides that it would rather let the language die than have foreign experts work on it?[12] The linguists are then put in an awkward situation: should they submit to the political will of the community or should they take direction from the native-speaking elders, who entrusted them to help in the stewardship of the language to younger generations?

Finally, research on endangered languages entails serious emotional issues of loss that the linguist will have to deal with. It is difficult for everyone when a elder and mentor passes on. Moreover, despite their best efforts, many linguists will live to see the last speaker of a language die. Dauenhauer and Dauenhauer (1998:78) frame the problem nicely. They say: "The paradoxical situation is that the languages will certainly die unless we do something; but, the reality is that they may also die even if we do something. Therefore, what do we do?" My personal choice has been to get out there and get busy and face the consequences. The positive aspects of working with the elders on their language have, over all, greatly outweighed the negative aspects. I hope other linguists will make this choice too, and that the field of linguistics, the universities, and the communities will make an effort to help the scholars that make this choice.

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[12]See Dorian (1993) and references therein for a discussion of the issue of the need for community control versus the importance of salvaging the language.

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