Language Documentation and Revitalization, and Impacts on Child Learners

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Background

Endangered language documentation can provide critical resources in support of language reclamation and revitalization (LR).

However, there are many questions about how documentation benefits LR, and how these practices may impact communities.
Background

Language documentation contributions to LR

- *Linguists have little guidance on how to structure their research activities and products to ensure they will be of use to the communities with which they work.*

Possible benefits of LR: increased fluency and number of speakers; improved mental and physical health; improved academic; sense of cultural identity and leadership skills; stronger community and family connections.

- *Link between LR and these benefits is not well-understood, and receives little attention within academia.*

LR and young children

- *Research on language development among children ages 0-5 in endangerment and LR contexts is especially lacking.*
Key Questions

➢ How, why, and to what extent does documentation benefit LR efforts? What are the methods for identifying and evaluating these benefits, and how can we achieve better cohesion between documentation practices and LR goals?

➢ What are the benefits of LR, including linguistic benefits (language competence and use) and extra-linguistic benefits relating to academic success and aspects of well-being?

➢ (How) does child language acquisition differ in endangerment and revitalization situations? How can understanding these differences help us optimize these unique language learning environments, and shed light on language change in endangerment contexts?
A cross-disciplinary perspective is critical to improving practices within the field of documentary linguistics, and to ensuring the maximum benefit of language documentation research to the field of linguistics and the broader society.
Our Approach

- Create and convene an interdisciplinary network of scholars and practitioners capable of moving forward with research on language endangerment and revitalization across disciplinary and professional divides, and supporting communities in their language reclamation efforts.

- Survey existing research to establish what is already known, and identify gaps, methodological concerns and areas needing further research.

- Develop and pursue collaborative and multidisciplinary research to address identified needs.

- Identify, implement and evaluate promising ways to enhance outcomes and impacts of documentation and LR.
Who We Are

Network of researchers and practitioners representing descriptive and applied linguistics, public health, language pedagogy, psychology, psychiatry, indigenous studies, education, and child development.

Organizers
Ruth Rouvier, UC Berkeley/ Education Development Center, Inc.
Joanne Knapp-Philo, Education Development Center, Inc.
George Ironstrack, Myaamia Center of Miami University
Haley DeKorne, University of Oslo

Working group members
Luiz Amaral, UMass Amherst
Alissa Baker-Oglesbee, Northwestern University
Megan Bang, University of Washington
Shobhana Chelliah, University of North Texas
Jordyn Flaada, Grassroots Indigenous Multimedia
Mary Hermes, University of Minnesota
Tracy Hirata-Edds, University of Kansas
Christopher Lalonde, University of Victoria
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Ananda Marin, UCLA
Barbra Meek, University of Michigan
Susan Mosley-Howard, Myaamia Center of Miami University
Richard Oster, University of Alberta
Chris Sims, University of New Mexico
Joshua Sparrow, Brazelton Touchpoints Center/Harvard University
Jennifer Weston, Wôpanâak Language Reclamation Project
# Literature Review

[Link to Google Sheet](https://docs.google.com/spreadsheets/d/1Uiarcf1DJzAXlYxttRh9a6489Fj2B_j7G5qet1L15Cg/edit?usp=sharing)

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Explored four core topics
- Young learners in LR
- Documentation methods and products in support of LR
- Linguistic outcomes and benefits of LR
- Extralinguistic outcomes and benefits of LR
Agenda-Setting Workshop:
October 13-14, 2016, Washington, DC

Shared findings and preliminary recommendations with 20 DC-area researchers, funders, and federal agency representatives

Transformed into permanent body which will hold regular workshops and/or conferences to pursue and share collaborative research
Preliminary Findings

General Issues
- Deficit model predominates
- Little research on LR for ages 0-5
- Existing research is scattered, not widely disseminated, and often difficult to find
- Investigating these questions requires a broad range of skills and expertise, intensive and sustained collaboration between researchers and practitioners in academic and endangered language communities

Institutional Challenges
- There is little academic (and funding) attention on and support for research on these issues
- No clear disciplinary or institutional ‘home’ for research
- Many barriers between key groups: academic disciplines, scholarly/professional, academic/governmental
- Few researchers whose training and focus is primarily on these issues
- Production of revitalization-focused materials is not widely valued within linguistics community
- LR work carries risks for funding, tenure and promotion
Preliminary Findings

Documentation
- Can generate excitement and pride in language within community, and develop skills and capacity for language work, but may drain attention and resources from community revitalization efforts
- Goals may not align with revitalization: learners need basic, well-understood and well-described language, presented through a functional framework

LR and acquisition
- LR inextricably tied to cultural revitalization; Shifts epistemological perspectives, making interrelationships within a community more salient and changes in perspective and behaviors possible
- Family and community are critical in shaping early brain development and language acquisition
- Acquisition research mostly on standardized, politically dominant languages, generally does not address multilingual influences; Language development sequences and timelines likely to be different in LR contexts
- Successful LR projects draw their direction and analytical framework from the community

Extra-linguistic impacts
- Global indigeneity is associated with negative health factors
- Social disparities are often seen as determinants of health disparities
- LR linked to improved resilience, pre-natal care, retention and graduation rates; and lower rates of diabetes and suicide
- Emphasis on respect in Native American cultures linked to an enhanced sense of tribal identity that is protective in aspects of health and wellbeing
- Research on language and health likely to have broad public health implications, beyond indigenous contexts
Recommendations

- Shift to ‘strength’ model
- Improve coordination, communication and collaboration
- Prioritize research on child development and language acquisition in LR
- Expand scope of language documentation
- Paradigm shift
Improve coordination, communication and collaboration

- Create professional networks and institutional infrastructure to improve sharing of knowledge and connecting research with practice
- Improve integration of research and practice
  - Inform research (agendas) with practice and practice-based evidence
  - Promote and support translation/practical applications of research
- Prioritize community-initiated projects, and fully involve communities in all stages of project planning and implementation
- Develop ‘system of monitoring’ language/culture/health outcomes in revitalization contexts
Prioritize research on child development and language acquisition in LR

Research Priorities

◦ Nature of input being received
◦ How linguistic, cognitive and social development is occurring
◦ How to enhance and support the learning process
◦ How cognitive benefits, such as increased executive function, inhibition and focus, are utilized differently (e.g. ceremony and cultural practices vs. work or school) in different communities
◦ Contextualize children 0-5 within their families and communities
Expand scope of language documentation

Research Priorities

◦ Acquisition (L1/L2)
◦ Child language use
◦ Child-adult language use
◦ Language shift
◦ Documentation of, and through, revitalization
◦ Sociolinguistic research on documentation and revitalization
Paradigm shifts

- Create new research paradigm and protocols for documentation
- Understand ‘health’ as it is defined by communities
- Recognize language and cultural health as determinants of ‘health’
- Incorporate community-generated definitions of language outcomes and social determinants of outcomes
- Elevate status of revitalization within linguistics and academia (including funding priorities)
Dissemination and Next steps

LSA poster (January 2017)
- “Improving language documentation and revitalization through interdisciplinary collaboration.” (Handout). Invited to publish research paper in the *Proceedings of the Linguistic Society of America, Volume 2 (2017)*.

White Paper (March 2017)
- Produce a white paper summarizing our findings, recommendations and plans, which we will share with academic, agency, funder and community partners. Sign up [here](#) to receive a copy.

ICLDC Workshop (March 2017)
- “Documentation, Revitalization, and Benefits for Young Learners and their Communities”: Share our preliminary findings and recommendations, and discuss implementation and solicit feedback from our ICLDC workshop participants.

Literature Review (Ongoing)
- Continue to collect, review and summarize research papers and additional popular press articles which directly relate to these issues, in order to create a library of existing research.

New Research Projects (Ongoing)
- Develop collaborative and interdisciplinary research projects among working group participants and outside colleagues to investigate key questions, and explore new methodologies identified by the group.