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Linguists and Reversing Indigenous Language Shift:

Issues of Planning, Implementation and Collaboration in RLS Projects

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ABSTRACT: Over the past few decades, the field of Linguistics has grown increasingly aware of the worsening global language diversity crisis. As languages die off in startling numbers, a handful of communities have initiated or participated in organized movements to reverse language shift (RLS). In the most extreme cases, these movements begin with only a set of written language records – often compiled by a foreign linguist with some deficiencies in comprehension and a questionable set of research ethics – and seek to build a generation of new speakers. Reversing the shift of a minority language to a majority one is an extremely ambitious project, in part because ongoing systemic disadvantages affect many groups whose languages are shifting, and the role of theoretical and formal linguistics in this project is by no means clear. This paper seeks to identify common obstacles to reversing indigenous language shift and, using three recent revitalization projects as case studies, to point toward models of successful (and unsuccessful) language work, especially as they relate to collaboration with academia. I argue that, while resource-poverty stands out as the greatest obstacle to revitalization, academic work with a strong ethical consciousness and language work with a highly organized political component show great promise as driving forces for RLS.

“Languages embody the intellectual wealth of the people that speak them. Losing any one of them is like dropping a bomb on the Louvre.” – Ken Hale

“When languages count as part of the universal ‘property’ of mankind, it is ‘we’ (not they) who lose, as Pinker puts it, if one dies. This is, in effect, a claim to languages that some speakers refuse to accept.” (Errington, 2008: 166)

“From the vantage point of the colonized, a position from which I write, and choose to privilege, the term ‘research’ is inextricably linked to European imperialism and colonialism. The word itself, ‘research’, is probably one of the dirtiest words in the indigenous world’s vocabulary. When mentioned in many indigenous contexts, it stirs up silence, it conjures up bad memories, it raises a smile that is knowing and distrustful.” (Smith, 2010: 1)

INTRODUCTION AND NOTES

Over the past few decades, the field of Linguistics has grown increasingly aware of the worsening global language diversity crisis (cf Bradley, 2002; Meek, 2009; Kroskrity, 2009; etc). As languages die off in startling numbers, a handful of communities have initiated or participated in organized movements to reverse language shift, the process by which a minority language community transitions to a state of linguistic assimilation with the majority culture – and the process by which languages may be lost forever (cf Ethnologue reports on Matagalpa, Teshenawa, Shuadit, etc). In some cases, reversing language shift (“RLS”, after Fishman, 1991) is a question of encouraging fluent speakers to pass on the language to their descendants, and of advocating for the language at the level of law and government. In the most extreme cases, revitalization movements begin with only a set of written language records and seek to build a generation of new speakers.

Reversing the shift of a minority language is an extremely ambitious project – in part because ongoing systemic disadvantages affect many groups whose languages are shifting – and the role of theoretical and formal linguistics in this project is by no means clear. This paper seeks to identify common obstacles to reversing indigenous language shift, and uses three recent revitalization projects as case studies – Arapaho, Māori and Kurna – to point toward models of successful (and unsuccessful) language work, especially as they relate to collaboration with academia.

This collaboration itself is a secondary focus of the paper, which identifies ways in which past models of academic work have undermined the self-determination and local unity of purpose required to reverse language shift, as well as ways in which positive collaboration with academic linguistics can be of use to indigenous groups.

Uniting these threads of inquiry, I argue that, while resource-poverty stands out as the greatest obstacle to revitalization, academic work with a strong ethical consciousness and language work with a highly organized political component both show great promise as driving forces for RLS.

A note on terms and sources

Some of the most influential scholarly work on language shift has come from Joshua Fishman, who introduced a number of concepts and terms upon which this paper depends in his groundbreaking 1991 work *Reversing Language Shift*. Fishman is responsible for a qualitative typology of stages of language shift, ranging from the absence of language X in “education, work sphere, mass media and governmental operations” (1991: 395) to the need to reconstruct language X and institute its acquisition as a second language. Fishman also advocated use of the phrase “language shift”, rather than “language death”, as it is specific to situations in which a community transitions from one language to a second, distinct language¹. Likewise, the term *reversing language shift* (RLS) is applicable in a broader set of contexts than is “revitalization”. “RLS” describes both the Māori project – in which speakers of a more and more infrequently spoken language are organized into transmitting it² – and the Kurna project – in which a fully dormant language is reawakened through academic and community work³.

Robert Amery, whose work I discuss in detail here, rejects the terms **language resuscitation** and **language resurrection**, due to their “inherent view of...languages as ‘dead’ or ‘extinct’” (2000:17) and because of the latter term’s “unwelcome religious overtones” (2000:17). The terms “sleeping” and “reawakening”, which more closely reflect Australian indigenous understandings of language use, are used freely throughout his work, as is the term **language revival**, which I have adopted after Amery as “a cover term” (2000:18) for both situations in which a language is recovering from a state of shift and for language work directed toward reversing that shift.

This paper uses the terms preferred by both Amery and Fishman, as well as the more traditional terms “language death” and “language revitalization” where appropriate, i.e. where a focus, respectively, on declining fluent speaker numbers and increasing fluent speaker numbers is intended. The paper relies heavily on Amery’s 2000 work on the Kurna

¹ ...rather than from an older stage of the language to a current stage, rendering the older stage a “dead language”.

² cf King, 2001:120; Fishman, 1991:395

³ Amery, 2000

reawakening, *Warrabarna Kurna!*, as well as papers in the Ken Hale- and Leanne Hinton-edited 2001 collection *The Green Book of Language Revitalization*, so named in response to UNESCO's "Red Book of Language Endangerment" (Hinton and Hale, 2001:xi). Also central to the paper are two other collections of essays, the first a set of reflections on Indigenous language revitalization edited by Northern Arizona University linguists Reyhner and Lockard (2009), and the second an interrogation of SIL's role in Indigenous linguistics – including a defense by an SIL linguist – compiled in *Language* (September 2009) and introduced by Lise M. Dobrin. In addition, I posted an inquiry to the Linguist List and received a number of thoughtful responses from linguists who had worked with minority languages. These responses, as well as content from a personal interview with Haskins Laboratory phonetician Christian DiCanio, are utilized in the sections on research ethics and roadblocks to RLS. Conversations with my thesis advisor – historical and field linguist and Australian language advocate Claire Bowern – as well as her student Laura Kling, have also informed this work.

Given the nature of these sources, and the nature of the revitalization question, this is essentially not a linguistic paper but rather a work of linguistic anthropology within a particular historical moment. As will be argued in later sections, the aims of linguists and the aims of indigenous groups seeking resources for RLS are closely intertwined. However, the work of linguists within academia is, for the most part, not the work that will bring languages back to speaker communities. This task will require more than documentation skills, an investment in language diversity, and strong analytical work. It will entail close attention to economic and sociopolitical forces which lead to and coincide with language shift, and a deep understanding of the true demands of language advocacy and collaboration toward RLS.

o: LANGUAGE SHIFT NOW

Language death

The current language shift crisis is well-recognized in the linguistic community and, increasingly, in the culture at large. Languages have, of course, always been prone to extinction, but the modern situation is fundamentally different, as noted by Ash, Fermino and Hale (2001):

“Whereas the early expansion of agricultural and pastoralist societies created large regions occupied by a single linguistic family, those same regions subsequently became linguistically diverse through the natural process of language differentiation...With certain exceptions, the situation now is that linguistic diversity is simply being lost without languages being replaced.”

This rapid decline in diversity is a global issue, and as Hinton notes, the quantitative picture is “dire”. She reports:

“(O)ut of approximately 6,700 known languages in the world (*Ethnologue*, 2002), only about 600 of them are spoken by more than 10,000 people... In fact 90% of the world speaks only 100 languages – the other 6,600 are kept alive by small groups, and for a very large proportion of those languages, the number of speakers is diminishing.” (Hinton, 2003 : 44)

Likewise, UNESCO has predicted that, at the current rate, as many as 90% of these 6,700 languages may go extinct by the end of the century. There is a substantial body of literature detailing the true cost – to indigenous groups and to the global community – of language death, which tends to center around one of two types of cultural loss: loss of knowledge and loss of power.

The idea that language is valuable because it encodes cultural knowledge – from ethnobotanics to creation myths to birthing practices – pervades and motivates much of the literature surrounding RLS, including articles in the popular press (cf Lovgren, 2007 in *National Geographic*: “Languages racing to extinction in 5 global ‘hotspots’”). This is indeed a compelling reason to address widespread language death, but it is incomplete: we cannot consider a “loss” only those practices and knowledges that might be considered assets to global knowledge, but also those which sustain and unite small speaker communities. With the loss of a language, in the eyes of many groups, comes the loss of continuity, history, and group identity. Knowledge is lost not only to the world but also to the peoples whom it defines⁴.

The loss of self-definition described above has arguably contributed to a lack of self-determination in many speaker communities, with a concomitant lack of power. As will be discussed in the following section, language shift is intimately tied to sociopolitical marginalization. Current trends of language death reflect the fact that most colonized

⁴ Or to whom it *belongs*: see section II.3 for a discussion of language as cultural property.

indigenous groups still struggle for land rights, reconciliation and historical recognition, in part due to a low cultural profile and a lack of political unification. Language, its transmission interrupted by educational policy as much as by less-recent violence and epidemics, has become an important symbol in these struggles. The death of a language may amount to the death of a politically viable group, and its reclamation⁵ can accompany a reclamation of power within the majority culture.

Models for RLS

Projects of reversing language shift, while they share motivations, ideologies, and challenges, are diverse in their goals – anything from the creation of written materials such as a dictionary⁶ to reinstating the language as one of everyday communication⁷ – and are also diverse in the models they apply toward these goals. Some programs, such as the first Arapaho program, are entirely school-based and are intended to create proficiency at an early age using pre-existing educational systems. As will be discussed in section I, such efforts may be challenged by the state of the school system in which they operate, although their approach of targeting young learners and raising the language to the domain of mainstream education is laudable. A program for reversing language shift may also create educational spaces – within after-school or summer programs, e.g. – outside of the mainstream system⁸. Other models are centered in community and familial structures. Such community models, exemplified by California’s pioneering Master-Apprentice program, have the advantage of being modest in scale but extremely effective given the right circumstances⁹. Some programs, including the Māori project, strategically occupy a space somewhere in between, utilizing and galvanizing community activities and extracurricular youth programs while also manifesting in mainstream educational institutions.

Reversing language shift (RLS): historical context

⁵ I use “reclamation” in the general sense, and not with the specific meaning given by Amery (2001:17) of “reawakening” a language no longer spoken.

⁶ cf Corris et al, 2002: 335, on Adang (Indonesia) maintenance dictionaries

⁷ cf Cotter, 2001: 301 on Irish language radio

⁸ cf Te Puni Kōkiri, 2005 on Māori development, including language programs

⁹ cf Hinton, 2001b: 223-5

Some of the earliest concentrated revitalization efforts were undertaken in Europe at the turn of the century. Cornish, a Celtic language of the UK, saw the death of its last native speaker in the 19th century, but it also saw the start of a revitalization movement that has continued to this day (Hinton, 2001d: 416). Today, many adults still speak and write some Cornish (albeit as a second language), and it lives on in signage, magazines, and radio broadcasts. Similarly, Welsh and Irish (discussed below and in Cotter, 2001 : 301 and Ó Dochartaigh, 1993) benefited from concerted efforts toward revitalization on the part of their speaker communities, and have been maintained as second languages for almost a century. These efforts were both notably effective and, while unusual in their time, were likely influential to indigenous programs at the other end of the century. In what was by some measures (though not the measures of this paper) the *only* successful language reawakening project ever undertaken, the middle of the century also saw the transformation of Hebrew from a written liturgical language that had gone hundreds of years without a single proficient speaker¹⁰ into a living, changing, language being reliably transmitted between generations. These three efforts will be excluded from the focus of this paper, Cornish and Welsh for the same reasons that Irish is, as argued in section I, inadequate as a model for other RLS projects.

Hebrew will be left aside for two reasons, namely that its situation is well-established and that it is unique. Hebrew revival is extremely well-documented, and the community's (communities') shift to other languages has long been securely reversed: Ethnologue reports a speaker population of almost 5.5 million – up from essentially 0 in 1880 (Fishman, 1991: 289). Thus Hebrew is less useful than, say, Māori, as an illustration of how RLS projects may combat globalization or utilize civil rights rhetoric. The second reason for largely omitting Hebrew is that the political context of its development – i.e. international recognition of a Jewish nation-state, practical need for a lingua franca, a nationwide religious affiliation – is utterly anomalous, whereas Australian and North American language activism today share common struggles and (to a lesser extent) a common history of activism¹¹.

¹⁰ Hinton, 2001d: 415, and Fishman, 1991: 289

¹¹ cf Spolsky and Shohamy 2001, via Hinton 2003, for more on Hebrew as far as Fishman's scale is concerned, and Fishman 1991: 245, for more on the uniqueness of its situation (he calls comparisons between Hebrew and other RLS projects "fallacious" and "pie in the sky").

Instead, this investigation of RLS focuses on several efforts undertaken since the late 1960s by indigenous groups in the United States and Australia. I have chosen to focus on these efforts, specifically the early Arapaho project in Wyoming, the current Māori programs in New Zealand, and the relatively new Kurna effort as championed by Robert Amery, for a few reasons. Most importantly, these movements constitute part of a “second wave” of projects undertaken in the context of a global indigenous rights movement. This movement grew in the late 1960s¹², in part due to the influence of projects of civil rights activism elsewhere. Indigenous rights activism has effected progress internationally, providing state funding to indigenous cultural and educational programs in the U.S. (29 USC § 2911), and granting full citizenship to aboriginal Australians in 1967¹³, for two of many examples. A large part of this paper is dedicated to providing a sociohistorical picture of the context in which minority language revitalization must occur, and programs like Arapaho, Māori, and Kurna are useful in highlighting shared political and social struggles contributing to language shift and encouraging its reversal in this era. The Māori program is especially important to this picture, given its striking success amid some of these same struggles, as well as its current status as an example to other programs (King, 2001:126). Finally, the Kurna program has been richly documented by its proponents, and could prove a pivotal positive example of “language reawakening” – reversal of the complete shift of a language – if it succeeds in returning Kurna as a language of communication.

I: OBSTACLES TO REVERSING LANGUAGE SHIFT

Irish: A case study?

The Irish language, a minority tongue in Ireland with an estimated 25,000 fluent speakers (Cotter 2001: 304), has been under attack for nearly a thousand years. The situation of Irish has been threatened from the time of the Anglo-Norman invasion in 1171, which

¹² cf Smith, 1999: 112-5

¹³ I refer here to the 1967 referendum (accessed online at www.naa.gov.au/), which removed a provision from the Australian Constitution declaring it “necessary to make special laws” for “the aboriginal people in any State” and thereby excepting/excluding them from other provisions in the Constitution. Aboriginal people had been granted suffrage five years previously in the commonwealth and two years previously in Queensland (www.naa.gov.au/collection/fact-sheets/fs150.aspx).

produced a diglossic feudal society in which heavy borrowing and morphological change coincided with pronounced social stratification (Ó Dochartaigh, 1992: 20). The language faced further pressure through the famine of the 1840s and the continuing globalization and urbanization of the nation. In his brief history and reference grammar of the Irish language, Ó Dochartaigh succinctly outlines a globally familiar pattern of language death, observing the “gradual exclusion (of Irish) from wider and wider domains of usage and its external branding and ultimately internal perception as a second-class medium” (Ó Dochartaigh 1992: 24). Cotter (2001: 301) reports a modern population of between 10,000 and 20,000 fluent speakers, most of whom live in one of a handful of rural communities (known as Gaeltachtaí). Today, speakers of Irish as a second language exceed native speakers (Hale, 2001b: 300), a fact which may explain the disparity between Cotter’s estimate and Ethnologue’s official report of 391,470 fluent speakers, since Ethnologue appears to include passive speakers and perhaps “hobbyist” speakers outside of Ireland. In any case, the number of speakers has dwindled – some citizens of Ireland even consider the language dead (Cotter 2001: 301) – and Irish has faced many of the same threats as other minority languages, including military invasion, suppression and condemnation of cultural practice, and a concomitant loss of prestige within the majority culture.

Despite the diminished state of the Irish language, a history of effective political advocacy and strong community support led to the implementation of Irish language programs within schools (Ó Dochartaigh 1992: 25) as well as Irish language programming for radio and television (Cotter, 2001). The proficiency of urban, L2 Irish speakers is variable, but language activists point out that the domain of the language has expanded over the past decades (Cotter 2001: 301), moving “up” from homes in rural communities and “out” into the city and its young adult culture. Perhaps unsurprisingly, Irish has a noticeable presence online, where it is blogged, wiki’d, tumbl’d, tweeted¹⁴, and facebooked, and selectable on Google Translate’s menu of 63 world languages.

This high profile – institutional, informational and cultural – appears to stem in a large part from sociopolitical activism comparable to that undertaken by other RLS projects. One of Ireland’s current all-Irish radio stations, Raidió na Gaeltachta, began as an independent

¹⁴ Irish (Gaelige) is, as of this paper’s completion, the seventh most tweeted (or at least tweeted-about) minority language in the world as registered by indigenoustweets.com, after Tswana (Setswana) of South Africa and Kampampangan of the Philippines.

"pirate" broadcast in 1972, in response to the "tokenism" its founders saw in the mainstream media: UK media's only nod to Irish language and culture at the time came from a five-minute helping of Irish-language nuacht (news) delivered daily by the BBC. In response to Raidió's act of peaceful protest, the state established the official all-Irish station heard today (Cotter 2001 : 304). The origins of government-supported Irish language promotion are also tied up in the politics of state formation; the Irish government began implementing the project of language maintenance in the educational system shortly after the establishment of Ireland as a free state in 1922. Regardless of the violence and unrest surrounding this change, it seems fairly clear that the institutionalization of language maintenance early on in the 20th century has strengthened the effort to reverse Irish language shift. The politics of RLS, both state-centered and grassroots, will be dealt with in section III below; however, Irish provides a helpful illustration of the political forces – from civil disobedience to governmental reform – which can sustain language shift reversal.

All this would seem to suggest that Irish could serve as an example to minority language maintenance projects worldwide. In the face of centuries of decline and ongoing social pressures toward shift to English, Irish has slowed this shift and arguably started adding new speakers; it has risen considerably in cultural esteem since the turn of the century, found a place (if only a symbolic one) in government and business, and expanded both its geographic and conversational domains.

However, the project of Irish maintenance, while an admirable achievement, is not comparable to the majority – and the most necessary – of RLS efforts. The world's top three language 'hotspots' – areas in which language endangerment is disproportionately high – as reported by National Geographic are Northern Australia, central South America (including the Amazon), and the Pacific Northwest of the U.S. (Lovgren 2007). All of these areas (and many other habitats of threatened, moribund, and extinct languages) are sites of comparatively recent colonization, in which (with a few exceptions) small, scattered Indigenous groups struggle financially and politically to maintain their communities and livelihoods. A large number of these languages were subject within the last century to aggressive assimilationist policies implemented through highly organized schools and missions; others have been and continue to be challenged, sometimes rather insidiously, by independent religious missions and corporations with a vested interest in the land (or the

"souls") held by the community¹⁵. A 2008 report on the state of indigenous languages submitted to the Australian Government Department of Education (Purdie, Frigo, Ozolins, Noblett, Thieberger, and Sharp, 2001) adds: "The languages threatening (Indigenous languages) are the most powerful languages in the world, each having total dominance within the nation state." (McConvell & Thieberger via Purdie et al, 2008: 10)

While Irish is also subordinate to one of the world's most powerful languages (English), it has the benefit of an established body of literature, mostly in the form of a set of high poetic works from the seventeenth century (Ó Dochartaigh, 1992 : 14), an independent nation-state, and a complex class system in which those with expendable resources may participate in traditional language programs for personal enrichment. The Irish-speaking identity is somewhat readily available to people whose social position affords them specific resources (time, media equipment, print literacy) conducive to language learning. In contrast, the majority of endangered languages belong to small, disadvantaged groups for which leisure time and disposable income are rare, and for whom political recognition is not just a matter of unauthorized radio broadcasts. According to the most recent U.S. Census, as reported by SpotlightOnPoverty.org (Rodgers, 2008), one in every four American Indians and Native Alaskans (25.3%) lives below the poverty line and a still larger percentage (29.9%) live without health insurance. Likewise, a 2004 report from the Australian Senate's Community Affairs Reference Committee states that, although measuring "Indigenous poverty" is a culturally and statistically difficult task, "most indicators of poverty and related disadvantage show that Indigenous people are between two and three times worse off than non-Indigenous people in Australia" (302); that Indigenous unemployment rates are "well over twice that of non-Indigenous people...and are much higher in remote areas" (302); and that "(s)ome remote Indigenous communities live in absolute poverty, measured by poor infrastructure with associated diseases that are largely eradicated in other parts of Australia" (303). The marginalization, political and social, of indigenous groups in sites of historical colonization continues to be a grievous problem, such that the issue of language shift, at its sites of greatest crisis is inextricable from other issues of minority rights and social inequality. In the areas in which the project of reversing language shift is arguably the most relevant, this project must contend with a range of serious obstacles, which have affected high-profile projects like Irish

¹⁵ of the *Catholic Encyclopedia*, available online at <http://www.newadvent.org/cathen/>, which currently catalogues many indigenous tribes, noting their number of viable "souls".

and Hebrew¹⁶ to a much lesser extent. I have placed these obstacles into two categories, the first having to do with resource poverty (by a number of definitions) and the second related to political pressures.

Resource poverty and reversing language shift

Reversing language shift requires a wealth of resources: not only money and general interest, but space, time, development, excellent documentation and pedagogical materials, unity of purpose and other resources even harder to quantify.

Costs of a school-based model

The expense of reversing language shift is evident in schools-based projects. Many efforts to maintain or revive a minority language have either included a childhood education component or worked for the most part through the infrastructure of the preexisting primary educational system: 260 Australian schools, for example, run programs in 80 different indigenous languages (Purdie et al, 2008) and allow students to study an indigenous language in order to satisfy the state LOTE (Language Other Than English) requirement. Even this fairly pragmatic approach has a daunting set of costs attached to it. Schools and communities, in nearly every case, struggle to find fluent speakers qualified and willing to head a classroom. Appropriate and up-to-date teaching materials are usually rare, and their development requires communities to absorb the costs of research, editing and printing or, if the community favors digital resources, programming and system updates¹⁷.

Perhaps even more significant than the material costs of the classroom model are its social costs. Since communities at a linguistic disadvantage tend strongly to be at a socioeconomic disadvantage also, groups that would derive the greatest benefit from RLS programs from a linguistic standpoint may see them as an unnecessary burden upon an educational system that is already struggling. Margaret Speas, who has worked extensively with the Navajo people and language, takes a strong stance against outside academics

¹⁶ Cotter, 2001: 301; cf also Fishman, 1991: 314-6 on "continuing problems" in Hebrew

¹⁷ The Myaamia program of Oklahoma (<http://www.myaamiaproject.org/index.html>) has made extensive use of digital tools, including an online dictionary; other programs (cf Kroskrity & Reynolds, 2001: 317) have struggled against digital obsolescence.

imposing an agenda of RLS on indigenous communities. She argues that, though no study has shown a cognitive difference between monolingual and bilingual children, it is not the place of "linguists to disabuse speakers of endangered languages of their misconceptions" regarding bilingualism. She adds:

"Bilingual parents in America know that school systems care only about English skills and minority languages are not widely valued....(Children's) knowledge of the home language will be generally ignored. Parents are not deluded to worry about the effects of bringing their child up bilingual. It takes a very strong parent with ample time to advocate for her children to counteract these effects." (Speas 2008 : 29)

Clearly, school-based models are expensive in more than one way. Whether because they are prohibitively expensive, or because there are simply not enough potential students to keep such programs running, some communities choose smaller, less institutionalized models of linguistic resistance.

Costs of a community-based model

In Northern California, an area of historically dazzling language diversity¹⁸, Native American groups have teamed with scholars from U.C. Berkeley in an ambitious, multifaceted language documentation and promotion project. One aspect of this project is the university's Breath of Life workshop, which directs speakers of Native Californian languages and dialects to written and recorded resources that will allow them to return to their communities with a stronger grasp on their own languages, as well as new strategies for documentation and independent linguistic analysis. California has also become well-known for its pioneering Master-Apprentice program, developed in 1992 by the Native California Network in cooperation with indigenous scholars Nancy Richardson and Mary Bates Abbott, and U.C. Berkeley linguist Leanne Hinton (Hinton, 2001b: 219). In this program, tribal elders fluent in the target language are paired with younger adults with little or no command of it. The pairs spend a predetermined number of hours together weekly, during which they speak only the target language (Hinton, 2001b: 220). The program, informed by the Total Physical Response model of language pedagogy as well as field techniques of language elicitation, encourages

¹⁸ U.C. Berkeley estimates that there were at time of colonization between 80 and 90 Native Californian dialects from 20 distinct language families. (<http://linguistics.berkeley.edu/~survey/languages/california-languages.php>)

masters and apprentices to begin with simple tasks - such as housework - in which the master gives commands to the apprentice, who must work out what is being asked of her (Hinton, 2001b: 220). Common activities such as shopping, as well as traditional modes of work and recreation, are encouraged as sites of language use, in the hopes of exposing the apprentice to a broader range of vocabulary and forcing both parties to communicate in real-world situations.

The Master-Apprentice program, while rewarding, is also quite costly, and once again it is disproportionately challenged by the resource-poverty of the communities it seeks to serve. Surface costs of the program include the running of regular workshops in elicitation techniques, and team-building, as well as the price of recording equipment and its maintenance: teams are instructed to record all of their sessions in order to document the languages, which are generally underdocumented (Hinton, 2001b: 221). Perhaps more significantly, most of the language mentors and mentees themselves must take time out of their work schedules to participate in the program. To compensate for this, program directors agreed to grant each member of a language-learning pair with a \$3,000 stipend for every 360 hours of language immersion work logged (Hinton, 2001b: 219)¹⁹. Hinton explains, "(O)ften this stipend can make the difference between an apprentice who works full time and thus is too busy or exhausted to take full advantage of the program versus an apprentice who can cut back on work hours and devote himself more fully" (219). Again, while a language like Irish benefits from an established middle class that can afford to volunteer its time to (or pay for) the process of language education, reversing language shift places a disproportionately heavy burden on communities in which the class structure is flatter and the socioeconomic level lower. Even in such a small-scale, intimate program as Master-Apprentice, the dedication required of its participants represents not only a psychological commitment but a financial one. In this case, that financial commitment is fulfilled by grants and donors through a non-profit organization, Advocates for Indigenous California Language Survival (<http://www.aicls.org> 1/28/12), but the fact that such a project depends on the work of non-profits and advocacy groups is indicative of the lack of resources, human and monetary, facing the objective of reversing indigenous language shift, even at the scale of person-to-person language transmission.

¹⁹ About \$8.33/hr, which was above California's minimum wage at time of publication.

Elderly speakers as a resource

The most important resource to a language community is, of course, its fluent speakers. They may be few in number and hard to find for any minority language community, but for Indigenous groups there is the added difficulty of histories of widespread linguistic and cultural repression, resulting in a generation or generations for whom the transmission of the language was interrupted, sometimes violently. The legacy of these “stolen generations” (as they are descriptively known in Australia²⁰) is that last fluent speakers tend to be elderly and, in many cases, to hold ambivalent or negative views about their heritage speech. The problems of information exchange between outside linguists and last speakers will be addressed in section II, but it is worth noting that even a sense of urgency in the community around the project of reversing language shift does not always counteract negative attitudes toward cultural practice (including use of heritage languages) and does not always motivate elderly speakers to share what linguistic knowledge they retain with outsiders or the younger generation. In a 1936 autobiographical poem, Isabel Meadows of the Rumsien Ohlone tribe of central California writes, “the only old lady / who would speak the language / in our hearing was / *la Omecia*. / All the others / did not like us young people / to listen.” (Yamane : 429) These lines are representative of a common obstacle to reversing language shift: the continued unwillingness of fluent (or previously fluent) speakers to participate, publicly or privately, in the activity of transmission, either because it has had bitter consequences in the past or because “rusty” speakers feel unqualified as representatives of a nearly-bygone speaker community, even ashamed of their shortcomings in the heritage language (Tsunoda, 2005: 191). Amery, whose work with the Kurna language community is extensive, acknowledges the “possibility that some residual Kurna language might be handed down orally from one generation to the next within certain Nunga families, who may not wish to make this information public.” (Amery, 2000: 75)

Even if last speakers are fully open and cooperative with language workers - both community members and outside linguists - the data obtained from these speakers can raise as many questions as they answer. First language attrition, “the disintegration...of the

²⁰ of “Bringing Them Home”, the Australian Human Rights Commission’s 1997 report toward reparations for victims of forced relocation and assimilation. (available online at http://www.hreoc.gov.au/social_justice/bth_report/report/index.html)

structure of a first language (L1) in contact situations with a second language (L2)” (Seliger & Vago, 1991: 3) is a well-attested phenomenon even under the most favorable conditions (e.g. in the grammar of an American translator who works several decades in Paris). Studies show that “pathological states such as...senile dementia are further contexts for attrition effects” (3). Given the poverty and widespread poor health afflicting many indigenous communities, one would expect elderly speakers in these communities to be disproportionately affected by the process of L1 attrition. One very thorough study of the structural effects of L1 attrition, which provides intriguing directives for further research, is Maiden’s 2004 work on morphological change in Vegliote. A significant body of linguistic work exists on Vegliote, a now-extinct dialect of Dalmatian, all of it compiled by Romance scholars in collaboration with the last speaker, Antonio Udina, during the last 20 years of his life (he died in a construction accident in 1898 at the age of 77) (Maiden, 2004: 87-8). In his analysis of the data, Maiden determines that Udina’s Vegliote idiolect has generalized an irregularity in verb conjugation and thus systematically neutralized a historical contrast between present and imperfect verb morphology (Maiden, 2004: 86-7). Complex, systematic language change processes can occur in the grammar of a single speaker without input or comparison from other speakers. Leaving aside issues of generalized memory loss and loss of motor coordination with age²¹, this finding alone should give all linguists pause who are seeking an accurate model of the historical language from last, and especially elderly, consultants.

Documentation-poverty

There is another kind of resource poverty that can stymie RLS efforts, one which the Master-Apprentice program gracefully addresses through its structure. This is the problem of under-documentation: the lack of complete written and recorded resources and, in many cases, fluent speakers. Poverty of written documentation is especially troublesome in situations, such as Kaurna or the Myaamia language of Oklahoma²², in which a community hopes to reawaken a language with no remaining fluent speakers. In many cases, historical

²¹ or, perhaps more commonly, hearing loss: field phonetician Christian DiCanio worked with two speakers of Ixcatec, a moribund language of Oaxaca, Mexico, and described in an interview (2/12) the difficulty of working with one consultant who had suffered serious hearing loss. The project was able to obtain state funding to provide hearing aids for this speaker.

²² (in fact some of the better-documented languages in their respective regions) (Bowern, personal communication, March 2012)

written sources are a problematic resource that demands intense academic study to decipher and leaves much to be desired as a basis for language reawakening.

Problems of historical sources

Joseph Errington's 2008 work *Linguistics in a Colonial World* describes the difficulties inherent to working with colonial-era documentation, often the most thorough and only systematic texts available to groups seeking to begin a revitalization project. One limitation of colonial-era linguistic texts arises from the nature of the position of language workers within colonial power structures. For Christian missionaries, language was most importantly a means of communicating religious "truths" to indigenous communities, meaning that all language work was in service of this goal. This limitation has affected missionary-sourced linguistic work from the 16th century – when the Catholic church issued injunctions to its missionaries to "safeguard the key words of the doctrine from confusion with native beliefs and terminologies" (Rafael 1993: 117 via Errington, 2008: 42) – to the 1980s, as religiously-funded SIL workers in South America struggled with faith and politics at the church, national, and international levels. As will be noted in the following section, SIL continues its fight to promote the precept that Bible translation and language maintenance are coefficient goals²³.

Likewise, linguistic consultants of secular "missions" – i.e. projects searching for economic gain that most often coincided with assimilationism at best and outright genocide at worst – produced work that suffered from the authors' place within colonial and imperial projects. In these cases, the language worker's output was only valued insofar as it benefited the goals of the occupying nation. Errington expresses what he calls the underlying "sameness" of linguistic work before WWII: its rootedness in European practices of literacy, the structure and organization of its literature, and a certain unity of philosophical purpose:

“(T)he intellectual work of writing speech was never entirely distinct from the ‘ideological’ work of devising images of people in zones of colonial contact...(L)anguage difference figured in the creation of human hierarchies,

²³ This struggle is extensively and fascinatingly documented in David Stoll's 1983 work "Fishers of Men or Founders of Empire?"

such that colonial subjects could be recognized as human, yet deficiently so.”
(Errington, 2008: 5)

Even the most practiced and well-intentioned language workers of this period, due to the pressures of the colonial project, were constrained in the scope and quality of their work. For example, much of the data being used in the Kaurua revival effort comes from the publications of Teichelmann and Schürmann, a pair of German missionaries “instructed in Latin, Greek, English, Hebrew, and even a little Chinese” (Amery, 2000: 76) who were sent to Adelaide in the mid-19th century to study the language with the explicit directive of ‘civilising’ the Kaurua people, specifically through Bible translation and assimilation education (Amery, 2000: 76). Once their term of employment had ended, the men left Adelaide with their notes. Teichelmann returned and went on to create a ‘Dictionary of the Adelaide Dialect’ which was sent to Australia’s Governor in 1857 (Amery, 2000: 77), but their work is by no means comprehensive and reflects the language only at a now-distant historical state. Schürmann himself stated in a letter that due to their limited term of employment and the narrow focus of their assignment, “we...do not think (our manuscript) to contain one half of the riches of forms and ideas which may probably be hidden in the language.” (Schurman, 1987: 91; via Amery, 2000: 76). In their 1840 grammar, the authors complain that “(e)ighteen months is but a short period for the study of an unwritten language, where no means of instruction exist, and where all information must be gleaned from casual and trivial conversation.” (Teichelmann and Schürmann, 1840; via Amery, 2000: 75). The authors also display the disdain for the linguistic habits of “natives” that characterizes even the most thorough language work from this period, a disdain that cannot have served their documentation project well in terms of completeness and candidness: “To this must be added, the uncommon rapidity, abbreviation, and *carelessness* with which the Aborigines speak; their extreme reluctance for a long time, to inform the inquirer; their *natural inability* to answer grammatical questions...” (Teichelmann and Schürmann, 1840: via Amery, 2000: 75, emphasis mine) We can only imagine what a modern linguist would make out of these “defects”; publications on Kaurua prosody, elision, lenition and word-final morphophonology, discourse structure, metalinguistic processing and ethnolinguistics seem in order, not a note about informants’ “carelessness”.

In addition to their limits as linguistic projects within the power structure and “human hierarchy” of colonialism, these early documentation projects suffer from a lack of linguistics-

specific standards. The situation of Kurna also illustrates the fact that a large part of the documented language work for languages no longer spoken comes from individuals or small groups unconnected with any academic linguistic community – although usually connected with missions or bureaucracies, or a network of “explorers” and “adventurers”. Besides the work of missionaries, most of the only known written sources of Kurna linguistic knowledge come from a Governor, two Protectors of Aborigines, a member of the Colonial Store Department, a well-known explorer, and a few interested private citizens (Amery, 2000: 76-91), each of these reporting in the capacity of his respective occupation, and thus not accountable for the accuracy of his findings in the context of a broader academic culture. Though Teichelmann and Schürmann apparently engendered a small community of academic practice within Adelaide that followed the original two missionaries’ methods (Amery, 2000: 76), those working outside of the ‘Adelaide School’ seem to an extent to have been doing so in a vacuum. Consequently, ambiguities arise in Kurna reconstruction due to conflicting documentation, especially in the domain of orthography and other notation conventions (Amery, 2000: 76-91). Kurna sources can be inconsistent with vowel length (which is phonemic in the language), and at least one source is consistently baffled by the word-initial velar nasal, either omitting it entirely or transcribing it as an *h* (Amery, 2000: 82).

The Miami tribe of Oklahoma, which has undertaken a daunting project similar to that of Kurna – i.e. reawakening of a “sleeping” ancestral language, Myaamia – faced a similar challenge in the early development stages of their movement. David J. Costa’s extensive 1994 dissertation on Myaamia (or Miami-Illinois), the most complete academic resource on the language, details the challenges of working with around 19 distinct sources, only a small handful of which came from trained linguists. Most of the modern (i.e. postcolonial) linguists were working at a time of pronounced language attrition and grammatical change; Costa in fact omits the most recent data in his study on the grounds that they are not “normal” (31). The other sources, as in the case of Kurna, include missionaries, bureaucrats of ambivalent departments, and an Indiana lawyer named Jacob Dunn with a personal project of documenting the language “for posterity” (23). Unsurprisingly, there are pronounced discrepancies in this documentation; many of the language workers in question had trouble distinguishing vowel length and preaspiration (both of which are phonemic in Myaamia) (cf Costa, 1994: 13), for example.

Even where the work of colonial-era linguists is thorough enough to reconstruct a phonological system and a working (if not fully reconstituted) grammar, pragmatic, idiomatic, and sociolinguistic information is frequently lacking, and the lexical and morphological information contained in these grammars may be systematically incomplete.

A religious belief in the fall of Babel animated many missionary linguists' work throughout the 19th and early 20th centuries, and with this belief came ideas of linguistic hierarchy and degeneration, as we can arguably observe in the passage from Teichelmann and Schürmann above. Errington argues that European linguists also displayed a prejudice toward Indo-European linguistic forms themselves. He makes reference to a frequently-cited quote from William Jones' Presidential address at the first meeting of the Asiatic Society of Bengal in 1786, which begins, "(T)he Sanscrit language...is of a wonderful structure; more perfect than the Greek, more copious than the Latin, and more exquisitely refined than either." (Errington, 2008: 56) This speech is understood as the cornerstone for the field of philology, but in this context it is important insofar as it reveals a belief in a linguistic hierarchy with Greek, Sanskrit and Latin as exemplars. Many European scholars of the period valorized (written) Greek and Latin morphology and syntax as "pure" and "refined", and so, faced with the often heightened morphological complexity of the languages they encountered (compared to, say, English or French), approached them through the frameworks of classicism and textualism. The grammars we have inherited from these language workers are often morphologically and syntactically incomplete, and yet their authors may do away with unfamiliar features by lamenting the languages' "lack" of certain features. Teichelmann and Schurmann, for example, say of the Kaurna prohibitive suffix that "it may be joined to nouns - in which case Europeans must supply an auxilliary verb, of which the language appears destitute." (1840: 17, via Amery, 2000: 133) Costa also laments the lack of information in his sources regarding certain morphosyntactic features of Miami-Illinois that would have been alien to a Eurocentric approach, among them obviative inanimate intransitive and transitive injunctive verb forms (xviii). More simply, these colonial-era works are limited by the interest of those gathering the information, both "interest" in the sense of economic and political investment, and "interest" in the sense of personal engagement.

For example, Amery notes that fishing was central to traditional Kaurna culture and continues to play a significant role in coastal communities, with comparison to neighboring languages and cultures suggesting this semantic domain was historically an extremely rich

source of species terms, idioms and verbs of practice (Amery, 2000: 126). However, Teichelmann and Schürmann, and (Teichelmann's later associate) Moorhouse "recorded only 12 terms for fish, shellfish, and other marine life, reflecting their limited experience and **lack of interest in fishing.**" (Amery, 2000: 126, emphasis mine), and consequently a whole domain of cultural knowledge is lost to the Kurna renewal effort. A lack of linguistic accountability and standardization, as well as an intensely Eurocentric orientation and an indifference to the subtleties of indigenous cultural practice and social structure make colonial linguistic texts a frustratingly incomplete resource.

RLS and political obstacles

While it may be implemented most visibly in the educational or social domain, the project of reversing language shift is never simply an educational or social one; it is necessarily political. The promotion of a minority language, especially one that has historically faced active suppression from the majority culture, involves tension between communities and outsiders, between preëxisting educational systems and proposed models, or among indigenous groups with a diversity of outlooks and cultural attitudes.

External political obstacles

In the United States, federal policy has come to be explicitly supportive of Native American language education and revitalization. The Native American Languages Act of 1990, states that "there is convincing evidence that student achievement and performance, community and school pride, and educational opportunity is clearly and directly tied to respect for, and support of, the first language of the child or student" (article 6) and that "languages are the means of communication for the full range of human experiences and are critical to the survival of cultural and political integrity of any people" (article 9). Language revitalization specifically is addressed in the Bush-signed Esther Martinez Native American Languages Preservation Act of 2006 (P.L.109-394), which seeks "(t)o amend the Native American Programs Act of 1974 to provide for the revitalization of Native American languages through Native American language immersion programs." A proposed executive order submitted to the White House in winter of 2011 also seeks a commitment from the Obama

administration to “revitalizing and protecting the use of Native American languages” (National Indian Education Association’s White House Native Languages Working Group, 2010).

Despite this recent climate of support, previous federal policy has been ambivalent as far as reversing language shift, in practice, is concerned. While the 1974 Act mentioned above did allow many indigenous groups to promote their languages within the school system to an extent, it did not allocate funding to, or contain articles addressing, the specific projects of language revitalization and maintenance (29 USC § 2911). And Native American language education programs have spent the past half-century in an uncertain middle-ground with respect to federal and state policy, benefiting from relatively liberal legislation such as that found in Title VII of the Elementary and Secondary Education Act (ESEA) of 1967 and suffering from legislation like Arizona’s recent Proposition 203, also known as the “English for Children” bill (AZ-H.R. 2064), which aims to remove bilingual education from public schools altogether. Such language policy is almost exclusively aimed at the languages of immigrant communities – minority languages to be sure, but very rarely endangered ones – and most of the debate surrounding this legislation touches on the politics of immigration and citizenship, not on the place of Native Americans and their languages in the educational system. Due to the ongoing struggle over bilingual education, even indigenous language programs that the government nominally supports are enmeshed in a heated minority rights battle, demonstrating further that (a) the act of indigenous language promotion in this or any climate in which indigenous communities remain marginal is inherently political, and (b) indigenous languages, disproportionately endangered, are beset with a disproportionate number of political obstacles²⁴.

Internal struggles

²⁴ What’s more, as Claire Bower (personal communication, March 2012) comments, legislation aimed at strengthening community health and (ideally) cultural transmission, may ironically interrupt the transmission of native languages. The allocation of funds toward Native American housing and childcare programs under Title VI improved indigenous communities’ standard of living, but had the side effect of less grandparent-grandchild interaction (this being the primary locus of language transmission in many communities). Without specific language support in place, no social support program guarantees the health of a minority language.

Political disputes also arise within communities hoping to reverse the shift of their own languages. A dispute about orthography or lexicon can reflect an underlying dispute about identity: the question of what (or whose) version of the culture is being promoted can be tightly bound up with what linguistic forms are being promoted. This issue afflicts even comparatively advantaged programs like Irish, in which “...strong dialect group affiliations have created hurdles.” (Cotter, 2001: 303) Cotter comments:

“None of the three main dialect regions [of Irish] – Ullster in the north, Onnacht in the west, and Munster in the south – is considered the standard, and no dialect group has been willing to defer to another for the ‘honor’. For that reason, a compromise standard that rather arbitrarily includes features from all the dialects, known as An Caighdeán, was instituted for education and government functions in the 1950s.” (Cotter, 2001: 303)

A related problem to the issue of standardization is the question of young people’s language. Māori elders have complained that children spout modern, Western concepts through the words of the old language (Hinton, 2001a: 16); likewise, a 1998 study found that “children who had acquired school-taught Welsh...did not so much as recognize certain long-standing features of their own locality’s Welsh” (Dorian, 2010: 35-6; in Farfán and Ramallo, 2010). The question of language change and adaptation as it relates to fledgling RLS movements is a complex one, which will be discussed further in section II.6 below. Many proponents of RLS – from Kaurna families²⁵ to conservative Hebrew speakers²⁶ – are concerned with a sense of continuity and authenticity in the revitalized “version” of the language; this concern intersects with concerns about, for example, using elderly last speakers as a language resource, since the grammar and lexicon these speakers transmit may not reflect the language as it was spoken among the community²⁷.

These considerations reflect the fact that RLS can be stymied by arguments about just what the language *is*, and what should be done with it – which is not to imply by any means that these debates are to be avoided, since they are arguably quite necessary. This kind of political conflict within a speaker community is only one more facet of the deeply challenging

²⁵ cf Power in Amery, 2000: 114: “I’ve got to know where (language material) comes from.”

²⁶ cf Fishman 1991: 299-300 on failures of the conservative Hebrew Language Academy to institute academically “correct” terms

²⁷ cf Maiden 2004 on language change in last speakers

nature of RLS, a project which is impossible to disentangle from a complex of other projects, none of them purely linguistic or educational.

In summary, an indigenous community approaching the task of RLS faces a host of unique and troublesome roadblocks that other communities seeking to acquire or maintain a minority L2 (e.g. Yiddish hobbyists, Esperanto proponents, Na’vi forum participants, etc.) do not. In the case of Irish, resistance from state institutions and within the speaker community have been minimal, and the project began with a comparative excess of resources (to use “resources” in the broad sense evoked above). For most endangered language speaker communities, though, as the recent history of RLS in the U.S. and Australia suggest, language maintenance and revitalization is caught up in problems of inequality and cultural tensions. As linguists increasingly become involved with such communities, these problems increasingly come into play in academic research. The following section deals with some ethical complexities of academic work on indigenous languages – upon which work many languages, and many academic careers, may depend. I also give salient examples of positive collaboration between academic and indigenous groups in this field.

II: LINGUISTS AND REVERSING LANGUAGE SHIFT

Given the complexity and magnitude of the challenges that most indigenous communities approaching RLS face, it is unsurprising that minority language groups are increasingly seeking outside help in such projects, specifically from the linguistic community. Likewise, academic linguists – by occupation invested in the survival of threatened languages, and competent in collection and analysis (and application) of language data – have developed a strong interest in endangered languages and their speakers. On the surface, linguistic research into threatened languages may seem unambiguously positive for all parties: academics gain information about the world in terms of its languages and human histories/geographies, and build their careers, while indigenous peoples enjoy a more nuanced understanding of their own cultures and access to valuable revitalization resources. However, the transaction between linguist and speaker is neither simple nor free of lingering colonial undercurrents, especially as far as its associations with missionary work are concerned and especially in cases of languages with only a handful of speakers.

In the coming decades, it will be important for the linguistic community to act ethically and sustainably when approaching collaboration with indigenous groups, and in a large part this will involve refraining from prescription of language policies and attitudes. As impossible/indefensible as this may seem, given the current crisis state of language diversity, it will be crucial to work in true collaboration. Prescriptive and highly academic efforts have historically been not only problematic or unethical in their power structure but also ineffective in terms of reversing language shift. The most ethical research and documentation are also the most effective for RLS.

Being “helpful”

In her 2008 paper “Someone Else’s Language”, University of Massachusetts field linguist Margaret Speas expresses a deep ambivalence toward the idea of academics inserting themselves into indigenous communities with the intent of being “helpful”, arguing that academic linguists are perhaps inherently unsuitable as partners in language development and maintenance. While it is true that expertise in pedagogy and social activism seem more germane to the project of reversing language shift than, say, expertise in anaphor binding or markedness constraints, Speas’ suggestion that a linguist is little more than a disinterested technician borders on narrow-minded and unfair. The assertions border on unhelpfully extreme when Speas claims that “asking a linguist to help you develop a language program is a bit like asking a mechanic to teach you how to drive...or asking a gynecologist how to meet women” (2008: 24). While their academic careers may be dependent upon close analysis of features of a language which can be alien to its speakers, linguists tend to be passionate and informed about the trials of language acquisition, the social contexts of language use, and the histories of languages. It is difficult to be a “good linguist” – to gain useful intuition about the languages studied, e.g., or to earn the trust of research consultants – without building personal connections to the languages under scrutiny and their speakers. However, Speas does raise compelling ethical concerns about academic field work and its role in reversing language shift. She cautions:

“(E)ach of us tends to assume that we are simply more enlightened than the missionaries, teachers, administrators and soldiers of the past...(B)ut many of them were eager to be helpful and were certain that they were enlightened about what the Indians needed: They wanted to ‘help’...by training children’s tongues away from their ‘savage’ languages...(T)he helpful well-meaning linguist

often sees her task as one of disabusing members of Native communities of their ‘misconceptions’ about language and sharing the truth with them.” (2008: 24-6)

Speas goes on to illustrate how beliefs about and practices of language use within speaker communities which to an academic seem unnecessarily destructive – negativity toward bilingualism, for example, or deliberate “language suicide” – may represent informed, pragmatic, culturally viable choices on the part of the community. In the light of this assertion, the desire of linguists to clear up “misconceptions” that accelerate language shift becomes problematic. In his “Postcolonial Postscript” to *Linguistics in a Colonial World*, Joseph Errington cautions against work that does not “recognize...that power differences are always in the zones of contact which they create in and for their work” (2008: 170). He goes on:

“These are differences which may be impossible to eradicate but, once recognized, may help to develop broadened agendas and strategies: if those differences become more explicit for all concerned, counting as topics in and not just as enabling conditions for the work of linguistic description, perhaps the field can find a different place in a postcolonial world.”

As upsetting as it is to an educated elite to “sit back” and watch languages die, it is clear that the coming decades will require work undertaken as a collaboration between indigenous groups and academia to be egalitarian, consensual, personal and otherwise ethically-minded. One subtext of such collaboration may be writing wrongs (inasmuch as this is possible) of centuries of ambivalent or downright destructive research, and another may be ensuring (and defining) best practices so that people hoping to build a community of practice around a language can do so effectively and sustainably. While the idea of “defining best practice” may seem to evoke Speas’ condemnation of the “eager, helpful outsider” rather uncomfortably, it does not seem unreasonable that linguists, who possess experience with and understanding of the implementation of language practice and policy, as well as access to and insight into prior research and documentation, can prove valuable to such communities as they work toward their goals. Amery asserts that it is possible to reach “an accommodation...which recognizes the right of (language) owners...to control the process, but also acknowledges the skills and expertise...(of) outsiders.” (2000: 46).

It is apparent that, in work with endangered languages, deep critical thinking regarding the ethics of one’s role as an “outsider” is in order, even if this is at the expense of speedier documentation at a critical stage. However, the work of formal documentation and language policy

implementation can very well involve (and has involved) linguists at many stages, in arrangements that sustainably benefit both indigenous communities and the world of academia. In their 2009 presentation on the ethics of field work and the thorny relationship between these ethics and the structure of IRB regulations, Claire Bower and Lise Dobrin advocate for a model of collaboration with a highly conscious ethical core, not just one bound after the fact by a set of (admittedly, detailed and well-informed) ethical constraints imposed by outside organizations like the IRB. Dobrin concludes:

“(T)he ethics of fieldwork is not the kind of thing you can plan to deal with on Tuesday. Ethics doesn’t reside in a code, or at the point of IRB review, or even in making a tough decision in the field. What we urge everyone to work toward is an ethics that is not efficiently inserted into our research but embedded in the daily business of academic practice, where it can inform our thinking and serve our relationships.” (Bower and Dobrin, 2009: concluding bullet point)

The following section will outline ways in which academic involvement in the affairs of disadvantaged indigenous groups, even in the absence of colonial-era notions of cultural hierarchy and assimilation, can lead to ethical problems of consent, equality, and sustainability. I will go on to illustrate that, despite these problems, there is a place in the project of reversing language shift for fruitful and mutually beneficial collaboration between linguists and speaker communities. More recent, and more successful, efforts have incorporated the kind of socially conscious models suggested by Bower and Dobrin.

Contending with history in language work

Like biomedical data collected from human subjects, linguistic data in American academia is subject to IRB constraints as regulated by the OHRP, which constraints aim largely for informed consent on the part of all subjects and seek special protections for vulnerable social and demographic groups. The OHRP was established in 1974, partially in response to public awareness of the infamous Tuskegee experiments²⁸ (Annas & Grodin, 1995: 294); these experiments, which utilized extreme deception tactics and placed unwitting “participants” at tremendous personal risk, were disastrous not only to the health of the individuals involved but also for the relationship

²⁸ “– also following from the Helsinki Convention...which itself has its roots in the Nuremberg Nazi war crimes trials in 1949” (Claire Bower, personal communication, March 2012; cf also Annas & Grodin, 1995)

between academic medicine and African American communities, to the extent that academic medicine remains reluctant – and communities’ responses make it difficult – to conduct studies that single out Black populations even when this distinction is justified on the basis of hereditary conditions such as heart disease (Skloot, 2010: 186, 197). While each academic community responds differently to its history of research involving minorities, many minority groups – especially indigenous minority groups – worldwide have historical precedent to mistrust outside researchers, and researchers (and their ethics boards) must respond to these particular historical precedents sensitively and dynamically.

Missionary activity, which will be addressed in more detail below, is one area of historical contact between indigenous groups and interested outsiders which has colored the attitudes of many groups toward research. In a personal interview this February, Haskins Laboratory phonetician Christian diCanio commented on the troubled history of evangelist SIL in Mexico and its shifting place in the struggle among evangelism, Indigenous Catholicisms and secularism that characterized Mexican politics through the mid 20th century. He says:

“(A)mong people that are doing field work in Mexico, this is a concern, that they are not proselytizing organizations. Being able to clarify when you’re in a community, saying ‘*no soy misionero*’, ‘I’m not a missionary’, is...an important thing, especially because religion in the smaller communities has now also become a very political thing.” (2/24/12)

While ethics review processes are, diCanio says, “fairly informal” in Mexico, the suspicion of indigenous speaker communities – many of these practitioners of an Indigenous Roman Catholicism (personal communication, 2/24/12) – regarding the motives of language workers is historically justified and it becomes the responsibility of the researcher, and the researcher’s sponsoring institutions, to demonstrate the fundamental difference between the current research projects and those that have been harmful to the researched community. Even if a researcher succeeds in distinguishing her project as beneficial to the researched community, the process of research itself can have unfortunate historical connotations. For example, Dobrin and Bower note that some groups, including Gaelic speakers and some aboriginal groups, “will only participate on the condition that they *do not sign forms*”. This condition indicates, in some circumstances, a collective resistance to getting involved with legal or governmental institutions, though it may also reflect communities’ unfortunate points of historical reference regarding institutional texts and the act of signing. The position of the field linguist may become complex when s/he confronts such points of

reference, which almost certainly contribute to some speakers' reluctance to work with researchers. Amery's account of the Kaurna situation (2000: 75), in which he acknowledges the possibility of whole families privately speaking the language without publicly acknowledging this, is only one example²⁹ of knowledge rendered inaccessible to academia by a combination of intercultural tensions, intracultural attitudes and historical violations of trust. Paka'anil linguist Lindsay Marean adds:

“There are a few other very old people who are said to speak Paka'anil, but either due to infirmity or *mistrust of pretty much everyone* or extreme rustiness in the language they don't make themselves available as language resource people. We're not giving up on them, however. They may yet come around.”
(personal communication, 2012, February 13, emphasis mine)

Clearly, thorough documentation and field work with skilled consultants can be of use to RLS projects. As Marean's (and others') account(s) illustrate, such work will be impossible without a critical eye to its own historical context and a graceful, well-informed approach to that context. Creating the proper conditions for trust and reciprocity in the light of past abuses will ensure that available human and cultural resources are employed to their fullest potential.

Problems of language as data

Linguistics as a science tends to regard the world's languages as “coherent and complete systems, essentially autonomous of direct influence from other mental, social or cultural influences, enabled by the arbitrariness of the sign...and structured by complex patterns of rules” (Coulmas 1997 via Amery 2000 : 39). This view of natural language is not necessarily in line with any speaker community's conception of its own language. The conceit that *language is data* is by no means universal, and this conceit encourages attitudes antithetical to an understanding of language as fundamentally esoteric, as a culturally specific code available only to insiders. The distinction between exoteric languages, which are regarded by their speakers as abstract entities distinct from other cultural practice and available for the use of all, and esoteric languages, was first drawn by Thurston (1987), and it is an important distinction as far as many indigenous languages are concerned. For many Australian Aboriginal speaker communities, a traditional language is not only

²⁹ (diCarrio, Kling and Bowern report similar circumstances)

a marker of cultural identity but also a piece of cultural property, an “artifact” (Amery’s term) that belongs in a very immediate sense to the community that produced it. Consequently, there is resistance among many communities to the idea of working with outsiders at all, let alone outsiders who may take linguistic input, render it on the page in the form of symbols unrecognizable to speakers, and then leave with this data, using and publishing it in ways that are (at least to some extent) beyond the speakers’ control³⁰.

Although a strong view of language as a set of cultural artifacts seems to be less characteristic of Native American language communities, certain groups do hold proscriptions against, for example, sharing information about language use that is related to religious practice (cf Pecos & Blum-Martinez 79), despite its potential value as linguistic data³¹. This attention to a kind of cultural privacy, as invoked by the esoteric-exoteric distinction, is crucial to the project of informed, ethical collaboration between linguists and speakers. As linguists, we are of course not obliged to give up a conception of linguistic facts as scientific data; it is difficult to imagine any progress in the field of linguistics without this conceit. However, we are obliged under certain circumstances to acknowledge other conceptions of what language *is* and how it should be treated, even if these conceptions are invalid within a purely empirical or theoretical approach.

Modern missionaries: interdependence and ethically sourced data

In their 2007 paper, “Practical language development: Whose mission?”, Lise Dobrin and Jeff Good comment on the “tacit reliance” of academic linguistics upon evangelical missionary organizations, especially SIL. This reliance is multifaceted and far-reaching, encompassing not only practical field concerns like getting in touch with consultants and finding a place to stay, but also discipline standards, such as the now-indispensable descriptive fonts, keyboard layouts and software

³⁰ Regarding linguistic data collected by linguists over the past two centuries, Amery comments on some Indigenous peoples’ “resentment at having to ‘buy back’ their linguistic heritage in the same way that they are having to buy back artifacts from overseas.” (Amery, 2000: 45) Furthermore, he argues that “The more languages are threatened the further they shift towards the esoteric end of the continuum...The portion of the language which is accessible only to the initiated may expand when the language is threatened.” (43-4). He also criticizes the 1996 Draft Declaration on Linguistic Human Rights for failing to mention Indigenous people’s right to restrict the spread of their languages, which he regards as a “major failure” (44) of the declaration.

³¹ cf, e.g., Josserand and Hopkins, 2005, on lexical retentions in the religious “cult” vocabulary of Tila Chol pilgrims in Chiapas, Mexico, and the use of these retentions to reconstruct cultural and linguistic history.

that SIL (and few other organizations) distributes free of charge³², and the system of three-letter language codes that irrefutably distinguish a language from a dialect as far as many sources are concerned (Dobrin and Good 2009). The authors characterize the relationship between SIL and secular linguists as an interdependence (or even a codependence), in that:

“...association with academic linguistics in turn provides SIL with the legitimacy of disinterested science, and hence a ‘vehicle for creating an alliance with whichever national elites are concerned with foreign expertise and “development”’ in the countries where it operates (Gilliam, 1984: 310)” (623)

Indeed, SIL goes to some length to distance itself publicly from evangelical goals as put forward by prior incarnations of the organization, and to highlight its contributions to the science of linguistics, characterizing itself as a “*scientific educational* organization of Christian volunteers” (<http://www.sil.org/sil/faq.htm> 2/22/12, emphasis mine) rather than what it is: a Christian organization supporting scientists and educators, founded by a wealthy evangelist (Stoll, 1983). Their web page insists: “Though faith-based, SIL limits its focus of service to language development work. SIL does not engage in proselytism, establish churches or publish Scriptures” (<http://www.sil.org/sil> 2/12). There may be definitions of “publish” by which SIL does not publish scriptures, but it has by no means discarded its goal of Bible translation, and this goal guides the organization’s work in ways that are not always conducive to reversing language shift. Some linguists have also pointed out that the relationships which develop between SIL and indigenous communities may be inherently coercive, at least as far as religious conversion is concerned. Epps and Ladley (2009) elaborate:

“Christianity is often not an isolable choice for many of those approached by missionaries...The decision to open one’s community to missions is bound up almost inextricably with other choices, such as a closer association with the outside world and the socioeconomic opportunities this is expected to bring – an expectation reinforced for local people by the obvious relative wealth and power of the missionaries themselves (see e.g. Schieffelin 2002), whose boats, planes, and seemingly inexhaustible supplies of material goods go hand in hand with their religious identity. The choice to accept only one part of what is offered, while openly rejecting the other...may be seen as socially inappropriate,

³² In my undergraduate field methods class, for example, in which we worked with a speaker of Pwo Karen and developed a small dictionary, both the IPA font and the lexicon-building software that my research group used were developed and released by SIL.

ungrateful, or risky, in that offending those who provide assistance might cause that aid to be withdrawn.” (643)

Intended or not, this kind of coercion has no place in a collaborative relationship that seeks to preserve language (and other cultural) practices. While it would be both uncharitable and counterproductive to dismiss the invaluable body of linguistic materials produced by SIL, it is important to note that an institutional understanding of language as a useful tool for transmitting religious ideas harkens back to older, less informed missionary-linguist projects such as those discussed in section II, above. These projects produced texts that in no way empowered the peoples upon which they reported, instead facilitating the occupation of these peoples' lands by outsiders possessed of unfamiliar practices of literacy (Errington's term). Similarly, even SIL's more secular projects seem designed to counteract and undermine indigenous knowledge, albeit "helpfully": today's missionaries "adapt or translate literature...on subjects such as nutrition, farming, health (including HIV/AIDS) and", of course, "Scripture texts", though the latter are "not always included in SIL's language development services." (<http://www.sil.org/sil/2/12>) It is difficult to imagine what a missionary linguist has to teach a member of a 5000-year-old hunter-gatherer society about nutrition. Likewise, the ethics of "re-educating" Ixcatec speakers away from their traditional system of ailments and medical practice³³ are questionable, especially when access to more industrialized and westernized practices of medicine is limited or nonexistent – or available only through the missionary organization. SIL's culturally prescriptive motives sit uncomfortably with many field linguists, and just as uncomfortably with certain indigenous groups, although often for different reasons³⁴.

Many secular linguists, as Dobrin puts it, "question the extent to which SIL... is really a fellow traveler." (2009: 618), and would agree that data sourced from SIL's work is data collected under circumstances troubling in their power structure and questionable in their sustainability. What's

³³ diCanio comments that "there are still in most of the towns (of rural Oaxaca) traditional healers, *curanderos*, who have different ways of healing different ailments, and there's different types of ailments. There are different medical conditions that are...not ones that you would recognize." (personal communication February 2012)

³⁴ Edward Cear and Timothy Steigenga's "Resurgent Voices in Latin America" details one particular struggle in which missionaries' insistence on desegregation in schools along communally determined lines of class and ethnicity in a Mayan community resulted in an outcry on the part of the community and the eventual expulsion of missionaries (99). This is just one example of the complex antagonism between good research and prescriptive attitudes.

more, the priorities of missionary linguistics are such that the languages of most interest to academia – and, arguably, to indigenous groups – the most severely endangered languages, are left behind in SIL’s linguistic triage. Languages with only a handful of elderly speakers, for which total language shift has more or less already occurred, are not assignments that are ‘likely to remain viable to the end’ of a missionary’s term and are therefore unlikely to “receive SIL’s close attention” (Dobrin and Good, 2009: 624). Given such qualms about the inherent problems of missionary linguistics, it seems imperative that academia interrogate its reliance on the data and infrastructure that missionary work provides. Of course, such an interrogation will be costly (in more ways than one³⁵) and time-consuming, in what is already a comparatively resource-poor field (Dobrin and Good, 2009: 628). Nevertheless, such a reanalysis will be necessary to help build trust between the field of academia – which relies on accurate, standardized data about linguistic systems – and indigenous communities seeking autonomy and cultural recognition. This will also help ensure that collaboration between these groups does not reinforce historically destructive research frameworks.

Beyond IRB: other ethical issues in field work with endangered languages

Dr. William de Reuse, a field linguist who has worked with speakers of Plains Apache and Hän, a highly endangered Athabascan language, comments that “the closer you get to zero speakers, the more the ethical problems increase.” (personal communication, 2/2012; cf also Holton 2009 on research in Alaska and Indonesia). He continues (emphasis mine):

“For example, when the last speaker and one relative say, ‘you gotta do the fieldwork now, I/he will be dead soon’, and another relative says, ‘I don’t like linguists, don’t work with him, or else’...*is the documenter’s ethical responsibility to the community representative/government, to the family*

³⁵ An interesting parallel to the question of language as property and the ethics of its collection as data lies in the increasingly salient question of tissue rights in medical research. Skloot (2010) mentions one among a number of similar recent legal cases, in which “members of the Native American Havasupai Tribe sued Arizona State University after scientists took tissue samples the tribe donated for diabetes research and used them without consent to study schizophrenia and inbreeding” (319). Issues of informed consent are extremely complex with respect to human tissue research, given different cultural relationships to medicine and the body, and convincing cases can be made against the use of many tissue cultures utilized by academic medicine. However, prohibiting the use of these tissues could have “disastrous” effects on medical research (328). Likewise, it is difficult to imagine the field of linguistics without the work of SIL, as much as we may question the moral purity of SIL’s data.

favorable to documentation, to the family unfavorable to documentation, or to the individual speaker?"

De Reuse's quandaries highlight the fact that, for languages with only a few speakers left – and such languages are understood by both academia and many indigenous groups as being in dire need of documentation – individual relationships and a very personal kind of ethics may very well complicate the work of the field researcher of moribund languages. On a similar note, Bower and Dobrin (2009) comment:

“Complex relationships and friendships may form, carrying along the associated expectations for reciprocity and ongoing engagement... (O)ne moment you're...sharing stories with a friend, the next you find you're collecting data from an informant. Because you don't know how the relationship and hence the research process will unfold, the risks [i.e. with respect to IRB approval] may be harder to assess up front.” (Introduction para. 2)

The authors also describe cases in which IRB standards themselves may disrupt this relationship and the undermine the rapport necessary for productive collaboration between linguists and consultants: some speakers, confronted with IRB standards that list most indigenous groups as vulnerable populations subject to special ethical consideration, “have been very offended to be included” on the same list as prisoners, children, and the mentally ill. In broader terms, the sensitive and personal nature of working with a very small number of consultants may clash with the global standards developed by ethics boards.

In addition to the challenges that such small-scale, intensive work presents to a standardized Ethics of Research, cross-cultural collaboration in many cases involves the interaction of academic literacy practices with local understandings of public and private, and this interaction can sometimes lead to unexpected problems of consent. For example, Dorian (2010) reports a case in which she collected oral histories from a small speaker community in rural Scotland and reviewed all materials thoroughly with her consultants – many of whom she had worked with for decades and developed quite a close relationship with – before submitting them for publication. During the review process, the families objected to the inclusion of a few details that they regarded as private and sensitive; Dorian omitted these details and obtained informal written consent to publish the rest. However, following the publication of the oral histories, one consultant's widow noticed details she had overlooked during the review process and requested their removal. Dorian's inability to do

so at this late stage became a source of some distress to the widow and complicated Dorian's relationship with her consultants. She adds:

“(The consultant’s widow) was a woman literate in English whose lifestyle...was not at that point exotic or unusual in any obvious way, yet her genuinely informed consent turned out to be much more difficult to achieve than I had imagined. It is easy to see how much harder it would be to achieve well-informed consent in a cultural context that differed more radically from the researcher’s own.” (2010: 33)

In these and other ways, the ethics of cross-cultural research along historically troubled lines – especially language research – become personalized and individualized in research situations involving last speakers. The relationship between linguist and consultant becomes necessarily more personal and, for lack of alternate language work resources, carries more weight than in circumstances in which there are many speakers of the language. Consequently, a model of language research and documentation that does not account for potential conflicts of responsibility, interpersonal relationships, and the “expectations for reciprocity and ongoing engagement” that Dobrin and Bowerman refer to, is an inadequate model both ethically and practically.

What linguists can do: positive implications of academic involvement

While the ethical questions surrounding academic work in endangered language communities are intensely complicated and somewhat difficult to reduce to a formalized set of standards, there are clear indications that collaborative language work can be valuable to both academia and to speaker communities given careful consideration of these issues. Many speaker communities have begun to seek out, through formal or social channels, resources that will allow them to reconnect with their linguistic heritage or to continue the transfer of language between generations, in part due to the increased global profile of indigenous rights movements since the late 20th century (Ash, Fermino and Hale, 2001: 20). A number of resources that the linguistic community has to offer are of great value to reversing language shift movements. As noted in previous sections, thorough and accessible documentation is extremely important, but academic linguists have more to offer. Given a commitment to ethical work and attention to such issues as reciprocity and ethnocentricity, linguistics can be a powerful asset to reversing language shift movements; there can and should be a symbiosis between the two communities. The following pages outline ways in which formal academics with a training in linguistics, working as descriptive linguists, can be effective as language activists within indigenous communities.

1) Resources and reconstruction

In a 1997 interview with Jenny Burford, Adelaide Indigenous rights scholar and activist Lester Irabinna Rigney said of missionary-linguist records of the Kaurna language:

“Now I don’t see it as something that has been written by goonyas [white people], therefore we shouldn’t embrace it. It is there. It’s ours. It has been recorded for us and indeed in some of those recordings our people are talking to us. But we need to decode it.” (via Amery, 2000: 75)

This sense of ownership, and what Amery calls a “reawakening and a yearning for knowledge of culture and language that go beyond childhood memories” (72), have animated a number of indigenous language RLS projects in the past few decades, and in the majority of cases embarking on such a project involves revisiting historical sources, many of which are held in academic settings far-removed from the communities they report upon. In the case of a sleeping language like Kaurna, these sources, and the infrastructure that governs their accessibility, may be approachable only by a trained academic. What’s more, simple access to historical materials may not suffice to reconstruct an accurate (or, more ambitiously, useful) model of the language. The academic who acts as a go-between in this situation is preferably one who can apply abstract linguistic judgements to problems such as imperfect phonetic transcriptions and genetic relationships, in order to contribute suggestions toward a working and “authentic” linguistic system.

As California Ohlone scholar Yamane’s (2001) reflections on connecting with her linguistic heritage demonstrate, the ability of academia to compile and facilitate access to language resources is of immense use to sleeping-language or shifting-language communities. Through dogged independent work in collaboration with Bay Area colleges and universities (especially U.C. Berkeley linguists), Yamane unearthed and interpreted the only available historical sources on her ancestors’ language and, by her account, reached some level of basic proficiency. Expediting the research process for indigenous groups, and helping these groups obtain useful information from dated and problematic texts, will be a vital function of linguists in language reawakening.

2) Language development

In most cases, the shift of a minority language to a majority one involves that language's exclusion from successive domains³⁶, both social domains – of leadership, of trade, of art, e.g. – and the semantic domains that correspond to them³⁷. The further the shift progresses, the more entire categories of vocabulary and discourse patterns are lost, such that the language is weakened in its communicative function. If the language has not been used recently within quickly-changing semantic domains such as technology and media (or if it has not been used recently at all) similar problems of practical inadequacy arise³⁸. Reversing language shift must include a reclamation of these domains, and this reclamation almost necessarily involves language planning³⁹. In the time of Ben Yehuda, one of the founders of the Zionist Hebrew revival,

“Hebrew lacked precisely those vital terms necessary for the performance of household tasks...Ben Yehuda himself was unable to express himself fluently and with ease...When (he) wanted (his wife Devora) to pour him a cup of coffee with sugar, he was at a loss (for) words such as ‘cup’, ‘saucer’, ‘pour’, ‘spoon’, and so on, and would say to his wife, in effect: ‘Take such and such, and do like so, and bring me this and this, and I will drink.’” (Fellman, 1973: 37-8; via Amery, 2000: 33)

As the Ben Yehuda anecdote suggests, lexicon development is another crucial function of language planning, especially for reawakening projects. Robert Amery, for example, used meticulously compiled missionary data and applied comparative methods to neighboring and related languages, while attending to word-formation processes, to offer Kaurna language workers suggestions for lexical items where these items were not recorded or had never existed (Amery, 2000: 114-30)

In cases in which the language has no (or no standard) practical writing system available to its speakers, an important aspect of language planning may be orthography development⁴⁰, which allows groups to utilize resources formerly only accessible to linguists, and to record orally

³⁶ cf Ó Dochartaigh, 1992: 24

³⁷ cf Fishman, 1991: xii, on “stylish” but ineffective methods of language maintenance and the process of language shift

³⁸ cf Hinton, 2001d: 414-5, on development of sleeping languages

³⁹ ...to the extent that some linguists have challenged reawakened or otherwise highly planned languages as artificial or unnatural. See Amery, 2000: 25-8 for a thorough defense of such languages. Likewise Coulmas (1997: 43, via Amery, 2000: 40) argued that “every language is the result of human language work”, calling into question the validity of any artificial/natural distinction for any language that is in use.

⁴⁰ Hinton, 2001c: 239-241

transmitted knowledge independently. This project can benefit from the work of a researcher well-versed in phonological systems, strategies for disambiguation and commonly-used diacritics.

Linguists' role in the development of pedagogical materials is a somewhat contentious subject (cf Speas, 2009; Hinton, 2003; Grenoble, 2008). While it is true that linguists are generally not language pedagogy specialists, and while prescriptions of educational *methods* have not historically been effective or sustainable, the process of developing accurate and linguistically comprehensive study materials from incomplete or unclear language data can certainly benefit from the work of academic linguists. Even Speas admits that her Navajo collaborator, Dr. Parsons Yazzie, "believes (the Navajo textbook they worked on together) was enhanced by (Speas's) expertise and analytical tendencies" (Speas, 2008: 35), despite her strong reservations about linguists' anglocentrism and academic distance from speaker communities.

3) Speaker empowerment

While academic language work can produce texts that are inaccessible to researched communities, it can also provide members of these communities with the tools required to document and promote their languages. Ken Hale's work was outstanding in this respect: by the time of his death last year, Hale had reached fluency in over fifty languages (Wright, 2001) and taught methods of linguistic elicitation and comparison to many of his consultants. As Speas (2009) remarked,

“(Hale) didn't think you had to be a linguist to pass on your language. He just found that there are people in every community who are interested in linguistics, and he believed that the knowledge he had shouldn't be held as esoteric knowledge that only members of the majority culture can have.” (254)

Two of Hale's students, Navajo Paul R. Platero and Hopi LaVerne Masayesva Jeanne, are believed to be the first Native Americans with doctorates in linguistics (Wright, 2001). While Hale's linguistic abilities seemingly bordered on superhuman, other linguists have worked toward training consultants to carry forward the work of documentation and revitalization, thus contributing in a uniquely meaningful way to self-determination (cf Johns and Mazurkewich, 2001: 355, on native language teacher training; and Hinton, 2001b: 225). This project can include training in lexicography, phonology, and elicitation, as well as a background in the global context of language shift and its reversal.

The ability of linguists to empower speakers of minority languages through a broadly-informed, abstracted and scientific approach to language is potentially a crucial factor in revitalization movements. Some, including Sharma (2003), have gone so far as to argue that “the very presence of linguists (provides) a *necessary* background for language awareness and language revitalization,” (in ILCRD 2003: 74) although this seems perhaps a step too far in the light of the fact that many RLS movements are (and should be) internally initiated.

4) Raising the cultural profile

There is another way in which linguists may be of use to indigenous language projects, which is troubling in terms of what it reveals, but is nevertheless important to such projects. This is the application of what Speas refers to as ‘gratuitous prestige’, the privilege (earned and unearned) afforded to cultural material produced by, and cultural inquiries originating from, academics (especially Anglo academics). The fact that association with and advocacy by academics can raise the profile of indigenous projects reflects and perhaps reinforces underlying sociocultural inequalities, as Speas’ (2009) observation suggests:

“Many people assume that if a Navajo and a Bilagáana (European-American) are co-authors, the Bilagáana must be the ‘real’ author, with the Navajo being some kind of assistant. We found that people would sometimes persist in this belief even after being told that Dr. Parsons Yazzie is the primary author...Even when the actual authorship was known, I was accorded...‘gratuitous prestige’” (31-2)

However, given the fact that state recognition and acceptance within the bureaucracy of local school systems are perpetual challenges for RLS activism and education, linguists (and other academics) occupy a privileged place that can benefit groups hoping to raise the status of their troubled language. An academic has access to the highest channels of cultural interaction, and it is in part the concern and dedication of academics (not just the work of equally, perhaps more, concerned and dedicated indigenous groups) that has brought language revitalization into the spotlight it occupies today. An ideal situation, of course, would be one in which impoverished indigenous groups had greater ease of access to the exchange of information and a higher status within hierarchies of knowledge. However, given the dire situation of so many languages, and given the fact that academic linguistics has much to offer anyone approaching language work, the fact that many indigenous

groups are now actively seeking out connections with academia – at least in part due to its problematic legitimizing effect – can be seen in a positive light.

Linguists intending to face the crisis of language shift head-on are in many cases opening the door to social and ethical quandaries that linguistic expertise does not in itself equip us to address. This is the case even when the need for research is expressed by the speaker communities (or people in the position of representing those communities) themselves. However, these quandaries are not grounds for dismissing academic linguists outright from the role of indigenous language worker or RLS-activist. Linguistic research does not benefit speaker communities unconditionally; that said, academic linguists can negotiate a collaborative or reciprocal role in these communities' work, evolving in their academic capacity while also assisting in struggles against language shift. The following section will provide examples of such roles in three RLS programs of the past few decades; these case studies suggest that academia as a partner in reversing language shift, while its role is not simple or straightforward, can be an enriching and sustaining presence – although most likely not the primary driver of shift reversal.

III: CASE STUDIES

My initial line of inquiry in this research was centered around the question “What factors lead to an RLS program’s success or failure?” It has become increasingly clear, however, that these terms are somewhat narrow and unhelpfully reductive. Reversing language shift is neither meaningful (to a non-linguist) nor possible without a corresponding sociopolitical project to give it context, and the comparative success of a program is necessarily determined within this context. Projects that a linguist might consider failed (e.g., those that are not producing new L1 speakers) can be of immense value to the community or individuals therein⁴¹, and many failures in reversing language shift – that is, programs that are discontinued or that the community considers failed – come about when focused language work is undertaken in isolation. As Athabaskan linguist Meek (2010) puts it:

⁴¹ Consider, for example, Stebbins' account of the nearly-extinct Sm'algayax language of British Columbia (2002, 59), which has now been documented thoroughly and returned to a place in public ceremony “as an educational resource, allowing people without fluency to enjoy the language of their community.” (76)

“(E)ndangerment is not simply a result of past assimilation projects; today’s atmosphere of multiculturalism and aboriginal rights is equally a path for the ongoing march toward language death. To interrupt this march, **it is necessary to understand language revitalization challenges not in terms of failure and success, but as a function of contemporary sociolinguistic landscapes.** We need to ask in what ways current social practices and ideologies reinforce, rather than prevent or reverse, indigenous language loss.” (41)

That said, there have been a few cases in which recent organized programs toward reversing indigenous language shift display some quantifiable results (such as a significant rise in L2 speakers and children approaching fluency), or at least great promise compared to others. Likewise, as noted above, a number of RLS projects have been abandoned outright or completely revised in the light of changing attitudes toward language pedagogy, bilingualism, and cultural assimilation, among other factors. In this section, I present one abandoned RLS project, one project that has attained a high profile for its impressive quantitative results, and one small but intensely committed project (Kaurna) showing promise as a rallying point for cultural renewal and, just possibly, the creation of L1 speakers in the future. These are, respectively, the Wyoming Arapaho program(s) begun in 1978, the current Maōri project (especially its Te Kohanga Reo or “language nests”), and the current Kaurna effort as reported upon by Amery (2000).

Arapaho: first renewal efforts

Following the Native American Programs Act of 1974, and the 1967 amendments to the Elementary and Secondary Education Act which provided funding for bilingual programs in U.S. Public schools, many Native American groups began to turn toward some form of language work, at least as part of a broader program of state-supported assertion of culture (Hinton, 2001a: 7-8). There is scant published work on this period of scattered revitalization and language education, likely in part due to reporting bias (no one wants to document their failures), and in part because it is overshadowed by more unified and clearly articulated projects of activism and education that emerged in the 80s and 90s. However, some examples of post-NAPA revitalization projects appear in RLS literature, including the first concentrated efforts to revive the Northern Arapaho language.

Arapaho (autonym *Hinóno'eitítí*) is an Algonquin language having, historically, a northern variety in the Wind River area of Wyoming and a southern variety in Oklahoma, with minimal dialectal differences (Hale, 2001a: 283). As of Cowell and Moss' 2008 grammar, there were about 200 fluent speakers, down from Greymorning's 1996 count of 1000 (mostly elderly) speakers. The language has been in danger of extinction for decades; by 1978, community members were concerned enough with the state of Arapaho to begin implementing both school- and community-based programs for young people and adults (Greymorning, 2001: 287. See also Cowell, 2008: 1-5). Fourteen years later, educators and community members realized these programs were doing next to nothing to stem the tide of language shift, and they contacted linguistic anthropologist Stephen Greymorning to help develop a more effective program (Greymorning, 2001: 288). This latter program has resulted in a growing elementary immersion school and a Disney-sanctioned Arapaho dubbing of "Bambi", as well as some media and academic attention to the renewal effort (cf Al-Jazeera's 2009 special "Voices of the Heart", available online).

In the years of the first renewal programs, before this more intensive program developed with Greymorning, Anderson (2009) notes that "a series of non-Indian social scientists and educators (had) visited the (Arapaho) reservation to start or redirect the language renewal process, generally with the newest pedagogical method or technology in hand." (69) Anderson presents these facts rather uncritically, as if the presence of these academics were inherently beneficial, rather than characterized by a series of unsustainable, inconsistent and likely unequal arrangements privileging and prescribing only the latest pedagogical tools. In any case, the dominant school-based model these educators left behind was one in which students received a total of 45 hours *a year* of language instruction on average (Greymorning, 2001: 288). This model operated within a school system in which "district superintendents, school principals, administrators, and perhaps 98% of teaching staff...(were) neither natives of the culture nor native to the reservations upon which they work and teach." (Greymorning, 1997) "Interestingly," he adds, the school's primary teachers were of the opinion that the language teachers" (all fluent L1 speakers) "were not competent because the children were not learning the language within the allotted time frame" (288). It is likely that such attitudes within the school system set back the project even further, lowering the profile of the language within the community at large and encouraging

administrators to be skeptical of claims that such a project is an effective use of student, family and school resources.

On the surface, the first Arapaho program's main shortcoming appears to have been poor pedagogical methods: 15 minutes a day of non-immersion language instruction is by no account sufficient to produce new fluent speakers, and it is tempting to regard this as the "fatal mistake" that doomed the effort and failed to produce new fluent speakers throughout the original program's 20 years of operation. However, the socioeconomic context in which this original program was operating (and in which its successor operates today) provides clues to the true nature of the project's weak points. In a 2009 interview, Ryan Wilson from the National Indian Education Association described the ongoing struggles of the educational system in the Arapaho community, stating: "We have a system where, if we've got 100 kids going into kindergarten, only 50 of them are going to graduate [from high school] on time; out of that, only ten or so might go on into college...And so I made the argument: is what we're doing through mainstream academics doing justice for these kids?" Meanwhile, Arapaho elder Crawford White has noted the need for solidarity among members of the community, citing "a lot of ill feelings" among community members as a driving force behind language and culture shift⁴². Wilson's argument, and White's concern about Arapaho unity, get at the heart of the revitalization question: it is a deeply political issue, and a purely linguistic or classroom-oriented model cannot produce a significant number of speakers without a corresponding initiative by the community to preserve the transmission of culture⁴³, of the context in which language becomes meaningful and in which its structures grow naturalized. Ideally, this initiative has clearly defined goals, a realistic appraisal of resources, and a strong component of political activism and community organizing. Good child-oriented programs should also apply critical thinking to their place in the educational system: if the community's school system is failing in its most basic goals, it seems unreasonable to expect that this system can support – without significant reform – an additional, highly complex, possibly controversial, program. Solutions include seeking and advocating for funding for after-school or summer programs, or for a re-orientation of local

⁴² Williams, 2009

⁴³ Indeed, the transmission of an indigenous culture, including discourse strategies and practices of literacy not limited to the mother tongue, is arguably more important to some groups than transmission of the code itself; cf Meek, 2010: 47: "(M)uch of the recent research – while still reflecting dimensions of loss – has shown that various interactional or sociological elements are being maintained even though the grammar...has changed."

school systems toward cultural goals (such that tribal elders, for one example, may be granted secure paid positions as language teachers within the school system⁴⁴).

In the case of these early Arapaho programs, language workers, while surely just as passionate and committed as those working in later programs, neither accounted for the true economic and systemic costs of such a program were it to be successful nor found themselves able to move toward the kind of unified political front required to combat the inertia of the state, and the hegemonies of English language ideology and practice. It is not especially meaningful to treat the first wave of Arapaho renewal efforts as simply a failed RLS project; rather, the failure of these earlier language workers to produce new speakers was arguably the only possible product of a movement that had no clearly defined objectives for RLS as a part of cultural preservation, and that lacked a cohesive base of support from the community. In order to succeed, the project of reversing language shift must occur as one component (perhaps the most publicized component) of a broader political project that rebuilds cultural infrastructure and galvanizes the community to participate. Since, in many communities (including that of the Arapaho⁴⁵), language is understood as the ultimate marker of cultural identity, the idea of reversing language shift can serve as a powerful symbolic rallying point for this project, but this idea alone seems to lack the teeth necessary to carry the project forward. As Fishman (1991) argues:

“RLS is, essentially, a societal reform effort that involves both the *abandonment* of widely accepted (but ideologically contra-indicated) cultural patterns and the attainment of their stipulated replacements. To realize this is to realize why RLS is so difficult to attain; not to realize it is to forgo the slim chances that exist for the success of RLS-efforts.” (19)

While certain programs lack an awareness of the kind of “societal reform” that reversing language shift entails, some have made great progress by turning an eye to this reality and addressing it. The Māori program, as detailed in the following section, is an excellent example of such a project.

Māori: te kohanga reo

⁴⁴ cf Berry, 2012: “Native Languages Bill Takes Another Step Forward” (indiancountrytodaymedianetwork.com/)

⁴⁵ As one interviewee in Al Jazeera’s “Voices of the Heart” special succinctly puts it: “Without our language, we ain’t Arapaho; we’re nobody.” (Williams, 2009)

Excluding Hebrew, the Māori effort in New Zealand has arguably been the most successful project aimed at reversing language shift in the past century. Following World War Two, a majority of parents consciously stopped using Māori in the home. In 1981, amid a climate of cultural revitalization and increased awareness of language endangerment, a meeting held by the state-subsidized Department of Māori affairs yielded the concept of an early childhood education program called *Kohanga Reo* (“language nests”). These *Kohanga Reo* would use a total immersion strategy to create a generation of Māori children literate (or, ideally, fluent) in their ancestral language (King, 2001: 121) – an unusually ambitious goal for this kind of project, but the *Kohanga Reo* seem to have succeeded, producing 60,000 new competent L2 speakers in 25 years, by the program trust’s own estimate (www.kohanga.ac.nz). Between 1983 and 1994, the number of language nests in New Zealand mushroomed – from 38 to 441 over these nine years⁴⁶ (King, 2001: 122) – motivating the creation of alternative immersion-based elementary schools (the *Kohanga Reo* program ends at age six) called *Kura Kaupapa Māori*, as well as bilingual units and classes within the mainstream school system (King, 2001: 122).

The remarkable growth and efficacy of the Māori program is still more remarkable given the fact that Māori communities have faced many of the same obstacles that stymie revitalization programs elsewhere. It must be noted that, compared to, say, the Yurok language of California, Māori is somewhat resource-rich, having a large body of texts and a tradition of Māori literacy lasting most of the 19th century (King 120), as well as a comparatively large body of Māori-identified citizens and official language status in New Zealand. What’s more, it was the primary home language in most Māori families until World War Two. However, the language community is still resource-poor in comparison with that of English, or even Irish. A report publicized last year determined that a slight majority of people living below the poverty line in the country were of Māori or Pacific Islander descent⁴⁷. Welfare dependence has long been an issue in Māori communities, both in the early 80s (Butterworth and Young, 1990: 117-8) and today, as an estimated one in three Māori children

⁴⁶ The number of *Kohanga Reo* has been slowly decreasing since 1994, but the program still boasts impressive enrollment and strong community support, as well as a large number of young children proficient in the language from each “nest”. King argues that the decrease reflects a restructuring of the program for efficiency and effective use of resources, or “the self-pruning of a tree whose branches have grown too far and too fast to be adequately supported by the community.” (2001: 124)

⁴⁷ ONE News, <http://tvnz.co.nz/national-news/disturbing-child-poverty-report-4381794> (accessed 3/29/12)

relies on welfare (Mitchell 2009). The education gap along lines of ethnicity is less pronounced in New Zealand than in Australia or the United States, and appears to be narrowing, but it is still significant: a 2007 Ministry of Education report found that the rate of serious in-school disciplinary cases (“stand-downs” and suspensions) for Māori students in mainstream schools was about twice that for non-Māori students (66), and that truancy and unexcused absences were similarly skewed (68). 14.8% of Māori graduates qualified (via standardized testing) to attend a university, compared with 36.3% of graduates in the population at large (120). Like many indigenous groups, Māori are still underserved as students and underrepresented in school administration and faculty (91).

Despite being at a disadvantage in these respects, the Māori language program, which now also includes Wānanga Reo (roughly “language colleges”) for adult education (King, 2001: 127), has effected heightened awareness of the language at the highest level of government and throughout the local majority culture, and is considered a model for indigenous language projects worldwide (including the current Arapaho project⁴⁸).

There are a number of aspects of the Māori program that set it apart from its contemporaries. First of all, its objectives and methods are ambitious but clear: the creation of sustained, full-immersion environments, presided over by fluent, trained instructors in each whānau (a Māori concept of community bound by extended kin group) in order to promote language literacy in a large group during the critical learning period (King, 2001). Beyond giving each individual Kohanga a quantifiable benchmark for success, the forefronting of specific goals and the standardization of these goals throughout the system seems to have boosted the program where a strong but unchanneled collective desire for revitalization could not have. Crucially, the project is also entirely community-initiated and is committed to “language revitalization within the context of the *whānau*” (King, 2001: 119); Māori groups identified a pattern of interrupted intergenerational transmission and intervened in their own communities with a solution built on traditional concepts, values and rhetoric. The two most salient aspects of the Māori project, however, are that it is integrated closely with a project of reversing culture shift, and that it is openly politicized, rooted in a history of fierce and politically savvy community organizing.

⁴⁸ Greymorning, 1997

This organizing arguably begins with some of the Māori people's earliest interactions with settlers and traders. Many Māori chiefs in the early 19th century – just preceding a period of mass British settlement and following a massacre at the hands of the French a few decades earlier – effected the (at least nominal) conversion of their communities in order to curry favor with the British (Butterworth and Young, 1990: 11). As the aforementioned period of settlement began in the 1830s, tensions mounted; many men in Māori communities had sailed on European trading vessels, and so most chiefs were all too cognisant of the possible implications of encroaching settlement (Butterworth and Young, 2001: 16). In response to the influx of British settlers, a group of Māori leaders met with appointed British Resident James Busby to draft a bilingual document, the Treaty of Waitangi, granting Māori tribes sovereignty (kawanatanga) over the lands they already possessed. A chief's power to govern was also guaranteed under the treaty (Butterworth & Young, 2001: 16). The history of ambivalent relations between Māori groups and Europeans in the century that followed is beyond the scope of this paper; what is most significant as far as the current cultural movement is concerned is that this treaty formed the basis for a series of claims laid by Māori civil rights leaders in the 1960s and 70s (Butterworth and Young, 2001: 110). These claims, reinforced by extensive petitioning and community organizing, granted Māori groups greater recognition at the level of the state and made extensive use of Māori lexical terms as well as cultural concepts pertaining to ownership and leadership (Te Puni Kōkiri, 2005). As a result, by 1975 the Treaty “was given not only statutory recognition but became a yardstick against which government legislation, policies and actions could be measured” (Butterworth & Young, 1990: 110). This led not only to stronger language policy – including the establishment of Māori programs in universities and the recognition of Māori as an official state language – but also reparative economic and social policies including community development and job training programs (Butterworth and Young, 1990: 113-21). The Kōhanga Reo system, as well as translation expectations based on the language's official status, have also created new work opportunities for Māori people fluent in their language. Hon Koro Wetere, the minister of Māori affairs from 1984-1990, comments on the growing self-sufficiency of the culture during this period:

“(Besides the exhibitions of Māori art undertaken in the early 80s), there were many other advances during that time in terms of Māori language,

kōhanga reo, health, housing. The Education Act was amended to cater for wānanga. Radio and television, Te Māngai Paho, were also all part of developments...We've got more doctors, more scientists, more lawyers, more accountants, all the people who are now coming back and contributing." (in Te Puni Kōkiri 2005: 11)

Māori scholar Tuhiwai Smith (1999) has described the rise of Māori scholarship specifically, citing "two distinct pathways through which an indigenous research agenda is being advanced": through "community action projects, local initiatives and nation or tribal research" – such as the Ngati Awa tribal community's highly active Research Centre (126) – and via "the spaces gained within institutions by indigenous research centres and studies programmes" (125). Smith also credits Auckland's Māori education program with the creation of a "Māori research culture" (135).

The Māori project, then, more than many other such programs, has a strong political component. It is rooted in a history of community organizing and protest, and a precedent of displaying a united front to the occupying culture. The structure of its revitalization plan is not "bottom up", not aimed at returning the language to the community in the hopes that this will foster cultural solidarity, but "top down": it seeks to steep the new generation in a strongly united and distinctly Māori worldview and political orientation and, as a corollary, a Māori linguistic competence. This structure has served the effort extremely well, and it is likely that other programs, taking a cue from Māori groups, will benefit from this example.

The Kaurna reawakening: what's next?

_____Kaurna, the revitalization of which has been discussed extensively in section I, is a recently sleeping language of Adelaide, Australia (Amery 2000:1). Following the theft of Kaurna lands by Europeans in the mid-1800s (cf Amery 2000 : 49), the number of Kaurna speakers plummeted; by the 1890s, the only known speakers of the language were a small displaced group living in the Port Adelaide area (Amery 2000 : 69). The last known speaker of this group, an elderly woman called Ivartiji, died in 1929 with only a little of her language (Amery 2000 : 70). The Kaurna identity, however, has persisted among some aboriginal people of the area (colloquially known as Nungas), some of whom initiated a language revival project in 1989 that focused largely on Kaurna's linguistic neighbors, Narungga and

Ngarrindjeri (Amery 2000:2). Members of this group also expressed a desire to reawaken the Kurna language, which led to the current Kurna movement as endorsed by Amery.

According to a 2011 submission made by Amery and the Kurna Warra Pintyandi (KWP) working group in response to a parliamentary inquiry on indigenous language learning, there has been notable progress in the Kurna reawakening, although there is much work to be done. They tout the establishment of three Kurna-language dance troupes and report:

“The Kurna language is frequently used to give speeches of welcome and to introduce public performance...Kurna is also used to name various entities and is also spoken casually to a limited extent. Greeting, welcoming, leave taking, thanking and certain other expressions are now commonplace. SMS messages and e-mails are sent in Kurna amongst a handful of language activists and students.” (Amery and KWP 2011:1)

The submission also notes that, as of publication, the language had been taught continuously at Kurna Plains School between 1992 and 2011, and that a number of other Kurna courses had been taught in local schools (Amery and KWP, 2011:1).

Reawakening a sleeping language is perhaps the most challenging degree of reversing language shift, and the most costly. Language development is crucial, as is a certain degree of flexibility about questions of authenticity and continuity. Native speakers do not exist to teach the language, and the underlying sociocultural causes of the language’s demise are likely still in place. However, in the light of other successes and failures, Kurna speakers have some cause for optimism.

For one thing, the project’s goals are well-defined and pragmatic. Though some proponents mention hopes for the eventual return of Kurna as an “everyday language” (cf Amery, 2000: 179-205), the project largely seeks the return of Kurna as a language with symbolic, ceremonial, and rhetorical (rather than practical) function:

“We are aiming to strengthen a sense of Kurna identity, thereby increasing self esteem. A knowledge of Kurna language and culture will increase employment options for Kurna people. The Kurna language facilitates mutual understanding and recognition.” (Amery and KWP, 2011: 2)

The group's recommendations, like Amery's 2000 work on the language, tend to highlight the function of the language as a marker of cultural identity, rather than as a means of communication, and its goals are largely directed toward this function. Given that such goals are both more practical than and arguably prerequisite to more purely linguistic goals, this kind of intentionality bodes well for the project.

The Kaurna reawakening is community-initiated and community-directed, and, as evidenced by the quotes above, has modest social and political goals. The KWP group's response to the parliamentary inquiry, for example, is careful to contextualize the language project as part of a set of (shared) political aims, especially that of "closing the gap" – a state buzz-phrase for reducing educational inequalities.

Self-determination and a political consciousness have led a number of RLS efforts to success, and are vital to the flourishing Māori project. The Kaurna project's relation to, utilization of, and collaboration with academia and academic resources has been committed, complex, and fruitful. Amery's writings, as well as the project home page and the comments of aboriginal language scholar-activists like Lester-Irabinna Rigney provide a sense that there has been true, sustained collaboration between academic linguistics and Kaurna-identified people. Rigney writes:

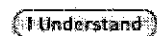
“(W)e as Indigenous peoples now want research and its designs to contribute to self-determination and liberation struggles as defined by us and our communities. A fundamental feature of (*Warrabarna Kaurna!*) is (Amery's) willingness to reflect on his own practices and speaking position in relation to Kaurna revival. Rob gives valuable insight into the tensions and contradictions implicit in disciplinary research protocol.” (in Amery, 2000: x)

Likewise, the Kaurna webpage demonstrates a commitment to culturally conscious language work, presenting visitors with the following disclaimer:

WARNING

Kaurna language and culture is the property of the Kaurna community. Users of this site are urged to use the language with respect. This means making every effort to get the pronunciation, spelling and grammar right.

Kaurna people reserve the right to monitor the use of the language in public. Users of this site should consult with Kaurna people about use of the language in the public domain. This can be achieved by contacting us (c/taylor.power-smith@adelaide.edu.au or rob.amery@adelaide.edu.au). Your request will be discussed at the next monthly KWP meeting.



via Kaurna Warra Pintyandi at <http://www.adelaide.edu.au/kwp/>

The strong ethical consciousness of this movement, and the consequent mutual appreciation and respect between “researcher” and “researched” (I’ve placed these terms in quotes because the extent of the project’s collaborative nature renders this boundary blurry) appear to have given the movement a strength that projects like Arapaho lacked. This collaboration has – in terms of concrete benefit – provided speakers with access to a wealth of resources (especially missionary materials in German) previously locked up in outsider infrastructure.

In summary, the Kaurna project is not only possessed of a dedicated group of language advocates, but also a healthy political and social consciousness and a set of ambitious but well-defined objectives. It has used academic resources effectively and has involved a longstanding and mutually beneficial relationship with an academic linguist. Kaurna is still, in Amery’s words, “in its infancy” (2000: 248), and it remains to be seen whether its strengths will allow it to overcome resource poverty and a lack of supportive infrastructure within the majority community. However, there are reasons for optimism in this situation, and in many like it, as indigenous people turn toward RLS measures.

CONCLUSIONS

As global media and international economies take hold, lesser-spoken and historically suppressed languages will continue their shift toward the languages of power, prestige, and consensus unless speaker communities take action. The issue of language shift has broad and possibly devastating implications within long-marginalized indigenous groups as well as within the field of linguistics, which depends on linguistic variety and positive relationships

with a diversity of strong speaker communities. These consequences range from the deepening of persistent socioeconomic inequalities to the loss of potentially life-saving medical information to the disappearance of human linguistic facts that could lead to our confirming (or refuting) the universal grammar hypothesis. Because of this, reversing the rapid shift of minority languages – a vast number of these indigenous tongues in areas of European colonization – is an urgent project for academics as well as for many groups struggling for self-determination.

Reversing language shift is not a question of “clearing up misconceptions”, or of reforming public education, or of any single “solution” to the “problem of language death”. Some communities may not see the death of their languages as an urgent problem compared to something like water-poverty or public health, and may quite rightly see *encouraging* language shift as a pathway to broader recognition and greater self-determination. It is crucial to understand the agenda of reversing language shift as rooted in value judgements that are by no means universal. However, indigenous groups are increasingly voicing concern for the state of their ancestral languages, and many have sought out linguists for such work as documentation and educational development. Linguists in such a position have the opportunity to work with speaker communities toward effective programs for RLS, and there are several roles in which good linguists have shown themselves to be effective partners in activism. That said, it is the responsibility of “outsider” academics to remain attuned to the community’s goals and sense of self-determination, and to attend to the delicate ethical questions that such complex work raises. What these goals are, how self-determination is ensured, and how the ethical consciousness of such work develops – from research to activism to language use – are all matters integral to the advance or retreat of an RLS movement. As Fishman (1991) succinctly and powerfully noted, “(T)he established sociocultural order often requires no reason, no conscious morale or justification, while its reversal or modification is usually beset with just such requirements.” Reversing language shift, as a challenge to sociocultural orders and their direction, requires not only a great deal of energy and resources but also an intricate awareness – on the part of all actors involved – of this project’s particular challenges, and of the true implications of cross-cultural language work. As the Māori and Kaurna cases illustrate, such an awareness is attainable and its results can be striking.

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