

## Native California languages and intersecting identities

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VOX California, UC Santa Barbara, April 3-4, 2009

### Introduction

- Members of Tribal communities within California engage with multiple overlapping communities of practice at the Tribal, statewide, nationwide, and often even global levels.
- Goal: To provide an overview of some of the ways in which individuals create and perform these identities linguistically, often interacting with multiple communities of practice within one setting, especially given the endangered status of Native California languages.
- These performances of identity, and their interpretation by the audiences at whom they are directed, rely crucially on the deployment of indigenous linguistic resources coupled with the use of English.

### Native California

- Stephen Powers, writing in the 1870s, estimated that there must have been at least 1.5 million people in what is now the state of California at the time of European conquest. (Powers 1976:3)
- The Tribes in this region were culturally and linguistically diverse, falling into six culture areas (Kroeber 1976); four of these together form a larger California culture area, while the other two have much stronger connections with culture areas outside the state. Note that the term “culture areas” implies an internal coherence which is overstated (Kroeber 1976:898), nevertheless it gives some sense of the kinds of broader

connections outside of individual Tribal groups which have existed throughout the history of Native Californians.

- A number of state and federal policies have been aimed at the dissolution of Tribal ties. These include (but are by no means limited to):
  - Act for the Government and Protection of Indians (1850): Included provisions to jail an Indian for “vagrancy”; to pay bail for a jailed Indian in exchange for indentured work (some 10,000 Native Californians were indentured during this period); and to make minors who are Indians “apprentices” at the word of a parent or “friend of a parent”. This last had the effect of removing large numbers of Native California children (an estimated 4,000) from families and Tribal territories.
  - Forced removal to reservations (1850s-1860s), often far from traditional Tribal lands.
  - Dawes Allotment Act (1887): Divided Tribal lands up into individually-owned allotments. Undermined traditional communal land-use practices; often led to loss of land.
  - Zimmerman Plan (1947): Aimed at identifying those Tribes who were “acculturated enough” to have federal trust status terminated.
  - Urban relocation programs (1950s): BIA offered incentives to Native Americans to leave Tribal lands and relocate to urban centers; both San Francisco and Los Angeles became home to large numbers of Native Americans from across the nation.
  - Boarding schools (at various times during the 1900s, lasting until late 1950s).
- Sovereignty in California:
  - Complex history, beginning with original negotiation of 18 treaties in 1851-2; the Tribal lands granted in these treaties would have encompassed approximately 7.5% of land in California. These treaties were never ratified by Congress.

- Tribes have sought and continue to seek federal recognition of sovereign status. This recognition process requires that Tribes prove, by a preponderance of evidence: that they have been identified historically and continuously until the present as American Indian, Native American, or aboriginal; that they presently inhabit and for the past two centuries have more or less continuously inhabited, a specific geographic range; and that they have a system of government that has evolved from aboriginal sources. (Slagle 1987:105)
- Note that proving these often involves oral histories which often rely crucially on now-endangered languages.
- Within California, the second of these is particularly fraught; given the role of California nationwide as a “promised land”, as a goal of migration, as a myth in many ways, Tribal people have undergone continuous campaigns of displacement. Some traditional Tribal lands are now seen nationally as lands to be held in trust for “Americans” (e.g. Yosemite); others are particularly desirable and valuable and concomitantly unobtainable (e.g. San Francisco Bay Area, Santa Barbara coastline, L.A. basin, San Diego county coastline). Thus, this myth of “California” has had a long-term impact on many Tribes’ abilities to gain federal recognition, and therefore, access to the rights, benefits, and opportunities that come with that unique status.

### **Native California languages**

- Prior to arrival of Europeans, California was home to some 100 unique languages belonging to six major language families, as well as other smaller families and language isolates.
- Today, approximately forty of those languages still have speakers.
- Those languages which have speakers typically have very few; most speakers are in their 70s and 80s.

- Implications for language revitalization:
  - The number of languages has an impact on the kinds of financial resources available at the state level for developing revitalization materials and programs;
  - Number and ages of speakers have an impact on the linguistic and temporal resources, in the form of speakers and learners, available in the development of such programs.

### **Deploying linguistic resources**

- Cultural capital: status resources which consist of ideas and knowledge people draw upon as they participate in social life. (Bourdieu 1991)
- Performativity: the ways in which speakers manipulate ideologies associated with speech in the ongoing production of identity. (Butler 1990)
- Socialization: “the process through which a child or other novice acquires the knowledge, orientations, and practices that enable him or her to participate effectively and appropriately in the social life of a certain community.” (Garret and Baquedano-Lopez 2002:339)
- Language socialization: “examines how language practices organize the life span process of becoming an active, competent participant in one or more communities.” (Ochs 2000:230)
- Language community: a community in which speakers share a denotational code;
- Speech community: a community in which speakers have “long-term, presupposable regularities of discursive interaction.” (Silverstein 1998:407)

### **Language revitalization in California**

- Master-Apprentice Language Learning Program: Pairs a speaker of a Native California language with a member of his or her Tribe who wishes to learn the language and then teach it to more Tribal members. Provides funding so that speaker and learner can spend longer periods of uninterrupted time together. Also

provides training in the creation and maintenance of an immersion situation when there are few speakers of a language, as well as on second-language acquisition and teaching.

- Breath of Life Language Restoration Program: Introduces Native Californians to the holdings of the UC Berkeley archives. Trains participants to interpret and utilize these archival materials in the development of language learning and teaching programs. Main focus is on languages of heritage which have no speakers.
- Language classes in public schools: A number of Tribes have worked within their local school districts to provide classes in a language of heritage; these classes then count towards “foreign” language credit within the high school and for the purposes of college applications.
- Bilingual education program: Some Tribes have implemented bilingual education programs, often immersion, particularly at the preschool and early grade levels.

#### **Native California languages as framing devices**

- Native California languages used to begin and end public speaking.
- Translations provided, often after introductions, and before closing speeches.
- Typical genres: greetings, introductions, thanks for the audience’s time, thanks to the people upon whose home ground the event takes place, and/or blessings or prayers.
- Audience response is often primed by the use of this framing device.
- Example:  
heKate ma ooxkathe kemtsil.  
How-ques you people-pl today.  
“How are all of you today?”

wiXin Robert Geary ke a ‘lembaq  
my-name Robert Geary and I Elem-from  
“My name is Robert Gary and I am from Elem.”

ke a meya tsmá kemtsil  
and I here good/happy today  
“And I’m happy to be here today.”

#### **Gender in discourse**

- Examples of gendered differences in discourse behavior:
  - Gendered responses of elders to questions deemed inappropriate.
  - Dominance in speaking conditioned by environment.
  - Relates to traditional discourse practices.
- Possible interpretations of these discourse practices by young women:
  - Powerful, appropriate, tried to traditional cultural practice (“It’s hard to be angry when you’re seen as powerful.” Quote from interview, Fall 2008);
  - Powerless, form of restriction of access to public speaking space, and to public praxis (“This is my culture. I don’t know if it can be my religion.” Quote from interview, Fall 2008).

#### **Conclusions**

- California:
  - Site for implementation of policies with effects on Tribal sovereignty, languages, and cultures;
  - Site for the development of a broader Native Californian identity.
- Language use in performance of these multiple identities is complex, creative, powerful.
- How is this use of language to engage simultaneously in both inward- and outward-facing identity work paralleled in other language communities in the state?

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