

Must There Be Two Solitudes? Language Activists and Linguists Working Together

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This paper suggests that there can be two solitudes that divide linguists and language activists and argues that there needs to be a mutual recognition that linguists and Indigenous communities need to work together to help revitalize Indigenous languages. It takes a community of people to revitalize an Indigenous language, and in order for linguists and language activists to truly work together, general principles such as relationships, respect, reciprocity and recognition are critical.

In Canada, there is a phrase that is sometimes used to signify the relationship between English-speaking Canada and French-speaking Canada, two solitudes. This term was popularized by Hugh MacLennan in the title of his 1945 novel, *Two Solitudes*. The publisher's blurb for this book says the following:

A landmark of nationalist fiction, Hugh MacLennan's *Two Solitudes* is the story of two races within one nation, each with its own legend and ideas of what a nation should be. In his vivid portrayals of human drama in prewar Quebec, MacLennan focuses on two individuals whose love increases the prejudices that surround them until they discover that "love consists in this, that two solitudes protect, and touch and greet each other.

A view that is sometimes found in the literature on language revitalization and the role of linguists in this endeavor is that linguists and language activists represent two solitudes, each with their own ideas, perhaps even their own legends, about what a language is and what language revitalization is all about. In this article I examine some of the differences in goals of language activists and linguists and ask if there must indeed be two solitudes, or if there is a way for the two to interact with each other in a positive and fruitful way.

Before beginning, perhaps a little about my background is in order. I have been involved in work for many years on Slavey (Dene), an Athapaskan language of northern Canada. In addition to linguistic fieldwork, I have taught workshops and courses on a variety of topics including literacy, grammar, language awareness, language documentation and language research. I have worked on dictionaries, both topical dictionaries and noun and verb dictionaries, as well as writing a grammar of the language and designing materials for teaching grammar. I was involved with a committee on the standardization of a writing system, looking at goals of standardization. I also worked with communities and teachers around issues of language awareness. I have also been involved in Aboriginal Studies at the University of Toronto, a program where language plays a key role. I have written on ethical responsibilities of linguists and have been an advocate at the Canadian Social Science and Humanities Research Council for the Aboriginal

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Research program. I oversaw the development of a website on fieldwork (www.chass.utoronto.ca/lingfieldwork) and developed an undergraduate course in language revitalization.

Some questions

Let me start by raising some questions that are important in considering whether two solitudes are inevitable. Here are a few: What is it that linguists want? What are their goals? What are they trained to do? What do they do well? Similarly, what is it that language activists want? What are their goals? What are they trained to do? What do they do well? Putting language activists and linguists together, we can then ask questions such as the following: How do the goals of linguists and the goals of language activists mesh with one another? Can they contribute to each other's enterprises? Importantly, in a situation where the linguists tend to be outsiders to a language community, what do linguists have to offer? These questions have been addressed in the literature in very recent years; see, for instance, the important works by Gerdts (1998), Shaw (2004), Czaykowska-Higgins (2007) and Dobrin (2008) and other references in those articles and in this one for discussion of these issues.¹ Much of what I offer here summarizes what these authors, and others, have contributed, bringing my own perspective from my own history to it.

A backdrop: An evolution in social science research over the years

Before responding to the questions raised in the previous section, it is useful to outline briefly the kind of evolution that has occurred in research in the social sciences over the past several years, as laid out by Cameron, Frazer, Harvey, Rampton and Richardson (1992). These authors trace the history of social science research from what they call ethical research, which basically involves research *on* a topic, to advocacy research, involving research *on and for* people, to empowerment research, which involves research *with*, or community-based research. Brief quotes on these models follow. See Rice (2006) for a somewhat more detailed discussion of how these different models have played themselves out in linguistics and for more references; this paper repeats some of what is in that work. See also Shaw (2004), Czaykowska-Higgins (2007), Grinevald (2007) and Yamada (2007), among others, for discussion of these different types of research models.

- *Ethical research*: "... there is a wholly proper concern to minimize damage and offset inconvenience to the researched, and to acknowledge their contributions. ... But the underlying model is one of 'research *on*' social subjects. Human subjects deserve special ethical consideration, but they no more set the researcher's agenda than the bottle of sulfuric acid sets the chemist's agenda." (Cameron, et al., pp. 14-15).

ON

- *Advocacy research*: "... a commitment on the part of the researcher not just to do research on subjects but research *on and for* subjects. Such

a commitment formalizes ... a rather common development in field situations, where a researcher is asked to use her skills or her authority as an ‘expert’ to defend subjects’ interests, getting involved in their campaigns for healthcare or education, cultural autonomy or political and land rights, and speaking on their behalf” (Cameron, et al., p. 15).

ON, FOR

- *Empowering research*: “... research on, for and with. One of the things we take that additional ‘with’ to imply is the use of interactive or dialogic research methods, as opposed to the distancing or objectifying strategies positivists are constrained to use. It is the centrality of interaction ‘with’ the researched that enables research to be empowering in our sense; ... we [propose three] ... statement[s] ...:

(a) ‘Persons are not objects and should not be treated as objects.’

(b) ‘Subjects have their own agendas and research should try to address them’

(c) ‘If knowledge is worth having, it is worth sharing.’” (Cameron, et al., pp. 22-24)

WITH, BY

The ethical model, called ‘linguist-focused’ by Czaykowska-Higgins (2007) in a paper on research models in linguistic fieldwork, is the traditional model of fieldwork, outlined in the classical book on fieldwork by Samarin (1967) and in other sources; see Newman and Ratliff (2001) as well as the new books on linguistic fieldwork (Crowley, 2007; Bower, 2008) for more recent perspectives. Over time, for various reasons, some of which are discussed later in this paper, many linguists have become involved in empowering research, or a community-based model.

In asking whether two solitudes are inevitable, it is useful to think about these different research models and where the linguist fits in; I return to this after discussion of the goals of linguists and language activists.

The perspective of the field linguist

What are the goals of the field linguist? While they are many and varied, depending on the individual linguist, the field situation, and numerous other factors, nevertheless there is a core that is recognized at least historically that provides insight into this question: it is often said that there is a ‘big three’ in linguistic fieldwork—the production of a grammar, a dictionary and texts. A grammar provides as thorough as possible a description of the sounds, words, sentences, discourse and so on of a language (see two recent edited books on grammar writing by Ameka, Dench & Evans, 2006 and Payne & Weber, 2006), a dictionary includes as much of the lexicon of the language as is feasible (see Frawley, Hill & Munro, 2002 and Amery, 2006 for recent discussions of dictionaries) and texts involve the recording, transcription, translation and annotation of texts from a wide variety of genres. While exactly what all this involves has been the topic

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of some debate in recent years (see e.g., Himmelmann's influential 1998 article on language documentation as well as papers in the recent book edited by Gippert, Himmelmann & Mosel, 2006) and technological advances have changed in many ways just how these goals can be accomplished, still these three types of work form the core of what linguists generally hope to accomplish through their linguistic fieldwork.

Linguists tend to become passionate about languages as objects of beauty and awe. This is beautifully put by Valentine, in the introduction to his 2001 grammar of Nishnaabemwin:

Writing a grammar is a profoundly humbling experience. Languages are almost unbelievably complex and represent the richest traditions that we as human beings possess. What remotely compares with them, whether we are considering the massively intricate and fluid physical gestures involved in the articulation of sounds, or the systems behind the thousands of possibilities of distinct expression in the verb system of a language such as Nishnaabemwin? A language is a natural object with a beauty and a capacity to inspire awe on the order of Niagara Falls or Lake Superior, if we take the time to appreciate it. Writing a reference grammar provides the enjoyment of thousands of hours of careful scrutiny, though at the same time one realizes acutely ... that a hundred linguists working for a hundred years could never get to the bottom of a single language. Nishnaabemwin is a language exceedingly rich in structure, inviting many levels of analysis - it is an inexhaustible source of pleasure and challenge for its students. (p. xxxi)

Frawley, Hill and Munro (2002) write in similar terms in describing the experience of creating a dictionary:

There is something at once both marvelous and practical about producing a guide to the mind, world, and behavior of a group of people. The benefits that accrue from such a handbook - literacy, preservation, history, discovery - only add to the excitement of seeing the published dictionary standing upright on the bookshelf. (p. 2)

Gerds (1998, p. 15) quotes Dixon (1997, p. 134), who speaks to the intellectual challenges and excitement of linguistic fieldwork:

It is hard to convey the sheer mental exhilaration of field work on a new language. First, one has to recognize the significant analytic problems. Then alternative solutions may tumble around in one's head all night. At the crack of dawn one writes them down, the pros and cons of each. During the day it is possible to assess the alternatives, by checking back through texts that have already been gathered and by asking carefully crafted questions of native speakers. One solution is

seen to be clearly correct – it is simpler than the others, and has greater explanatory power. Then one realizes that the solution to this problem sheds light on another knotty conundrum that has been causing worry for weeks. And so on.

Comrie (2007) stresses the importance of core linguistic work, noting that documentation of a traditional language is required even when a linguist is committed to work on language revitalization because of the contributions that understanding the language can make to linguistics:

Let me now try to draw some conclusions from the above discussion, in particular with regard to linguists' work on endangered languages. Perhaps the most salient lesson for linguists is that the revitalization of a language does not obviate the need for documentation of the traditional language, since a revitalized language may differ quite extensively from the traditional language to which it corresponds, in particular through the loss of precisely those distinguishing features that make the traditional language of such paramount importance to linguistics. (p. 34)

The traditional concerns of linguists then are primarily with the language itself and, at least for many fieldworkers, the culture in which that language is spoken. In thinking about language loss, linguists often speak of the loss of languages as laboratories of study, the loss of linguistic diversity, the loss of intellectual and cultural wealth, and the loss of windows on the mind. See, for instance, Crystal (2000) and many of the papers in Grenoble and Whaley (1998), among numerous other references.

The perspective of the language activist

Having examined the goals of the linguist, it is appropriate to turn to the goals of the language activist and leader. People speak movingly about what their language means to them. A Dene Elder makes the following comment:

Nahezha gots 'é goinde. Nahegeduutth 'é goniddhe.

We are talking to our young and hoping they will understand.
(Thom & Blondin-Townsend, 1987)

For the speaker or would be speaker of a language, the language is to be transmitted. Perhaps at the core, language is a part of a deep spirituality, well represented in the words of the following from an Assembly of First Nations (1990) document:

Language is our unique relationship to the Creator,
our attitudes, beliefs, values and fundamental notions of what is truth.
Our languages are the cornerstones of who we are as people.
Without our languages our cultures cannot survive.

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Similar points are made by many others. In a 1992 work from the Assembly of First Nations, the importance of language is spelled out in a slightly different way:

Aboriginal language is an asset to one's own education, formal and informal. Aboriginal language contributes to greater pride in the history and culture of the community; greater involvement and interest of parents in the education of their children, and greater respect for Elders. Language is the principal means by which culture is accumulated, shared and transmitted from generation to generation. The key to identity and retention of culture is one's ancestral language.

Others find ways of expressing similar thoughts. Just a few additional quotes are given below; it would be easy to multiply these. The quotes here are largely from Canadian sources; they are echoed by remarks of people from around the world. See, for instance, Greymorning (2004), Abley (2003) and Harrison (2006) for presentations of views of community members in sources from a language activist, a journalist, and a linguist respectively.

We say we are pitiful. We, the Dene, are not well educated but for myself, I think we are still strong because we have our Dogrib language. We are rich because of it. All around us in other northern places and in the south, people such as the Cree are losing their languages. Today the Dogrib are still strong because of our language. We still speak Dogrib, and our children still speak in the Dogrib language. In the future, maybe in twenty to forty years when our children begin to lose our language, it will be a difficult time for us. A great culture will be destroyed. (Edward Erasmus in Martin, 1991).

Without the language, we are warm bodies without a spirit.
Mary Fox, Ojibwe Elder (Royal Commission on Aboriginal Peoples, 1996)

Friends, we think highly of our ability to speak Mi'kmaq. If we lose this, it is for certain that we will lose Mi'kmaq knowledge.
Marie Battiste, Mi'kmaq Nation (Royal Commission on Aboriginal Peoples, 1996)

The importance of the language for a culture and its value system is enshrined in educational philosophies, as shown by a 2007 statement below from the Cree School Board:

The Cree School Board will ensure that each student has the opportunity to develop his or her full potential as an individual and as a member of society.
We believe that:

The Cree language and culture are the root of the Cree education system
We believe that the Cree child:
Is unique

...
Has the right to learn and be taught in his or her Mother tongue
Has the right to be taught and practice his or her culture and its value system

The Royal Commission on Aboriginal Peoples (RCAP) is a very important Canadian document produced by a commission charged with “investigating the evolution of the relationship among aboriginal peoples (Indian, Inuit and Métis), the Canadian government, and Canadian society as a whole. ... The Commission should examine all issues which it deems to be relevant to any or all of the aboriginal peoples of Canada.” This report includes a chapter on language, where the importance of language is summarized as follows.

Our languages, our spirituality and everything that we are was given to us and was carried before us by our ancestors, our grandparents who have passed on. When they couldn't carry it any longer and they went to join that spirit world, they handed it to us and they said ‘Now you are the real ones. And you have to carry it.’ Now they are in the spirit world. They are our past. Now we have a responsibility to carry that because we hear seven generations in the future. They are our future. They are the ones that are not yet born. (Royal Commission on Aboriginal Peoples, 1996)

For the speaker, the learner, the language activist, language is part of their responsibility to their children and their children's children; it is an integral piece of the culture.

Comparing the goals of the field linguist and those of the language activist then, they are not the same: to put it simply and starkly, without the refinement that is clearly needed to fully understand the complex issues involved, one is concerned with the documentation and analysis of the language, the other with language as spirituality, culture and recognition.

Shifting research paradigms

In recent years, there have been ongoing shifts in social science research paradigms, as outlined previously. The methodology of linguistic fieldwork, like the methodology of other social science research, has been subject to deep scrutiny. For many linguists it is perhaps a combination of working in communities and the words of Aboriginal scholars that are influential in thinking about different ways of doing research. Smith (1999) has been highly influential in leading fieldworkers to rethink some of their goals. In Canada, the necessity of a shift in paradigms is spoken of directly by Aboriginal scholars. They talk of

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the need for universities to rethink their basic goals and to the importance of the direct involvement of Indigenous peoples in research that involves them:

Most existing research on Indigenous peoples is contaminated by Eurocentric prejudice. Ethical research must begin by replacing Eurocentric prejudice with new premises that value diversity over universality. Researchers must seek methodologies that build synthesis without relying on negative exclusions or on a strategy of differences. ... Nowhere is this work more needed than in the universities. ... These academic disciplines have been drawn from a Eurocentric canon...that supports production-driven research while exploiting Indigenous people, their languages, and their heritage. (Battiste & Henderson, 2000, pp. 132-133)

Ethical research systems and practices should enable Indigenous nations, peoples, and communities to exercise control over information related to their knowledge and heritage and to themselves. These projects should be managed jointly with Indigenous peoples, and the communities being studied should benefit from training and employment opportunities generated by the research. Above all, it is vital that Indigenous peoples have direct input into developing and defining research practices and projects related to them. To act otherwise is to repeat that familiar pattern of decisions being made for Indigenous people by those who presume to know what is best for them. (Battiste & Henderson, 2000, p. 132)

One can understand why issues might arise between linguists and language activists: these two groups often have different goals and, often, are coming from very different research paradigms. Can there be a meeting of minds?

Shifting priorities of field linguists

In recent years, as there has been debate about social science paradigms, there has been introspection by linguists about the role that the linguist plays in fieldwork, especially in communities where languages are endangered. In an influential article on the role of linguists in language revitalization that is one of the first major works in this area, Gerds (1998, pp. 15-17) writes of the distrust that linguists often face in doing fieldwork, and she asks why linguists might be misunderstood. She puts it very baldly: "I have come to the conclusion that some of the distressing unpleasantness [with the programs that have been developed] originates with me, the cultural outsider. ... Put simply, linguistic expertise is not sufficient for successful participation in a language program. The linguist must develop social and political skills to be an effective member of a language revitalization team" (p. 13). Gerds outlines a number of reasons why there might be distrust, including suspicion on the part of speakers of the motives of linguists and a lack of understanding of the goals of linguistic fieldwork. She further notes that much linguistic material is inaccessible to a layperson, including speakers of the language. In addition, linguists often do not learn to speak the languages

that they study, and may be driven largely by theoretical interests. In some cases, linguists have not learned very much about the culture of the communities in which they work. On top of all of this, language teaching is what is often desired on the part of a community, and linguists often lack expertise in this area that is considered so vitally important. Gerdts concludes that linguists have much to offer language revitalization programs, but “their work can be made difficult both by shortcomings in their own training and experience and also by lack of knowledge on the part of the community about what linguistics is and what linguists do” (1998, p. 17).

As Gerdts outlines, suspicion and a lack of understanding of the goals of linguists are important factors in leading to the two solitudes of the title of this paper. One hears many comments made to academics about their goals; a frequent one is that people are tired of being the object of study. Indigenous people sometimes remark that everything else has been taken from them, and now the linguists are trying to steal their language as well. Linguists have been well meaning in trying to show that the languages in question are not primitive, but equally complex to dominant languages such as English. This well-meaning attempt may backfire though, leading to people saying things such as the following: Our language is too hard for our children to learn, it’s no wonder the children can’t speak it.

As communities and scholars have raised questions about traditional kinds of social science research, linguists too have begun to speak out about the kinds of interactions that might exist between linguists and communities. Berardo and Yamamoto (2007, p. 112) note that the tradition of linguistic description has its own culture and values, one that does not necessarily intersect with that of local communities: “the linguist does impose a linguistic approach to language description, which has been developed outside the values, attitudes, beliefs, assumptions, and traditions of the local culture.” Gerdts speaks to this, remarking that communities want control, “They want their language and culture back. They want control of all aspects of education and research. They want autonomy. They want to do the work themselves without help from foreign experts” (1998, p. 17). Grinevald (2007) addresses to the importance of linguists working together with communities, in empowerment and community-based models.

A future perspective in terms of the community also means considering the sustainability of the work done on the language, through empowerment of members of the community, particularly in the form of continued training of speakers and semi-speakers capable and interested, and participation and support to the production of language materials, with a view to producing material that is actually usable in the field and by the community. (p. 43)

Berardo and Yamamoto (2007) stress the importance of listening:

When we work with endangered languages, we are committing ourselves not only to documenting and describing the languages, but also

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to meeting the linguistic, social, and educational needs of the communities. Thus, it is especially important for us to listen to the voices of indigenous peoples. (p. 107)

And Valliquette addresses the issue that linguistic work is not benign, but can do harm, “What can professionals and community members do to preserve endangered languages? The answer is: much harm as well as good” (1998, p. 107).

In a book on language endangerment and language revitalization, Tsunoda (2005) includes a chapter called ‘Role and ethics of researchers.’ Among many other things, he reviews a list of principles issued by the Australian Institute of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Studies in Canberra, Australia for ethical research with Indigenous peoples. These include the need for consultation, negotiation, mutual understanding, respect, recognition and involvement as well as an awareness of benefits, outcomes, and agreements.

In a recent paper focused on linguistic fieldwork, Czaykowska-Higgins (2007) reflects on four research paradigms, a linguist-focused model (basically the ethical model of Cameron et al. (1992) discussed previously), the advocacy research model, the empowering research model, and a community-based research model. This latter builds on Cameron et al. (1992) in assuming that “the linguist is but one of the experts in the research process, and that community members as well as linguists should be directors of and active partners in the research, as opposed to being simply empowered research subjects” (Czaykowska-Higgins, 2007, p. 7). Czaykowska-Higgins notes that linguists working with Indigenous communities are increasingly attempting to bridge the divide between linguist and community through the use of different models depending on goals, aspirations and needs of the community and of the linguist. She argues that there are a number of reasons why a linguist might choose engagement in and with a community, reasons that are grounded ultimately in ethical considerations. As she points out, choosing not to engage can have unintended and often negative consequences since linguistic research is not conducted in a social, political or cultural vacuum (2007, p. 10). In other words, reinforcing points made by linguists such as Valiquette (quoted above), Hale (2001, p. 76), Dimmendaal (2001, p. 55), Darnell (2005, p. 156) and others, some of whom are cited above, linguistic research is not a neutral activity. Czaykowska-Higgins goes on to say that linguists have skills to contribute to community goals and aspirations, giving them an ethical obligation. Shaw (2004, p. 184) also stresses this point, speaking to the necessity for local control. She further points out:

On the one hand, there are no guarantees that the recognition of mutually enhancing goals and the negotiation of respectful protocols for working collaboratively towards those goals can ensure the revitalization of a language. On the other hand, however, the consequences of a lack of commitment on either side to collaborate in such efforts effectively preclude its ultimate survival.

Dobrin closes with the following remark about responsibilities:

If I understand my obligation to Apakibur villagers as fulfilled by giving them a dictionary or story books, I will have missed an opportunity to allow them power in the way they value it, within their framework of meaning. I will have won the battle to document another language before it dies, but lost the war over human diversity and linguistic human rights, because I will have disappointed the villagers' hopes that, in at least this one context, their globally peripheral voices were actually being heard. (2008, p. 320)

Bach (2003, p. 173) puts very bluntly the responsibilities of the linguist: "The days of such colonialist research are gone forever."

Just as the research paradigm for social sciences in general has evolved, so has the sense of what the responsibilities of the linguistic fieldworker are, and what the effects of fieldwork, both positive and negative, might be. A group that already existed has perhaps become more visible, or perhaps simply more outspoken, a group that we might call linguist activists. How the work of the linguist plays itself out is variable, depending on many different circumstances, as discussed by Czakowska-Higgins (2007), but the model is one of partnership.

What might the linguist have to offer?

The linguists cited above, and many others, are part of a group that continue to rethink the role of the linguist in a community, stressing the need to attend to responsibilities to the community. In this section I look a little more concretely at what some of the things are that linguists might be able to contribute. Grinevald (2007, p. 41) addresses this question, speaking of the responsibilities of the linguist in fieldwork:

[T]he role of linguists in the overall dynamics of such projects may need humbling re-evaluation and readjustment, even though...one must keep in mind that the original and indispensable contribution of linguists remains the analytical study of the language. It may well be that...the most productive approach to the description of the language is one channeled through the training in descriptive linguistics of linguistic community members, for self-sustaining language work of the kind that can be of use to the community. This means that the field linguists double up as linguistics teachers, or are hired actually as full-time teachers with supervisors of linguistic work done by speakers themselves (the WITH and BY fieldwork frameworks...).

Grinevald seeks a balance between the analytical study of the language and the responsibilities to the community, a balance sought in one way or another by the others mentioned in this paper.

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One role of the linguist discussed by Grinevald is what she terms revalorization of the language:

Linguists contribute to the revalorization of the language itself, by their own scientific work, the proof that the language can be written, is worth studying and is rich in grammar and vocabulary. This revalorization of the language must be addressed both to the community members themselves and to the members of the dominant culture. (2007, p. 47)

See also Dobrin (2008) for a discussion of valorization and the role played by the outsider.

Gerdts addresses the role of the linguist more specifically: the linguist has the training to do the analysis and produce the kinds of reference materials required for a language revitalization program. “the importance of the linguist or team of linguists and the materials that they produced or helped produce is an essential part of the program. ... to provide tokens of analyzed language and the necessary reference materials” (1998, p. 17). She provides a list of the kinds of work that a linguist can do:

- write reference materials and other scholarly works
- collect and archive materials
- help secure funding
- help produce educational materials
- train other linguists, including Native linguists
- help train teachers
- help teach the language
- serve as mediators between Natives and universities
- act as advocates for Native language programs
- serve as researchers or expert witnesses on matters involving language (e.g., place names, genealogies, ethnobiology, labels and translations for museum exhibits) (Gerdts, 1998, p. 14)

Another list of what linguists can do is given in the same volume in an article by Valiquette (1998, pp. 109-110):

- recognize their position as an outsider
- convince the community that there is a problem of language loss, that the responsibility lies with the community, that there are ways to preserve the language
- guide the community in choices:
 - focus on L1 or L2?
 - emphasis on oral or written?
 - teachers—community members? speakers?
 - centre of teaching as school or community?
 - tools (e.g., grammars, computers) required?

- training
- language assessment
- “outside work”
- linguistic work
- material (e.g., texts, songs): training to record community genres

Valliquette stresses how important it is for a community to make informed choices and accept responsibility for them.

Tsunoda (2005) summarizes and adds to these lists, stressing the need for linguists to give copies of their materials to the community. He notes also that the linguist has responsibilities to the general public.

While these various lists capture the kinds of things that linguists are probably best prepared to do, the various authors cited in the previous section all make clear that what is important is discussion and negotiation, in a framework based in trust and respect. None offer a single answer, recognizing that there is not a single balance and what that balance is can be established only through time and the various factors discussed already, not through a checklist or recipe of any sort.

The need to negotiate: Some concrete examples

What are some of the kinds of things that might be negotiated? There are many that might have to be thought about depending on the situation. I list here just a few that might come up.

For one thing, western trained scholars tend to value literacy. Do all value literacy? Should literacy be a goal?

For another, western tradition places much value on standardization of a writing system, and people often decry poor spelling. What does it mean to standardize a writing system? Is it an immediate goal?

And another, there are many ways of teaching a language. What is appropriate in the particular circumstances?

And one more. What is it that is taught? Is it the language of the Elders? Is it culturally relevant vocabulary? Is it modern, up-to-date vocabulary? Is it the language of the younger generation? These are only a few of the very many alternatives.

And yet one more: What is an appropriate orthography? How much should it be based in the orthography of another language? Do orthographic decisions made for related languages affect the choice of orthography, or are they irrelevant? Are there grounds for choosing one particular writing system or another if one appears to be linguistically superior in some way to the other?

And one last one, as discussed earlier, one likely goal of a linguist is to produce a dictionary, grammar, and texts of a language. One can ask questions about these various kinds of work. For example, what is a dictionary? What goes in a grammar? Who is the audience for these kinds of works? Can one dictionary or grammar meet all needs? Turning to texts, how should a text be presented? How is it laid out on the page? What language or languages are used?

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It might seem like there are straightforward answers to these questions, but in fact these questions, and many others, each raise a range of challenging issues for all involved. For some recent discussion on some of the complexities, see Nevins (2004) and Dobrin (2008).

In the following section I follow up on the final issue raised above, examining two dictionaries, both of which I myself consider to be outstanding, to probe some of the issues that might arise around dictionaries.

An example of dictionaries and what can be different depending on goals

One might think that a dictionary is a dictionary is a dictionary, and that a single dictionary is all that is needed for a language. Yet dictionaries can differ considerably in their goals. This is obvious when one looks at a few different English language dictionaries: the dictionary might be aimed at children, at adults, at second language learners; it might or might not include etymologies; examples of a word in use may or may not be present; it may be an English dictionary, a Canadian English dictionary, an Australian English dictionary; and so on.

In order to illustrate some of the differences that can exist between dictionaries, I look briefly at the definition of the word ‘muskrat’ in two different, and, as I said above, to my mind, outstanding, dictionaries of Athapaskan languages. The first is a dictionary of Kaska produced by the Kaska Tribal Council (1997, p. 30). The entry for ‘muskrat’ is given below:

muskrat

- tanusť'ǫ' (tunoost'ǫ')
- tanwust'ǭ (tunwoost'ǭ)
- tanusť'á' (tunoost'á')
- tanusť'eā' (tunoost'eā')
- tenusďǭ
- tenusďié'
- tenusďǭ
- tenusďié'
- dzana
- dzana
- tehk'ǭ (tehk'a)
- tahk'a
- his/her muskrat*
- matenusďié'
- matenusďǭ
- matenusďié'

1. Kahseh nan ki'q' tū zedle' gūlīn ekúh tenusďié' nan gunela'. *When earth first appeared, there was only water when muskrat made earth.*
2. Sejōni tenusďié'lá' ts'e'dāne ma'ējé' kegedetl'ūn tādet'ē dzenēs ts'j'. *Ts'édāne tá gutie kuhlā dege. Old people tie the front feet of a muskrat on a children's shirt for three days so they will really work hard.*

There are notable features of this dictionary, and I mention just a few. The dictionary includes multiple pronunciations of words, different forms of words, and different dialects. Many entries are accompanied by statements in the language as to the importance, the role, and so on of a particular entity. Thus the entry above includes not only words from various dialects of what is generally identified as Kaska (Lower Liard, Good Hope Lake, Liard, Frances Lake, Pelly, Ross River in the entry above), but also words from what are generally identified as two other languages, Mountain Slavey and Fort Ware Sekani, with this latter presented in more than one orthography. The two sentences at the end of the entry above provide insight into the history and use of the muskrat. Other information is given in other entries, including the location of places and the words for the sounds that some of the animals and birds make.

The second dictionary, the Koyukon dictionary, is an amazing piece of work, authored over the course of a century through work of Jules Jetté, a missionary in the early part of the 20th century, and Eliza Jones, a speaker/linguist who has been involved in work on the language for over thirty years. The word for ‘muskrat’ is one of the subentries under the entry for the stem for ‘long’ as it literally means ‘that whose tail is long.’ The entry from pages 432-433 of the dictionary is given below:

naal *n^y-z /be long/

bekenaale (n.) muskrat (*Ondatra zibethicus*), lit. ‘that whose tail is long’
“Other current terms are *dzenh kaadenlededle*, *kk’odemaay*, *bekaa’ deltsude*, *mekenaadeelek*, *todetsule*. *Bekanaal de’aak* a muskrat parkie, *bekannal is’ede* a muskrat blanket. Muskrat skins being the common material for parkies and blankets, when no special material for parkies is mentioned, the article is understood to be of muskrat skin. The skin of the back is stronger and heavier, and the fur of a dark brown color, that of the belly is lighter and weaker, with a cream-colored fur, having a pearly gloss. Hence the backs and bellies are not usually employed for the same article. The backs are used for a strong durable one; the bellies for a light, pretty one ...

“The muskrat is used as food, and is palatable, if the abdominal wall is removed before cooking, this containing apparently the musk glands, or some of them. Eating the tail of a muskrat (prepared as a beaver tail) is believed to bring good luck to the one who eats it.” (b-22)-JJ

“They search lakes and small streams for its [the muskrat’s] tracks, and then try to locate the “feed house” which it builds over the ice, for the tunnel is generally near this.” (1942:109)-RS

“Young people are not allowed to eat the muskrat tail, because it would cause them to shoot poorly. Its tail wiggles and quivers when it swims.” -EJ

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Features of the Koyukon dictionary include rich linguistic information, both historical and current. This entry contains statements from the literature about the muskrat, as well as statements from the authors of the dictionary (JJ is Jetté, EJ is Jones, RS is Robert Sullivan) about the muskrat. The dictionary also includes drawings, photographs and wide-ranging information that is of both linguistic and cultural interest.

These two dictionaries share many properties. Both are bilingual and both contain entries for many of the same words. Both include information that is not typically found in an English language dictionary, and in this sense represent a combination of an English language dictionary and an encyclopedia. Nevertheless, the two dictionaries are quite different, and it is interesting to compare them not only for their content but also the goals that underlie each of them.

The Kaska Tribal Dictionary addresses its goals directly:

This dictionary came together because the vision of the Kaska people was endorsed by the Government of Canada, The Government of the Yukon, and the Government of British Columbia. The Kaska vision of their future includes their language and the languages of all the native people in their traditional territory.

The dictionary arose out of direction from the chiefs and the speakers of the languages, and their sense that one way of aiding the survival of a language is to record the vocabulary of that language along with its cultural context. (Kaska Tribal Council, 1997, p. 1)

The *Koyukon Athabaskan Dictionary* is not so directly explicit as to the goals. In the Preface by James Kari (2000b) there is detailed discussion of the kinds of entries that it contains:

The Koyukon Athabaskan Dictionary draws upon the extensive Koyukon ... materials recorded by Jesuit missionary and scholar Jules Jetté (1864-1927) from 1898 to about 1922, as well as the extensive vocabulary and grammatical materials recorded by Koyukon scholar Eliza Jones from 1974 through 1999.

The main section of the dictionary (pp. 1-749) contains 1,778 entries and sub-entries for more than 8,800 vocabulary items. The vocabulary covers all aspects of Koyukon life and is illustrated by more than 2,700 mini-essays and descriptive comments by Jetté, plus more than 90 of his drawings, diagrams, and photographs. There are also another 500 cultural and grammatical comments by Jones, as well as extensive comments by other experts and specialists.

Over 1,600 verb themes are presented in the KAD, most of which can appear in hundreds of derived verb forms. The KAD vocabulary is exemplified by more than 17,500 example sentences. The English-to-Koyukon Index (pp. 839-1060) refers to nearly 19,000 items in the main entries. (p. xxvii)

In addressing the user, Kari says the following:

The *Koyukon Athabaskan Dictionary* contains a vast amount of information. It can be used for random browsing and for the enjoyment of reading the information about Koyukon language and life. Also the KAD can be used to memorize sets of words, to practice reading the language, or to practice forming words and sentences. Beginning users of the dictionary need not be distracted or intimidated by abbreviations and the more technical features of the format. As you become a more advanced learner of the language, you can learn more about these technical features. (2000a, p. xxxvi)

In another section of the introductory material to the dictionary, Krauss comments on the size and complexity of the dictionary, remarking that the dictionary has limitations:

Above all, given its sheer size and complexity, it cannot be easy to use or handy for the beginner or schoolchild or anyone without experience with dictionaries. ... Also in spite of its size, this dictionary can make no claim to be complete. ... We realize, of course, as noted above, that though this work is incomplete, it is at the same time far too extensive and complex to be easily used or practical for students of the Koyukon language below college or perhaps secondary level. For primary educational purposes, it will of course be necessary to develop a whole generation, so to speak, of appropriate materials. We intend and expect this book to be a rich source of information from which to derive a great variety of teaching materials and lessons: on Koyukon grammar and vocabulary, including student dictionaries of all sorts, and on many aspects of Koyukon culture. (Krauss, 2000, p. lxxx)

The introduction of the *Koyukon Athabaskan Dictionary* implicitly lays out its goals: both breadth and depth of coverage of the language. The work by Jetté was quite extraordinary, and coupled with the outstanding work by Jones, the dictionary is unparalleled in scope.

The audience for the Kaska dictionary is the speakers and future speakers directly, and much is done in the dictionary to meet the needs of this audience. The audience for the Koyukon dictionary is different, as pointed out in the quotes above. This dictionary is not really designed for the beginner, but rather it serves as a resource for the development of further materials for teaching and learning the language, as Krauss notes. The different audiences for the different dictionaries lead to rather distinct types of entries in the two works.

As a final example of the differences between the dictionaries, consider the ease with which an entry can be found. The Kaska entry for the word ‘muskrat’ is directly under ‘muskrat.’ In the Koyukon dictionary, on the other hand, even if the user knew what the word for ‘muskrat’ was in Koyukon, they would not

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find it directly since the word is listed as a subentry of the stem in this word, namely ‘be long’ (it is easy to find the word ‘muskrat’ in the English index of the dictionary, and this index includes the page number of the full entry).

The Kaska dictionary and the Koyukon dictionary represent two very different types of work, each with their own strengths. Which do we choose? They aim at very different audiences. The goals of a dictionary project need to be carefully thought through in order to create a dictionary that will satisfy the needs of the audience, and the needs of the linguist and those of the speaker are not necessarily one and the same.

Some examples of projects with communities and linguists in Canada

Can linguists and language activists work together successfully to bridge the two solitudes? As already discussed, such work involves negotiation of responsibilities, recognition of each other’s strengths and interests, a recognition of the challenges of the different kinds of work, and many other things. Many of the works cited in this paper end by exhorting the linguist to involve themselves in work with communities. For instance, Gerdts (1998, p. 21) ends her paper on the role of the linguist by saying that she hopes that other linguists will make the choice that she has, and that “the field of linguistics, the universities, and the communities will make an effort to help the scholars that make this choice.” Shaw (2004) remarks that the goals of linguists and communities are not mutually incompatible, but rather are mutually enhancing. Czaykowska-Higgins (2007, p. 22) concludes by saying that “in the future, as more linguists engage in collaborative research with communities, collaborative kinds of research models will become more readily understood and accepted within the Western academic world. Linguists in the 21st century have more opportunities for choosing how to practice linguistic research than they had in the past. New types of knowledge, new benefits for linguists and for communities are likely to result. It is a very interesting, exciting, and challenging time to be a linguist.”

More concretely, what might actually be done? Some lists of possible ways in which linguists could contribute were given previously in this paper, and in this section I outline a few of the kinds of projects that have been undertaken under an explicitly community-based model of research. When I first began working on this topic several years ago, in the late 1990s, very little had been written on the kinds of work that was being done in this model (the work was going on; it simply was not much written about); more is available now. For instance, the second issue of the new journal *Language Documentation and Conservation* (December 2007) includes two articles that contain detailed descriptions of the kinds of work that are ongoing. One, by Otsuka and Wong, discusses a language revitalization project undertaken by the Tokelauan community in Central O’ahu, Hawai’i. The linguists worked with the Tokelauan community to design a questionnaire to examine language competence, use and attitudes, something that the community was interested in. The second article, by Yamada, describes collaborative work with a Kari’nja community in Suriname. Yamada worked closely with a community member, Chief Ferdinand Mandé, in developing various

projects including a daily language hour, the production of films and collaborative analysis of grammatical topics of interest to Chief Mandé as a teacher of the language. In addition, they provided linguistic training of interest to language learners and worked on a pedagogical grammar and thematic dictionaries.

Below I outline briefly a few other projects. These are all being carried out in Canada under the auspices of the Social Science and Humanities Research Council.

An ongoing project is the development of a website for East Cree, found at www.eastcree.org. This project involves a linguist and a number of speakers of East Cree. The website has stories on it both to read and to listen to. It includes a basic reference grammar with sound files, a dialect map and information about syllabics. There are lessons, a dictionary, rich resources and a closed forum for creating new words. The team includes a linguist, a computer programmer, a web designer, cataloguers, storytellers, editors, translator and Elders. The goal is set out: to involve more speakers and Cree youth in documenting the language, to investigate new technologies in culturally appropriate ways and to promote Cree language survival. Also available through this web site (<http://eastcree.org/en/grammar/ling-atlas.swf>) is a Cree language atlas, where speakers of Cree from across the country can add their own way of saying things.

Another outstanding project is called COOL (Cayuga: Our Oral Legacy), with a website available at www.mun.ca/cayuga/home/. This team consists of a language activist, a linguist, an administrative assistant, a coordinator for transcription, community representatives, Cayuga speakers and Elders, student transcribers from the community and web designers. From the start, this team posed a number of important ethical questions; Should the Cayuga language be recorded and written down? If so, who can listen to the recordings? What should be done with written versions if the language is written down? Should materials be translated into English? What constitutes respectful treatment of the language of speakers' expertise? With these questions in mind, this team set out to transcribe recordings of Cayuga conversation, and create a particle dictionary, Cayuga grammar and reader.

A third team is involved with work on Inu-Aimun in Labrador (www.innu-aimun.ca). Similar to the others, this team includes a linguist, a project manager and representatives from various groups. The team set as its goals to consolidate and extend linguistic documentation and applied materials, to build on research to make it accessible to the community, to train Innu community members, to teach literacy, to build new media and to enable community leadership in research. Various lesson books and compact disks (CDs) will be produced, as well as workshops in vocabulary development and literacy training.

These projects have much in common: there is a common linguistic component, consisting of transcription, the development of grammatical materials and vocabulary, with training in all areas. Each project is designed for to meet the needs of the particular community. Many projects involve surveys and the production of materials. All involve linguists with long involvement in the community, a depth of knowledge of the language in question and a continuing

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commitment to work with community members. Each project has changed over time, to meet changing needs. Projects involve written and oral materials and visual materials such as CDs and videos, and training is at their core.

To end

I began this paper by suggesting that there might be two solitudes, dividing linguists and language activists. Must there be two solitudes? The answer to this is maybe not, if there is mutual recognition that a linguist cannot on their own save a language; it takes a community of people to do that. In order to truly work together, general principles such as relationships, respect, reciprocity and recognition are critical.

Berardo and Yamamoto (2007, p. 116) point out that “We are at a time when collaborative and cooperative efforts among Native language speakers, linguists, educators, and advocates can lead to successful Native language revitalization, maintenance, and fortification.” They thus believe that the two solitudes can be overcome, as do the many other linguists cited in this articles. Words expressing solitudes have been spoken by Indigenous peoples and academics both; most of the words in this paper about bridging those solitudes come from academics. Let us hope that those words represent the sense of the linguists and the language activists both, and that the two groups can find a common meeting ground and ways of working together with each other, whatever struggles that might bring, recognizing that the linguistic work is important if it is properly framed, however that might be interpreted for the particular situation.

Note

¹The Proceedings of FEL XI, *Working Together for Endangered Languages: Research Challenges and Social Impacts* (Foundation for Endangered Languages, 2007), edited by Nicholas Ostler came out after this paper was completed. It includes several papers of relevance to the theme of this paper.

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Brief History of the Stabilizing Indigenous Languages Symposiums

Gina Cantoni was the driving force behind the 1st and 2nd symposiums held at Northern Arizona University (NAU) in 1994 and 1995. The symposiums focused on creating an agenda for reversing language shift and featured some of the leading figures in the field of minority language preservation. Papers, speeches and session summaries from these symposiums were published in *Stabilizing Indigenous Languages*.

The 3rd Symposium was hosted by Richard Littlebear and held in Anchorage, Alaska, in 1996 and brought together mostly Alaskan Native educators. The 4th Symposium, “Sharing Effective Language Renewal Practices,” was held in 1997 at NAU and cochaired by Evangeline Parsons Yazzie and Jon Reyhner. A selection of papers from this conference was published as *Teaching Indigenous Languages*. The 5th Symposium on “Strategies for Language Renewal and Revitalization,” cochaired by Robert St. Clair and Evangeline Parsons Yazzie, was held in Louisville, Kentucky, in 1998. Papers from this conference were published in *Revitalizing Indigenous Languages*.

The 6th Symposium, held in 1999 at the University of Arizona in Tucson, was sponsored by the 20th Annual American Indian Language Development Institute (AILDI) and was cochaired by Teresa McCarty and Ofelia Zepeda. Papers from this conference were published by the Center for Indian Education, Arizona State University in 2006 as *One Voice, Many Voice—Recreating Indigenous Language Communities*. The 7th Symposium on “Language Across the Community” chaired by Barbara Burnaby was held in 2000 in Toronto, Canada. The conference proceedings is titled *Indigenous Languages Across the Community*.

The 8th Symposium on “Merging Tradition & Technology to Revitalize Indigenous Languages” was cochaired by Gary Owens and Jon Reyhner and held in 2001 at NAU. The 9th Symposium was held in 2002 at Montana State University, Bozeman. The 10th Symposium was hosted by the Ho Chunk Nation in Wisconsin Dells, Wisconsin. Selected papers from the 8th, 9th, and 10th conferences are included in *Nurturing Native Languages* published in 2003.

The 11th Symposium was held in Berkeley, California, in 2004. It was chaired by Leanne Hinton and hosted by the Advocates for Indigenous California Language Survival and the University of California at Berkeley. The 2005 Symposium was held at the University of Victoria in Canada. The 2006 Symposium was chaired by Lori Quigley and held in 2006 at Buffalo State College in New York and was co-hosted by Buffalo State College’s School of Education and the Seneca Nation of Indians. The 2007 Symposium was held in Mount Pleasant, Michigan, and was hosted by Eastern Michigan University and the Saginaw Chippewa Tribal Nation and chaired by Margaret Noori.

For the 15th Symposium, we returned again to Northern Arizona University. The 16th Symposium is scheduled for Arizona State University in 2009 and the 17th at the University of Oregon in 2010.