

## Vanishing Voices

The first European visitors to this continent spoke a wide range of languages from just as wide a number of countries. That number, however, cannot even begin to compare to the number of native languages already being spoken in this wild, new world. The carry-over European languages still enjoy a large body of speakers to this day: Spanish, German, French, and of course English. The same cannot be said for the Native American languages that they displaced. Many today are extinct, and of those extant, most are critically endangered. The links between language and culture are such that one must wonder: given their history of maltreatment and forced assimilation, without unique languages to unite them, how much longer can the native cultures of the Americas survive?

### Research Question

Many Native American tribes, though by no means all of them, have developed programs to preserve their historical languages for future generations. I want to investigate this phenomenon and its results. First of all, I will investigate the hypothetical effects of certain factors on the likelihood of a tribe having a language preservation program. These predicting variables will include:

- **Funding** (in terms of both source and amount): Does the majority of the funding come from the state/federal government, other external organizations, or within the tribe? How much funding is available?
- **Population size**: How many members belong to the tribe? If the tribal lands include a reservation, how many live on it? How many do not?
- **Geographic location**: Where in the country is the tribe located?

Of the tribes then that *are* undertaking language preservation initiatives, in addition to the above questions, what types of programs exist? Specifically, how are the programs structured, what percentage of the tribe participates, and who is most likely to participate? Finally, I will record the success rates of the programs. (This will be measured in terms of the number of enrollees retained by the end of the programs, growth or decline in program functions, and perhaps even language retention rates after program completion.)

### Methods

To answer my questions about existing programs (or the lack thereof) and the factors that affect them, I will perform initial web-based and textual research. Then, through personal communication (telephone and e-mail), as well as notes and recorded interviews conducted on-site at reservations and tribal lands, I will collect the rest of my data. (To gain an adequate sample of data, I aim to travel to reservations in many parts of the country.)

The methods I will use to compile and analyze the data will be both quantitative and qualitative. The quantitative portion of the research will take the form of statistical analyses. The programs will be categorized based on type (in terms of organization, participation of elders, etc.), percentage of participation, and intensity. Along with the numbers collected regarding the

above-mentioned predicting variables as well as success rates, these data will reveal trends that may influence the future of such programs. Meanwhile, the qualitative portion of the research will be equally as important. Relying heavily on the personal communications and interviews, I will be able to compile ethnographic narratives that will give life to the numbers I collect, and be crucial in accurately interpreting the data.

### **Qualification and Interest**

I am a double major in Archaeology and Latin Language Education, with a minor in German. In addition to my avid interest in all languages, I am fascinated by how they develop and change over time (and hope to pursue this topic in graduate school). Through archaeology courses covering North America, I was introduced to the issue of waning Native American languages. Naturally, my interest was inflamed and I wanted to investigate the topic thoroughly. Relevant courses I have taken on the topic of Native American culture include ANTH 045 (Cultural Anthropology), ANTH 152 (Hunters and Gatherers), ANTH 011 (Introduction to Native American Archaeology), ANTH 433 (Archaeological Ethics), and am currently in ANTH 559 (Human Ecology). In addition to this, my coursework through the College of Education in classes like WLED 300 (Foundations of Second Language Teaching) and WLED 411 (World Language Teaching) has greatly augmented my understanding of the relationship between language and culture.

I also traveled to the Oneida Indian Nation in Oneida, NY last summer, where I spoke in depth about some of my research ideas with the Nation's Education and Cultural Outreach Director. In addition to the Oneida Nation, I have contacted other New York tribes including the Seneca Nation and Cayuga Nation. I plan to visit these tribes when collecting data, as well as many other tribes in the Northeast. With funding, I can greatly expand the number of tribes in which I can conduct interviews. This will be important not only to gain an adequate sample size on which to perform accurate statistical analyses, but also to represent a wide ethnographic diversity (both of which will become crucial parts of my honors thesis).

I believe that I am respectful and courteous, as well as personable enough to engage in friendly professional relationships and present information in a way that will not distort or offend. I also feel that my strong interests in the fields of anthropology and linguistics, as well as my respect for cultural diversity qualify me to bring this research to fruition.

### **Dr. Newsom's Involvement**

I have taken Dr. Newsom's classes for four of my six Penn State semesters, and so have had a long time to formulate and refine this research idea under her guidance. She herself has done extensive work involving NAGPRA (the Native American Graves Protection and Repatriation Act) federal legislation, and remains in contact with many tribes. Besides being a wealth of information on research ideas and sources, her experience in the area will help me in contacting tribe members who might not be as willing to volunteer their time for a lone undergraduate.

Through frequent communication by phone, e-mail, and the occasional meeting, Dr. Newsom's support will ensure that my research remains on-track, professional, and thorough.