

ENDANGERED LANGUAGES AND MEETING THE NEEDS OF THE LINGUISTICS COMMUNITY AND THE LOCAL COMMUNITY A CASE FROM THE LOYAL SHAWNEE LANGUAGE COMMITTEE

Marcellino Berardo

University of Kansas

Research priorities of the linguistics community, such as representing cognitive processes associated with linguistic knowledge, piecing together human (pre)history, and uncovering values and attitudes that underlie language use do not always overlap with the priorities of local communities interested in preserving their language. Of central importance to many local communities is to have more speakers of the language to strengthen the linguistic factor to group identity and to continue the linguistic heritage. A fundamental question arises from the conflicting research priorities of the two communities: "Should the purpose and direction of linguistic research on endangered languages primarily benefit the linguistics community, the local community, or both?" The nature of the research depends, of course, on the answer to this basic question. It is the view of the Loyal Shawnee Language Committee that the needs and priorities of both communities should be addressed. This paper outlines the LSLC's research agenda focusing on the relevance and priorities of the Loyal Shawnee community as well as the linguistics community. In addition, a discussion of the LSLC's attitudes toward language and cultural and educational concerns are discussed. These attitudes and concerns are brought up as possible supplementary topics for those interested in incorporating needs and priorities of local communities into the study of endangered languages.

INTRODUCTION

I would like to open with a quote from a Loyal Shawnee elder I am working with. This quote comes from a report that aired in July 1996 on South Dakota Public Radio. The reporter asked about saving the Shawnee language:

" my language means a lot because that was given to us many years ago. And my ancestors and my grandfather and great grandfather and mother had always said that if we ever lost that, we're just losing a lot of our own self-respect. If you [the English people, the White man] were losing your language why would you want to save it? It's just about the same thing. That's what I feel. I want to save our language because once it's gone, it's gone."

The following four points were made:

1. My language means a lot to me.
2. Shawnee was given to us from our ancestors.

- 3 Loss of the language leads to loss of self-respect
- 4 When the language is gone, it's not likely to be revived

Saving the language is the Loyal Shawnee's primary linguistic interest To this end, the following linguistic needs have been identified

Figure 1 Linguistic Needs of the Loyal Shawnee Community

- a) to have more speakers of the language
- b) to preserve the language for future generations
- c) to continue the linguistic heritage passed down from ancestors
- d) to maintain self-respect
- e) to maintain the linguistic factor in group-identity
- f) to create cultural space or occasions and situations where speakers can use the language

I would like to be specific with what I mean by terms like "linguistic heritage", "group-identity", and "cultural space" Linguistic heritage, here, refers to the Shawnee way of doing things with the language that was passed on from generation to generation In particular, what was passed down from generation to generation was the Shawnee way of greeting, praying, showing respect, resolving conflict, songs and ways of joking Speech act theory in an historical sense makes this explicit The linguistic tradition includes strategies for making assertions, disclosing information, (dis)agreeing, hypothesizing, stating opinions, describing, denying, questioning, commanding, disputing, envying, expressing appreciation, telling secrets, and gossiping A more extensive list is offered below (The organization of this list is inspired by Allan 1986)

Figure 2 Shawnee Linguistic Heritage Including Strategies Used to

- a make assertions including ways to affirm, allege, avow, claim, declare, indicate, maintain, propound, and submit,
- b inform, including to advise, announce, disclose information, insist, notify, point out or (de) emphasize, regret, report, reveal information, and testify,
- c concede such as acknowledge, admit, agree, allow, assent, concur, grant, give up,
- d dissent such as to differ, disagree, and reject,
- e suppose, such as ways to assume, hypothesize, postulate, stipulate, and theorize,
- f offer approval, state opinions, corroborate, deem (un)necessary or (un)important, judge and rate,
- g describe, assess, classify, date, diagnose, identify, and rank,
- h ascribe, attribute, and predicate,
- i withdraw statements, repudiate, disavow, and deny,
- j accept, agree, and concur,
- k dispute, object, and question,
- l abhor, detest, disdain, dislike, distrust, dread, envy, fear, lament, mourn, pity, regret and resent,

- m express admiration, appreciation, enjoyment, exaltation, love, respect, support, toleration, and trust,
- n tell secrets, and gossip

By "group-identity" I include a sense of belonging together and unity. The Shawnee language is an important uniting factor. Specifically, when the speakers I'm working with were growing up, the community they belonged to and identified with spoke Shawnee. The sense of family and belonging together was wrapped up with the use of the language. One speaker reports that

"Shawnee is all we ever talked. We couldn't even speak English until after we started going to school. I can remember my folks, aunt Rosie's folks, uncle Pete and their families would go fishing in the pasture. We would pester our families, "We want to fish too!" So they would get a piece of stick and string and put a pin on it. But what our families were doing was getting together and talking."

Now, when reflecting on the language, the speakers recall pleasant memories of earlier times. Memories are evoked by names of people and places that come up in our sessions. This quote was evoked during a conversation about childhood and school.

By "cultural space" I mean the situations and occasions where one does things with the language such as occasions where one alleges, notifies, acknowledges, rejects, stipulates, deems (un)necessary, classifies, repudiates, accepts, objects, mourns, and expresses enjoyment. (My development and use of the concept 'cultural space' is inspired by Fishman 1996.) English has taken over this cultural space for most of the Shawnee people. We are now beginning to illicit the linguistic forms used to perform the acts listed in this paper.

NEEDS OF THE LINGUISTICS COMMUNITY

Traditionally, central priorities of the linguistics community did not include producing more speakers of a language, concerns for the loss of self-respect of speakers of a language or continuing a linguistic heritage passed down from ancestors. The following is a brief list of some traditional priorities of the linguistics community.

Figure 3 Some Priorities of the linguistics community

- a to describe language
- b to discover and model cognitive processes associated with knowledge of language
- c to argue for/against hierarchical classifications of humankind
- d to learn about early human migrations
- e to make explicit how language changes
- f to discover values, attitudes, beliefs, and assumptions of a community through the analysis of language use
- g to discover mental processes involved in the production and perception of language
- h to save the very subject matter needed to do (a) - (g)
- i to provide future scholars with the tools necessary to do a-h.

By the "linguistics community" I mean not only linguists working in linguistics departments, but also language scholars working from other points of view, such as the psychological point of view, sociological point of view, anthropological point of view, and educational point of view etc

To meet the needs of both communities, linguists and native speakers enter into a partnership that benefits both parties. Linguists work with local communities for the advancement of our understanding of the nature of language and for the promotion of endangered languages.

Meeting the needs of both communities, the LSLC is taking the following initial steps

1 Documentation of the language Documentation involves video and audio taping conversations, writing down notes, recording short songs, and maintaining ritual language use as in prayers before meal time. This last way to document the language results in preserving the language through oral traditions rather than written traditions. The elders on the LSLC are not united on whether we should record prayers or not. Holy language may not be suitable for recording. The documentation of other linguistic forms may be delayed. Some stories, for example, are only told during certain times of the year. Therefore, some stories may not be "available" for documentation for many months.

2 Description of the language We are writing two different kinds of grammars. First we are making explicit the phonology, morphosyntax, and semantics. From the description of the phonology and morphosyntax, we are developing a pedagogical grammar and other pedagogical materials that systematically organize the language to facilitate the acquisition of its use.

3 Dictionaries We are writing two kinds of dictionaries. One kind is the more traditional dictionary with words listed in order with relevant grammatical information. This kind of dictionary does not organize the language in ways to facilitate the acquisition of the skills involved in speaking and understanding the language. To facilitate the ability and knowledge necessary to speak and understand the language, we are developing a 'pictionary'. This is a dictionary of pictures and the Shawnee words for the pictures. One way to use the pictionary is to have elders talk about the pictures to the learners of the language.

4 Creating Cultural Space. The LSLC is documenting the language, describing the language, and developing pedagogical materials to teach the language during evening sessions at the local community building and to implement the language in the local school so every Shawnee grade school student will have experience with the language. Putting the language in the school also sends the message that there is a place for Shawnee (language and people) in important institutions like school. This could have a positive effect on self-esteem.

Unfortunately, the documentation of the language, the institutionalization of the language in schools, and evening sessions are simply not enough to produce more speakers. The linguistic documents leave the language in books. The institutionalization of the language leaves the language in schools. The evening language sessions at the community center leaves the language at the building. We have to guard against typecasting the language, that is against the association of Shawnee with unfamiliar kinds of books or with an institution everyone eventually leaves or with a slightly out of the way building. In order for the language to be learned, there has to be space for the language to be used in every day life.

This is one of our biggest challenges. Now English fills the cultural space where one does things with language. We need to identify the culturally appropriate and frequent linguistic acts that non-Shawnee speakers will want to associate with their traditional language. Greetings and table/kitchen talk associated with food and drink (thank you, that's enough, where is my cup etc.) are occasions where one already hears the language and associates it with these cultural spaces. We need to organize the language to facilitate the acquisition of its use in these and other cultural spaces.

SOME ATTITUDES AND NON-LINGUISTIC FACTORS INVOLVED IN LANGUAGE PROMOTION

In order to incorporate linguistic needs of the Shawnee, attitudes toward language promotion, educational factors, cultural factors, L2 acquisition theory and practice, and time, place, health-age factors must be addressed. Attitudes toward

language promotion along with non-linguistic factors, though necessary to the achievement of the linguistic goals of local communities are not necessarily discussed in typical field methods courses. Though not a complete list, these points are brought up here as supplementary topics for discussing the incorporation of the linguistic needs of local communities. Listed below are attitudes and cultural factors relevant to the Loyal Shawnee. All our work is embedded in this context.

1 Language Materials for Profit. "Selling Out"

I was questioned strongly by the Chairman of the tribe about "selling out." He wanted to know if I intended to sell the LSLC's descriptions and pedagogical materials to other groups who are interested in profiting from the linguistic heritage. "These people" were referred to as Wanna Bees- not real Shawnee. The Chairman grew angrier and angrier thinking about them until he called them communists. The idea of selling language materials to a "related group" is not my intent or that of the LSLC. The force with which this was communicated surprised me. All linguistic work is done in this context.

2 Pedagogical Factors

At least one elder did not want to develop a writing system, describe the language, and develop pedagogical materials because 1) fear of profiteering and 2) people should just speak the language to their children.

3 Illiteracy

Illiteracy has effects on self-esteem and confidence on at least one speaker. One of the best speakers keeps repeating she's not sure if the word or sentence is proper because she never finished grade school. She says "this is how I say it and how I've always heard it but I don't have much education." Of course, Shawnee was not taught in her school but she still equates school with proper language.

4 Cultural Space

Creating cultural space for the language when only a handful of speakers still speak the language is a challenge. Some ideas include publishing a newspaper, adopting an elder, institutionalizing the language (schools), putting the language on the radio, local cable access, making-distributing videos and cassette tapes, implementing prayers and other ritualistic language use at all social events. The intent is to find ways to get speakers to habitually interact in meaningful ways with non-speakers.

5 Development of Pedagogical Materials

We work to organize the language to facilitate the acquisition of implicit knowledge, the kind of knowledge necessary to the production and perception of the language. Culturally appropriate language learning/teaching strategies need to be developed, introduced, and promoted.

6 Time and Place

Traveling and time consumption on the road is no trivial matter. This summer (1996) it took an hour and a half one way to pick everyone up and bring all

members of the LSLC to a location where we could work on the language. This means we spent approximately three hours on the road. Too much road time led to fatigue.

7 Health and Age Factors

The health and age of the speakers amplify the urgency of our work. Because the average age of our native speakers is in the 70's, it is absolutely necessary to have them interact linguistically with non-speakers as soon as possible to begin the acquisition process. This can be difficult because the speakers can not move around much due to slow healing broken hips and a diabetes.

Conclusion

In conclusion, the linguistics community needs to make the workings of the phonology, morphology, syntax, and semantics explicit in order to learn more about cognition, human prehistory, values and attitudes that underlie language use, and the nature of the linguistic processor. The primary linguistic interest of the Loyal Shawnee, however, is to have more speakers of the language to continue the linguistic heritage, maintain self-respect and group-identity, and to create cultural space for the language. To meet the needs of both communities, the LSLC is organizing the language in two ways. The language is organized so it can be readily used as evidence for linguistic theory and so it can facilitate the acquisition of the use of the language.

REFERENCES

- 1 Allan, Keith 1986 Linguistic meaning, vol 2 London Routledge & Kegan Paul
- 2 Fishman, Joshua 1996 What do you lose when you lose your language? Stabilizing Indigenous Language, ed by Gina Cantoni, 80-91 Flagstaff Northern Arizona University