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# Reflections on language community training

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I reflect upon four decades of language community training, treating Watahomigie & Yamamoto (1992) and England (1992) as the starting point. Because the training activities these papers report began in the 1970s, there is a convincing and growing literature on training, including work published in the years since Himmelmann's (1998) article. The upshot of my reflections is this central point: Language documentation is better when it occurs alongside an active training component. Underlying this point is an acknowledgement that linguists and communities are engaged in mutual training, and in fact, that a binary distinction between linguist and community member is a false dichotomy. The Chickasaw Model, a model that formalizes training, linguistic analysis, documentation, and revitalization as a feedback loop (cf. Fitzgerald & Hinson 2013; 2016), offers a way to capture a fully integrated approach to training. I conclude with nine significant contributions growing out of the training literature.

**1. Introduction**<sup>1</sup> Linguistics and documentary linguistics benefits from close to half a century of research on training, much of it predating the “official” inauguration of the era of language documentation (Himmelmann 1988). However, the literature on training provides a crucial foundation to many approaches to language documentation and revitalization. In reflecting upon training, have linguists learned anything? What might the consequences and future implications be in training communities and others engaged in documentary projects? I address some of these issues here.

A compelling account of training emerges in two of the papers from Hale et al. (1992), each describing training activities started in the 1970s. One is situated in Arizona in

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the United States (Watahomigie & Yamamoto 1992) and the other in Guatemala (England 1992). Watahomigie & Yamamoto (1992: 12) lay out an early ethics lesson by centering on the responsibility of academics to engage local community members through training:

The goal of collaborative research is not only to engage in a team project but also, and perhaps more importantly, to provide opportunities for local people to become researchers themselves. As Watahomigie & Yamamoto state (1987: 79), 'It is vitally important that anthropologists and anthropological linguists undertake the responsibility of training native researchers and work with them to develop collaborative language and cultural revitalization and/or maintenance programs.'

In the following sections, I outline my assumptions in this paper, and present a short overview of an effective model of training, the Chickasaw Model (Fitzgerald & Hinson 2013). I then outline nine key findings that originate in training activities and that have led to scientific and societal advances. Given the rapid rate of language loss of the world's estimated 7,000 languages, and the scarcity of resources in terms of people, money, and time, a strategic plan for training and community engagement is essential. But it is also important to articulate precisely how and why training is valuable and essential to language documentation.

**2. Preliminaries** This paper, at the request of the organizers of this volume, references language community training. The responsibility of linguists to communities is addressed in many places (for example, Wilkins 1992; Rice 2006; Fitzgerald 2007b). In a number of these studies, training is recognized as bidirectional, with linguists are trained as much by language communities as linguists train communities. This point is made in numerous places (see for example, Czaykowska-Higgins 2009; Yamada 2007; 2014; K. Rice 2011; Fitzgerald & Hinson 2013; 2016) and is a fundamental premise of my paper. Let me illustrate how this works by drawing from a collaboration in which I am involved, joint work with Joshua Hinson of Chickasaw Nation that focuses on Chickasaw, a severely threatened Muskogean language of southcentral Oklahoma in the United States. We observe that our partnership, between a linguist and the (Indigenous) director of a language revitalization program, involves "educating and training each other, as well as Chickasaw and UTA participants (Fitzgerald & Hinson 2013: 57)." Skills and knowledge transfer are bidirectional and mutual, and goes beyond these the two of us, filtering outward to others in our organizations and in our region.

Acknowledging that training is mutual is especially important because of how these relationships have the potential to enhance the value of the language work for communities, as well as the potential to diminish or even damage that work. Yamada (2007: 262) brings her observations from the Amazon that the results from collaborative language work are also more productive, noting that "[b]y working together, we accomplish much more than either of us could alone." Stenzel (2014: 289), drawing on a participatory language project situated in the Amazon, describes it as having "the potential to contribute to linguistic studies in unexpected ways and to produce data that is *better* in the sense of being richer and more complete," as well as resulting in outcomes better aligned with community goals. Leonard (2017: 20)'s interviews with community practitioners suggest that "[l]anguage work that identifies and legitimises local notions of language, while not a panacea," can improve the range of possible scientific analyses and

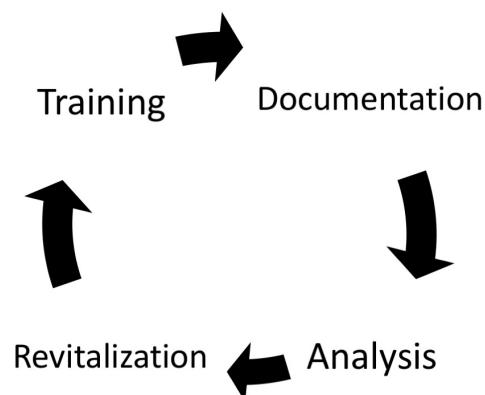
avoid diminishing Indigenous community members' contributions. Better science, better outcomes for community goals, more productive projects are all desirable outcomes. It should be noted that collaborative language work, where training plays a major role, and relationships are essential, should not be viewed without challenges (see, for example, Czaykowska-Higgins 2009; Stenzel 2014). But as noted by all of the researchers cited in this section, these approaches value the expertise held by community members and regard language work as a partnership, one in which linguists are conscious they are also learning.

**3. Training alongside documentation, revitalization and linguistic analysis** The previous section laid out some assumptions about training and collaborative relationships in language documentation. In this section, I flesh out a more detailed model of precisely how training interacts with language documentation. In this model, a feedback loop is used for the conceptual formulation of the relationship between not just training and language documentation, but also between language revitalization and linguistic analysis.

In a variety of papers, I—along with collaborator Hinson—have argued for framing the collaborative Chickasaw Model (Fitzgerald & Hinson 2013; 2015; 2016; Fitzgerald 2017a; forthcoming) as feedback loop. That is, each stage of language activities produces output which then serves as input to the next stage, creating a mechanism of improvement in response to each stage, feedback occurring as a loop, as in Figure 1. In the Chickasaw Model, language documentation and revitalization are not treated as separate modules, occurring at different times and with no explicit connection. Instead, they are integrated with each other, with revitalization goals driving the documentation and the documentation improving as a result of attention to those goals. Integrating documentation into the revitalization activities improves both kinds of output. When documentation provides rich cultural and linguistic input, it serves as a meaningful learning stimulus, grounded in traditions, conveying community history, and exemplifying the kinds of oral traditions and values often connected with community identity. The Chickasaw Model also predicts how the output of documentation and revitalization will benefit from integrating analysis and training. Analysis of the documentation allows more thoughtful design of revitalization activities, which in turn feeds into training activities that build capacity and engagement within the community. Fitzgerald (2017a) demonstrates how this operates in the context of Chickasaw revitalization, with an eye to phonology and second language acquisition of pronunciation, and Fitzgerald (forthcoming) extends it to activities in the Amazon.

To illustrate this more concretely, I use an example drawn from the community-based language documentation project for Kawaiisu, a highly endangered Uto-Aztecan language of California in the United States. The Kawaiisu Language and Cultural Center has been engaged in a multi-year language documentation and revitalization project, and the team is engaged in transcription and morphemic analysis (Grant & Ahlers forthcoming). These linguistic activities have increased their Kawaiisu language abilities. Elder speakers are producing grammatical items that have been particularly resistant to emerging under elicitation. And these activities in turn are leading to new insights and challenges to earlier analyses of the language by linguists.<sup>2</sup> Engaging community members in researching their own language, incorporating all four stages of Figure 1, makes advances

<sup>2</sup>See also Yamada (2007) for another example of how engaging and training native speakers has yielded improved linguistic analyses that challenge prior analyses of the language.



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**Figure 1:** The Chickasaw Model (Fitzgerald & Hinson 2013: 59; Fitzgerald 2017a; forthcoming)

in scientific and community goals possible. Both Hale (1965) and Himmelmann (1998) argued for the importance of training and engaging native speakers in research. The Kawaiisu documentary project reinforces the value of training for native speakers and shows its value for second language learners.

**4. Nine significant findings from training activities** Having laid out the relationship between training and documentation, I now outline nine significant findings that emerge from the training literature.

**(1) The documentation (linguistic and otherwise) is richer.**

Himmelmann (1998: 176) notes that language documentation should include “as many and as varied communicative events as one can get hold of and manage to transcribe and translate.” Training has expanded the pool of documenters, resulting in turn in richer corpora. For Eastern Chatino of San Juan Quiahije, one such genre occurred in tandem with elections, as town hall oratories were delivered in honor of these events. H. Cruz (2014) analyzes the literary structure of this and other political discourses in her dissertation, accompanied with a documentary collection deposited in the Archive of the Indigenous Languages of Latin America (AILLA) as H. Cruz (n.d.). Her interest in documenting political discourse stems in part from being a diasporic community member, with such events being unfamiliar to her until she returned with a focus on language documentation and orthography development. In the domain of the verbal arts, Fitzgerald (2017c) gives numerous cases where training and revitalization activities enrich resulting documentation. Another testament comes from Linn (2014: 63), who outlines the diversity of language materials that results from a “community-based archive.” Her approach encourages youth involvement whether by new venues online like Facebook or by training Native American youth to use video cameras, and the resulting videos end

up in the language archive. A more diverse set of documenters yields a richer set of language materials in the documentation, such as by providing more context, or adding genres otherwise unnoticed or ignored by academics.

**(2) Scientific findings are stronger and more complete.**

Growing evidence bolsters the claim that scientific knowledge of a language is enhanced when documentation is collected in environments characterized by mutual training and learning. Certainly, the objects of study may be different when native speakers of Indigenous languages are the linguists and choose research topics. The detail brought to these studies is enriched by the perspective and insights of Indigenous linguists, one reason why Hale (1965) argued that training native speakers as linguists would significantly advance linguistic understanding of language. An example of enriched findings comes from E. Cruz (2017), where she explicates the complexities of naming practices and usage in Quiahije Chatino, an Indigenous language of Mexico. She draws from her own insights as a native speaker and from narratives (cf. the archival deposit, E. Cruz n.d.). In Yamada (2007), which describes her strongly community-centered work with the Kari'ña in Suriname, linguistic training fostered a common meta-vocabulary for talking about language, which in turn strengthens the insights for scientific analyses of the language.

**(3) Indigenous community concerns like injustice and trauma affect language work.**

Non-Indigenous researchers come from different backgrounds and often do not share the same experiences as Indigenous people, especially regarding violence or trauma, including where language was concerned (cf. Leonard 2017). In many countries, formal education has explicitly or tacitly worked to eliminate minority and Indigenous languages used in homes and communities. In the United States, in my own work, community members have shared their painful stories of boarding or day school where they were punished for speaking their language. Florey (2018) argues it is essential to recognize formal education as a potential barrier, in work done by the Resource Network for Linguistic Diversity in capacity-building and training efforts for Indigenous communities in Australia. Perhaps it is obvious to state, but outsider status can mean there is much one is unaware of, such as political processes and different communicative practices. That lack of knowledge may ultimately be fatal to a project's progress (cf. Fitzgerald 2007a). Privileging the concerns of Indigenous community members increases the potential for more effective and stronger partnerships between communities and non-Indigenous researchers.

**(4) Language revitalization and its outcomes are better understood.**

The early revitalization literature drew heavily from four language communities: Modern Hebrew, Irish Gaelic, Hawaiian and Māori. From 2000 to 2018, we have seen that literature explode with a host of examples from all over the globe, representing many different contexts. For example, Hawaiian is an Indigenous language of the United States in a location without other Indigenous languages, but other U.S. languages may be found in locales with more than one community language, or no speakers (i.e., sleeping languages), or little documentation. Documentation resources and training can

better support community goals to learn and teach their language as appropriate to that community's linguistic circumstances, such as Breath of Life archival workshops, which have been quite successful in simultaneously serving attendees from distinct sleeping languages at a single venue (Hinton 2001; Fitzgerald & Linn 2013; Sammons & Leonard 2015).

**(5) Community reclamation activities are better supported.**

Leonard (2012:359) distinguishes language revitalization from reclamation, the former focusing on creation of speakers while the latter is “a larger effort by a community to claim its right to speak a language and to set associated goals in response to community needs and perspectives.” Language reclamation centers community priorities. Returning again to Kari’jna, Yamada (2007) observes that linguistic training of community members empowers their understanding and revitalization of constructions that may have disappeared from wider usage by speakers. Of key importance here is the role that revitalization and reclamation play for a community and its members’ well-being, as well as how those revitalization activities serve as a barometer indicating the vitality of an endangered language (Fitzgerald 2017b).

**(6) Language documentation and revitalization training occurs on all continents in order to address local concerns over global language loss.**

Delivering training to language community members in the local context is becoming more widespread. Certainly, as Florey & Himmelmann (2009) and others note, training for academics exists (see also Jukes 2011). But training native speakers in descriptive linguistics creates cohorts of Indigenous linguists; this was illustrated by the training Mayan linguists in Guatemala (England 1992). Projects may have a mix of academics (both students and faculty/professional linguists) and language activists together, such as at the Institute on Collaborative Language Research, CoLang (formerly InField), (cf. Genetti & Siemens 2013), as well as in trainings held elsewhere, like those described in Indonesia by Florey & Himmelmann (2009). These approaches are short, perhaps one or two weeks, and the content varies based on the needs of a given locale.

Importantly, short-term training institutes that include language activists are being held for local language communities. Examples exist for local communities of speakers of minority or endangered languages worldwide. In **Asia**, institutes have been held in Tibet (Atshogs et al. 2017, Xun et al. 2017) and Yunnan Province (Mu 2016) in China; in Pakistan by the local Forum for Language Initiatives (Liljegren & Akhonzada 2017); and in Indonesia and Malaysia (Jukes et al. 2017). Training events in **Latin America** have taken place in Mexico (Cruz and Woodbury 2014), in Brazil (Franchetto & Rice 2014; Stenzel 2014; Silva 2016), Peru (Valenzuela 2010; Mihás 2012; Vallejos 2014; 2016), and Guatemala (England 1992; 2003; 2007). In fact, every continent with Indigenous languages has hosted training events: **Europe** (ELAR 2018), **North America** (McCarty et al. 1997; 2001; S. Rice 2011; Fitzgerald & Linn 2013; Fitzgerald 2018a); **Australia** (Amery 2016; Florey 2018, among others); and **Africa** in Ghana (Ameka 2015). And there are examples where training has traversed home locations for both the researchers and the community members, as in the multi-year, multi-location training-based collaboration described for the Kenyan Ekegusii community by Nash (2017). It is worth noting that these examples are drawn from published case studies, but much training occurs without a corresponding publication.

**(7) Sustaining language work requires the energy of grassroots community support.**

One of the longest running training institutions is the American Indian Language Development Institute (AILDI), which began in 1978 (as described in Watahomigie & Yamamoto 1992). AILDI's ongoing legacy is highly positive, as an empowering site of training, education and language activism for parents, teachers, learners (McCarthy et al. 1997; 2001). It is responsive to community needs, changing the length of the summer session, the offerings, and adding short workshops and offsite training over the last four decades. It was founded and run by key figures in Indigenous language revitalization, tribal citizens Lucille Watahomigie, Ofelia Zepeda and non-Indigenous ally Teresa McCarty. The emergence of two other regional-focused institutes in North America serve similar regional needs: the Northwest Indian Language Institute (NILI, Jansen et al. 2013) and the Canadian Indigenous Languages and Literacy Development Institute (CILLDI, S. Rice 2011). This kind of "Indigenous drive," energy that originates in what communities set as their goals, is analyzed by Fitzgerald (2018a) as essential for sustainable models of language documentation and revitalization.

**(8) The most complete understanding of language phenomena draws on Indigenous expertise, ways of knowing and epistemologies.**

This point is made insightfully in Leonard (2017), drawing from his analysis of interviews with participants in the Breath of Life and other language workshops. A deeper understanding of the role revitalization plays in a community has drawn on ethnographic and approaches to language revitalization and reclamation (see Granadillo 2006; Meek 2010; Hermes et al. 2012; Davis 2017) that brings different, often Indigenous perspectives to the research questions and investigations. And as argued above (Yamada 2007; 2014; Fitzgerald & Hinson 2013; 2016; Stenzel 2014; Grant & Ahlers forthcoming), stronger and more robust scientific findings are produced by projects that have focused on community-oriented goals in the research project.

**(9) Training increases the diversity of linguists and can blur the distinction between linguist and community member.**

Expanded opportunities for training, including training and community research involvement are creating pathways into linguistics. Engaging with one's language seems to be that pathway to increasing Native Americans in linguistics (Fitzgerald 2018b), functioning as what some describe as a high impact practice (Kuh 2008), engaging experiences like undergraduate research, internships, and service-learning, all of which positively influence student success, especially for underrepresented students. For example, curiosity over her language, and the non-Indigenous anthropologists "whose job it was to study and describe the lifeways of the O'odham," Tohono O'odham linguist Ofelia Zepeda moved from reading and writing into doing linguistics on her language (Hill & Zepeda 1998: 130).

There are more and more individuals who have roles both as academics and as community members. The range of identities and roles of individuals involved in language work is more complex today than in the 1970s, reported in those foundational papers in Hale et al. (1992). In an annual report on the 2018 California Breath of Life workshop, Hinton (2018: 14) comments on changes in the discipline in linguistics in many domains,

including a heightened awareness of community goals, increasing power over research by Indigenous communities, and "an increase in the number of indigenous people seeking higher education and becoming linguists themselves." More Indigenous scholars are doing linguistics and language work. The body of work they are producing is exciting, asking different questions, integrating different theories, and bringing different perspectives to their languages. In looking at the literature in other disciplines, this should be unsurprising. Outside of linguistics, there is growing evidence supporting a positive correlation between ethnic, racial and gender diversity of teams with an organization's performance (Hunt et al. 2015). And diverse perspectives have been argued to advance science, as Leshner (2011) claims:

increasing the diversity of the scientific human-resource pool will inevitably enhance the diversity of scientific ideas. By definition, innovation requires the ability to think in new and transformative ways. Many of the best new ideas come from new participants in science and engineering enterprises, from those who have been less influenced by traditional scientific paradigms, thinking, and theories than those who have always been a part of the established scientific community.

A critical mass of diversity can itself end up in a feedback loop, fostering the development of more Indigenous linguists as people see role models and colleagues like themselves.

**5. Final thoughts** It is an uncontroversial point that data from endangered languages has advanced typological and theoretical knowledge in syntax, morphology, phonology semantics and linguistic theories. Importantly, this knowledge production is also occurring in other domains of relevance to linguists. More case studies and analysis of Indigenous language revitalization and training models worldwide will be beneficial, especially if case studies address how these approaches are advancing scientific and other knowledge and testing training models such as the Chickasaw model.

Language documentation is better when it occurs alongside an active training component, and as a result, democratizing training and engaging with communities increases the diversity of linguists. Such important implications are not limited to linguistics; a recent paper in biological anthropology on the ethics of consultation with Indigenous communities over human remains draws on their experiences with training in genomics and supports greater community engagement in order to "produce stronger scientific interpretations and improve relationships between scientists and Indigenous peoples, particularly as the number of Indigenous scientists grows (Bardill et al. 2018: 3)."

Training can effectively be integrated into documentary projects. Additionally, revitalization, in an approach like the Chickasaw Model, serves the community's goals and produces better analysis and documentation of the language. Ultimately, training and engagement with communities results in better science, more diverse scientists, and more empowered communities.



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