

A Master-Apprentice program as a component of language revitalization

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Acknowledgements

- Niwhnī ts'iyenī slegh 'iwhgegh...

How language shift can shift within a community

W	W	W		
	W-e	W-e	W-e	W-e
		W-E	W-E	W-E
			w-E	w-E
				E
1900?				2008

Language revitalization

- = Reversing the shift to another language
- Is it possible to reverse language shift?
 - Yes.
- Is it easy to reverse language shift?
 - No.
- Lessons can be learned from other areas that have undertaken language revitalization programs.

Language revitalization is a world wide concern

- New Zealand: Maaori language
 - language nests
- California: in 2002, still over 50 First Nations languages
 - “not one of them is typically learned by children at home. Most of these languages have fewer than a dozen speakers, all of them elderly.”
 - Master-Apprentice program
 - developed and fine-tuned there
 - documented in Leanne Hinton’s (2002) book *How to Keep Your Language Alive*. Berkeley: Heyday Books.
(<http://www.heydaybooks.com/california-indian/how-to-keep-your-language-aliv.html>)

What is a Master-Apprentice program?

- a type of language learning program for adults
- “one-on-one language immersion”
 - one speaker (“master”) + one learner (“apprentice”) create their own immersion situation
 - learners must be highly motivated and committed to learning the language
 - 10-20 hours per week has best results
 - a long-term partnership
 - an already existing personal relationship may be helpful (e.g. mother+son)

How does a Master-Apprentice program work?

- Less formal approach
 - form a team and just do it
- More formal approach
 - apply for funding
 - each member of the team is (partially) compensated for their time
 - outside assessment of learner's progress
 - but bureaucracy involved, possibly jealousy (< \$)

“Ten points for successful language learning”

1. “Leave English behind”

- “At first there will be difficulties because the apprentice will not be able to understand or communicate.”
- “The apprentice should learn how to ask things in the language,” such as ‘What is this?’ ‘What are you doing?’

2. “Make yourself understood with nonverbal communication”

3. “Teach in full sentences”

--don't just teach/learn “floor”; teach “sweep the floor”, “(don't) sit on the floor”, etc.

4. “Aim for real communication in your language”

--if you know how to say something in Witsuwit'en, don't say it in English

6. “Focus on listening and speaking”

--Get the language into your head, not on paper.

--Get words and phrases into your head by hearing them and saying them over and over, in different situations.

8. “Use audiotaping and videotaping”

--You can listen to the same word 100 times if needed.

9. “Be an active learner”

-- “the master is the expert who knows the language and a vast store of cultural knowledge that goes with it”

but

--“the apprentice...can guide the teaching by asking the master questions about the language, by suggesting activities, by setting up play-acting situations, or by asking the master to tell you things”

10. “Be sensitive to each other’s needs; be patient and proud of each other and yourselves.”

--*teachers* must be patient: learners have to be able to recognize words before they can speak them (“comprehension precedes production”). At first, conversations will be very one-sided.

--*learners* must be patient: the need to communicate is very strong; it will be very hard for the teacher not to lapse into English

7. “Learn and teach the language through activities”

--Traditional activities

-- “Live your daily life together”

-- “Work with objects and pictures”

-- Think of “communicative situations”—how to talk about playing baseball, eating a meal.

“One complaint about many language classes is that people learn numbers, colors, body parts, clothing, and animals over and over. Think instead of situations. For anything you are doing, how would you talk about it?”

5. “Language is also culture”

Try it out

- Form small groups now
 - one teacher (speaker) + one learner (non-speaker)
 - Niwhnī ts'iyenī Witsuwit'en k'yewhlhdic niwhle dik didiwhleh.
 - others should observe silently
- “A sample sequence for beginners”
 - Greetings and beyond
 - what to say after **so'endzin**?
 - Figure out how to ask for things in Witsuwit'en (what is this? how do you say ___?), how to have things repeated
 - Practice simple situations
 - situations on cards if needed
- Remember: **NO ENGLISH**
 - Work with gestures at first
 - Then add spoken language to gestures

Lessons from this activity

- Problems and their solutions
 - From the learner's point of view
 - From the teacher's point of view
 - hard not to laugh
 - hard not to speak English

Now what?

- How much time per week could you devote to this?
 - 10-20 hours is best; 5 hours/week is probably minimum to see results
- Buy and read Leanne Hinton's book.
 - It contains lots of ideas for activities, such as
 - watch TV together with the sound off; narrate in Witsuwit'en
 - It contains solutions to common problems like "I don't have enough time for this."
 - It contains leads to other useful sources of information.
- Get together with other dedicated learners.
 - Teach what you have just learned to each other.
 - Support other people who are trying to learn and document the language.

'Awet zeh. Misiyh.