Documenting for revitalization: Kwadacha Tsek’ene, a case study

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Tsek’ene language

- Tsek’ene > Sekani, Siccany, Sékanais, etc.
- Other dialects
  - Fort Grahame > Ingenika, Tsay Keh [tse k’eh]
  - McLeod Lake
- Closely related to Dane zaa (Beaver), especially Halfway, Moberly Lake
Linguistic origins of Kwadacha

- 4 Tsek’ene groups “in the early days of the nineteenth century” (Morice 1892-1893)
  - Tseloni (Tselone)
  - Sasuchan (Sąstoot’ą)
  - Yutuwichan (Yitsoot’ą)
  - Tsekani (Tsek’ene)

Morice, Adrien-Gabriel. 1892-1893. 'Notes Archaeological, Industrial and Sociological on the Western Dénés With an Ethnographical Sketch of the Same.' Transactions of the Royal Canadian Institute 4:1-222.
History of Kwadacha

- 1924 interviews by anthropologist Diamond Jenness in McLeod Lake and Fort Grahame
- 4 groups “in the early days of the nineteenth century”
  - Tseloni (Tselone)
  - Sasuchan (Sąstoot’ą)
  - Yutuwichan (Yitsoot’ą)
  - Tsekani (Tsek’ene)


Morice, Adrien-Gabriel. 1892-1893. 'Notes Archaeological, Industrial and Sociological on the Western Dénés With an Ethnographical Sketch of the Same.' *Transactions of the Royal Canadian Institute* 4:1-222.
History of Kwadacha, cont.

- Fort Grahame established “about 1890”
- *Otzane* ['Odziinè’]
- Unlike Tsek’ene and most Dane zaa
  - no d t t’ > j ch ch’
  - too vs. choo ‘water’
’Àtse Davie and some relatives

Munro  Harry  Mac  Frank  ’Àtse
Massetoe Davie McCook Abou Davie
son-in-law son-in-law son-in-law to Munro
stepson to Mac
Language documentation

- Dave and Kay Wilkinson, Summer Institute of Linguistics (1965-68?)
  - developed writing system
  - literacy manual
  - translations of Bible stories


Language documentation, cont.

- Sharon Hargus (1985-86, 1999-present)
  - revised writing system slightly
  - topical dictionary
  - texts, mostly from Mike Abou
  - grammar in preparation
  - dictionary in preparation

Mike Abou

a son of Frank and Louise Abou, great-grandson of ’Àtse Davie
Edna McCook

a granddaughter of Mac McCook, and great-granddaughter of ’Àtse Davie
Lena McCook
originally from Tsay Keh
The late Mary Charlie

• Long time language teacher
• Retired 2010

cousin to Eileen and Edna
The late Louie Tomah
originally from Fort Grahame
Current language teaching

- Aatse Davie School, Kwadacha
Current language teachers

- Faye Seymour, originally from Halfway
Current language teachers, cont.

- Angela Hocken

  (testing Rhianna McCook)
Current language teaching situation

• Teachers are learning the language as they teach it
• Using materials developed by
  – previous teachers (mostly)
  – linguist (me) + speakers (some)
Documenting for revitalization

- Revitalization is happening right now
- Documentation needs to be useful to language teachers and learners
  - Pedagogical grammar has immediate value
  - Grammar written solely for other linguists has limited value
- Purely written materials are of limited use
  - Writing system may be hard to learn
  - Writing system may not fully reflect pronunciation
Limits of written materials

• Kwadacha Tsek’ene is a tone language
  – ’iize ‘slush’ vs. ’ììze ‘I hear’
  – ’ehda ‘golden eagle’ vs. ’èhda ‘he/she is hunting while sitting’
  – lhàwìì ‘once’ vs. lhawìì ‘stop it’
Limits of written materials, cont.

• But there is also stress
• Writing system does not show stress. (Dictionary does.)

- didii ‘this’ vs. digii ‘swan’
- dune ‘person’ vs. dude ‘groundhog’
- ’indiinii ‘kinnikinnik’ vs. ’utadii ‘horsefly’
Sample dictionary entries

- ’utadii n (pr ’utadii’) ʘ ma horsefly, warble fly.
- ’indiinii n (pr ’indiｉ’ni) ʘ ma kinnikinnik, bearberry, “chicken berries”. (Arctostaphylos uva-ursi) [PA *dənəx’y “arctostaphylos, bearberry” (KL)]
  ’Indiinii gàh pn. Ingenika R.

- ’ine

ti#h-’ine v. be poor, pitiful, wretched. —Tits’eh’ine.
  Poor us. (lit. “We’re pitiful.”) (impf 1s tes’ine, 2s tinh-, 3s teh-, 1p tits’eh-, 2p tah-, 3p tigheh-) ʘ ma
Recordings

• Recording is important, but recording alone will not revitalize the language.

• Sample video recording of Mike Abou and Louie Tomah (talking about Tsiɡazii)

Beginning of Louie’s story

Gwuda muma kwùne ghidubùt.
there his family they're hungry
‘His family was hungry there.’

Dò’awwòèlèhh.
they were starving
‘They were starving.’

’Ii sò chighdudùlh ’ighdudììchèh.
then they pull out of camp they're trying to subsist
‘Then they pulled out of their camp to try to subsist.’

Muma chets--- chighdugeh.
his mother they're packing him as they pull out
‘They were packing him (Tsìgazii) as they pull out.’
Final thoughts

- Future teachers (if not current ones) will be language learners too.
- Written materials alone are not enough.
- Recordings alone are not enough.
- Cool technology alone is not enough.
- Language documentation should be approached with humility.
Musii chow