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The Development of “New” Languages in Native American Communities

ANNE GOODFELLOW

I've been attending the annual Stabilizing Indigenous Languages Conference (SILC) since 1999, and have presented papers there every year. SILC is a unique conference that brings together educators and researchers of indigenous languages (mostly Native American¹ ones), most of whom work in and for programs at the primary and secondary levels. The conference program focuses on what's being done in various communities to reintroduce, revitalize, or stabilize indigenous languages. A great deal of effort is going into Native American language programming. Dictionaries and grammar books, although still sometimes used, have been replaced in many schools with immersion-type programs and interactive computer software. The sheer volume of available materials and the commitment of those who dedicate themselves to keeping Native American languages alive are impressive. Invariably though, when asked about the level of fluency of students coming out of these programs, presenters claim that the languages are not very strong, that almost everywhere they're "dying out" and being replaced by English. This is disturbing, especially when there is widespread sentiment that one's language is intimately related to one's cultural identity. Why aren't these programs working when so much is at stake and so much tireless devotion is put into the goal of keeping these languages alive?²

Various reasons have been proposed. Most have to do with the experiences of Native American children in government-operated residential and boarding schools, where Native languages were forbidden, and Euro-American society infiltrated almost every aspect of Native American life (through such media as television). In most Native American communities, the ancestral language has not been learned by anyone as a mother tongue for many years, and the responsibility for teaching the language to children has been placed on schools.

So when children are taught their ancestral language at school, they're already speaking another language, usually English. Learning the structures

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of their ancestral language is difficult for them because these structures will be quite different from those of English; however, learning vocabulary is easier for them. In many cases, if they do begin to be able to speak their language, it's in a "pidginized" form that often combines English grammatical and phonological structures with vocabulary from the Native American language. The problem is that since this pidgin language is not considered to be the "real" language, we constantly hear of the failure of Native language programs to produce "fluent" speakers.

Instead of asking why these programs aren't working and striving for what I believe to be unattainable goals, I'd suggest that we look at the issue of language maintenance in a new way. More specifically, we should accept these "pidginized" languages as new forms of Native American languages. If we can begin thinking and talking about Native American languages in a different way than we have for the past few decades, we might be able to incorporate this way of thinking into language programming, and thus be more successful.

To validate this argument, I'll begin with summarizing research that I conducted on the relationship between culture contact and linguistic change among the Kwakwaka'wakw of British Columbia. Kwak'wala, their language, is in a situation similar to many other Native American languages in that it's losing ground to English.³ The mixed language spoken by young people is not considered to be "good" Kwak'wala. I will then provide examples from North America and Russia, where languages that arose out of culture contact *were and in some cases continue to be spoken*. Three of these are considered Native languages in their own right (Chinuk Wawa, Michif, and Copper Island Aleut), while one, Louisiana Creole, is a French creole. If these are considered to be languages, why should other contact languages not be? There is a history of denigrating mixed languages among academics, as well as within Native American communities. If we accept that language change is normal, perhaps our efforts at revitalizing Native American languages, even in their new forms, will become more successful.

Kwak'wala, a language of the northern branch of the Wakashan language family, is spoken in British Columbia on the northern and northeastern parts of Vancouver Island, the adjacent mainland, and the islands in between (fig. 1). In the literature, the language and the culture have both been referred to with some rendering of the term Kwaguilth, or Kwakiutl. However, I prefer the terms the people use themselves, which is Kwak'wala for the language, and Kwakwaka'wakw for the people—literally "Kwak'wala-speaking people."

The history of contact between Kwakwaka'wakw and European colonizers is similar to that of many Native American communities. The first Europeans to encounter Kwakwaka'wakw were the crew of the British explorer James Strange in 1786.⁴ Strange visited only the west coast of Vancouver Island, and it was not until George Vancouver sailed between the mainland and the island in 1792 that Europeans realized it was an island.⁵ After these early explorers came a brief period of sea-based trade in the late eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries, followed by land-based trade with the Hudson's Bay Company (which still has stores in Canada) setting up various trading posts. Although there was no warfare, other than some minor skirmishes, essentially

Figure 1. Map of Kwakwaka'wakw Territory (approximate boundaries)



the British kept moving in gradually, establishing the colonies of Vancouver Island and British Columbia in the mid-1800s. British Columbia finally joined Canada as a province in 1871. This province is an anomaly in Canada in regard to agreements or treaties made between governments and indigenous inhabitants. Although treaties cover most of the rest of Canada, the early colonial government in British Columbia did not feel the need to make agreements with the original occupants; it simply allocated reserves (equivalent to reservations in the United States, although reserves are much smaller).

The educational system and legislation alike kept the cultures and languages of First Nations throughout Canada, including British Columbia, under attack until recently—around the 1970s, when First Nations language and culture programs began appearing to try to undo some of the damage

done through such institutions as residential schools. In the Kwakwaka'wakw area, with the imposition of the English language and British culture in schools, there was an attempt to eradicate the language and culture. This, of course, is not a unique example, as similar scenarios played out in most areas of North America. Today, when knowing the language and practicing the culture provides prestige, Kwakwaka'wakw are actively establishing and maintaining their cultural identity; one way for them to do this is through the use of Kwak'wala.

A problem exists, however, because there was a break in the transmission of Kwak'wala through the generations, largely due to earlier attempts to wipe it out. How can a language be maintained if it's not being passed on to younger generations? Linguistic data (more than 1,200 entries of words and phrases) that I've collected from three generations of ten present-day Kwak'wala speakers in the late 1990s confirm that the language has changed significantly. All of these speakers lived on a First Nations reserve and have used the language since they were young children. Six speakers were over fifty years of age (oldest generation), two were between the ages of twenty-five and fifty (middle generation), and two were under the age of twenty-five (young generation). Among the oldest speakers, some went to residential school, and one completed high school. All the middle and young generation speakers completed high school, and one young speaker has gone on to postsecondary education.

There is a noticeable change in the use of the language between the different generations. I sought to elicit forms from all three generations to see what types of differences exist between them. As a base, I used material written by George Hunt and Franz Boas from the early twentieth century.⁶ Most readers are probably familiar with Boas. George Hunt was a bilingual Kwak'wala/English-speaking mixed heritage (Tlingit/English) man who lived in the northern Vancouver Island area and worked extensively with Boas. He is sometimes referred to as Boas' main "informant," but more recently he's been recognized as having contributed more substantially to Boas' publications on the Kwakwaka'wakw as an anthropologist in his own right.⁷ Today, Hunt is the name of an important family in the Kwakwaka'wakw area.

Kwak'wala is a polysynthetic language that uses extensive suffixing, while English is a more analytic language. Polysynthetic languages express in one term, by adding affixes to a stem, what analytic languages such as English express in a sentence with separate words. I attempted to see what types of constructions I would get from the different generations that would indicate grammatical changes. To ascertain whether there have been phonological changes to the language, I compared the pronunciations of the different generations of speakers.

The chart in figure 2 gives some examples from the data that show grammatical and phonological changes between generations of speakers. Although the grammatical examples show a change from polysynthetic in the two older generations to analytic constructions in the young generation, this is not to say that the younger generation uses no polysynthetic constructions. In all, there were thirty-eight suffixes elicited. The speakers from the oldest generation used all of them (100 percent), thirty-six of the suffixes (95 percent)

Figure 2. Differences in Generations of Kwak’wala Speakers**Examples of Grammatical Differences***suffix* = ʔstu (eye, door, round opening)

“to wipe your eyes”

OLDEST GENERATION

didəʔsto

wipe=eye

MIDDLE GENERATION

didəʔsto

wipe=eye

YOUNG GENERATION

dixidasus gegasus

you wipe - your eyes

suffix =kʷa/=xʷi (hand)

“to wipe your hands”

OLDEST GENERATION

didənkʷa

wipe=hand

MIDDLE GENERATION

didənxʷi

wipe=hand

YOUNG GENERATION

dixidasus asu

you wipe - hands

suffix =əxst(a) (opening; mouth of animal; to eat, meal; to talk about)

“small mouth”

OLDEST GENERATION

tʰogʷəxsta

narrow opening=mouth

MIDDLE GENERATION

amaʔixsta

small=mouth

YOUNG GENERATION

amaʔi səms

small – mouth

suffix =inuxʷ (a person who does an action habitually, professionally; an habitual action)

“good talker”

OLDEST GENERATION

yʰəqəntalenuxʷ

talk=person who often

MIDDLE GENERATION

dutinuxʷ

talk=person who often

YOUNG GENERATION

olakaʔix dutaya

really good – talker

Examples of Phonological Differences*Loss of Glottalized Consonants* (glottalized “p”, “y”, “t”)**OLDEST GENERATION**

pʰəspʰayʰu (ears)

tʰəxəla (door)

MIDDLE GENERATION

pʰəspʰayʰu

tʰəxa

YOUNG GENERATION

pəspəyu

təxa

Loss of Uvulars (back “g”; “q”)**OLDEST GENERATION**

gayagas (eyes)

qasa (to walk)

MIDDLE GENERATION

gəʔegəs

qasa

YOUNG GENERATION

gegasus

kasa

Loss of Velar Fricative (loss of “x”)***OLDEST GENERATION**

həbəxsteʔ (beard)

MIDDLE GENERATION

həbəxsta

YOUNG GENERATION

həbəsta

*Loss of Lateral Affricate***OLDEST GENERATION**

ləxʷid (to stand up)

MIDDLE GENERATION

ləxʷi

YOUNG GENERATION

gləxʷa

* It is interesting that this seems to occur only when the velar fricative is followed by another fricative, here “s”. We see the use of “x” in other examples where it is preceded and followed by vowels.

occur in the data from the middle generation, and only fourteen (37 percent) were used by speakers from the young generation. So, although the young speakers do use some polysynthetic structures, this usage is far less frequent than among the speakers of the two older generations.⁸

In the examples of grammatical change, we see that the Kwak'wala suffixes for "eye," "hand," "mouth," and "person who does an action habitually" (-ʔstu, -kʷa, -əxsta, and -inuxʷ respectively) were used by both the oldest and middle generations, while the young generation used analytic constructions based on English in these cases. In the second example, variant forms of the suffix -kʷa were used by members of the middle and oldest generations for "hand" to translate the English expression "to wipe your hands"; similarly, the two oldest generations used the suffix -əxsta in their Kwak'wala for the English "small mouth." Although in this third example the two stems are different (t'ogʷ- and amaʔ-), both forms have the suffix.

In their analytic constructions members of the young generation use independent words (in these cases nouns) instead of suffixes. Because of this, these types of suffixes are referred to as lexical suffixes, since they contain an idea that can also be expressed using a single lexical item. A lexical suffix is defined as "one which reflects the semantic content of lexical items ... [and] copies a portion of the semantic content of some term in construction with the form to which it is affixed";⁹ and they "are distinguished from other derivational affixes in having specific lexical referents."¹⁰

There are also examples of phonological changes between the generations. One change is in the loss of glottalization, a sound produced by closing the throat. In the word for "ears," the members of the oldest and middle generations provided the form with three glottalized consonants, while the young generation did not glottalize any of these. The initial consonant in the word for "door" is not glottalized by the young generation either. The next examples show the loss of uvulars, sounds produced in the area of the uvula at the top of the throat. In the examples from the oldest and middle generations, the forms for "eyes" have two uvular stops. The forms are different, but again both use uvulars. The speaker from the young generation, on the other hand, uses a velar rather than an uvular stop. The initial uvular in the example for "to walk" has also been changed to a velar stop. The next example shows the loss of velar fricatives, which are sounds produced by allowing a restricted amount of air to pass between the back of the tongue and the velum. In the word for "beard," the oldest and middle generations use a velar fricative, while the younger generation does not. Although the velar fricative occurs in the speech of the young generation (e.g. in "dixidasus"), it was dropped here when followed by another fricative, in this case "s." The final example shows the loss of lateral affricates, which sound very similar to "dl," "tl," and "gl" to anglophones (hence many words such as *Tlingit* are spelled this way in English). The young generation here has replaced this voiced lateral affricate with a voiced velar stop plus a lateral (gl). Glottalized consonants, uvular stops, velar fricatives, and lateral affricates are not English phonemes, while they are in Kwak'wala.¹¹

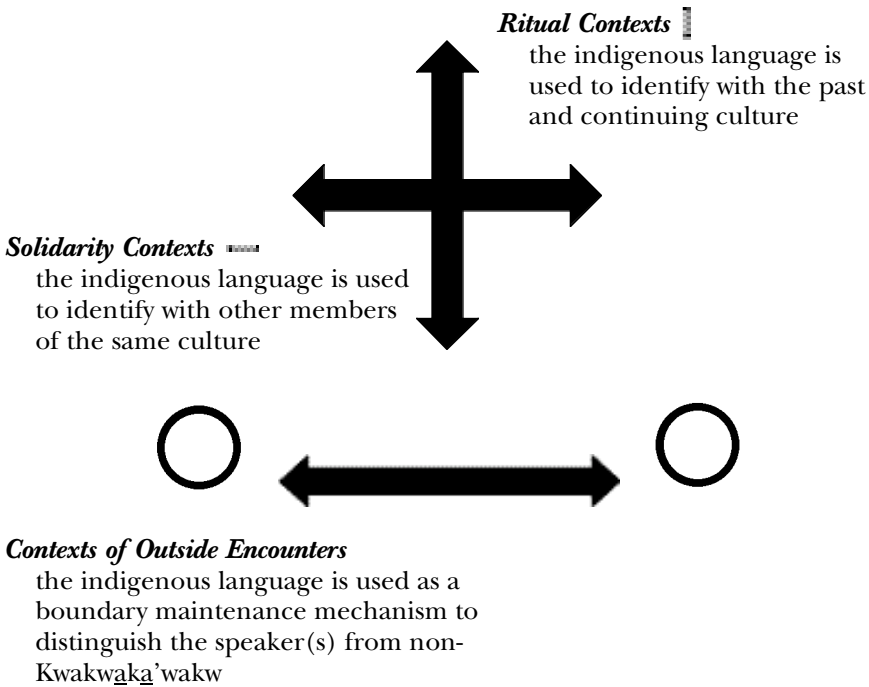
A subset of the lexicon, kin terms, are not changing in form but it appears that they might be starting to be used in different ways. One reason for this might be that living arrangements among the Kwakwaka'wakw have changed from large houses, called bighouses, where several related nuclear families would live, to single nuclear-family dwellings. Today when children begin attending school, they're already using English kin terms, since the first language they learn is English, which has a different way of organizing kin relations than Kwak'wala. In Kwak'wala, a younger same sex sibling (male or female) is *c'ay'ə*, and an older same sex sibling (male or female) *n'ula*. Cross-sex siblings, either younger or older, are referred to as *wəq'wə*. In English, the sex of the individual who has the sibling doesn't matter—both girls and boys have sisters (female siblings) and brothers (male siblings). In Kwak'wala, the age and sex of individuals in relation to their siblings determine what kin term to use. In addition, the Kwak'wala sibling terms also extend to first cousins. How then does one teach English-speaking children that if you're a girl, all your female siblings who are older than you, and older female first cousins (who probably do not live with you), are called by one term—the same term that boys use for their older male siblings and first cousins? This might result in what Paul Friedrich refers to as “cognitive confusion.”¹² So, when children learn Kwak'wala as a second language, it's difficult to teach them to “think about” kin relations in a different way. The indigenous system of designating siblings according to whether they're older or younger and of the same sex as the individual, known and used by the older generations, might be in the process of being replaced by terms that parallel the English system of sister and brother, which neither specify the sex of the individual in relation to siblings nor differentiate between older or younger siblings.

The linguistic data clearly indicate that the language is changing dramatically because of the influence of English, and Kwakwaka'wakw and linguists generally think that it's in the process of dying out. However, Kwakwaka'wakw continue to use Kwak'wala in three contexts to assert their cultural identity as Kwakwaka'wakw¹³ (fig. 3): (1) ritual contexts; (2) solidarity contexts; and (3) contexts of outside encounters

In ritual contexts, Kwakwaka'wakw identify with their past and continuing culture through the use of Kwak'wala. This is illustrated by the vertical arrow, designating diachronic continuity. Ritual contexts include potlatches and other ceremonials that accompany such special events as the construction of a new building or canoe launching, where Kwak'wala is used during the speech-making. If the speaker is fluent, the entire speech will be in Kwak'wala. If the speaker is not fluent, he or she will use some Kwak'wala words and/or phrases during the speech, which will otherwise be in English.

In solidarity contexts, Kwakwaka'wakw are maintaining their cultural ties to other members of their community. These contexts can be as diverse as two fluent speakers conversing in the home to teaching Kwak'wala language lessons at school. The use of Kwak'wala establishes the identity of the interlocutors as members of the same cultural community. This is graphically illustrated here by the horizontal line, indicating synchronic identification with other group members.

Figure 3. Contexts of Speaking Kwak'wala



In contexts of outside encounters, members are trying to highlight differences between themselves and non-Kwakwaka'wakw. In this sense, they're using their language as a boundary maintenance mechanism.¹⁴ This is illustrated in the diagram by the two separate circles. A specific example of this comes from a time I was in Kingcome Inlet, a Kwakwaka'wakw community, when there was a canoe-launch practice a few days before the actual launch. While teenage Kwakwaka'wakw paddlers were being given instruction on proper technique, some non-Native kayakers came up the river, obviously curious about what was going on. As they approached, a Kwakwaka'wakw woman yelled out to them in Kwak'wala. They looked a little bewildered, and everyone on the shore laughed. But I think more than just a funny incident was occurring here. By yelling out to them in Kwak'wala, she was stating that this was Kwakwaka'wakw territory. Further support of this comes from the fact that during the times that I've been in Kwakwaka'wakw territory, I hear Kwak'wala spoken most frequently when there are visitors in the villages. Although I have distinguished these three contexts for illustrative purposes, they might overlap in everyday life.

I believe that, although Kwak'wala appears to be a dying language, it's being maintained as a marker of cultural identity in certain contexts. People who speak their ancestral language, even as a second language, have "a feeling

of pride of knowing their own language, the feeling of security of knowing their heritage and culture, and the confidence of a strong identity."¹⁵ Thus, language not only communicates ideas but also has a symbolic function.

DYING LANGUAGES AND NEW LANGUAGES

Jane Hill¹⁶ notes that the processes involved in dying languages are very similar to those that occur in the development of pidgins and creoles, as William Samarin has described the process of pidginization.¹⁷ Thus, if pidginization is a process that might lead to either a language dying, or to a new language, why can't we think of Native American languages today as types of pidgins or mixed languages? If we look more closely at pidgins, creoles, and mixed languages, we can find many similarities to Kwak'wala as it is spoken today.

The most obvious similarity between so-called dying languages and the development of pidgins, creoles, and mixed languages is that these always occur in the context of language contact, usually between a European colonial language and one or more indigenous languages. All Native American languages have been in contact with a European language (usually English) for at least the past two hundred years. During the past two or three decades, Native American communities have made efforts to revitalize ancestral languages, largely due to the belief that a person's language is intimately linked to one's cultural identity. As we saw earlier in the case of Kwak'wala, a break in transmission occurred between older and younger generations, due in large part to this imposition of European culture and values. Educators and researchers in Native American language maintenance often comment that students are not speaking the "real" or "pure" language.¹⁸ So what are they speaking? The Native American language? English? Or a mixed language? Can a mixed language still be considered a language? Usually, the answer to the last question is no. My question is, why not?

Before arguing that a mixed language is an acceptable form of a language, I will provide examples of pidgins, creoles, and mixed languages to be better able to compare them with current forms of Native American languages. Pidgins are languages that are "primarily used as a means of communication among people who do not share a common language."¹⁹ Pidgin languages are usually not anyone's mother tongue; that is, they're not the first language learned by a child. They develop in an attempt by people speaking two languages to communicate, and involve processes of simplification in phonology and grammar. Pidgins develop in different contexts, such as conducting trade; interethnic contact of a religious, political, or ceremonial nature; or when people speaking different languages live and work together over an extended period of time.²⁰ Many pidgins developed in North, Central, and South America when contact was made between Europeans and Native peoples.²¹ For example, Chinuk Wawa (previously referred to as Chinook Jargon), spoken along the Northwest Coast of North America from present-day southern Oregon to Alaska, is a pidgin that was used primarily for trade, but also for ceremonial and religious purposes. A well-known word in anthropology, "potlatch," comes from Wawa *patač*²² meaning "give-away."

This pidgin is “based lexically upon Chinukan, Nootka, Salish, Kwakiutl, and (later) French and English, with smaller contributions from Hawaiian, Chinese, and other languages.”²³ It’s still spoken by a few people in British Columbia and Oregon, and there are efforts to revitalize it as a community language on the Grande Ronde and Warm Springs reservations in Oregon.²⁴ This example illustrates the use of Lower Chinook, Nootkan, and English elements in a single Wawa phrase:²⁵

ʔixt tənəs san (L.C. = Lower Chinook)

‘one’ ‘child’ ‘sun’

ONE LITTLE DAY

L.C. Nootkan English

“one morning”

Creoles are languages that develop from pidgins which become more widespread and stabilized, and usually become mother tongues or first languages. In comparison to a pidgin, a creole has an expanded vocabulary and an elaborated syntax.²⁶ For example, Louisiana Creole developed among African American slaves of different linguistic origins in eighteenth-century Louisiana, and is based on French, the language of their masters.²⁷ The Africans developed their own style of speaking French, which eventually became a language of its own, with different dialects.²⁸ Here is an example from the Pointe Coupee dialect of this creole:²⁹

mo *pele* *nom-la*³⁰ (“J’ai appelé l’homme” in standard French)

‘Me’ ‘called’ ‘man’

“I called the man”

Here we see the use of *mo* (from “moi”) as a subject, rather than an object as in standard French.

Mixed languages differ from pidgins and creoles. Essentially, a mixed language combines the vocabulary of one language with the grammar of another.³¹ For example, Michif, the language of the Métis people, combines Cree grammar with mostly French vocabulary, although some of the vocabulary is Cree as well.³² This language developed out of the interaction between French Canadian fur traders and Cree people (primarily women) before the 1800s in the area of present-day Winnipeg, Manitoba. It’s currently spoken by about 1,000 people in the Plains area of Canada and the United States, most speakers being over sixty years of age.³³ Its future, like those of many indigenous languages, is threatened.³⁴ Here’s an example of Michif in which different combinations of French and Cree can be used to say the same thing. Cree is written in italics, and French in bold. These examples come from different communities.³⁵

(1)

miša:hta **la** **māzū** (IMP = imperative)

‘big.make’.IMP ‘the’ ‘house’

“Enlarge the house.”

(2)

ply **gru** *ušta* **la** **māzū**

‘more’ ‘big’ ‘make.it’.IMP ‘the’ ‘house’

“Enlarge the house.”

Both Louisiana Creole and Michif are good examples of contact languages that act similarly to other languages as dialects developed over time when speakers became geographically distinct.

Another mixed language is Copper Island Aleut, a combination of Russian and Aleut spoken in the Aleutian Islands. Stems and grammatical markers in this language come from either Russian or Aleut, as in these examples, in which items of Aleut origin are in italics, and those of Russian origin in bold.³⁶

axsa = *y* = **it**

‘die’ = -/- = 3sg

“He/she/it dies.”

Here the stem “*axsa*” (die) is Aleut, while the Russian ending “-it” indicates third person singular. Stems can also be from Russian, as in this example:

stiiklaxx *sixxa* = *xxtaa* = *y* = **it** **davnu**

‘glass break’ = result = -/- = 3sg ‘long ago’

“The glass has been broken for a long time.”

Here the stems “*stiiklaxx*” (glass) and “*davnu*” (long ago) are from Russian, while the stem “*sixxa*” (break) is Aleut. “*Xxtaa*” is an Aleut resultative marker, and the marker for third person singular “-it” is again from Russian. So, we can safely say that Copper Island Aleut is a mixed language.

Now that we’ve seen some examples of this language, let’s discuss how it might have developed. Nikolai Vakhtin has proposed one interesting explanation for the emergence of Copper Island Aleut. In his scenario (which has not been substantiated by historical “fact”), at some point younger generations of Aleuts who spoke Russian as a mother tongue (like young generations of Native Americans who speak English) needed to communicate with older Aleut speakers in their ancestral tongue, to show their identity as Aleuts. So they began mixing the languages by using Russian grammar with Aleut vocabulary that they knew.³⁷ The members of the older generation supported this attempt, and gradually a new mixed language emerged, which eventually came to be used as an everyday means of communication. After several generations of use, the language became the main one of the community. It’s interesting to note that today, Copper Island Aleut “is considered by all its speakers to be a 100 per cent native Aleut language.”³⁸

We need to recognize that there are differences between pidgins, creoles, mixed languages, and the “new languages” that are spoken in Native American communities today. These new languages tend to be quite simple structurally and are usually used only in specific situations.³⁹ However, all of these different types of languages developed out of language and culture contact and show some structural similarities. Christine Jourdan believes that pigeon-holing languages (no pun intended) as either pidgins or creoles on the basis of whether or not they become someone’s mother tongue does not reflect the reality of language use. Pidgins as second languages can become quite widespread and elaborated.⁴⁰ Even though, at this point, many Native American languages are rarely used in any form, there’s no reason why they can’t become community languages through good planning. An excellent example comes from Belfast, Ireland, where eleven families decided that they

wanted their children to learn Irish Gaelic, their ancestral language, as well as English. None of the adults were native speakers of Gaelic. They bought houses in the same community, learned Gaelic themselves, and spoke it to their children in the home. The children learned English from the larger community outside their small “Gaelic-speaking enclave” of eleven families—and in this way they became “true bilinguals.”⁴¹ However, since the parents were speaking Gaelic as a second language, it was probably different from the Gaelic of their ancestors.

Daryl Baldwin, a member of the Miami Tribe of Oklahoma, is attempting something similar with the Native American language Miami. Baldwin, part of a research project to revitalize the language, speaks only Miami with his family. His children are becoming bilingual in Miami and English. Baldwin claims that he and his family sometimes get “strange reactions” when speaking Miami outside the home: “Sometimes I’m in line waiting, speaking to my kids in Miami. . . . People will turn and say, ‘You’re in America. Speak American.’ They don’t have a clue that we really are speaking something that’s more American than English.” He also has come to realize that although he and his children will probably never become “fluent” in the traditional sense of the word, they might “happen to gain a degree of fluency.”⁴² In my opinion, this degree of fluency would represent a new Native American language, since it will be passed on to future generations.

Throughout North America, and elsewhere, indigenous languages seem to be losing ground to European ones, particularly English, Spanish, and French. When the vocabulary and grammar of a European language infiltrate a Native American language the process is often described as “language death,” and there’s a sense of inevitable doom, even before a language ceases to be spoken. It’s true that many indigenous languages are no longer spoken; so we’ve developed Native language programs in an attempt to revitalize languages that are no longer being learned as a mother tongue. In most cases, these programs are failing to produce fluent speakers because the indigenous languages being taught are quite different from the mother tongues of the children in terms of grammar and phonology. The learners might have difficulty because of what’s sometimes referred to as “interference,” defined as “the tendency of second language learners to transfer patterns from their first language to the second language.”⁴³ In the case of Kwak’wala, this interference can be attributed to a prolonged period of exposure to the English language and Euro-Canadian culture, since English has become the mother tongue of Kwakwaka’wakw children. As we saw, when Kwak’wala is learned as a second language (usually in the context of elementary school), it’s influenced by the English grammatical and phonological structures which have already been established in the cognitive schemata of the child’s linguistic repertoire. This is often not recognized, and it’s assumed because of what has been termed the “genetic fallacy”⁴⁴ that Native American children, regardless of their mother tongue, should be able to learn their ancestral language with ease. When this doesn’t happen, the program fails, and often schools and/or teachers are blamed (teachers of Native languages are also expected to be Native Americans themselves—non-Native teachers, even if they’re quite

familiar with the Native language, are usually unacceptable).⁴⁵ And because most Native American language learning today takes place in the schools rather than in the home or community, students are usually exposed to their ancestral language for a limited period in a controlled environment where they seldom use or hear the language used in a conversational style. Classes are often based on learning vocabulary and grammar. These and other factors combine to make most Native language programs unsuccessful in producing students fluent in their ancestral language:⁴⁶ "Most often, people aim too high, too soon, relative to the state the language is in."⁴⁷

In my opinion, the greatest obstacle to keeping Native American languages thriving is a prevalent belief of linguists, language planners, teachers, and the general public that a language must somehow be maintained in its "pure" form, which usually means the oldest form of the language now spoken by elderly people. A language that doesn't fit this ideal is labeled as "grammarless" and "less than fully formed."⁴⁸ People have certain ideologies about the form and use of languages as badges of cultural identity. Because language change that is concomitant with colonialism is seen as just another factor in the oppression of Native American cultures, it's sometimes hard for people to accept these changes. This ideological dimension of language change is understandable in the context of colonialism. Ironically, however, people involved in maintaining indigenous languages often adopt the position held by the oppressors that languages must have a standard, and any variability due to dialectal differences or incursions by other languages is seen as decay.⁴⁹ Fluent speakers often express the opinion that their language has not been learned properly by less-than-fluent speakers.⁵⁰ Some of the latter might even hesitate to claim that they're speakers of a language at all because they've been told that their language capabilities are imperfect.⁵¹ Richard Bauman and Charles Briggs believe that the enforcement of high standards for language use by society's elite speakers is based on the philosophy of John Locke: "In outlining his proposal for perfecting language by standardizing it, Locke suggests that the linguistically enlightened have the right and the duty to regulate the language use of their interlocutors. . . . The linguistically enlightened can also play a special role in policing the language acquisition of children."⁵² Because most students are unable to attain a level of language proficiency deemed acceptable by many fluent speakers, we constantly hear that most Native American language programs are failing to produce students fluent in their ancestral language.

However, if we make an analogy between language and culture (as is often done), we might come up with different conclusions. In anthropology today it's no longer accepted that cultures "die" through colonial contact. This was the subject of acculturation studies of the 1950s and 1960s. We now recognize that, in more than a material sense, cultures adapt to environments and change over time. Native Americans today have different societies from those of the past, but they're still Native American societies. Why can't we look at language in the same way? Native American languages have evolved and adapted to their changing environments as well, but they're still Native American languages, and should be viewed as such.

I believe that the first step in making Native American language programs successful is to accept change as natural. Second, we should view languages that developed out of a culture contact situation as languages in their own right, not as being at a “stage” of dying. They should be promoted in classrooms and communities.

If we go back to our discussion of changes to Kwak’wala, we might view them in a different light. Why can’t we say that some young Kwak’wala speakers are speaking a type of mixed Kwak’wala-English, or a “Pidgin Kwak’wala”? In the examples of grammatical differences, because the younger speaker is using an analogy with English when speaking Kwak’wala she’s mixing the two languages by using Kwak’wala vocabulary with English grammar. In the phonological examples, we see a loss of some of the distinctive features of Kwak’wala, probably because they aren’t distinctive in English. In essence, even though the younger speaker is speaking Kwak’wala with an “English accent,” she’s still understood by other Kwak’wala speakers.

How can we apply this knowledge to the maintenance of indigenous languages? Perhaps we can use the fact that all languages change in contact situations to our advantage. If the process of language change can be arrested somehow so that it does not lead to a complete shift to English, there’s a better chance for the indigenous language to continue, although in a different form, similar to a pidgin or mixed language.

To do this, one thing that must change is attitude. Contact languages throughout the world suffer from a lack of prestige. In efforts to maintain indigenous languages, we would like children to speak the same way that their grandparents do or even the way their great-grandparents did. Is this a realistic goal? Are we setting children, teachers, programs, and language planners up for failure? Current efforts at revitalizing and/or maintaining indigenous languages are all well intentioned; however, rather than saying such things as, “the children aren’t speaking the language properly” because they might use some English vocabulary or grammar, perhaps we should encourage and accept this use as a new and different language. Is it taking it too far to suggest the development of language programs based on a new language, such as Pidgin Kwak’wala? This might be the way to go in the future once the responsibility for maintaining the indigenous languages falls to the generations who speak the language imperfectly, usually those who learn it as a second language.⁵³ For example, the Tsawatainuk, Kwakwaka’wakw of Kingcome Inlet began a Kwak’wala language immersion program in the summer of 2002 for about thirty young people who have some knowledge of the language. The aim of the program is to pair students on a one-to-one basis with elders from the community for several weeks. Kwak’wala is the second language of these young people, and certainly, even after their immersion experience, they’ll be teaching a language quite different from that of their teachers. However, the effort is being made to maintain the language, even in a different form.

A similar program is currently in operation in California. The Master-Apprentice Language Learning Program operated by the Advocates for Indigenous California Language Survival through the University of California, Berkeley pairs fluent speakers with language learners in order to keep Native

Californian languages alive. Leanne Hinton, chair of linguistics at Berkeley and one of the founders of the program, was a keynote speaker at the 2003 Stabilizing Indigenous Languages Conference. She notes that in many Native American communities today, the task of teaching the Native language often falls on "non-fluent speakers" who might also be learning the language while teaching it; she refers to such individuals as "teacher-learners."⁵⁴ Hinton recognizes that in order for many Native languages to survive, schoolteachers can't wait until they're totally fluent before they begin passing on their knowledge to students. She advises the language learner to "teach whatever you learn to someone else! Darrell Kipp, a Blackfeet language educator, admonishes language learners not to wait until they know the language well before trying to teach it; if you learned two words today, he says, knock on your neighbor's door and say, 'Turn off the TV! Get the kids! I have two new words!'"⁵⁵

Even though young Kwak'wala speakers might not be using the language of their elders, they're nonetheless very proud of their ability to speak their ancestral language, as long as they aren't criticized. If this phenomenon could become more widespread, we might see the resurgence of new Native languages all over North America. For this to happen, however, there must be a perceived social status in speaking the Native language, in whatever form, as a marker of cultural identity. I think that in most, if not all regions of North America, it's now prestigious to speak a Native language. We need to extend this prestige to the recognition and acceptance of the new languages by fluent speakers in Native American communities today. If the language continues to be spoken in its present form, it can become a community language, as long as it's accepted as such and people can claim their cultural identity through its use.

CONCLUSION

The time has come to stop talking about language death and start talking about language change. Schools could have two types of classes: those in the "classical language," in which students study the language as it has been written down over the past few hundred years, and classes in the language as it's currently used by most community members.⁵⁶ This might be fun for students as well, and perhaps they'd feel less inhibited about using this new language in the real world. In all Native American communities with language programming, this is exactly what people are trying to do: take the language out of the classroom and into the community. Community activities could focus on the use of the language, in whatever form. Maybe then we'll start hearing more about success in revitalizing Native American languages, and less about failure.

NOTES

1. Throughout this article, I use the term *Native American* to refer collectively to indigenous populations of Canada and the United States. I use *First Nations* when referring specifically to indigenous people of Canada, as it's the term most widely used in this country. The politics of creating ethnic identities through naming is relevant, but will not be discussed here (perhaps in a future paper).

2. Online texts of SILC proceedings, which include information on the implementation, successes, and failures of many indigenous second-language programs from around the world, can be accessed at <http://jan.ucc.nau.edu/~jar/books.html>.

3. This paper uses the spelling conventions for Kwakwaka'wakw and Kwak'wala that are used in the communities. For the linguistic data, I've used an Americanist version of the International Phonetic Alphabet.

4. Helen Codere, "Kwakiutl: Traditional Culture," in *Handbook of North American Indians: Volume 7, Northwest Coast*, ed. Wayne Suttles (Washington: Smithsonian Institution, 1990), 363.

5. George Vancouver, *A Voyage of Discovery to the North Pacific Ocean and Round the World: Volume 1* (London: G. G. and J. Robinson, and J. Edwards, 1798), 343–353. (Reprinted in 1967 by Da Capo Press).

6. Franz Boas, "Kwakiutl: An Illustrative Sketch," in *Handbook of American Indian Languages: Bulletin 40, Part 1* (Washington: Bureau of American Ethnology, 1910).

7. For example, see Regna Darnell, "The Pivotal Role of the Northwest Coast in the History of Americanist Anthropology," *BC Studies* 125 /126 (2000): 44–48.

8. For a complete list of examples from the data, see Anne Goodfellow, *Talking in Context: Language and Identity in Kwakwaka'wakw Society* (Kingston, Ont.: McGill-Queen's University Press, in press).

9. Ross Saunders and Philip W. Davis, "Bella Coola Lexical Suffixes," *Anthropological Linguistics* 17, 4 (1975): 154.

10. M. Dale Kinkade, "The Lexical Domain of Anatomy in Columbian Salish," in *Linguistics and Anthropology: In Honor of C. F. Voegelin*, eds. M. Dale Kinkade, Kenneth L. Hale, and Oswald Werner (Lisse: The Peter De Ridder Press, 1975), 424.

11. For readers unfamiliar with linguistics, phonemes are distinctive sounds that contrast to make different meanings in words. For example, the words "bat" and "pat" mean different things in English because the initial consonant is voiced or unvoiced, respectively.

12. Paul Friedrich, "The Linguistic Reflex of Social Change: From Tsarist to Soviet Russian Kinship," in *Explorations in Sociolinguistics*, ed. Stanley Lieberman (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1967), 48.

13. For a more complete discussion of these contexts, see Goodfellow, *Talking in Context*.

14. See introduction to *Ethnic Groups and Boundaries*, ed. Fredrik Barth (Boston: Little, Brown and Company, 1969); and preface to *Culture, Ethnicity, and Identity: Current Issues in Research*, ed. William C. McCready (New York: Academic Press, 1983).

15. Kaia'titahkeh (Annette Jacobs), "A Chronology of Mohawk Language Instruction at Kahnawà:ke," in *Endangered Languages: Language Loss and Community Response*, eds. Lenore A. Grenoble and Lindsay J. Whaley (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1998), 122.

16. Jane H. Hill, "Language Death, Language Contact, and Language Evolution," in *Approaches to Language: Anthropological Issues*, eds. William C. McCormack and Stephen A. Wurm (Paris: Mouton, 1978), 46.

17. William Samarin, "Salient and Substantive Pidginization," in *Pidginization and Creolization of Languages*, ed. Dell H. Hymes (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1971).

18. For discussions of enforcement of language purity, see Bonnie Urciuoli, *Exposing Prejudice: Puerto Rican Experiences of Language, Race, and Class* (Boulder: Westview Press, 1996); Kathryn A. Woolard, "Introduction: Language Ideology as a Field of Inquiry," in *Language Ideologies: Practice and Theory*, eds. Bambi B. Schieffelin, Kathryn A. Woolard, and Paul V. Kroskrity (New York: Oxford University Press, 1998); Judith T. Irvine and Susan Gal, "Language Ideology and Linguistic Differentiation," in *Regimes of Language: Ideologies, Politics, and Identities*, ed. Paul V. Kroskrity (Santa Fe: School of American Research Press, 2000); Paul V. Kroskrity, "Regimenting Languages: Language Ideological Perspectives," in Kroskrity, *Regimes of Language*.

19. Pieter Muysken and Norval Smith, "The Study of Pidgin and Creole Languages," in *Pidgins and Creoles: An Introduction*, eds. Jacques Arends, Pieter Muysken, and Norval Smith (Amsterdam: John Benjamins Publishing, 1995), 3.

20. Peter Bakker, "Pidgins," in *Pidgins and Creoles*, 27–28.

21. For historical descriptions of pidgin development, particularly on the eastern seaboard of North America, see *The Language Encounter in the Americas, 1492–1800: A Collection of Essays*, eds. Edward G. Gray and Norman Fiering (New York: Berghahn Books, 2000).

22. Laurence C. Thompson and M. Dale Kinkade, "Languages," in *Handbook of North American Indians*, n.p. n.d., 50.

23. Ian Hancock, "The Special Case of Arctic Pidgins," in *Language Contact in the Arctic: Northern Pidgins and Contact Languages*, eds. Ernst Håkon Jahr and Ingvild Broch (Berlin: Mouton de Gruyter, 1996), 15.

24. Tony A. Johnson and Henry B. Zenk, "Chinuk-Wawa: History and Revitalization of a Northwest Native Mixed Language." Paper presented at the *7th Stabilizing Indigenous Languages Conference: Language Across the Community*, Toronto, 11–14 May 2000.

25. *Ibid.*

26. Zdenek Salzmann, *Language, Culture, and Society: An Introduction to Linguistic Anthropology* (Boulder: Westview Press, 1998), 174–175.

27. Until 1763, the Louisiana Territory was controlled by France. See Nancy Bonvillain, *Native Nations: Cultures and Histories of Native North America* (Upper Saddle River, New Jersey: Prentice-Hall, 2001), 137–138.

28. See Thomas A. Klinger, "Louisiana Creole: The Multiple-Geneses Hypothesis Reconsidered," *Journal of Pidgin and Creole Languages* 15, 1 (2000).

29. *Ibid.*

30. Klinger does not discuss the meaning of "la" here, as "nom" is obviously the cognate of the French "homme." In some dialects of Québec French, "lá" (lit. "there" usually pronounced "lo") operates as a type of tag at the end of a phrase or sentence, similar to Canadian English's "eh." Perhaps it has the same function in Louisiana French.

31. Peter Bakker and Pieter Muysken, "Mixed Languages and Language Inter-twining," in *Pidgins and Creoles*, 41.

32. *Ibid.*, 45–46.

33. Norval Smith, "An Annotated List of Creoles, Pidgins, and Mixed Languages," in *Pidgins and Creoles*, 370.

34. Norman Fleury, "History of the Michif Languages from a Michif Person's Perspective." Paper presented at the *7th Stabilizing Indigenous Languages Conference: Language Across the Community*, Toronto, 11–14 May 2000.

35. From Peter Bakker and Robert A. Papen, "Michif: A Mixed Language Based on Cree and French," in *Contact Languages: A Wider Perspective*, ed. Sarah G. Thomason (Amsterdam: John Benjamins Publishing, 1997).

36. All examples are from Nikolai Vakhtin, "Copper Island Aleut: A Case of Language 'Resurrection,'" in *Endangered Languages: Language Loss and Community Response*, eds. Lenore A. Grenoble and Lindsay J. Whaley (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1998).

37. *Ibid.*, 324.

38. *Ibid.*, 327.

39. Victor Golla, personal communication.

40. Christine Jourdan, "Pidgins and Creoles: The Blurring of Categories," in *Annual Review of Anthropology* 20, ed. Bernard J. Siegel (Palo Alto: Annual Reviews Inc., 1991).

41. Kenneth Hale, "On Endangered Languages and the Importance of Linguistic Diversity," in *Endangered Languages*, 214.

42. Bill Sloat, "A New Generation Gives Voice to a Native Tongue," *The Plain Dealer* 06/04/01, [<http://members.tripod.com/TopCat4/news/4jun01.txt>], September 12, 2001.

43. John J. Gumperz and Jenny Cook-Gumperz, "Introduction: Language and the Communication of Social Identity," in *Language and Social Identity*, ed. John J. Gumperz (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1982), 16.

44. Nora Marks Dauenhauer and Richard Dauenhauer, "Technical, Emotional, and Ideological Issues in Reversing Language Shift: Examples from Southeast Alaska," in *Endangered Languages*, 83.

45. See Dauenhauer and Dauenhauer, "Technical, Emotional, and Ideological Issues in Reversing Language Shift: Examples from Southeast Alaska."

46. *Ibid.*, 83–84.

47. *Ibid.*, 97.

48. Woolard, "Introduction," 17.

49. *Ibid.*

50. See for example Susan Garzon, "The Process of Language Death in a Mayan Community in Southern Mexico"; and Clifton Pye, "Language Loss Among the Chilcotin," both in *International Journal of the Sociology of Language* 93 (1992).

51. Seosamh Watson, "Scottish and Irish Gaelic: The Giant's Bed-fellows," in Nancy C. Dorian ed., *Investigating Obsolescence: Studies in Language Contraction and Death* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1989); Paul V. Kroskrity, "Language Contact and Linguistic Diffusion: The Arizona Tewa Speech Community," and Jacob Ornstein-Galicia, *Bilingualism and Language Contact: Spanish, English, and Native American Languages*, eds. Florence Barkin, Elizabeth A. Brandt, and Jacob Ornstein-Galicia (New York: Teachers College, Columbia University, 1982).

52. Richard Bauman and Charles L. Briggs, "Language Philosophy as Language Ideology," in Paul V. Kroskrity, ed., *Regimes of Language*, 157.

53. For a discussion of differences in and problems between generations of Native American language curriculum developers see Timothy Montler, "Language

and Dialect Variation in Straits Salishan," *Anthropological Linguistics* 41, 4 (1999): 489. Also see James Collins, "Our Ideologies and Theirs," in *Language Ideologies: Practice and Theory*, where he "was warned to work with 'real speakers'" when working on the Tolowa language of northern California (264).

54. Leanne Hinton, "How to Teach when the Teacher Isn't Fluent," in *Nurturing Native Languages*, eds. Jon Reyhner, Octaviana Trujillo, Roberto Carrasco, and Louise Lockard (Flagstaff: Northern Arizona University Press, in press).

55. Leanne Hinton with Matt Vera and Nancy Steele, *How to Keep Your Language Alive: A Commonsense Approach to One-on-One Language Learning* (Berkeley: Heyday Books, 2002), xvii.

56. This idea was proposed to me at a SILC by Billy Allen, who teaches Tohono O'odham at Casa Grande Union High School in Arizona.