Indigenous Language Revitalization Through Observing and Pitching In to Family and Community Endeavors

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Abstract
This poster presents a grounded approach to Indigenous language revitalization that involves Learning by Observing and Pitching In (LOPI) to family and community endeavors (Alcalá et al., 2014; Copps et al., 2014; Correa-Chávez et al., 2015; López et al., 2012; Paradise and Rogoff, 2003, 2009; Paradise et al., 2014; Rogoff, et al., 2001, 2014, 2015; Urrieta, 2015; Rogoff, 2014). LOPI is:

- a way of organizing learning opportunities in which children are broadly integrated in the activities of their families and communities and learn by attentively contributing to the endeavors around them, in a multifaceted process. (Rogoff, 2014, p. 69).

The approach to Indigenous language revitalization presented here is a way of expanding Indigenous language instruction beyond formal educational institutions. It is intended for Indigenous communities whose heritage language is endangered but still spoken by some members, and where LOPI is part of the heritage culture, such as the Cherokee, Cree, Crow, Lakota, and Navajo. It honors these communities’ desire to stop or prevent Indigenous languages from existing only as institutionalized and “curricularized” school “subjects” taught using Assembly-Line Instruction. It provides a conceptual framework for designing local plans and programs for restoring intergenerational Indigenous language use in informal daily interaction. The approach calls for programs that include more communication-based language acquisition through Observing and Pitching In to Family and Community Endeavors. This LOPI-based approach also raises implications for educational policy.

Language Revitalization Challenges
- Often, Indigenous language instruction in formal educational institutions is based on Western pedagogy, involving direct Assembly-Line Instruction of grammar, vocabulary, decontextualized communication, and formal assessment measures, which does not lead to much communicative competence (but does enhance ethnic identity and pride!)
- Children and youth are often unmotivated to learn language the “White” way in school through extrinsic rewards and avoiding threats
- Where school- and nursery-based immersion programs exist, children and youth do not usually extend their use of the Indigenous language to family and community domains
- Most people in the parenting generation do not have communicative competence in the Indigenous language (it is concentrated among the elderly), so they are unable to engage children and youth in the Indigenous language
- Home- and community-based language instruction often involves “unnatural” language lessons requiring deep commitment by participants who must devote enormous amount of “spare time” to develop fluency

Essential Questions
1. How can Indigenous language learning in formal educational institutions be expanded to include informal, out-of-school Indigenous language use and acquisition?
2. What does reattaching Indigenous language use to family and community endeavors imply for language planning and educational policy and practice?

A LOPI-based Approach to Indigenous Language Revitalization
Existing practice of LOPI in Indigenous communities may be used as social and cultural scaffolding to which communication in Indigenous languages can be intentionally reattached

- Facet 1 - Immersion in Indigenous language is integral to family and community endeavors, does not require “spare time” for language lessons
- Facet 2 - Motivation to communicate in the Indigenous language is located in accomplishing endeavors and desire to belong and contribute to the group
- Facet 3 - Indigenous language acquisition is embedded in social arrangements that are collaborative, flexible ensembles, allowing for the organic emergence of communication
- Facet 4 - Becoming a fluent Indigenous language speaker is yoked to the goal of contributing to and belonging in the community
- Facet 5 - Means of acquiring the Indigenous language involves wide, keen attention and contribution to endeavors
- Facet 6 - Communication carried out naturally and based on “coordination through shared reference,” using verbal and nonverbal conversation
- Facet 7 - Assessment is to aid learners’ contributions during endeavor, not judge communicative competence directly

Language Planning Implications
- Identify family and community endeavors for potential deliberate immersion, considering need for participation of fluent speakers, “language givers” (may be available in only some families)
- Identify language givers willing to be “language surrogates” during community endeavors for families in which Indigenous language is not spoken by anyone, but who desire to develop Indigenous language competence
- Organize deliberate immersion in selected family and community endeavors

Education Policy Implications
- Shift focus from Assembly-Line Instruction of Indigenous languages to communication-based language acquisition embedded in collaborative endeavors
- Immersion programs in schools and nurseries must expand from classroom only to community-based endeavors involving student interaction with fluent speakers unaffiliated with school (e.g., elders at senior citizens’ centers)
- Need to align in-school endeavors requiring Indigenous language communication with family and community involving immersion in Indigenous language