

Refusing “Endangered Languages” Narratives

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Indigenous language endangerment is a global crisis, and in response, a normative “endangered languages” narrative about the crisis has developed. Though seemingly beneficent and accurate in many of its points, this narrative can also cause harm to language communities by furthering colonial logics that repurpose Indigenous languages as objects for wider society’s consumption, while deemphasizing or even outright omitting the extreme injustices that beget language endangerment. The objective of this essay is to promote social justice praxis first by detailing how language shift results from major injustices, and then by offering possible interventions that are accountable to the communities whose languages are endangered. Drawing from my experiences as a member of a Native American community whose language was wrongly labeled “extinct” within this narrative, I begin with an overview of how language endangerment is described to general audiences in the United States and critique the way it is framed and shared. From there, I shift to an alternative that draws from Indigenous ways of knowing to promote social justice through language reclamation.

The United Nations Educational, Scientific, and Cultural Organization (UNESCO) declared 2022–2032 as the International Decade of Indigenous Languages (IDIL), noting that “[o]ptimistic estimates suggest that at least 50 percent of today’s spoken languages will be extinct or seriously endangered by 2100. More pessimistic, but also realistic estimates claim that 90–95 percent will become extinct or seriously endangered. . . . Most of these languages are Indigenous languages.”¹ In this summary, UNESCO correctly identifies a major crisis: the world’s language diversity has drastically diminished in the last several decades, many languages are not being transmitted to new generations, and the majority of these languages are Indigenous.² This phenomenon, referred to technically in language sciences as *community language shift* or just *language shift* but more commonly framed with metaphors for the endangerment of biological species, is particularly serious in North America, the focus of this essay.

Native American and other Indigenous language shift has increasingly become a focus of scientific and social concern, and the collective response has had many effects, several of which are positive. These include increased awareness, research,

community language programs, and new networks of scholar-practitioners and activists. Language policy has shifted accordingly, both at the level of individual Indigenous communities and by non-Indigenous governments and organizations, with many calls to support language maintenance and revitalization. The IDIL, for example, “aims at ensuring [I]ndigenous peoples’ right to preserve, revitalize and promote their languages, and mainstreaming linguistic diversity and multilingualism aspects into the sustainable development efforts.”³ Organizations geared toward this work, along with several language documentation initiatives, have been created. Even the U.S. government, long an agent of violence toward Native American nations and languages, passed in 1990 the Native American Languages Act, which established as policy that the United States will “preserve, protect, and promote the rights and freedom of Native Americans to use, practice, and develop Native American languages.”⁴ Most important, many Native American communities are working hard for language maintenance and recovery.

I come from a Native American nation that is engaged in such work. I am a citizen of the Miami Tribe of Oklahoma, and our language, *myaamiaataweenki*, fell into almost complete dormancy during the 1960s, having been replaced by English until community efforts began in the 1990s to bring our language back by learning it from historical documentation. I am proud to report that *myaamiaataweenki* is used by many Miami people today. In this essay, I draw from my experiences in Miami language work, as well as my training and research as a linguist who specializes in *language reclamation*, a decolonial approach to language revitalization that centers community needs and goals and focuses on addressing the underlying causes of language shift.⁵ The way language reclamation brought my community together corroborates, alongside similar examples from other communities, the assertion in the aforementioned Native American Languages Act that “the traditional languages of Native Americans are an integral part of their cultures and identities and form the basic medium for the transmission, and thus survival, of Native American cultures, literatures, histories, religions, political institutions, and values.”

What happened among Miami people – a story of extreme language shift but also, and crucially, of language recovery – is shared by other Native American communities. Indeed, as summarized by Indigenous education scholars Onowa McIvor (*maskiko-nehinaw*) and Teresa L. McCarty, “the sociolinguistic landscape in Native North America is defined by the dual realities of language loss and reclamation.”⁶ However, accounts of reclamation are not widely reflected in academic and popular descriptions of language shift, which instead emphasize only the loss. I collectively refer to these as *dominant endangered languages narratives*, the core parts of which I refer to in the singular as *the narrative*. As I detail below by drawing upon tools and principles from Linguistics and Native American Studies,⁷ the narrative contains several truths and is framed as beneficent, but draws attention away from the injustices that underlie language endangerment.

Linguistics, the discipline described as “the scientific study of language” though better characterized as a set of particular approaches to studying language, is predicated on the inherent value of language. Linguists recognize that all humans use language, and that languages meet the communicative needs of their users and evolve as needed. For this reason, claims about intrinsic deficiencies in a given language variety – for example, that it “doesn’t have grammar” or “is primitive” – are linguistically baseless. Instead, they are manifestations of a sociopolitical principle exemplified throughout this volume: that beliefs about people get transferred to the language(s) with which those people are associated. Beliefs about a given language variety’s alleged superiority or inferiority relative to others, along with other language myths, strongly affect language practices and policies. In contexts where Indigenous peoples are rendered as “savage” or even less than human, related ideologies about Indigenous languages follow.

Related to the point above is the notion that accounts of languages and language use are contextually embedded in historical and contemporary social relations and power structures. As a corollary, public narratives about oppressed language communities are likely to 1) privilege the needs, wants, and perspectives of dominant groups and 2) discount the roles of dominant groups and institutions in this oppression. Following this logic, dominant narratives warrant careful scrutiny, both in terms of their content and who is relating them for whom. Even “descriptions” can become speech acts – statements that perform an action – especially when they come from people with power. As discussed throughout this essay, it is common for non-Indigenous agents who have considerable power due to their social positions to describe Native American languages in ways that are not accountable to Native American communities.

Conversely, the field of Native American Studies frames issues, linguistic and otherwise, through Native American experiences and points of view, and strongly emphasizes accountability to Native American nations. Though a principle of Native American Studies is that respect for tribal sovereignty entails identifying differences among tribal nations, the field also recognizes common experiences across multiple nations, especially those with shared relationships to a particular colonial government. For this reason, alongside attention to particular tribal histories and circumstances, it is common for structures of oppression, and strategies to end them, to be theorized in general ways as I do in this essay. Native American Studies responds to a variety of oppressions such as racism and sexism, recognizing the need for an intersectional analytic as elaborated by Aris Moreno Clemons and Jessica A. Grieser in this volume, but stresses the major role of colonization in contemporary Native American experiences.⁸ To this end, Tribal Critical Race Theory, a framework that draws upon general principles of Critical Race Theory but adds and highlights the political status (nationhood) and experiences of Native Americans, asserts as a foundational principle that colonization is endemic in

wider society.⁹ Particularly important for this essay is *settler colonialism*, the project and supporting logics whereby governments such as those of the United States and Canada try to replace Indigenous peoples – and by extension our languages, lifeways, intellectual traditions, and futures – through resettling Indigenous lands with new polities and linguistic landscapes.

Given the violence of settler colonialism, scholarship in Native American Studies frequently references oppression and trauma. As these accounts are crucial for understanding realities such as the current status of Native American languages, I include them. At the same time, I share Unanga scholar Eve Tuck’s observation that “damage-centered” accounts can promote problematic views of contemporary Indigenous peoples and mask our resilience and successes.¹⁰ My response is to refuse the assumptions of inferiority that often accompany such accounts and instead to promote reclamation, with emphasis on how Indigenous cultural and intellectual traditions provide tools to support this work. For example, the focus on relationships that is core to Miami and other Native American communities’ ways of knowing is hugely important for language reclamation. A relational approach to understanding the world illuminates how language shift occurs when something ruptures the relationships people have to languages; language recovery thus requires rebuilding these relationships.

Though linguists certainly consider relationships such as how multiple languages may derive from a common source, it is not a disciplinary norm of Linguistics to follow the relational model described above. Instead, aligning with dominant academic practices of conceptualizing knowledge as universal and disembodied, it is common for linguists to focus on discrete elements, such as sounds, words, and clauses. Moreover, it is common practice for researchers to present linguistic analyses without mentioning their relationships to the communities whose languages are under discussion or engaging the question of who is licensed to make or share a given analysis. According to this logic, the quality of research conclusions lies in their reasoning, evidence, and impact. In Native American Studies, conversely, these metrics apply, but there is also emphasis on how knowledge is produced in particular places and contexts, with significant attention paid not only to what knowledge should be produced but also if, how, and by whom it should be shared.

As a Miami person whose lived experiences with language shift and recovery primarily involve my own and other North American Indigenous communities, and whose professional training occurred at U.S. institutions, my analysis draws on global trends but focuses on North American (particularly U.S.) dynamics. For this reason, the points I offer in this essay should not be taken as universal, though I draw attention to two themes that I believe are true for most Indigenous communities. First, members of Indigenous communities (as with minoritized communities in general) share the experience of being the characters, rather than the

narrators, of stories and theories about language shift. Second, although many language scholars and activists center social justice when responding to language endangerment, this is not true for dominant endangered languages narratives. While the sharing of these narratives has supported some important interventions in research, education, and policy, their framing can harm Indigenous communities and the language reclamation work we do.

Widely referenced by linguists as a call to action is the 1992 “Endangered Languages” collection of papers published in *Language*, a flagship journal in Linguistics. This series includes linguist Michael Krauss’s essay “The World’s Languages in Crisis,” which claims that “[I]anguages no longer being learned as mother-tongue by children are beyond mere endangerment, for, unless the course is somehow dramatically reversed, they are already doomed to extinction, like species lacking reproductive capacity.”¹¹ While such a break in intergenerational transmission actually applies to an array of languages and dialects, several of which are not Indigenous, Indigenous languages have become the prototype in discussions of language shift. This theme of doom and gloom, with Indigenous language “extinction” as the presumed endpoint, anchors many popular as well as scientific discussions of language endangerment, and is central to dominant endangered languages narratives.

For instance, the teleological trajectory toward complete nonuse of a given language, described in the narrative as “extinction,” is almost always anchored in predictions with specific numbers. In general, this is operationalized through a statement that some percentage of the world’s roughly seven thousand languages will disappear within a specified time frame, often one hundred years, as with the IDIL statement quoted earlier. Sometimes the narrative mentions that “languages have always died,” but with an accompanying explanation that this phenomenon has greatly accelerated in recent times. Especially frequent in reference to current trends is the specific claim that “a language dies every two weeks.” Though empirical research reported on in the *Catalogue of Endangered Languages* finds instead that this rate is actually about every twelve weeks, the crux of the idea holds.¹²

Even though the narrative often ignores major types of linguistic diversity – for example, the glaring omission of endangered sign languages – it normally includes a statement about the value of linguistic diversity, or of human diversity more broadly. If framed within human rights, the narrative could offer compelling support for social justice. However, the narrative instead too easily evokes neoliberal discourses of diversity, in which examples that are lesser known by dominant groups – the assumed baseline – are rendered “diverse” and become repurposed as resources. This is exemplified by the narrative’s lamentation of cultural and scientific losses when languages “disappear,” emphasizing how “we” (who is the pronoun referring to?) are losing this knowledge or “our” heritage.

Particularly when shared with academic audiences, these claims of imminent loss frequently reference how language diversity is crucial to science. For instance, a major research framework in Linguistics aims to uncover universals of human languages, a task that requires data from many languages, including, of course, those that are endangered. Especially when related by linguists, the narrative may include details about how concepts are encoded in grammar, or how ecological knowledge may be gleaned from words. Longer versions might include examples of concepts known only because “we discovered them before it was too late.”

Although the basic idea is true – that different groups, and by extension different languages, encode different types of information and showcase human linguistic potential in different ways – the problems in this section of the narrative are numerous. As elaborated throughout this essay, the framing of Indigenous languages as resources to extract, whose value lies in what they can provide for “us” (non-Indigenous publics), and whose embedded information becomes true “knowledge” only after it has been described and curated within scientific circles, is Colonialism 101.

Most important, and also a reflection of colonialism, is that the narrative de-emphasizes why language endangerment is occurring on the unprecedented scale that it is. Indeed, a common statement is that Native American languages are “quickly disappearing,” and that “a language dies when people stop speaking it.” Such tautologies are not helpful. Borrowing conceptually from Newton’s principle that objects in motion stay in motion unless an external force acts upon them, Chikasaw linguist Jenny L. Davis observes that intergenerational transmission of languages continues over time unless an external force disrupts this process.¹³ By extension, the external forces should be the focus, yet the dominant narrative largely does not reflect this.

The narrative often does provide some explanation for current trends in language “loss” by referencing broad factors such as globalization, education, or language shame. Some narrators identify unequal power relations explicitly. However, the narrative rarely engages the deeper forces that facilitate these unequal power relations and related inequities. Missing, for instance, is critical engagement with how globalization is not merely a story of the world’s populations getting closer due to travel and technologies, but crucially also a story of colonialism and imperialism. Missing are critical examinations of how policies, such as what languages are used and taught in schools, are indexed to nation-building and nation-eradicating practices that are themselves linked to colonialism and imperialism. Language attitudes, particularly shame toward one’s language(s) of heritage, can have large effects and are worth studying. The problem occurs when the narrative presents language shame as the source of language shift, rather than an outcome of oppression.

Sometimes the narrative includes explanations that superficially may come across as reasonable or self-evident. Referencing “economic pressures,” for ex-

ample, some versions explain that members of minoritized language communities adopt languages of wider use to get jobs. However, beyond failing to query the economic injustices that often characterize these situations, the narrative frequently omits key linguistic principles that bring such explanations into question. Multilingualism is the historical and contemporary norm in most parts of the world, and people can and do learn additional languages while maintaining those they already have. Nevertheless, the narrative naturalizes Native American communities' wholesale *replacement* of their original languages. Along with "wouldn't it be better if we all spoke one language?"-type arguments that dismiss the harms of language shift, the narrative misses how language maintenance and reclamation occur in contexts of multilingualism, which has long been the norm across Native North America.¹⁴

And sometimes the implied reason for communities such as my own shifting entirely to English is that it just happened. *Native American language loss is a natural result of progress – unfortunate, yet inevitable, and in Native Americans' best interest, helping them to be part of modern American society.* This colonial rationale evokes logics of Social Darwinism that have long been debunked in anthropological sciences but remain robust in wider society, as a quick perusal of reader comments for popular articles about "dying" languages shows.

The truth is that contemporary Native American language shift is primarily an outcome of oppression, a point that many members of Native American communities can explain easily because we experience the effects of settler colonialism, racism, and other *-isms* daily. Major examples include land dispossession through forced relocations and environmental degradation, policies aimed toward language eradication, violent disruptions to cultural practices (with some even made illegal), and assimilatory education through missions and boarding schools. Added to these are wider issues that adversely affect language maintenance in general, such as the hegemony of English and other pressures discussed by other authors in this volume.

In critical scholarship, language endangerment is theorized and responded to in complex ways, engaging issues such as those summarized above. Recent Native American language shift reflects what critical language scholars such as Tove Skutnabb-Kangas refer to as *linguicide*, which is anchored in *linguicism*: "ideologies, structures and practices which are used to legitimate, effectuate, regulate, and reproduce an unequal division of power and resources (both material and immaterial) between groups which are defined on the basis of language."¹⁵ But linguicism is not the frame that the narrative espouses. Instead, it focuses on the "disappearance" of Native American languages, with little attention to the oppressions that created and reinforce this outcome.

In response, I next explore these stories of oppression and linguicide – those that are *not* prominent in the narrative but that regularly come up in my discus-

sions with other Native Americans. These are the stories that must be shared, honestly acknowledged, and responded to. Again, owing to my experiences and relations as a Miami person, I draw heavily on examples from my own community.

I begin with literal displacement via land theft. Despite a series of treaties by Miami leaders with the U.S. government stating that the original Miami homelands in Indiana and surrounding areas would remain Miami forever, our community was split in 1846 when many families – including my direct ancestors – were forcibly removed from these lands to a reservation in Kansas by U.S. agents. Traditional Miami cultural practices, which reflect relationships to particular homelands, were, of course, disrupted. And then in a second removal in the late 1860s, several Miamis, though not all – again, splitting the community beyond what had already occurred in 1846 – were sent to Indian Territory (present-day Oklahoma), further disrupting community lifeways. This second removal was followed by individual land allotments through legislation similar to the broader U.S. policy (Dawes Act) to socialize Native Americans into Euro-Western relationships with land as individual property and capital.¹⁶ As with this allotment policy, which applied to members of many Native American nations, the Miami removals themselves also reflected a broader policy: the U.S. government’s Indian Removal Act of 1830.¹⁷ For this reason, though the details vary, the examples from my community parallel those of many Native American nations, particularly those whose homelands are in what is now the eastern part of the United States.

Shortly after the bulk of removals and displacements, the U.S. government adopted a policy of assimilatory education of tribal youth via federally operated Indian boarding schools, which several of my Miami ancestors attended. When these institutions are (sometimes) mentioned in the dominant narrative, the illustrative detail is that they forbade the use of Indian languages and physically punished children who broke this rule. This is true and clearly important, but there is much more to consider. The fundamental assumption underlying these institutions was that Indian cultures and knowledge systems were “savage” and needed to be eradicated. In addition to their practices of blatant cultural genocide along with additional abuses, these schools ruptured tribal relationships; children were literally removed from their homes and kinship networks.

Although there are many stories of resistance, Indian boarding schools’ objectives were largely realized. Not only did the use and transmission of many children’s tribal languages end, these children were also inculcated with ideologies to justify this linguicide. I have long been haunted by an interview with a Miami Elder who had gone to boarding school in the early 1900s and stated that “it done the Indian children just a lot of good.” She explained that visitors came from the eastern part of the United States to make sure the children were speaking English, and that she worked in the sewing room at the school five days a week but

on weekends went to church and Sunday school. She emphasized how on Sundays, they didn't get supper but instead got a piece of apple pie and gingerbread, and that she would never forget that apple pie!¹⁸ But she did forget – perhaps was forced to “forget” – our tribal language.

Other boarding school survivors share their experiences of language oppression more directly, as with the following story from a Warm Springs Elder:

Before I went to the boarding school, I was speaking [a Native American language], and all my sisters and brothers were speaking it. That's all we spoke, and then we got into boarding school and we were not allowed to speak. And I grew up believing that it was something very bad, because we got punished, or switched, and so they just kind of beat it out of me.... That boarding school did bad stuff to us, and they took the most important thing, which was our language.¹⁹

As Diné scholar James McKenzie explains in an essay directed to applied linguists, trauma experienced directly by boarding school survivors, which in many cases extends far beyond language oppression to include physical and sexual violence, does not end with the survivors themselves.²⁰ Instead, the trauma can be passed on to subsequent generations, continuing to harm individual and community well-being until something intervenes. Language reclamation can address this trauma by helping people to (re)establish healthy relationships with their languages and what those languages represent in their respective community contexts and cosmologies.

Around the same time as the development and spread of Indian boarding schools in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries, the U.S. government increasingly adopted policies and promoted nationalist narratives that furthered an ideal of English monolingualism. Even though the earlier historical record of settler life in the United States documents a landscape of many languages and more acceptance of language diversity, the notion that English was *the* language of the United States became increasingly promoted as an imagined original American trait.²¹ This belief, which remains strong today, impedes the maintenance of Native American (and other) languages.

Linguistic justice calls for sharing stories such as those above, which though highly abridged can at least point to recurring themes of oppression, thereby facilitating the detailed discussions that need to occur. But sharing stories of colonial violence or the hegemony of English disrupts contemporary power structures, so stories such as those of boarding school survivors tend to be pushed to the margins. Whether by misattributing fault onto language communities or by just ignoring the agents of language oppression entirely, the narrative often works against justice by engaging a strategy that Davis calls *erasure of colonial agency*. Complementing this is a strategy of removing languages from their relational contexts. Davis describes the latter as *linguistic extraction*, the process of documenting, describing,

preserving, or otherwise engaging with languages separately from the social and political contexts of their historical and contemporary use and users.²²

Both strategies occur in dominant endangered languages narratives, which adopt and naturalize “endangered languages” as the unit of focus as opposed to the broader process of endangerment. This frame of “endangered languages” reinforces a theory of languages as objects: named, bounded sets of grammatical patterns and vocabulary that can be counted, analyzed, or lost. Indeed, research by language scientists, which as shown throughout the essays in this volume has great potential to promote social justice, can also foster harm by rendering languages into disembodied data or objects whose primary value lies in what they contribute to science. I emphasize that it is common in Native American communities for languages and peoplehood to be heavily intertwined.²³ In such contexts, objectifying the language by emphasizing, for example, what its grammar reveals for science easily objectifies the people who claim the language.

Unfortunately, as extractive models of Indigenous language research remain sanctioned in normative research practices, associated framing is common in the dominant narrative. For instance, it regularly includes queries about how Native American languages contribute to “our knowledge,” where “our” is contextually referring to members of dominant groups, such as language scientists. Asking “What do we lose when a language dies?” has a similar overtone, especially when relayed in a context with few or no Indigenous people. This noted, it is not my opinion that wider society cannot or should not appreciate and learn from Indigenous languages. The problem is rather that these queries too often lack important counterparts, such as “What does colonialism have to do with it?”

It is common in Linguistics to categorize and theorize “endangered languages” through biological metaphors such as *living* and *dying*. This practice, which also occurs in Indigenous communities, is not surprising, given that using language is so intertwined with human life experience. Moreover, language endangerment, like biological species endangerment, occurs when environments have been seriously disrupted. If employed to express these links, the use of biological metaphors could facilitate social justice by calling attention to the issues that must be addressed to reverse language shift. In general, however, use of biological metaphors warrants great caution. In the narrative, Native American language shift is normally framed unidirectionally (only away from the original languages) using categories that represent increasingly severe stages of endangerment and end at *extinction*. This is highly problematic.²⁴

Actual extinction of a biological species is normally understood as a lost cause, an irreversible eventuality. By extension, if a language is “extinct,” interventions that could promote its future use, such as funding language programs, are illogical, hopeless, and unlikely to be supported. But here the species extinction meta-

phor fails. Using language is an action, not an object. A community may stop using its original language, but they can also start using it again so long as there are records of the language to learn from and people who are able and empowered to do this work.

In masking these and related possibilities, extinction narratives are a form of oppression. They are also entrenched. I have on many occasions related the story of how my tribal language had been declared “extinct” by linguists before the Miami people reclaimed it as a language of everyday use. Although Miami people assert our linguistic sovereignty by explaining that our language was just “sleeping” for about thirty years, some scholars continue to describe myaamiaataweenki as “extinct.” This is just one of the many contradictions supported by the dominant endangered languages narrative, whose strength in guiding theory likely at least partly explains why public sources such as Wikipedia have continued to describe my community’s language as “extinct,” despite ample evidence otherwise.²⁵

Even more serious than masking possibilities for language reclamation, the logic of language extinction intersects with the dominant narrative’s focus on “endangered languages” in a way that goes beyond erasing the underlying oppressions of language endangerment to also erase their continued presence. That language shift is “complete” does not mean these oppressions have even been identified, let alone corrected. The intergenerational trauma from boarding school experiences, for example, does not stop when a community’s language has gone out of use. Rather, it stops when communities can engage in and are supported in healing, and in rebuilding the relationships that boarding schools violently severed. Similarly, ruptures between communities and their lands do not stop when language shift is complete. Rather, they stop through interventions that restore those relationships, a process that requires decolonization and supporting activism such as the LandBack movement.²⁶

The dominant endangered languages narrative fails to support language recovery because it puts the focus on results of oppressions, rather than on identifying and dismantling the oppressions. But it does not have to be this way. I conclude with possible changes and actions.

First, rather than lamenting how languages “disappear” or “vanish,” I propose highlighting the agents of language shift through queries such as, “Who or what is oppressing these language communities?” From this vantage, the central question is no longer about what an undefined “we” lose when languages go out of use, but instead about changing social dynamics, a process that requires identifying structures of oppression and stopping them. This is a social justice approach, situated in an honest account of the historical and contemporary factors that underlie language shift in places like North America. Anthropologist Gerald Roche gets to the heart of what a social justice-oriented narrative could emphasize:

Speakers and signers of Indigenous and minoritized languages have repeatedly explained that their languages are endangered due to failures of social justice – the oppression, marginalization, stigmatization, exclusion, deprivation, and so on – that take place in the context of imperial, colonial, and nationalist domination.²⁷

Beyond working to reverse the injustices created by this domination, the second key to an alternative narrative is a focus on reclamation, and what non-Indigenous agents and institutions can do to support it. Shifting the unit of analysis away from “endangered languages,” which focuses on languages rather than the peoples who claim them, is crucial to this narrative. “Language endangerment” is an improvement, as it references a process rather than objects, but better yet would be to position community language ecologies as the anchor for the story. Language ecologies are the ways in which languages exist in their environments, and an ecological approach thus inherently emphasizes place (which is especially fundamental to Indigenous communities) along with sociopolitical, economic, and other factors in language shift and recovery. An ecological approach emphasizes relationships, which as noted earlier must in some way have been severely changed or damaged in order for language shift to have occurred. Unlike the dominant narrative’s focus, this approach firmly engages the multiple oppressions those communities have experienced and continue to experience, while also drawing attention to their rights, needs, goals, and futures.

Finally, following from the last point is the importance of prioritizing the lived experiences of members of Native American language communities when planning and executing language work. Roche notes that dominant approaches to theorizing language endangerment largely miss the political factors and lead to “a refusal to sincerely hear the voices of the linguistically oppressed.”²⁸ I follow Roche’s observation that many members of oppressed language communities are already explaining the causes of language endangerment and sharing stories of language reclamation, and yet we are not fully being heard or seen.²⁹ In Native North America, where settler colonial logics teach that Native Americans for the most part no longer really exist, this is to be expected; and by extension, the stories we relate and the needs we articulate are easily dismissed by dominant discourses and the actions they promote. As shown throughout the essays in this volume, however, many tools to address these injustices already exist. The question is whether people with power are willing to engage them.

AUTHOR'S NOTE

A Dean's Professorship at the University of California, Riverside Center for Ideas and Society funded through a Mellon Foundation Investments in Humanities Faculty Grant supported work on this essay.

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ENDNOTES

- ¹ United Nations Department of Economic and Social Affairs, "International Decade of Indigenous Languages 2022–2032," <https://www.un.org/development/desa/indigenous-peoples/indigenous-languages.html> (accessed June 12, 2023).
- ² I follow the convention of capitalizing *Indigenous* when used as an ethnopolitical identifier to specific original peoples.
- ³ This statement appears on one of the main UNESCO websites for the IDIL. See UNESCO, "Indigenous Languages Decade (2022–2032)," <https://www.unesco.org/en/decades/indigenous-languages> (accessed July 25, 2023).
- ⁴ An Act to Reauthorize the Tribally Controlled Community College Assistance Act of 1978 and the Navajo Community College Act, 101st Congress, 04 Stat. 1152, Public Law 101-477, October 30, 1990, <https://www.congress.gov/bill/101st-congress/senate-bill/2167/text>.
- ⁵ For an overview of the language reclamation framework, see Wesley Y. Leonard, "Contesting Extinction through a Praxis of Language Reclamation," in *Contesting Extinctions: Decolonial and Regenerative Futures*, ed. Suzanne M. McCullagh, Luis I. Prádanos, Ilaria Tabusso Marcyan, and Catherine Wagner (Lanham, Md.: Lexington Books, 2021), 143–159.
- ⁶ Onowa McIvor and Teresa L. McCarty, "Indigenous Bilingual and Revitalization-Immersion Education in Canada and the USA," in *Bilingual and Multilingual Education*, 3rd edition, ed. Ofelia García, Angel M. Y. Lin, and Stephen May (Cham, Switzerland: Springer Cham, 2016), 422, https://doi.org/10.1007/978-3-319-02258-1_34.
- ⁷ I capitalize the names of academic fields to recognize that they are proper nouns, each with specific sets of questions, methods, goals, and personnel.
- ⁸ Aris Moreno Clemons and Jessica A. Grieser, "Black Womanhood: Raciolinguistic Intersections of Gender, Sexuality & Social Status in the Aftermaths of Colonization,"

- Dædalus* 152 (3) (Summer 2023): 115–129, <https://www.amacad.org/publication/black-womanhood-raciolinguistic-intersections-gender-sexuality-social-status-aftermaths>.
- ⁹ Bryan McKinley Jones Brayboy, “Toward a Tribal Critical Race Theory in Education,” *The Urban Review* 37 (5) (2005): 425–446, <https://doi.org/10.1007/s11256-005-0018-y>.
- ¹⁰ Eve Tuck, “Suspending Damage: A Letter to Communities,” *Harvard Educational Review* 79 (3) (2009): 409–427, <https://doi.org/10.17763/haer.79.3.n0016675661t3n15>.
- ¹¹ Michael Krauss, “The World’s Languages in Crisis,” *Language* 68 (1) (1992): 4.
- ¹² Lyle Campbell and Eve Okura, “New Knowledge Produced by the *Catalogue of Endangered Languages*,” in *Cataloguing the World’s Endangered Languages*, ed. Lyle Campbell and Anna Belew (New York: Routledge, 2018), 79.
- ¹³ Jenny L. Davis, “Resisting Rhetorics of Language Endangerment: Reclamation through Indigenous Language Survivance,” *Language Documentation and Description* 14 (2017): 41, <http://doi.org/10.25894/ldd147>.
- ¹⁴ McIvor and McCarty, “Indigenous Bilingual and Revitalization-Immersion Education,” 3.
- ¹⁵ Tove Skutnabb-Kangas, “Linguicism,” in *The Encyclopedia of Applied Linguistics* (Malden, Mass.: Blackwell, 2015), <https://doi.org/10.1002/9781405198431.wbeal1460>.
- ¹⁶ An Act to Provide for the Allotment of Lands in Severalty to Indians on the Various Reservations (General Allotment Act or Dawes Act), 49th Congress, 2nd Session, Stat. 24, 388–391, December 6, 1886 (codified as 25 U.S.C. ch. 9 §331 et seq.).
- ¹⁷ An Act to Provide for an Exchange of Lands with the Indians Residing in Any of the States or Territories, and For Their Removal West of the River Mississippi (Indian Removal Act), 21st Congress, 4 Stat. 411, signed into law May 28, 1830.
- ¹⁸ This example comes from a series of Miami Elder interviews in the late 1960s that I accessed through Miami tribal archives. For reasons of privacy, I omit identifying details.
- ¹⁹ Quoted in Erin Flynn Haynes, “When Support for Language Revitalization Is Not Enough: The End of Indigenous Language Classes at Warm Springs Elementary School,” *International Journal of the Sociology of Language* 209 (2011): 143, <https://doi.org/10.1515/ijsl.2011.026>.
- ²⁰ James McKenzie, “Addressing Historical Trauma and Healing in Indigenous Language Cultivation and Revitalization,” *Annual Review of Applied Linguistics* 42 (2022): 71–77, <https://doi.org/10.1017/S0267190521000167>.
- ²¹ April Linton, “Language Politics and Policy in the United States: Implications for the Immigration Debate,” *International Journal of the Sociology of Language* 199 (2009): 9–37, <https://doi.org/10.1515/IJSL.2009.033>.
- ²² Davis, “Resisting Rhetorics of Language Endangerment,” 40–45.
- ²³ Wesley Y. Leonard, “Producing Language Reclamation by Decolonising ‘Language,’” *Language Documentation and Description* 14 (2017): 15–36, <http://doi.org/10.25894/ldd146>.
- ²⁴ I detail the harm of this trajectory along with the underlying logics and effects of these biological metaphors in Leonard, “Contesting Extinction.” See also Bernard C. Perley, “Zombie Linguistics: Experts, Endangered Languages and the Curse of Undead Voices,” *Anthropological Forum* 22 (2) (2012): 133–149, <https://doi.org/10.1080/00664677.2012.694170>.
- ²⁵ Leonard, “Contesting Extinction.”

- ²⁶ Also written as two words (“Land Back”), this movement calls for and develops strategies to return lands to the control of their original caretakers. See LandBack, <https://landback.org>.
- ²⁷ Gerald Roche, “Abandoning Endangered Languages: Ethical Loneliness, Language Oppression, and Social Justice,” *American Anthropologist* 122 (1) (2020): 164.
- ²⁸ Ibid.
- ²⁹ For example, a 2021 issue of *WINHEC: International Journal of Indigenous Education Scholarship* focuses on “Indigenous Language Revitalization: Innovation, Reflection and Future Directions.” See *WINHEC: International Journal of Indigenous Education Scholarship* 16 (1) (2021), <https://journals.uvic.ca/index.php/winhec/issue/view/1486>. For an example from a previous issue of *Dædalus*, see Teresa L. McCarty, Sheilah E. Nicholas, Kari A. B. Chew, Natalie G. Diaz, Wesley Y. Leonard, and Louellyn White, “Hear Our Languages, Hear Our Voices: Storywork as Theory and Praxis in Indigenous-Language Reclamation,” *Dædalus* 147 (2) (2018): 160–172, <https://www.amacad.org/publication/hear-our-languages-hear-our-voices-storywork-theory-praxis-indigenous-language>.