Predictors of Success for Language Revitalization: Institutions, Education, and the Internet

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LING 320: Introduction to Sociolinguistics
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Abstract

Language revitalization projects can differ in their goals, programs, and ways of finding funding due to the varying contexts in which these projects occur and the current situation of the language under study. To identify common predictors of success or failure in different language revitalization approaches, this paper will draw upon six different academic sources and the cases of South Sámi, Quichua, Cherokee, and Hawaiian to discuss the roles of the institution, education, and the internet in language revitalization, as well as the notable factors of each level that contribute to the success (or failure) of language revival. These notable factors will include sufficient funding and program diversity on the institutional level, immersion-style education models on the educational level, the online dissemination of resources, and the development of online language programs on the Internet level. Finally, the significance of identifying predictors of language revitalization success will be discussed in relation to future linguistic prospects.

1 Introduction

Language revitalization projects can take many different approaches characterized by different goals, programs, and ways of finding funding—all of which are contingent on the current situation of the language under study. Comparing the approaches of different language revitalization projects and their results allows for the identification of common predictors of success or failure in language revitalization work. This paper will compare six different sources to explore the roles of the institution, education, and the internet in language revitalization work, and the notable factors of each level that act as predictors for successful language revitalization or unsatisfactory results. The cases of South Sámi, Quichua, Cherokee, and Hawaiian—all languages that have undergone revitalization work—will be used to support the identification of these predictors.

2 Review of previous research

"The Role of Organizations in Language Revitalization" (Gessner et al., 2018) discusses the role of institutions in language revitalization programs, with the First Peoples' Cultural Council of British Columbia serving as one example. The First Peoples' Cultural Council is run by a First Nations committee which develops and delivers programs to support the revitalization of Indigenous languages and culture. These programs include full-immersion programs for young children, Mentor-Apprentice programs for adult learners, as well as training workshops for prospective teachers in language revitalization work. The First Nations Peoples' Cultural Council's biggest contribution to language revitalization work in British Columbia comes from providing funding to a multitude of different resources which focus on immersion, documentation, provision of teaching materials, and curriculum development. This source details how adequate funding of a variety of different resources has contributed to the success of language revitalization projects.

"Preschool and School as Sites for Revitalizing Languages with Very Few Speakers" (Todal, 2018) discusses the school setting as a site for language revitalization, using the case of South Sámi as an example. Initial efforts of revitalization of South Sámi in Norway demonstrate the limitations of a specific approach to language revival referred to as a "weak form of bilingual education." In this approach, schools only used the South Sámi language in the subject South

Sámi and utilized Norwegian in all other contexts, reducing the students' exposure to South Sámi to only two or three hours per week. Since few of the children had exposure to the language outside of school, these classes proved to be inefficient in establishing basic competence in South Sámi among the children and parents were left dissatisfied with this approach. Subsequent efforts to improve the usage of South Sámi in Norway addressed these shortcomings by making adjustments to the education model, one of which was the adoption of an immersion-style model where children were exposed to South Sámi at much greater lengths and in various linguistic domains. The immersion-style model was deemed a success in the schools where it was implemented.

"Revitalizing the Cherokee Syllabary" (Montgomery-Anderson, 2018) discusses the role of the Internet in language revitalization work, highlighting how new technologies and social media have promoted literacy in Cherokee—an Iroquoian language indigenous to the United States—by supporting the presence of the Cherokee syllabary on digital platforms. A survey in the early 2000s by the Cherokee Nation found that only around 4% of the Cherokee population were able to read Cherokee, and less than 1% could write in the traditional Cherokee script. This sparked the development of three main initiatives for Cherokee revitalization: the founding of an immersion school, a Cherokee language Bachelor's degree program at Northeastern State University, and a Master-Apprentice program. All three of these initiatives were enhanced and supported by the increased presence of the syllabary in social media, a result of the Cherokee Nation Language Technology Program, which worked with multiple software companies to make the Cherokee Syllabary available on many digital platforms. As a result, there has not only been a noticeable increase in Cherokee language resources shared online, but an increase in the use of the Cherokee Syllabary in and around the city of Tahlequah.

"Language Revitalization: An Overview" (Hinton, 2001) provides a broad outline of language revitalization work, which includes common obstacles faced by language revitalization programs and successful approaches and their methods. To minimize obstacles, Hinton (2001) emphasizes the importance for institutions to fund a diverse set of programs in language revitalization, with the focus not only on full-immersion schools but also on programs for older learners and children outside of the regular school year. The importance of proper funding in the development and provision of language materials is also discussed, as many education-style language revitalization projects have faced impediments due to a lack of learning and teaching resources. Within the classroom, it is stated that the full-scale immersion approach is considered to produce the best results, as students are exposed to more of the language and in more various linguistic domains than in other education models. Hinton (2001) also brings attention to the value of incorporating cultural elements associated with the language into the curriculum, as it reinforces positive attitudes about languages that are often stigmatized.

Language Revitalization Processes and Prospects: Quichua in the Ecuadorian Andes (King, 2001) studies school and community efforts to restore the Quichua language in predominantly Spanish-speaking communities in Saraguo, Ecuador. This source discusses the shortcomings of the approach taken in Saraguo and how these shortcomings may be applied to future language revitalization work. In Saraguo schools, Quichua learning was restricted to only a few short lessons and activities each week, where the functions of Quichua were largely limited to translating and copying, and the content of instruction was mainly composed of basic vocabulary items and formulaic phrases. Furthermore, the teacher infrequently communicated with the children in Quichua, so the students were rarely exposed to authentic or naturalistic uses of the language. There also remained heavy stigmatization of the language, as many middle-aged Saraguo adults were reported to associate Quichua with low levels of education and socioeconomic status. King (2001) argued that the limited quantity and quality of Quichua instruction in the schools as well as the failure to address negative attitudes towards Quichua within the community led to poor results—the children were not able to develop basic competence in the language through school exposure alone.

"Technology and Indigenous Language Revitalization: Analyzing the Experience of Hawai'i" (Warschauer, 1998) discusses how technological developments have impacted language revitalization efforts for Hawaiian. Warschuaer (1998) highlights some of the major challenges that modern revitalization projects face, and how new technologies are meeting these challenges in four areas: (1) the preservation of and access to authentic Hawaiian; (2) the development and dissemination of new materials; (3) connections among isolated

groups of speakers; and (4) achieving relevance. Converting old Hawaiian documents to microfiche and uploading filmed videos of authentic Hawaiian conversation to the internet allow for the preservation of the language, and the increased accessibility of the internet allows for those resources to be available to Native Hawaiians across several communities. More and more Hawaiians are beginning to use the internet as a way of developing and distributing original curriculum materials, and the development of an online presence for Hawaiian is helping to achieve relevance for the language in a technology-driven era.

3 The Role of Institutions

Although each speech community develops their own approach to revitalization, institutions are often developed to assist language revitalization work. The involvement of an institution—led by members of the language community itself—in language revitalization work is already a predictor of better results than the efforts of a smaller community due to the greater number of resources that large-scale organizations possess and the subsequent capacity to address whole regions. However, both Gessner et al. (2018) and Hinton (2001) show that, on the institutional level, the proper allocation of those resources is essential in maximizing the success of language revitalization programs. Gessner et al. (2018) highlight the work of the First Peoples' Cultural Council, which has funded full-immersion programs for young children, Mentor-Apprentice programs for adult learners, as well as training workshops for language teachers (p. 52). Although Hinton (2001) emphasizes full-immersion schools as the most effective education model for children, she also highlights the importance of childrens' programs outside of school and programs for adults. Summer programs serve to reinforce language skills developed during the regular school year and thus, have shown very good results in combination with regular school programs. While adult language programs rarely involve full immersion, programs such as the California Master-Apprentice Language Learning Program allow for adult learners to utilize immersion-style techniques by using the language while partaking in ordinary, commonplace activities with their mentor (Hinton, 2001, p. 10). As both sources emphasize a multifaceted approach that goes beyond a single school program that often only targets one age group, sufficient funding in a diverse set of programs is identified as a predictor of success in language revitalization work.

The First Peoples' Cultural Council also aids in the development and provision of teaching materials by funding FirstVoices, an online Indigenous language documentation and teaching resource (Gessner et al., 2018, p. 52). FirstVoices functions as a digital archive where language communities can create and share learning and teaching resources. Hinton (2001) also emphasizes the importance of proper funding in the development of language materials such as books, audiotapes, videotapes, and other media, not only to aid learning in classroom settings, but to properly document the language. A lack of proper language resources makes revitalization work exceedingly difficult, and there have been excellent programs, such as the California Indian Libraries Collection, which helped distribute materials for Indigenous languages, that unfortunately went dormant due to a lack of funding—negatively affecting the language revival process (Hinton, 2001, p. 11). Therefore, both sources identify sufficient funding in the development of learning and teaching materials as another way that institutions can aid in language revitalization work and also as a predictor of success in language revival.

4 The Role of Education

The education system is regarded as one of the most important sites of language revitalization work and is often the primary approach of language revitalization programs. However, language revitalization through schooling is often met with various obstacles—some of which were addressed in the discussion on the role of institutions in language revitalization— such as the lack of adequate funding in learning and teaching materials. Other obstacles arise from the design of the educational program itself. Todal's (2018) study on South Sámi showed that the most effective method of the educational approach comes from immersion, full immersion programs being the most valuable. While "weak forms of bilingual education" where the children are only exposed to the language a few hours per week and in a single subject are not necessarily predictors of failure, the case of South Sámi has made it apparent that this approach makes it exceedingly difficult for children to obtain and maintain competence. Only after Norwegian schools switched to an immersion-style model that exposed the children to South Sámi at much greater lengths and in various linguistic domains did results improve (Todal,

2018, pp. 76-77). Language revitalization work for Quichua also showed a similar pattern, as schools in Saraguo also utilized a "weak form of bilingual education" where children had little exposure to naturalistic uses of Quichua and learned through a few short lessons and activities each week. In Saraguo schools, teachers infrequently communicated with the children in Quichua and lessons mainly consisted of basic vocabulary and formulaic phrases. This approach was unsuccessful in establishing basic competence in Quichua among the children (King, 2001,p. 187). Thus, both sources suggest that longer exposure to the language and in multiple linguistic domains through an immersion-style model is a predictor for success in language revitalization work through the education system.

Hinton (2001) identifies the incorporation of cultural elements into the classroom as an essential for language revitalization work in Indigenous languages. She argues that the most successful education-based language programs work actively to bring the culture associated with the language into the curriculum, reinforcing positive attitudes towards the culture and consequently, the associated language (Hinton, 2001, pp. 9-10). The incorporation of culture into the classroom may include the use of traditional objects, teaching traditional subjects, and designing the shape of a classroom or school to fit traditional culture and values. King (2001) states that one of the most common reasons for failure in language revitalization work is negative attitudes towards the language internalized by the potential speakers themselves. These attitudes may have contributed to the lack of success of Quichua revitalization efforts, as many middle-aged Saraguo adults were reported to associate Quichua with low levels of education and socioeconomic status, and there were no efforts within the classroom to confront this stigmatization (King, 2001, p. 212). While King (2001) suggests that widespread stigmatization of a language and negative attitudes towards the language by the potential speakers themselves are predictors of failure, Hinton (2001) suggests that mechanisms to reduce these negative attitudes, such as the incorporation of cultural elements associated with the language into the education system, will produce better results in language revitalization work.

5 The Role of the Internet

The Internet has come to be a fundamental part of many present-day language revitalization programs. One role that the internet plays in language revitalization work is in the dissemination of language materials. The First Peoples' Cultural Council funds FirstVoices, an online Indigenous language documentation and teaching resource that has been especially useful in language revitalization work in British Columbia (Gessner et al., 2018, p. 52). Language content that is uploaded to the archive can be accessed by different communities and subsequently used to create learning and teaching tools. In the case of Hawaiian, new technologies helped to preserve authentic Hawaiian use, allowing language activists to convert nineteenth-century Hawaiian newspapers into microfiche and film videos of elderly Hawaiian speakers. However, the problem of accessibility quickly arose, as Native Hawaiians were dispersed across different communities on several islands, and few had access to the university archives where these materials were being kept. Thus, the Internet became the primary method for Hawaiian language activists to disseminate these language resources (Warschauer, 1998, p. 142). With ample pre-existing documentation, even languages that no longer have any living speakers can be revitalized, despite the scarcity of resources or low accessibility to them making language revitalization increasingly difficult. Therefore, both sources demonstrate the importance of language resources and identify improved accessibility to these resources as a predictor of successful language revitalization work.

Another role that the Internet plays in language revitalization work is in helping the language achieve relevance. Achieving relevance is a challenge that underlies all language revitalization work, as speakers will only commit to learning and using the language if they regard it as a part of their future and not just their past. Warschauer (1998) argues that for a language like Hawaiian to be seen as a "real living language," it must be seen, heard, and used everywhere, and that includes the use of computers (p. 145). To accomplish this, many Hawaiian language activists are continuing to develop various online programs in Hawaiian so that computer education in schools can be delivered in Hawaiian, to which the students have been reported to react positively towards (Warschauer, 1998, p. 146). In the past decade, the Cherokee Nation has taken multiple initiatives in attempts to revitalize Cherokee among its population. All of these initiatives have been enhanced and supported by the increased presence of the Cherokee script in social media, as the Cherokee Nation Language Technology Program has collaborated with many software companies to ensure that the Cherokee script is available on

multiple digital platforms (Montgomery-Anderson, 2018, p. 175). These technological developments have resulted in a noticeable increase in the use of the Cherokee script both online and in person, in and around the city of Tahlequah. Both sources highlight how the internet has played a huge role in establishing relevance for Hawaiian and Cherokee, and the continued development of new technologies—either online programs for educational use or the availability of a writing system on electronic devices–have shown to be a potential predictor of success for language revitalization work due to their positive effects.

6 Conclusion

The analysis of six different textual sources have displayed the roles of institutions, education, and the Internet in language revitalization work, as well as the predictors of success or failure on each level. On the institutional level, sufficient funding in a diverse set of programs is identified as a predictor for success in language revitalization work. Funding programs beyond a single educational-style approach, such as summer programs outside of the regular school year or language programs for adults, encourage language revitalization for more than one age group and support language use in various linguistic domains. Sufficient funding in the development of learning and teaching materials to simultaneously preserve the language and be used in classroom settings is also a predictor of success. On the educational level, immersion-style education models are predictors of success as they expose learners to more of the language and produce better results than "weak forms of bilingual education." The incorporation of cultural elements into the school curriculum is also recognized to positively impact language revitalization work, as it reinforces positive attitudes towards the often-stigmatized language. The Internet has also come to play a large role in language revitalization, as it is now a method of language preservation, disseminating resources across entire communities, and achieving relevance. Both increased accessibility to language resources and the development of online language programs have had positive effects on language revitalization work. Finally, identifying predictors of success from earlier language revitalization projects may be especially helpful for future prospects. If factors that were found to produce positive effects are taken into account in the future modeling of language revitalization programs, language shift for more languages may be successfully reversed.

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