

“The essence of the language is in texts”: Attitudes towards and uses of texts in language revitalization

Edwin Ko

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Land acknowledgments

I acknowledge with respect that the University of Arizona resides on the traditional homelands of the Tohono O'odham and Pascua Yaqui Nation since time immemorial.

I am also honored to study and work on the traditional, ancestral, and unceded land of the Ohlone people.

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Introduction

- There have been significant efforts to produce dictionaries, grammars, and texts (i.e. Boasian trilogy) beginning in 20th century.
- While uses of grammars and dictionaries are relatively straightforward, the value of using texts is less so.

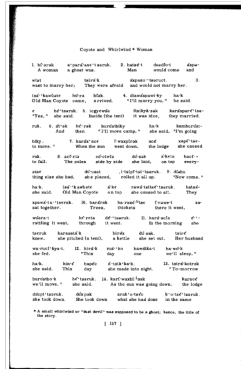


Figure: A Crow text *Coyote and Whirlwind Woman* (Lowie 1960)

Northern Pomo language revitalization camps

Northern Pomo Online Phrasicon

English Word Lookup
 a b c d e f g h i j k l m n o p q r s t u v w x y z

Northern Pomo Word Lookup

? b ch ch' d h j k k' k' l m n p p' p' s sh t t' f f i i' f f ts ts' w x y

Submit

☐ Hyper Search

? k' p' f' i' f'

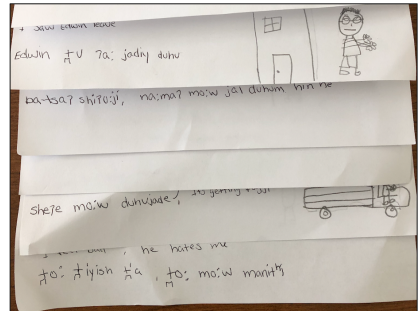
29 search results found for "leave" in English.

Chrissy duhujaade

Chrissap	duhu	-j	-ade
Chrissap	go	-semelf.	-present

Chrissy is going to leave

EC
▶ 0:00 / 0:03
◀ | ▶





Northern Pomo stories and texts

⏮ Play Entire Story
Toggle All Glosses


1	⏮ Gloss	kawiyaba: ʔiʔi ma-kaʔaknam	The boy, her grandchild,
2	⏮ Gloss	ʔiʔi diye:ka ʔahin dat'aʔnama:n so baʔaʔ duhun	accompanied her, right? Going (with) the old lady to gather clover.
3	⏮ Gloss	nan be: yo:w yo:w habeda ʔ'inʔa so baʔaʔyeʔ	And there to the south, south somewhere, wasn't it? (They) gathered clover.
4	⏮ Gloss	kawiyaba:namo:wal de:ʔin	Leading the boy.
5	⏮ Gloss	nan mu: so ma:da k'ana:huhi dat'aʔnama:n so jimen jimen	And having approached where the clover is the old lady gathered clover, gathering...
6	⏮	"The word jimen means, you know, gathering it like that" (gathering motions towards her)	
7	⏮ Gloss	nan nahe t'in ʔul jimehe she: kawiyaba:namo:wal	So then, after having gathered for a long time, to the boy (she said),
8	⏮ Gloss	ʔo: xa jo: k'ala:jade	"I am going to die of thirst,
9	⏮ Gloss	xa xadim ʔal p'ik'anamili	get water with this basket."
10	⏮ Gloss	kawiyaba:namo:wal bayokan	telling the boy.
11	⏮ Gloss	nakan kawiyaba:namo:w p'ik'anamu:l dejin	So then the boy took the basket
12	⏮ Gloss	mu:l be: yo:w xabedaxaʔ duhun	way down south going towards the stream.

Northern Pomo stories and texts

 Play Entire Story


 Toggle All Glosses

1

 Gloss


kawiyaba: ʔiti ma-kaʔaknam
kawi -ya -ba: ʔiti ma-kaʔak -nam
child -plural -man her.logo. her grandchild -the
The boy, her grandchild,

2

 Gloss


ʔiti diye:ka ʔahin datʔaʔnama:n so baʔaʔ duhun
ʔiti diye:ka ʔa -hi -n datʔaʔ -nam -man so baʔaʔ duhu -n
her.logo. accompany Q -say -ing old woman -the -she clover gather go -ing
accompanied her, right? Going (with) the old lady to gather clover.

3

 Gloss

nan be: yo:w yo:w habeda ʔinʔa so baʔaʔyeʔ
nan be: yo:w yo:w habe -da ʔin -ʔa so baʔaʔ -ye -ʔ
and dir. south south where -at not -Q clover gather -past -Q
And there to the south, south somewhere, wasn't it? (They) gathered clover.

4

 Gloss

kawiyaba:namo:wal de:din
kawi -ya -ba: -nam -mo:wal de:di -n
child -plural -man -the -him lead -ing
Leading the boy.

Motivations for this work

- Not much is known (or has been shared) about how texts can be used in language revitalization.
 - As Hinton (2011) notes, adopting methods used to teach ‘big’ languages (e.g., French) may not always be appropriate.
 - Underlying attitudes and perceptions towards aspects of language revitalization and texts influence how texts are used.
 - Carr and Meek (2013:210) discuss how language revitalization often obscures texts as *reported* language rather than *performed* language (à la Hymes 1975).
- An understanding of what types of texts are highly desired can potentially inform documentation efforts.

Main questions

- 1 What are the attitudes and perceptions of using texts in language revitalization, and what factors influence them?
- 2 What are the prospects (and challenges) of using texts?
- 3 What genres of texts are highly sought after?

Defining *texts*

Definition (adapted from Hanks 1989:95-96)

The term *texts* is a broad and vague category that consists of any kind of speech (spoken or written) composed of a series of connected sentences.

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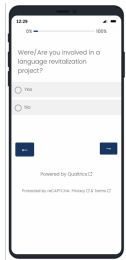
4 Attitudes towards LR and texts

5 Prospects

6 Conclusions

Data collection: Online survey

- Survey was designed using Qualtrics and consisted of roughly 38 questions (approx. 18-20 minutes):
 - Background of respondents
 - Attitudes towards various aspects of language revitalization
 - Prospects and challenges of using texts
- Question formats include multiple-choice, select-all-that-apply, Likert scale, and open-response
- Piloted and then distributed internationally via email (e.g. listservs) and social media (e.g. Twitter)
- 102 participant responses were analyzed (out of 141 total responses)



Data collection: Interviews

- Survey-takers were invited to participate in a follow-up interview of approximately 10-15 minutes
- Semi-structured interviews were conducted via Zoom
- 21 participants were interviewed



Mixed-methods approach

- In general, each question was treated as a variable.
- 'How important...' questions involving Likert-scale were converted into numerical values.
 - Descriptive statistics: What is the mean response for 'How important...'?
 - Inferential statistics: What variables correlate with 'How important...'?
- Open-response questions and interviews involved thematic analysis to identify themes and subthemes in participants' responses (Braun and Clarke 2006).
 - These (sub)themes then served as variables for more quantitative analyses.

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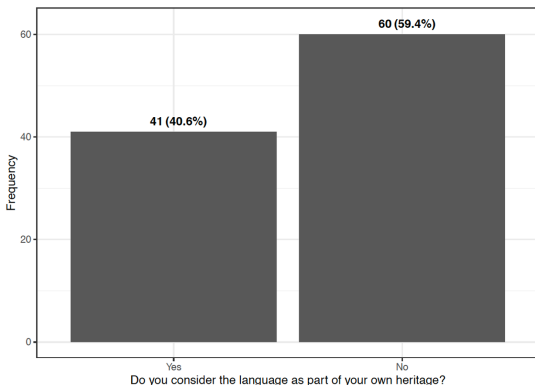
5 Prospects

6 Conclusions

Background of respondents

Do you consider the language as part of your own heritage?

Most respondents (59.4%) are not community members.



Background of respondents

What is your role(s) in your language revitalization efforts?

Most respondents (59.4%) indicate their role as academic linguist.

Please indicate your role(s) in your language revitalization efforts.

Select all that apply.

☐ Language teacher

☐ Language learner

☐ Academic linguist (that is, working at a university/college)

☐ Non-academic linguist (that is, working elsewhere)

☐ Other

Background of respondents

In which country does your language revitalization work take place?

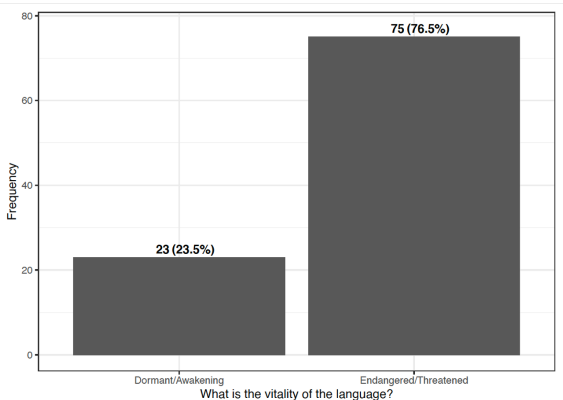
Most respondents do their language revitalization work in the USA.

COUNTRY	#	COUNTRY	#
Australia	3	Micronesia	1
Belize	1	Myanmar	1
Brazil	1	New Zealand	1
Cameroon	3	Peru	2
Canada	5	Singapore	1
Chile	1	Thailand	1
China	1	Turkey	1
Côte d'Ivoire	1	UK	2
France	1	USA	59
Guatemala	2	Vanuatu	1
India	1	Wales	1
Latvia	1	Zimbabwe	1
Mexico	6		

Background of the language

What is the vitality of the language?

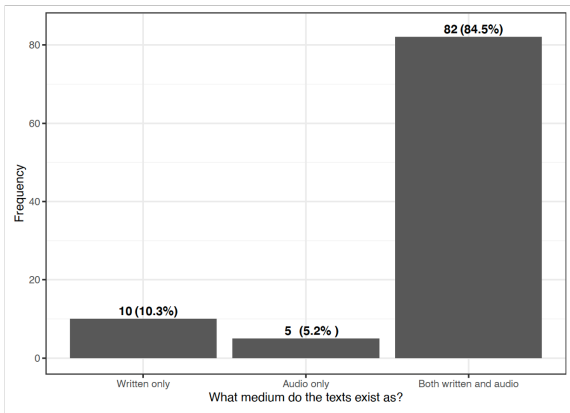
Most respondents work on an endangered/threatened language.



Background of texts

What medium do the texts exist as?

Most respondents indicate texts exist in written and audio formats.



Background of texts

What kinds of texts are available in the language?

The two most commonly available texts are traditional and historical narratives.

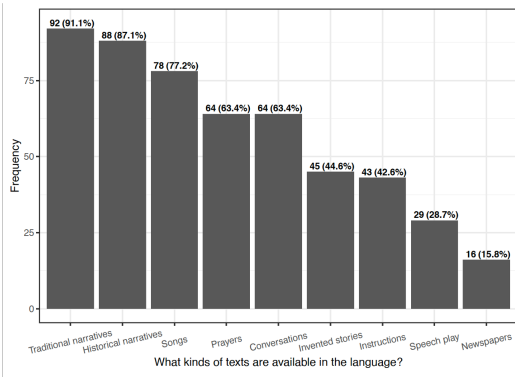


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Why do you think language revitalization is important?

- 1 Connections: *vehicle of culture, history and heritage*
- 2 Social justice: *basic human right to speak*
- 3 Epistemology: *better understand a people and their culture*
- 4 Diversity: *linguistic diversity is as important as biodiversity*
- 5 Wellbeing: *access to language increases self-esteem and health*
- 6 Conservation: *preserves not only language but also history, culture, and knowledge*

Aspects of language revitalization

- How important is it to...
 - 1 Have a writing system for the language?
 - 2 Teach learners how to read and write in the language?
 - 3 Speak the language in same way as the ancestors did?
 - 4 Keep the language free from influence of the dominant/majority language?
 - 5 Speak the language all the time?
- How appropriate is it to...
 - 6 Use the language on digital devices?
 - 7 Incorporate topics and items of the dominant/majority culture?

Overall attitudes and perceptions

Overall, there are positive attitudes and perceptions (mean ≤ 2.5 ; 1 = extremely important/appropriate) towards:

- How important is it to...

- 1 Have a writing system for the language?**
- 2 Teach learners how to read and write in the language?**
- 3 Speak the language in same way as the ancestors did?
- 4 Keep the language free from influence of the dominant/majority language?
- 5 Speak the language all the time?

- How appropriate is it to...

- 6 Use the language on digital devices?**
- 7 Incorporate topics and items of the dominant/majority culture?**

Attitudes and perceptions: (Non-)Community members

Community members tend to have more positive attitudes and perceptions ($p \leq 0.001$; Mann-Whitney U) towards:

- How important is it to...

- 1 Have a writing system for the language?
- 2 Teach learners how to read and write in the language?
- 3 **Speak the language in same way as the ancestors did?**
- 4 **Keep the language free from influence of the dominant/majority language?**
- 5 **Speak the language all the time?**

- How appropriate is it to...

- 6 Use the language on digital devices?
- 7 Incorporate topics and items of the dominant/majority culture?

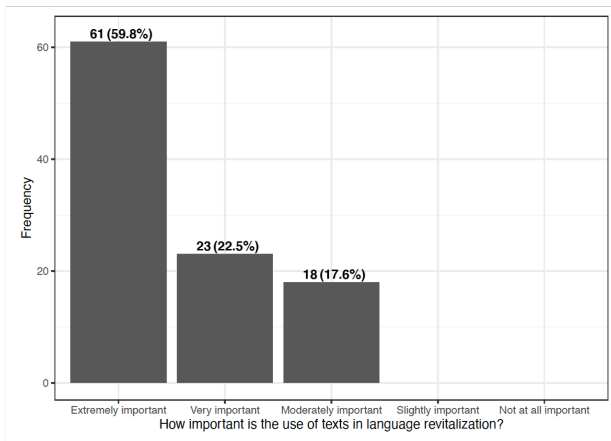
Relationships across aspects of language revitalization

Direct and indirect relationships exist across the seven different variables using Spearman's (ρ) rank correlation coefficient.

		1.	2.	3.	4.	5.	6.	7.
1. ORTHOGRAPHY	CORR. SIG.	—						
2. LITERACY	CORR. SIG.	0.824 ***	—					
3. ANCESTORS	CORR. SIG.	0.268 **	0.225 *	—				
4. DIGITAL	CORR. SIG.	0.270 **	0.292 **	N.S.	—			
5. CULTURE	CORR. SIG.	0.246 *	0.280 **	N.S.	0.294 **	—		
6. PURITY	CORR. SIG.	0.310 **	0.327 ***	0.578 ***	N.S.	N.S.	—	
7. SPEAKALLTIME	CORR. SIG.	N.S.	N.S.	0.433 ***	N.S.	N.S.	0.466 ***	—

How important is the use of texts in LR?

Respondents generally have a positive perception of using of texts.



Relationships between importance of using texts

There is a positive correlation (Spearman's ρ) with four variables with IMPORTANCELITERACY as the best predictor.

	ORTHO.	LITERACY	ANCESTORS	DIGITAL	CULTURE	PURITY	SPEAKAllTime
CORR.	0.408	0.458	0.244			0.245	
SIG.	< 0.001	< 0.001	0.014	N.S.	N.S.	0.014	N.S.

Why do you think the use of texts is important in LR?

- 1 Language learning: *helps students learn the language*
- 2 Conservation: *texts are the most permanent form*
- 3 Context: *texts provide examples language in use*
- 4 Authenticity: *the way that people actually use the language*
- 5 Language description: *can show grammatical features*
- 6 Culture: *can teach culture and traditions*

Fitting an ordinal logistic regression model

- There are three statistically significant predictors:
 - IMPORTANCELITERACY: Importance of teaching literacy
 - CONTEXT: Mentioning context in the open-response question asking why texts are important
 - NEWSPAPER: Availability of newspaper for the language

	ESTIMATE	STD. ERROR	t-VALUE	Pr(> t)	
INTERCEPTS:					
ImportanceText:3 ImportanceText:2	-3.796	0.765	-4.962	< 0.001	***
ImportanceText:2 ImportanceText:1	-2.01	0.692	-3.324	< 0.001	***
COEFFICIENTS:					
ImportanceLiteracy	-1.118	0.276	-4.054	< 0.001	***
Context:Yes	1.707	0.524	3.256	0.001	***
Newspaper:Yes	1.582	0.797	1.984	0.047	*

Note: One unit decrease in IMPORTANCELITERACY corresponds to higher perceived importance of teaching literacy (1 = Extr. important).

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Prospects of using texts in language revitalization

1 Resource development

- Creation of new texts, corpora, and materials

2 Learning

- Language, literacy, culture, and history

3 Language maintenance

- Promoting accessibility, awareness, and digital presence
- Language conservation and language landscape

1. Resource development: Creation of new texts

Video removed.

1. Resource development: Corpus development

Video removed.

2. Learning: Everyday expressions

Video removed.

3. Language maintenance: Community building

Video removed.

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Conclusions

- Having positive perceptions of literacy and language in context is linked to having favorable views of texts.
 - Aligns and contrasts with the entextualization and decontextualization practices of the Boasian tradition.
 - Blurs the distinction between orality and literacy.
- Some respondents mentioned how texts have been used in performances, such as recitations and staged conversations, to build confidence in speaking the language.
 - Carr and Meek (2013) advocate for a shift towards exercising more vernacular, discursive, and performative practices.
- Yet texts can be used in various capacities, many of which transcend language learning but still highly relevant to LR.

Conclusions

- The survey results reveals some of differences in attitudes and perceptions between community members and outsiders.
 - As outsiders, we come into the community with our own set of values, beliefs and worldviews that may be different from those of the community.
 - The importance of collaboration in language documentation and revitalization cannot be understated.
- Effort should be placed into documenting a greater range of discourse types, guided by gaps in the documentation record and by the values of the community (cf. Epps et al. 2017).

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Thank you for listening!

Prospects of using texts

- Corpus, material, and text development
 - Developing an online user-friendly searchable corpus consisting of texts with simple searches – this may be helpful in developing other kinds of computer tools in the future
 - Phrasebooks, textbooks grammar books, lesson plans and other kinds of language learning and teaching materials can incorporate sentences and phrases from texts
 - Adapting existing texts into a new form, such as graphic novels illustrated by artists within the community or videos that target specific youth segments in the community
 - Creating signage to place around universities, government buildings, transport hubs, and other public spaces in the language of the people whose territory are being resided on
- Culture and history:
 - Connecting with one's heritage
 - Promoting history and visibility
 - Creating contemporary renditions of traditional stories
 - Instructions about certain traditional activities (e.g. weaving a hat out of palm leaf) and used in a cultural lesson

Prospects of using texts

- Digital Presence:
 - Social media and other online venues in the language to circulate texts
 - Holding discussions and language lessons that involve texts via Zoom
 - Playing recordings of texts and reading texts on the radio and on podcasts
 - Developing e-books and digital language learning applications from existing texts
- Discussion:
 - Having discussions of texts in the classroom and on listservs
 - Holding weekly Skype study groups to talk about texts (e.g. grammar, cultural information.)
 - Discussions by Elders about texts can be of great interest to many people
- Listening:
 - Internalizing the sounds and cadence of speakers to help with one's own pronunciation
 - As listening practice as well as transcription and comprehension exercises

Prospects of using texts

- Promote accessibility and awareness:
 - Making texts freely available and sharing and circulating them widely may encourage people, who may not have known about those texts, to use them
 - Creating transcriptions, glosses, and translations for texts allows learners to follow along the texts
 - Creating smaller chunks from larger texts to help learners
 - Creating online resources to make texts more accessible
- Reading and recitation:
 - Reading (out loud) in the classroom, home, and language events (e.g. poetry reading, festivals and fairs)
 - Reading (out loud) from memorization or from transcriptions can be a useful way of having learners better accustomed to speaking the language

Prospects of using texts

- Reference tool:
 - Looking up how words and sentences are used in context
 - Teachers can search for (frequent) sentence patterns to teach learners
 - Providing examples in the development of resources or for teaching
 - As activities for students to practice identifying certain types of structures or patterns within texts
- Song:
 - Composing and singing songs
 - As inspiration for new creative work in the language
- Staged conversations
 - Adapting existing texts into plays for children
 - Modeling dialogues in question-response or other communicative formats
 - Acting out while reading out loud
 - Writing, memorizing and performing dialogues can help learners become more comfortable speaking

Prospects of using texts

- Story creation:
 - Training youths to work with Elders to produce and publish texts
 - Younger learners can illustrate existing stories
 - Translating and transforming stories written by children in English into bilingual booklets
 - Assigning an English text for students to create their own version in the language
 - Encouraging youths to express themselves by letting them write in the language in any way they feel like
 - May lead to standardization of orthography
- Translation:
 - Translation exercises based on existing texts can be done as a group and can also increase accessibility to those texts

Challenges of using texts

- Accessibility:
 - Physical texts housed in archives
 - Sheer volume of materials to search through that do not have any indexing
 - Proprietary formats or pay-walled files
- Annotation:
 - Lacking transcriptions, translations and metadata
 - Unintelligible handwriting in older documents
- Appropriateness:
 - Not friendly towards beginning learners due to complexity and/or length
 - Texts may not always be relevant to one's learning/teaching
- Archaisms:
 - Words and other aspects of grammar may have changed their meanings
 - Topics discussed long ago may be rarely discussed in current times
- Availability:
 - Limited range of genres

Challenges of using texts

- Complexity:
 - Discourse-level phenomena such as information structure, topic marking, prosody and discourse-sensitive word order or morphology
- Comprehension:
 - Unknown words or insufficient knowledge of the language
- Context:
 - Lack of context (metadata) or page numbering in older documents
 - With older documents, there may be misunderstanding in their meaning and intent due to loss of context – instruction using texts without knowing their context may lead to misunderstanding
- Dialect and register:
 - Words and phrases from different dialects or registers may cause confusion
- Jargon:
 - Texts laden with linguistic descriptions may make it illegible or difficult to understand

Challenges of using texts

- Orthography:
 - Unfamiliarity with the orthography or phonological description
 - Orthographies may be change over time
 - Lack of standardized orthography
- Pronunciation:
 - Written texts sometimes do not have an audio counterpart
 - Lacking tone or stress marking or other important phonological information in the orthography
- Quality:
 - Disintegration of texts' physical forms
 - Poor audio quality
- Relevance:
 - Some learners may not find the texts personally relevant – some texts reflect experiences of older generations

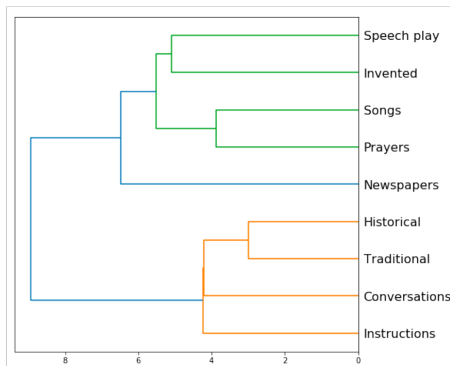
In general, respondents consider newspapers to be the least important type of text.



Availability of newspapers as a predictor

In your opinion, what are the most important types of texts?

According to a hierarchical clustering analysis (via Ward's method), newspapers do not typically co-occur with other text types.



Availability of newspapers as a predictor

In your opinion, what are the most important types of texts?

- In the follow-up interviews, participants often indicated that newspapers were not selected because they did not exist for the language.
 - But there is no relationship between availability of newspapers and selecting newspapers as an important text type.
- There is also no relationship between availability of newspapers and variables that involve literacy.
- Availability of newspapers is a predictor of perceived importance of texts but newspapers are not considered one of the most important text types.