

# **Revitalizing Endangered Languages**

A PRACTICAL GUIDE

EDITED BY  
**JUSTYNA OLKO  
JULIA SALLABANK**



## Revitalizing Endangered Languages

Of the approximately 7,000 languages in the world, at least half may no longer be spoken by the end of the twenty-first century. Languages are endangered by a number of factors, including globalization, education policies, and the political, economic, and cultural marginalization of minority groups. This guidebook provides ideas and strategies, as well as some background, to help with the effective revitalization of endangered languages. It covers a broad scope of themes including effective planning, benefits, well-being, economic aspects, attitudes, and ideologies. The chapter authors have hands-on experience of language revitalization in many countries around the world, and each chapter includes a wealth of examples, such as case studies from specific languages and language areas. Clearly and accessibly written, it is suitable for nonspecialists as well as for academic researchers and students interested in language revitalization. This book is also available as Open Access on Cambridge Core.

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# Revitalizing Endangered Languages

*A Practical Guide*

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# Welcome!

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*Justyna Olko and Julia Sallabank*

## **Who This Book Is For**

Local languages have been falling into disuse and becoming forgotten in an increasingly accelerating pace over the last century or so: media and scientific reports keep reminding us, with quite alarming statistics. However, the last few decades have also witnessed another steadily growing trend: initiatives, both grassroots and top-down, to counteract the devastating loss of linguistic diversity and to promote multilingualism and the use of local languages. There have been programs and activities that can be considered real success stories or at least important steps toward them, even if revitalizing and supporting endangered languages is a never-ending task. But it is a task that can be planned, implemented, evaluated, and brought into a next stage thanks to this growing body of individual and collective experience and generated knowledge.

This book is meant for anyone who feels concern or even pain because of the loss they and their communities might face; it is for people who experience joy when speaking their languages and want to have them heard, spoken, and strong. It is for people who learned their languages, or who wish to learn them, from their parents, grandparents, community members, or on their own. It is also for people who want to pass their ways of speaking to children and peers. As an Indigenous teacher in the Navajo reservations recently shared with one of us, the most committed parents wanting their children to learn the ancestral Diné language were those who grew up in borderland towns and lost it themselves. Loss can be an empowering stimulus to act. It can also lead to a profound joy of reclaiming a language, learning, speaking, and passing the language to other people, to experiencing the world through its unique perspective, to accessing the knowledge generated and transmitted by the ancestors. But language revitalization is not about going back to the past; it is about acting in the present and heading toward the future, recognizing that the past provides an important foundation and stimulus to achieve it.

This book emerges from the results of the collaborative *Engaged Humanities* project<sup>1</sup> and reflects the philosophy of this collaborative initiative. It has been created jointly by community members and language activists, as well as by educators, students, and academics interested in developing fair and nonpatronizing ways of working with local communities and in response to communities' initiatives and needs. All the contributors generously share their perspectives, thoughts, and practical experience, in the hope of inspiring others. Our project has shown the potential and utility of learning from other contexts, even geographically or culturally remote ones. We also learned that mutual empowerment is possible. The profound respect we have developed for different knowledge systems and approaches can not only decolonize our research and practices, but also help to develop more effective language revitalization strategies.

### What This Book Does

The aim of this guidebook is to provide practical help and guidance on how to approach and plan language revitalization. We want to stress from the outset that there is no 'one-size-fits-all,' lock-step solution to language endangerment. Just as each language is different, the contexts in which each language is used are different, and the reasons why its use is declining might also be different. While the case studies are intended to help readers learn from each other, perceived similarities between communities can lead to underestimating or ignoring differences that may seriously influence revitalization efforts, as it is risky to assume that a specific approach implemented in one case will bring similar impact and results in another community. It is important to understand each context in order to address its unique features, even if the experience of others can be very useful; this book will provide insights into how to go about this in a principled manner.

Our intention is also to fill the dearth in available literature on the topic. Most of the relevant existing works are specialized, academic publications that reflect more the views of researchers than the perspectives, goals, and interests of communities and their members interested in revitalizing their own languages. We want this book to be affordable and accessible to local people. The guidebook provides members of language communities and other readers with concrete ideas and real examples of actual experiences and strategies, as well as essential background knowledge that they will need in order to launch successful grass-root initiatives.

<sup>1</sup> Twinning Programme of the European Commission, Horizon 2020 coordinated by the University of Warsaw along with the School of Languages, Cultures and Linguistics at SOAS, University of London, Leiden University's Center for Linguistics (Faculty of Humanities) and Department of Archaeological Heritage (Faculty of Archaeology).

## What This Book Is Like

For this reason, our aim for this book has been to create readable content presenting a broad range of options and voices. We are convinced that accessible and understandable style, free of academic jargon, does not result in simplification, nor does it make the publication unfit for students or researchers. The organization of the book is intended to help readers conceptualize and plan practically oriented projects. The chapters are written by contributors with a wealth of practical and research experience in language revitalization that is being carried out in many countries around the world. Each chapter includes ‘Capsules’ that share insights from the direct experience of contributors.

The final result covers language revitalization seen as a holistic, multilevel, multiphase, and long-term process, as completely as possible without resorting to a 500-page monograph or a 1,000-page encyclopedia.

It is primarily **practitioner-oriented**. The fact that our book is designed first and foremost as a practical guide implies that it is as ‘hands-on’ as possible (e.g. the capsules relate to the real-life experiences of various revitalizers), backed up by reliable research (the chapters are for the most part written or cowritten by recognized scholars who engage in revitalization activities). Therefore, the book is intended to present only as much theory as needed to support the practical guidance, as well as many relevant, hands-on examples. We avoid the one-size-fits-all approach by not presenting any single possibility as the best or the only one. The guidebook shares good practices, different approaches previously applied in specific cases, and new possibilities currently being explored or put into practice. We discuss, for example, planning aims and objectives, understanding and addressing language attitudes, the advantages and disadvantages of writing or standardizing your language, policies and fundraising, and suggestions for practical activities including music, arts, and teaching and learning endangered languages. We also want to draw our readers’ attention to the economic value of local languages and possible marketing strategies for language revitalization.

## Where We’re Coming From

What are our ideological background and motivations? In the first place we wish to stress we aren’t imposing a particular party line – the point of presenting options is to provide tools and share knowledge to facilitate making informed decisions and undertaking specific steps toward language revitalization. We also think that it is important not to ‘exoticize’ Indigenous viewpoints – many endangered language community members live in cities and/or have been acculturated to majority lifestyles.

In nearly every part of the world, smaller or less powerful languages are being used less and less, while the use of larger, more dominant languages is

growing. Some people do not see this as a problem; indeed, some even welcome it, saying that it is more useful for children to learn regional, national, or international languages of wider communication. We believe it is important for language revitalizers to understand their own motivations, and to develop arguments to counter critics and gather support. The authors and editors of this book see language endangerment and loss as linked to the marginalization of Indigenous and minoritized peoples and their cultures. For us language revitalization is therefore a key component of empowerment, reclaiming identities, and challenging colonialist attitudes.

In fact, the majority of people in the world speak more than one language, using different languages and styles of speaking for different purposes in their daily lives. Multilingualism is beneficial, both for personal intellectual development and for social integration. We need to get across the message that engaging with wider societies and learning major languages does not mean that people need to abandon their own linguistic identities and cultural heritage.

### **A Note on Terminology**

Many concepts, terms, and approaches have been developed in the area of language revitalization, including language maintenance, language revival, or language reclamation. We should keep in mind, however, that these are ideas created and promoted by researchers and often not the conceptualizations of communities themselves. These concepts are also strongly influenced by biological metaphors of Western science and not necessarily seen that way by language communities. Therefore while referring to the broad and open meaning of 'language revitalization' this book avoids making strict conceptual distinctions and definitions, leaving decisions on how the process should be defined to the people involved.

### **The Need for Reflection**

There are many different ways of reacting to language endangerment. As mentioned, some people see it as a sign of progress. Some are in denial, especially if they feel partly responsible for not passing their languages to their children. Others feel nostalgic for a view of the past that, for them, is linked to their heritage language. But there are some who feel motivated to do something. Quite often, they feel a sense of urgency, because they can literally see their language dying – in Guernsey or Wilamowice, for example, most speakers are now very old and we're losing some every month or two. So it is not uncommon for language activists to rush into the first activities that come to mind; however, this might not be the best use of their time or energy.

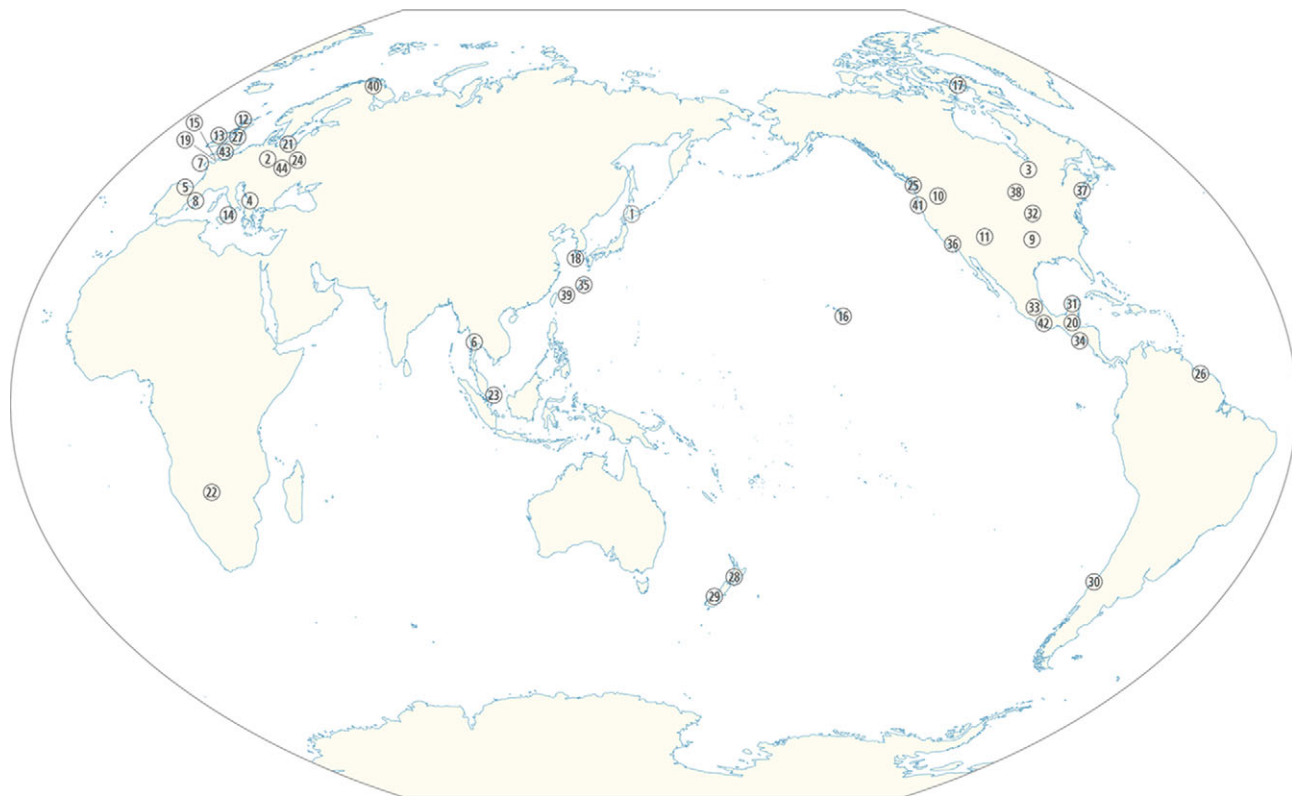
This is why we want to encourage critical discussions about other ideas and real situations. For example, people often assume that because children seem to learn languages easily, and because schools are effective at killing minority languages, they need to get their languages taught in schools. But if our languages are not part

of the mainstream curriculum, and have no materials or trained teachers, they often end up being taught for half an hour a week, after school or at weekends, by people who are passionate about their language but don't know how to teach it. Very few children will become fluent from this kind of teaching, and some will be put off the language for good; they may also absorb the implicit message that the minority language is not good enough for 'proper' school. And the language activists have no time for other activities that might be more effective, such as conversing with other adults to maintain or increase their fluency. It is important to take time to find out more about the language situation and to reflect on potential courses of action and their outcomes, in light of the resources available – human, financial, and in terms of language teaching and reference materials. This book discusses aims and objectives: short-term, medium-term, and long-term. We believe that spending a bit of time to undertake a survey of language attitudes, and who speaks the language, and how well, will repay the time and effort by providing a sound basis for planning other activities.

This book aims to share the richness of multiple perspectives and examples as well as a coherent, logical sequence of complementary topics to consider while planning language revitalization or struggling in the midst of this process. It is intended not only to provide revitalizers with coherent knowledge and a strong point of departure, but also to encourage, inspire, and empower them. And, as we have already said but wish to emphasize again, we avoid a 'one-size-fits-all' approach by presenting concrete examples and **providing readers with the tools they need to make their own decisions.**

### Examples of language revitalization in this book (see map on page 6)

- |  |   |
|--|---|
| 1. Ainu  | 23. Kristang                                      |
| 2. Alznerish                                   | 24. Lemko   |
| 3. Anishinaabemowin                            | 25. Lushootseed                                   |
| 4. Arbanasi                                    | 26. Makushi                                       |
| 5. Euskara   Basque                            | 27. Manx   Manx Gaelic                            |
| 6. Black Tai   Lao Song                        | 28. Northern Māori                                |
| 7. Breton                                      | 29. Southern Māori known as Kai Tahu              |
| 8. Catalan                                     | 30. Mapudungun                                    |
| 9. Cherokee                                    | 31. Yucatec Maya, maaya t'aan                     |
| 10. Chinuk Wawa                                | 32. myaamia   Miami-Illinois                      |
| 11. Diné   Navajo                              | 33. Nahuatl                                       |
| 12. Scottish Gaelic                            | 34. Nawat   Pipil                                 |
| 13. Irish Gaelic   Irish                       | 35. Okinawan                                      |
| 14. Greko                                      | 36. Pahka'anil                                    |
| 15. Guernesiais                                | 37. Passamaquoddy   Maliseet   Wolastoqi          |
| 16. Hawaiian                                   | 38. Potawatomi                                    |
| 17. Inuktituk                                  | 39. Ryūkyūan                                      |
| 18. Jejudommal   Jejuan, Jejueo or Jejubangeon | 40. Sámi  |
| 19. Jërriais                                   | 41. Tolowa Dee-ni'                                |
| 20. Kaqchikel                                  | 42. San Martín Peras Mixtec   Tu'un Savi (Mixtec) |
| 21. Kashubian                                  | 43. Welsh   |
| 22. Khwe                                       | 44. Wymysiöeryś   Vilamovian                      |



Map of examples of language revitalization in this book

*Part I*

Planning to Revitalize



# 1 Why Revitalize?

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*Lenore A. Grenoble*

## **Introduction**

There are a great many reasons to consider revitalization, and more than one can be a decisive factor in deciding to take this on. Language revitalization is often packaged as having the goal of creating new speakers of the target language, of building new domains for language use, and of creating a future generation of speakers. This view is overly simplistic. Although creating new speakers is an important goal (and potential benefit) of revitalization, the notion of a speaker is complicated, and achieving fluency in a language requires a lot of work. It can be very liberating to reconceive the benefits and goals of language work to focus less on creating new speakers and more on the broader advantages that revitalization can bring.

Different people have different ideas about why they want to revitalize, and there is no single right reason. It is also important to keep in mind that the motivations for revitalizing can change as one goes along. Revitalization is a dynamic, fluid process. Moreover, it is important to keep in mind that revitalization is not just about language: it is a social movement and brings benefits to society as well as to individuals.

The decision to revitalize is often a personal one; it requires time, commitment, and tenacity. But at the same time many people may decide to revitalize to benefit not only themselves, but their family, or their larger community or network of friends and acquaintances. And there may be pressure from friends and family to revitalize, or not to. This chapter provides an overview of common motivations to revitalize, and a discussion of the potential benefits of language vitality. One over-arching impetus for revitalization has to do with *identity*: defining and claiming identity for an individual or a collective group is one of the most compelling reasons for language work. And for many, it also involves reclaiming rights to self-determination and control over one's life.

The motivations listed here can be unified under the larger umbrella of identity, but it is important to consider each individually, to understand them better, and to think of how they can both be used to encourage

revitalization work, and manipulated to serve its end goals. They are divided into six broad groups that encompass a range of social, psychological, and physical categories/stimuli:

- (1) connecting with ancestors, the past, and cultural heritage;
- (2) healing;
- (3) building community;
- (4) knowledge and culture;
- (5) well-being; and
- (6) cognitive benefits.

As these labels suggest, the categories overlap and, even if the motivation for revitalization comes from one specific area, the resulting benefits are considerably broader.

For clarity, I list these reasons to revitalize as separate points, but it is useful to keep in mind that the benefits are interconnected and a benefit in one area can spill over to another area. This is one reason motivations may change as people revitalize, because they recognize (and need) different benefits at different times. Moreover there are benefits to being bilingual, and these benefits also intersect with the benefits of revitalization. If revitalization moves people from being monolingual to bilingual, they will enjoy the advantages of being bilingual. Being bi- (or multi-) lingual has benefits that are independent of language revitalization: being bilingual in two majority languages brings not only the obvious social benefits of being able to communicate with more people, to interact with them more directly, but also cognitive benefits in improved performance in school, along with physical and mental health benefits. This is important to keep in mind at the outset, as many people mistakenly fear that learning one language interferes with speaking another, and see this as a reason not to revitalize, or not to speak an Indigenous language with their children. This is not true. There is ample evidence that bilingualism is an advantage.

Overall language vitality is related to a combination of factors –social, political, demographic, and practical – and all are usually at play at once. Of greatest relevance are the social and political factors: the use of the language in a wide variety of domains, including the home, schools, places of worship, government offices, on the streets, in stores, in the workplace (broadly defined). The availability of the target language in these various domains is not always the decision of individual speakers, but is often determined by the language and education policies. This is linked to the social prestige of a language, which is in turn related to speakers' motivations to use the language, and also connected to the economic power of a language: does knowing the language bring job possibilities or hinder them?

Finally practical considerations can also determine whether a language is used. These include such factors as whether the language has a written

form, an orthography that makes it keyboard-friendly (for text messages, emails, and social media), a standardized form that is taught in the schools, is used on signage, and so on. This is not to say that any of these are requirements for a language, but rather, if a standardized form has already been sorted out, it may be functionally easier to get it into textbooks and on public signs than if it hasn't, for example.

As this list makes clear, language use is a social act, and revitalization – by its very nature – involves social transformation. The transformation may be as basic as bringing use of the language into some domain where it was not previously found, or had not been used for many years. But it may involve massive social change if it involves the (re)introduction of language use (and thus language rights) in education and administration, and increased presence and voice in matters of governance. And this is one reason that revitalization efforts are sometimes (often?) met with resistance by authorities (local or national) as they are viewed as a kind of empowerment that may be threatening. Some governments see revitalization, as well as Indigenous language use more broadly, as steps towards self-governance, autonomy from existing powers. One argument against revitalization that is often invoked is the idea that it costs too much. But in fact research shows quite the opposite. A relatively small investment in the use of local or Indigenous languages has big financial payoffs: it improves educational outcomes and improves health and well-being. It thus is more cost-effective to invest in people at an early age, to produce adults who contribute to society.

From this perspective, revitalization is not a sociolinguistic process but a sociological one, and the changes it brings may not be just locally significant, but regionally or nationally. This is a strong view, but it underscores that language revitalization is both social and political, and brings a host of potential benefits and hazards that are not, at first glance, directly related to language itself.

Revitalization is an active process, and the kinds of benefits you gain from it will depend on the investment, at an individual level, at a community level, and at a larger societal level. Because it is an active process, the goals, motivations, and benefits can and often do change over time. One of the core motivations for revitalization is to claim, or reclaim, identity. This is a consideration that drives many revitalization efforts, and in some sense is an overarching motivation that encompasses the separate points given here.

Stories and oral histories have been, and continue to be, important vehicles for teaching about one's self, for learning what it means to be a member of society, how to deal with adversity, to face challenges, and to celebrate accomplishments. These are important aspects of identity and resilience, which are acquired and accessed through language. For example,

in their report on the Mi'kmaq and Maliseet/Wolastoqi immersion programs, Tompkins and Murray Orr<sup>1</sup> discuss community activities and benefits in revitalizing language in two First Nations groups in Canada. They note that the benefits are often framed in terms of academic impact, but they find in interviews with participants, language and identity are closely linked. They find that participants in the program evaluate knowing the language as the single route to learning to be a member of the culture. By the same token, the more children are exposed to the culture, the more they learn the language. The two cannot be separated.

### **1. Connecting with your Ancestors, the Past, and Cultural Heritage**

Language revitalization is often a first step in cultural revitalization and reinvigorating cultural traditions. Speaking the language of one's ancestors is one obvious way to make a connection with the past, with linguistic and cultural heritage. In some cases this can mean being able to speak directly with living relatives, elders, or other people. Speaking to them in their native tongue, your ancestral tongue, is rewarding for both sides, and opens windows to closer understanding of your heritage.

In other cases there may be no speakers of the language, but the cultural heritage lives on in prayers, stories, and songs, and in many cases in written historical documents, not only from ancestors but also from outsiders, such as explorers, missionaries, and colonizers. In order to understand these texts, knowledge of the language is critical. Language revitalization often goes hand-in-hand with cultural revitalization, and connections with the past provide a stepping stone for creating a new cultural future.

As this implies, motivations for revitalizing a language can be spiritual. Language is used for spiritual purposes, to communicate with the gods, spirits, or supernatural beings. Sacred language is an important part of many cultures. While in some cultures, only certain people have access to sacred language, in others, all people do. In many societies language is the primary means for communicating with the spirits or gods, and even in places where a new religion has come to replace the old beliefs, it may not have done so entirely. In Siberia, Indigenous peoples are often Christian, but many communities still have shamans and practice animism alongside Christianity. Shamans communicate with the spirits in the ancestral language, and people need to communicate with the shamans in that language too.

The close connection between spirituality and culture is hard to understand without the ancestral language, as these connections are often

<sup>1</sup> J. Tompkins and A. Murray Orr, *Best Practices and Challenges in Mi'kmaq and Maliseet/Wolastoqi Language Immersion Programs* (Dartmouth, Nova Scotia: Atlantic Policy Congress of First Nations Chiefs Secretariat, 2011), [www.deslibris.ca/ID/230705](http://www.deslibris.ca/ID/230705).

expressed, maintained, and negotiated through language. For some, spirits or gods can only be addressed in certain kinds of speech: specialized sacred language, or special words, or more simply in the ancestral language itself. For many Indigenous peoples, nature, spirituality, and language are deeply interwoven.

Breton provides an interesting counterpoint, illustrating that religion and language are intertwined in a variety of ways. Breton is a Celtic language, closely related to Cornish and Welsh. It is spoken in Brittany (Breizh in Breton) in France. The most up-to-date information of the total number of speakers puts it at 206,000, based on a poll conducted in 2007.<sup>2</sup> (This figure is deceptively high, as most speakers are elderly and the language is considered endangered.) There is a strong association between Catholicism and the use of ‘good’ traditional Breton. Although this attitude has led to stereotypes and strong ideologies about who counts as a speaker of Breton, it has also served as a protective factor, and has helped foster revitalization.<sup>3</sup>

Some revitalization programs are aimed at what Leanne Hinton calls the ‘missing generations’: people of parental and professional age who are not able to teach their children their ancestral language because they themselves do not speak it, but their parents, family members, or elders do. The Master-Apprentice Program<sup>4</sup> (also known as Mentor-Apprentice) is just one example of a program that specifically partners adults with elders to learn the language, thereby also building stronger, closer connections with at least one member of a generation that spoke it and used it in daily life. Some examples are discussed in [Chapter 15](#). Such bridges are important for building connections that extend far beyond the language itself (a fact which pertains to most or even all revitalization). And this speaks to another motivation for revitalization: passing the language to your children (and their children), and to future speakers. This helps restore links between generations, heal possible ruptures, and nurture cohesion and well-being in the community. In this sense, connecting with generations is not only backward-looking, but forward-looking as well. Connecting with the past may not alone be sufficient motivation for younger (or even older) speakers to revitalize, but understanding history and heritage is an important part of (re)claiming identity.

<sup>2</sup> Published in TMO-Fañch Broudic 2009. *Fañch Broudic. Parler breton au XXI<sup>e</sup> siècle. Le nouveau sondage de TMO Régions* (Brest: Emgleo Breiz, 2009), [www.fr.brezhoneg.bzh/5-chiffres-cles.htm](http://www.fr.brezhoneg.bzh/5-chiffres-cles.htm).

<sup>3</sup> J. L. Davis, ‘Intersections of religion and language revitalization’, in S. D. Brunn (ed.), *The Changing World Religion Map* (Dordrecht: Springer, 2015), pp. 1091–101.

<sup>4</sup> L. Hinton, ‘The Master-Apprentice language learning program’, in L. Hinton and K. Hale (eds.), *The Green Book of Language Revitalization* (San Diego and New York: Academic Press, 2001), pp. 217–26.

## 2. Healing

Many Indigenous peoples cite healing as a primary reason for revitalization. They often feel (with good reason) that their languages were forcibly taken away from them, along with rights to self-determination and to deciding one's destiny. Revitalizing language is part of a larger process of decolonization, cultural revitalization, and reclaiming the right to determine one's fate. Colonial language practices have had a deleterious effect on local language vitality in many places. The forced imposition of a colonial (national) language and assimilation to a majority culture resulted in many people feeling a loss of self-worth and pride. These practices have left deep and painful scars. Reclaiming one's language is an important means to combating the colonial legacy.

Healing implies overcoming trauma, and sadly there are too many people around the world who have suffered traumatic experiences where use of their language is concerned.

In the late nineteenth century, and well into the twentieth century, in different parts of the world (including Australia, Canada, the Soviet Union, the USA, and Scandinavia), children were forcibly taken away from parents to live in residential or boarding schools, in the name of 'civilizing' them. In these schools they were often actively punished for speaking their language. This was not only painful for them but also became a driver behind language shift, as they actively avoided teaching their language to their children so as to protect them from these painful experiences. They suffered further damage by being separated from their families; in many cases children returned to their home communities as strangers, unable to speak the local language and having forgotten the local culture. The impact of the residential system cut to the very core of local societies. This also occurred, and continues to occur, in less extreme circumstances in normal day schools, with children punished or ridiculed for speaking their language.

Research has shown that many people in North America do not recognize the term 'historical trauma' per se, but speak about it in their own words, referring to it as 'disturbing times' or 'the events the ancestors went through'. They also speak about trauma with specific reference to language ('I don't understand my talk, my language') and talk about sorrow and loneliness of the soul.<sup>5</sup> Language revitalization can be a direct goal, with

<sup>5</sup> K. M. Reinschmidt, A. Attakai, C. B. Kahn, S. Whitewater, and N. Teufel-Shone, 'Shaping a *Stories of Resilience Model* from urban American Indian elders' narratives of historical trauma and resilience', *American Indian and Alaskan Native Health Research* 23/4 (2016), 63–85. <http://dx.doi.org/10.5820/aian.2304.2016.63>.

reclamation of the language as healing. And it can be the means to an end, since language is a vehicle for culture. In addition, research shows concrete benefits for psychological and physical health related to reinforcing a sense of identity in close connection to the use of the heritage language (see section 5 of this chapter).

Healing through revitalization goes beyond language-specific trauma; it is an important means of building resilience. Using a language can be a means of reclaiming and regaining control of one's fate; it can be an act of political resistance, resistance against linguistic and cultural assimilation, against the very act of colonization. The United Nations Declaration of the Rights of Indigenous Peoples declares that all peoples have the right to self-determination: Language revitalization can be a deliberate reclamation of that right.<sup>6</sup>

### 3. Building Community and Social Change

People often begin revitalization with the goal of learning to speak their ancestral language, but then find that the benefits extend far beyond linguistic abilities. Often the very act of revitalization brings people together, creating closer community ties.

In Native North America, people used to say how the video rental truck was a major cause of language shift. Instead of coming out of their homes in the evenings to talk to one another, people would rent videos and stay home and watch them. The videos were eventually replaced by the Internet and widely accessible video content (on programs such as YouTube), but the effect has been the same. Community-based revitalization programs bring people together: in classes and workshops, in planning sessions, and in events celebrating the language. Even where groups of people convene to practice a few phrases, the very act of coming together builds stronger social ties and a sense of shared purpose and therefore community. These programs offset some of the isolating effects of modern society.

Active engagement in community language revitalization also helps create leaders and build research capacity in the community. Some community language activists – Daryl Baldwin of the Myaamia Tribe, and Jessie Little Doe Baird of the Wampanoag, both in North America – have received formal linguistics training to help them do the language work more effectively. They have brought these skills to their communities and put them to work in supporting youth to create future leaders.

<sup>6</sup> For some concrete examples about current work and successes, see the *Healing Through Language Project* at <https://holisticnative.org/our-projects/healing-through-language/>.

#### 4. Knowledge and Culture

Language and culture are deeply intertwined, and knowledge of all kinds is packaged in language and cultural practices. Certain kinds of knowledge are packaged in the words of a language, and other kinds of knowledge are packaged in larger communicative practices. For example, a large number of studies have been done documenting knowledge and use of plants in traditional medicine; this work is of interest to scientists and health care specialists searching for cures for diseases that are still unknown in Western medicine. Oftentimes knowing the name of a plant will tell you about its uses. In many languages, the common name for *Euphrasia* gives a clue to its usage: in English it's 'eyebright'. In my own fieldwork in Greenland, I found that many people knew its name but not its use. It's called *isiginnaq* < *isi* 'eye' in Kalaallisut (Greenlandic); the name does give a clue here even though the usage was forgotten, but people would guess that it has something to do with eyes or vision just based on the word.

Reindeer herders have a rich vocabulary for referring to the reindeer and to the herding practices themselves, and these vocabularies can and do vary across different herding cultures. It is not just that the words vary, but what is named, and how it is named, can vary from language to language. The Evenki people of Siberia have a complex vocabulary for different kinds of reindeer, varying with age, sex, and their use in the herd, while in the Northern Sámi of Norway, the labels include categories for colour, body shape, and size in addition to age, sex, and use. In both cases, the complex lexicon encodes important information for identifying different animals for different purposes. Both groups often say that you need to know the language in order to know how to herd reindeer.

The words we use for food tell us what people eat, how they collect it, prepare it, and how they serve and eat it. Many cultures have food taboos, some for particular life cycles (e.g. foods that are banned during pregnancy); some items are eaten in certain communities but banned by one group; and in some communities women cannot eat certain foods, or only members of the royal family can eat certain foods. Food preparation in many cultures connects mothers to daughters, older women to younger women, in communities where it is women who prepare food. These specialized ways of speaking provide all kinds of information about cultural practices involving an important aspect of human life, and the knowledge that accompanies these practices.

Culture is often reflected in the ways people speak, not only the words people use, but also in how people talk about things, what they say when, and to whom. This can be as basic as the ways you greet people, joke with them (or not), or how you thank others or express gratitude, or praise. A more complicated area is child-rearing practices and the ways of speaking (or not) to