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Being Special

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Abstract

Skilled first-language speakers are often unaware of the astounding intricacies of their languages, especially if the languages do not have long literary traditions. The value accorded such languages by both those within the community and those outside, especially when the language is spoken primarily by small numbers of elderly people, may be more a reflection of attitudes toward the culture than toward the language itself. But attitudes can also flow in the opposite direction. A language can become a cornerstone of pride in heritage, particularly once it becomes clear that it is not only as good as an encroaching majority language, but also special.

1. Introduction

Attitudes toward language are a cultural matter. Some communities view language primarily as a utilitarian tool, if they think about it at all. Different languages simply allow one to communicate with different people, much as different kitchen utensils are useful for preparing different foods. Other communities have traditions of appreciating, cultivating, and enjoying their languages. Not surprisingly, these attitudes can have profound effects on the viability of languages under threat of replacement. People tend to use languages they hold in high esteem and those they know are respected by others. And children are more likely to learn the languages they hear around them.

But respect and esteem need not be inert. They can be developed and nurtured. And the rewards can be felt far beyond the languages themselves.

2. Invisibility

Some years ago I was visiting friends who were just beginning to recognize that their heritage language was no longer being learned by children. The five-year-old son of my host raced into the house after his first day of school sobbing, "They called me a Indian!" School district boundaries in this area were such that children from the community were distributed among four districts and were a minority in each school. His mother replied gently, "But you ARE an Indian". This made him cry all the more. To him 'Indian' was no more than a dirty name.

This community went on to develop language programs in the schools, which resulted in successes far beyond what had been anticipated. Those children may not have emerged as perfect speakers, but their lives were turned around. Their grades went up in all subjects, and they became better-adjusted, happier individuals. To them, being Native now means something substantive,

positive and important. The language classes have unveiled a heritage they are proud of.

Similar stories can be seen all over the world. Children and adults who discover the richness of their own background tend to be happier with their place in the world, and, more often than not, more successful in both their own community and the surrounding culture. Language can be a major piece of this picture.

For those of us already fascinated by languages, the significance of each one seems obvious. But for many people, both those inside the communities in which endangered languages are spoken and those outside, the value of these languages may be largely invisible. Work with the languages can do more than provide a record; it can play an important role in raising awareness, respect, and appreciation of the value of a heritage.

Several kinds of strategies can help move things along, some aimed at demonstrating that the language is 'every bit as good' as a competing language, and others that it is much more than a simple equivalent.

3. Every Bit as Good

Minority languages are sometimes rejected by younger generations and looked down on by outsiders because they are viewed as less effective than a competing dominant language: they may be spoken mostly by old people and considered ill-equipped to deal with the modern world. One step toward changing this perception is to make them an observable presence in modern, everyday life. We are all more motivated to learn languages we hear and see around us.

For this it makes sense to make available kinds of language that learners can use easily and interactively on a daily basis. Words and phrases of this type are fortunately part of most community programs aimed at revitalization. Most language classes begin with greetings and chitchat: 'Hello', 'How are you?', 'Please pass the bread', 'Thank you', 'See you'. In many Native

communities in North America, the accessibility of such simple expressions has made a tremendous difference. Community members of all ages now routinely use the heritage language in greetings, at the table, on the telephone, and even texting. The language is alive, a symbol of community and pride in heritage, observable to both community members and their neighbors.

Compiling sets of core expressions can provide a showcase for creativity. Special attention can be paid to what tends to be said most often in the course of a normal day, by both young and old. Dogs and cats will be just as happy with names in the traditional language, for example, and learn to respond to commands just as easily (or lackadaisically). Pets are decidedly less judgmental about pronunciation than peers. And talking to pets in the traditional language puts it out there. Equipping sports teams with special expressions, such as signals for particular plays, cries of encouragement, and victory cheers can be effective for intimidating adversaries and developing team spirit.

Heightening the visibility of the language can be effective as well. A group of Native language teachers in another community realized that they needed to develop a good orthography, one that would reflect all distinctions in the language, so that future second-language learners could know exactly how words should sound, one that people could write with confidence, one that could be used in the digital age, but one that would look like the traditional system used by missionaries. They came up with a fine system. But this savvy group of teachers realized that it could not be imposed on a community like theirs by fiat. They constructed signs to place around the community: traffic signs, signs on the post office, on churches, on schools, on aisles at the grocery store. Soon other merchants in town began asking for signs for their businesses. The language now has a visible presence in the community that it did not have before.

Of course initiatives aimed at bringing a traditional language into modern community life can raise some fundamental issues. Communities vary in their receptiveness to words from other languages, for example. Speakers of some languages, like English, readily adopt foreign words, such as *spaghetti*, *Weltanschauung*, and *tsunami*. Speakers of others routinely construct their own terms from native material, either on principle or because their own languages offer good tools for the task. Neither strategy is right or wrong. In some communities, incorporating words from other languages simply continues ancient traditions and current practices. In others the adoption of each foreign word is viewed as a step along the slippery slope toward loss.

The issues raised may be more subtle. An important reason for preserving endangered languages is the fact that they are the embodiment of a culture, of traditional

ways of thinking and interacting. During the course of work with speakers of still another language, no longer used on a daily basis, I noticed that I had never observed people greeting each other. When asked about greetings, the speakers first looked puzzled, then discussed the question, and finally agreed that they did not exist. I asked what someone might say if she ran into a friend shopping in the next town. Again they drew blanks. Finally one volunteered the equivalent of 'Oh, you're here.' According to them, greeting rituals were not a traditional part of this language, one that had always been spoken in a very small community. This difference raises an interesting question for those working toward language revitalization: Is it preferable to preserve traditional practices associated with the language, or to create new ones in line with modern culture?

4. Beyond Equivalent: Being Special

Linguists often comment that all languages evolve to meet the needs of their speakers. In most languages, it is a relatively simple matter to create terms for such devices as radios, computers and microwave ovens. But if all languages were truly equivalent, the value of each would be marginal, to the communities in which they are spoken, to their neighbors, to scholars, and to all persons interested in the capacity of the human mind. The more we learn about languages, the more we can appreciate the ways in which each individual language is special. Recognizing the specialness can be a powerful tool for building respect and esteem, within the community and beyond.

Differences among languages are neither random nor arbitrary. We know that thoughts that speakers have chosen to express the most often in their everyday conversation, distinctions they have considered worthy of mention, become routinized over time and established in vocabulary and grammar. Elaboration develops in those areas important to a culture. Some may emerge from the physical environment: terms for geographical formations, for medicines, for kinds of fish, for types of baskets. Some may be social, such as terms of address, terms for kinsmen, and names of ceremonial practices. Vocabulary of these kinds is often the most obvious and most likely to be documented. But specialness can be much deeper, in the ways speakers categorize concepts, organize and connect their thoughts, convey them to others, and in the ways speakers interact. Differences of this type are often more subtle, complex, and interesting.

In the following sections, some examples of specialness will be illustrated with material from Mohawk, an Iroquoian language spoken in northeastern North America, primarily Quebec, Ontario, and New York State. Of course what is special will differ from one language to the next: that is what makes it special.

4.1. Polysynthesis

One of the most obvious special features of Mohawk is its propensity for long words. Words, particularly verbs, can potentially contain many meaningful parts, a characteristic termed *polysynthesis*. What might be expressed in a full sentence in English or Spanish is often expressed in a single Mohawk verb. Words like that in (1) are not uncommon. The first line in the example shows the word as spoken (in the community orthography), the second shows its meaningful parts (morphemes), the third shows the meaning of each part, and the fourth a free translation of the whole.

- (1) *Thia'tonsakani'tsónhkwahkwe'*
th-i-a'-t-onsa-k-an-i'tsonhkw-ahkw-e'
just-there-PAST-change-back-I-own-rear-pick.up-PFV
'I just jumped right back in there.'

It might be wondered whether polysynthesis makes any difference. In fact it does.

Any Mohawk speaker would immediately recognize (1) as a single word, but most would not be able to segment it into morphemes (unless he or she has studied linguistics). Speakers would not, for example, identify *i-* as the part meaning 'action directed away from the speaker', or *t-* as a change in position, any more than English speakers would immediately identify the sound *-t* as the past tense, though that is the difference between English *look* and *look-ed*. They can, however, manipulate the parts with often dizzying skill. And they generally have a sense of the meanings contained within the word. Speakers have sometimes remarked that the language paints pictures in their minds. It is easy to see why. Consider the Mohawk word for 'lightning': *tewani'nehkara'wánionhs*. Literally it means 'it is sticking its tongue out here and there'. (It can be compared to the command *tesani'nehkara'w* 'Stick out your tongue!', with pronominal prefix *s-* 'you' in place of the prefix *w-* 'it' in 'lightning', and no habitual suffix.) The language is full of such images.

Often embedded in such structure are aspects of culture. If a speaker bought a gift for a friend, she might say (2).

- (2) *Wa'khehárhahse'*
wa'-khe-har-hahs-e'
PAST-I/her-hang-for-PRF
'I hung it for her.' = 'I bought her a gift.'

People usually use the term without a second thought. But it has a history. Speaker Kaia'titáhkhe' Jacobs explains that people used to offer blankets as gifts. When a couple married, a rope was put up in the house and guests would come in and hang gifts on it. Another example can be seen in the term for New Year in (3).

- (3) *tsi na'teiontatenoronhkwánionhs*
tsi n-a'-te-iaw-atate-noron-hkw-anion-hs
as when-PAST-two-one-each.other-be.dear-with-habitually
'when people kiss each other' = 'New Year'

It used to be the custom that on New Year's day, people went around from house to house, where they would share a drink and kiss each other.

Polysynthesis also provides speakers with ready tools for creating new vocabulary. If the new words are used often enough, they become a regular part of the language, and speakers may cease to focus on their original literal meanings. But the literal meanings can shed light on how the concepts were viewed at the time the words were created. The modern word for 'hospital', for example, does not paint a rosy picture of medical practices at the time of early contacts with Europeans.

- (4) *tsi iakenheion'taientákhkwa'*
tsi iak-enheion-'t-ient-ahkw-ha'
at one-die-er-lay-with-habitually
'where one habitually lays the dead' = 'hospital'

4.2. Noun incorporation

A second look at some of the Mohawk verbs seen so far shows that they can contain nouns inside of them. The verb 'jump' in (1) is literally 'pick up one's bottom'. It contains the noun stem *-i'tsonhkw-* 'bottom/rear/bum'. Noun incorporation, by which a noun stem is integrated into a verb, is used pervasively by Mohawk speakers to form new words, such as the word for 'hospital' in (4) above, with the incorporated noun stem *-enheion't-* 'those who are dead'. (This noun stem was itself formed from a verb root 'die' plus a nominalizing suffix 'the one(s) who'.)

Mohawk noun incorporation can provide glimpses of the classification of concepts. Three noun stems are incorporated particularly often: *-'nikonhr-* 'mind', *-ia't-* 'body', and *-rihw-* 'matter, affair, word, news, etc.' An example of the effect of incorporating the noun stem *-'nikonr-* 'mind' into a verb meaning 'throw' can be seen in (5).

- (5) *ionkwá:ti'*
'I threw it'
ia'kate'nikonhrón:ti'
'I mind threw myself' = 'I expressed myself'

The results of incorporating the noun stems *-ia't-* 'body' and *-rihw-* 'matter' into 'seek' can be seen in (6).

- (6) *kéhsaks*
'I am searching' = I am looking for it (an object)
kheia'tísaks
'I am body-searching' = 'looking for her (a person)'
kerihwísaks
'I am matter searching' = I am doing research'

In a sense, these incorporated nouns serve to categorize verbs into classes pertaining to mental, physical, and abstract matters. Some further examples are in (7), (8), and (9).

(7) -'nikonhr- 'mind'

wakate 'nikonhrriiòhston

'I have made my mind good' = 'I am being patient'

wake 'nikonhraién:ta's

'it is mind settled on me' = 'I understand'

wake 'nikonhratshà:ni

'I am mind strong' = 'I am brave'

sonke 'nikónhrhèn: 'en

'it has mind fallen on me again' = 'I have forgotten'

Se 'nikòn:rarak

'Keep your mind on it' = 'Be careful'

(8) -ia't- 'body'

wakia 'tishónhkhwa'

'I am body shaking' = 'I am shivering'

wa 'kheia 'táta'

'I body inserted her' = 'I buried her'

wa 'katia 'tahserón:ni'

'I body prepared myself' = 'I dressed up'

wa 'katia 'tawi 'táhsi'

'I body uncovered myself' = 'I took my jacket off'

kia 'tión:ni

'I am body extended' = 'I am stretched out'

(9) -rihw- 'matter, affair, idea, word, news, . . .'

wa 'katerihwatè:ko'

'I matter-escaped' = 'I avoided the matter'

wakerihwakéhte'

'I am matter carrying' = 'carrying a burden'

wa 'kerihó 'kwate'

'I matter dug' = 'I did some research'

wa 'kerihwahserón:ni

'I matter prepared' = 'I organized it'

wa 'kerihwahni:rate'

'I matter strengthened' = 'I proved it'

Skilled speakers also use noun incorporation on occasion to control the flow of information, directing attention to some parts of their message and backgrounding others. One woman was describing how she makes traditional cornbread, mixing up the ingredients, shaping the dough, and plopping it into boiling water. She noted that she fries up meat to make gravy to go with it.

(10) Tionhónhskwaron' o 'wà:ron ehskeri:tahwe'.

cow meat you will fry

'You fry up some beef.'

At this first mention of the meat, she used the independent lexical noun o 'wà:ron 'meat' to draw

attention to it. (Most Mohawk noun stems do not occur as words on their own. The noun for 'meat' consists of a neuter prefix o-, the noun stem -'wahr- 'meat', and the noun suffix -on.) She then went into greater detail on the optimal consistency of the dough, exactly how it should be shaped with wet hands, the perfect size and shape of the cakes, how long they should boil, and how hot the water should be. At that point she mentioned the meat again, this time incorporating it into the verb 'fry'.

(11) Enhse 'wahrakeri:tahwe'.

en-hse-'wahr-keri't-hw-e'

FUT-2SG.AGENT-meat-fried-CAUS-PFV

'You'll meat-fry' = 'You'll fry the meat'

This time the meat, which was already part of the scene, was not a focus of separate attention. It was simply a part of the meat-frying step.

4.3. People and Objects: Possession

Grammatical constructions can provide interesting glimpses of conventionalized types of relationships: relationships between objects, between persons and objects, between persons, and between ideas. In English, my relationship to my face, my money, and my grandfather are all expressed grammatically in the same way, with the same possessive pronoun *my*: *my face*, *my money*, *my grandfather*. In many other languages, including Mohawk, these kinds of relationships are differentiated in the grammar.

One set of possessive prefixes are used with most things that are part of oneself, especially body parts. This kind of possession is termed 'inalienable' or 'inseparable'.

(12) *k-konhsà:ke* 'my face (area)'

k-ahonhtà:ke 'my ear (area)'

k-ahsinà:ke 'my leg (area)'

A different set of possessive prefixes are used with objects that are can be acquired and lost. This kind of possession is termed 'alienable' or 'separable'.

(13) *ak-hwísta'* 'my money'

ak-hwèn:kare' 'my snowshoes'

ak-kónhtshera' 'my paint'

Languages with an inalienable/alienable distinction differ in interesting ways in how they categorize specific objects. A few Mohawk nouns can appear with either kind of prefix, but with a difference in meaning.

(14) *k-hnia'sà:ke* 'my throat (area)'

ak-hnià:sa' 'my collar'

ke-'nionkserà:ke 'my big toe'

ake-'niónkseri 'my onion'

In many languages, one's relatives (kinsmen) are categorized as inalienable possessions. In Mohawk, they are not categorized as possessions at all. Kinship terms are basically verbs that describe relationships. Like all

verbs, they contain pronominal prefixes identifying the major parties involved. The word for ‘my grandfather’, begins with a prefix *rak-* ‘he/me’, the same prefix as the verb *rakenòn:we’s* ‘he likes me’. Most kinship terms end in diminutives, originally a sign of affection.

(15) *rakhsótha*
 rak-hsot=ha
 he/me-be.grandparent.to=DIMINUTIVE
 ‘he is grandparent to me’ = ‘my grandfather’

(16) *khe’kèn:’a*
 khe-’ken’=a
 I/her-have.as.younger.sibling=DIMINUTIVE
 ‘I have her as yngr sibling’ = ‘my younger sister’

Where the relationship is symmetrical or mutual, a reciprocal verb is used.

(17) *onkwara’se’okòn:’a*
 onkw-ar-a’se’=okon’a
 we.all-each.other-have.as.cousin=variously
 ‘we all are cousins to each other’ = ‘my cousins’

Spouses can be referred to in a number of ways. One is a reciprocal construction much like that for cousins.

(18) *teiakeni:teron*
 te-iaken-i’teron
 two-we.two-reside
 ‘we two reside’ = ‘my wife’ or ‘my husband’

Another is with terms based on the verb root *-ksten* ‘be old’ plus the diminutive.

(19) *khekstèn:ha*
 khe-ksten’=ha
 I/her-be.old=DIMINUTIVE
 ‘I have her as my little old one’ = my wife’

There are terms based on the noun root *-nahkw-*, also used in the noun for ‘marriage’. Here the spouse is treated grammatically as an alienable possession.

(20) *aonáhkwa’*
 ao-nahkw-a’
 her.ALIENABLE-spouse-NOUN.SUFFIX
 ‘her husband’

raonáhkwa’
 rao-nahkw-a’
 his.ALIENABLE-spouse-NOUN.SUFFIX
 ‘his wife’

4.4 Linguistic and extralinguistic context

Most spoken languages contain small words (particles) that are almost below the consciousness of speakers. Speakers are often hard put to translate them. These little words tend to disappear when speakers are first writing their mother tongue, particularly if they first learned to write in another language without obvious equivalents. These particles are often conspicuously absent from language lessons, and second-language learners do not learn them. But the best first-language

speakers tend to use them prolifically and to great effect, though the effects may be subtle.

One such Mohawk particle is *se’*. A woman announced that there was soup for lunch.

(21) A *Tanon’ ónon:tara’ iakotkátsthon.*
 and soup she has made
 ‘And she’s made soup.’

This speaker was born in another community, but had come to this one as a teenager. In that other community, some speakers use *l* where everyone in this one uses *r*, including this woman. Another diner, grinning, made the crack in (22), substituting *l* for *r*:

(22) B *Onón:tala’. Sá:ien’ ken nonón:tala’*
 soup you have Q the soup
 ‘Soup. Do you have soup?’

A *Hánio!*
 ‘Come on now.’

B *Iáh se’ thikonie:ron’.*
 not indeed am I just making fun of you
 ‘I’m not making fun of you.’

This small particle *se’* means essentially ‘contrary to what you were thinking’. The conversation continued.

(23) A *Iah nowén:ton tho tè:ioht tewakatá:ti.*
 not ever there was it so did I talk
 ‘I never spoke that way.’

B *Iah ki’ né: teká:ton.*
 not in fact that am I saying
 ‘That’s not what I’m saying.’

The particle *ki’*, often almost inaudible, specifies that the sentence is directly pertinent to the preceding discussion. They continued.

(24) A *Í: kwi’ tehsekká:nehre’*
 me in fact you know you are looking at me
 ‘Well you’re looking at me

tsi ne: sá:ton.
 as that you are saying
 as you’re saying it.’

B *Í:se’ ki’ wáhe’ ákta’ ihsete’.*
 you in fact you know near you are standing
 ‘Well you’re the one that’s standing close by.’

In his last remark, B again used the particle *ki’* to show that he was responding directly to the preceding statement. He also used the particle *wáhe’*, which also serves as the marker of tag questions (‘isn’t it so’), to suggest that his listener already knew this. Her previous remark contains the particle *kwi’*, a shortened form of the combination *ki’ wáhe’*, ‘in fact you know’.

Many other particles also have subtle functions. All Mohawk verbs contain pronominal prefixes identifying the major participants in the situation. The verb *tehsekká:nehre’* ‘you’re looking at me’ in (24), contains

the prefix *-hsek-* ‘you/me’. This word *tehsekká:nehre* would be a complete, grammatical sentence on its own: additional separate pronouns are not grammatically necessary. But the sentence it is in begins with the independent pronoun *í:* ‘me myself’. The sentence which followed begins with another independent pronoun *í:se* ‘you yourself’. Independent pronouns serve special functions in Mohawk: they are used for emphasis or contrast. Sentences (23) and (24) also contain another particle: *né:* ‘it, that’. Both of these sentences would have been grammatical without *né:*. It, too, has a special function, referring to something that is not precisely the continuing topic, in this case the entire fact that the lady might have spoken with *l*.

Some particles convey information about what the speaker believes the listener may know or be thinking. Another lady mentioned that she was a bit tired.

(25) *Iáh né: tewakhné:ken.*
not it is not am I drunk
‘It’s not that I’m drunk.’

This sentence would have perfectly grammatical without the particle *né:’e:* *Iáh tewakhné:ken* ‘I’m not drunk’. With the particle, she suggests (in fun) that her listeners may have been suspecting that she was tipsy.

Some particles indicate the source of a speaker’s information. Two men were talking about a piece of land where someone had once grown hay.

(26) *Ne: kí’ thí:ken ká:nen kí’ nà:’a taháhtka’we’*
that in fact that seed INFERENCE he let it go
‘Guess he just let it go to seed.’

The expression *kí’ nà:’a* indicates that the speaker lacks firsthand knowledge and can only speculate on the basis of what he remembers about the state of the field.

Numerous particles indicate the degree to which the speaker is committed to the truth of a statement. All of the particles underlined in (27) suggest less than total certainty on the part of the speaker in one way or another.

(27) *Khere’s ken tóka’ rón:nehre’*
perhaps eh maybe they think

ta’nón:wa’ watié:sen’ wáhe’.
perhaps it is easy isn’t it
‘Maybe they think perhaps it’s easy, right?’

4.5. Language Use

Use of language is a highly cultural matter. We all have ideas about cultures in which people are relatively taciturn, cultures in which children are expected to be silent, cultures in which people are constantly chattering on top of each other, etc. Mohawks have a long history of appreciating, cultivating, and enjoying their language, of taking advantage of the tools it offers for expression. They have always been known for their

formal oratory. And they are masters at other genres as well, from skilled storytelling to puns.

The elaborate word structure of Mohawk offers skilled speakers ubiquitous opportunities for word play. The English translation of the exchange in (28) makes little sense.

(28) A *Né:ne sha’tiakeniksà:’a*
it is when we two were children
‘We were just little children

tsi tiatáhsawen ki: na’ionkeniió’té’.
as we two have begun this we worked
when we started working on this.’

B *Ó:nen saksowá:nen nòn:wa’.*
now you are plate big presently
‘Now you have a big plate.’

Speaker B was playing with the root *-ksa’* ‘child’, followed by a diminutive, and the root *-ks-* ‘plate’.

One speaker warned another to be careful as he was moving toward an electrical cord. He asked what he should be watching out for. Her response is in (29).

(29) *Wáts ki’ tho enhsia’tièn:ta’ne’.*
wats ki’ tho en-hs-ia’t-ient-a’n-e’
just actually there FUT-2SG.AGENT-body-lie-INCH-PFV
‘You might fall down.’

Ensaia’taièn:ta’ne’.
en-sa-ia’t-ient-a’n-e’
FUT-2SG.PATIENT-body-lie-INCH-PFV
‘You’ll get a body.’ = ‘You’ll get a girlfriend.’

The two verbs are very close: *enhsia’tièn:ta’ne’* and *ensaia’taièn:ta’ne’*. The only difference is in the pronominal prefix ‘you’: *-hs* versus *-sa-*. The first is literally ‘you will come to be bodily lying’, and the second is literally ‘it will come to be bodily lying to you’, but they are used idiomatically to mean very different things. Language play like that in (29) is pervasive in good Mohawk conversation.

The preceding has shown just a sample of ways in which Mohawk is special. Every language is special in its own ways, in the categories it embodies, in the distinctions and generalizations it allows and requires speakers to make, in the attitudes it lets them convey toward both their message and each other. The differences can be what make it special to both those within the community and those outside, perhaps especially those differences that distinguish it from the encroaching majority language.

5. Discovering and Preserving the Special

One of the oldest methods of language documentation, used for purposes ranging from linguistic theory to language teaching, has been elicitation through translation. It is efficient and appropriate for many kinds

of information. It is useful for some of the goals described here, such as asking people to think of names of dogs they have known, collecting kinship terms, or assembling paradigms to build into lesson plans. At the same time, if asking for translations from a contact language is the only method, much of the specialness of a language can be missed, since that is precisely what might not be part of the contact language and thus missing from the model words or sentences. Particles are conspicuously absent from most translations. Perhaps even more important and less tangible is the fact that people say different things in different languages. They often choose to convey different information, and package it and arrange it in different ways. The difference between a text that originated in a particular language and one that was translated into that language from another is often immediately obvious. This is especially true when the two languages are quite different in structure. Again the differences raise important but subtle issues for revitalization work.

English written language can differ substantially from spoken language. Perfectly good spoken English can look silly when it is transcribed word by word, with its pauses and repetitions. Written English can be impenetrable when it is read aloud, in part because of its grammatical complexity. Each has evolved for its own medium. Speakers and listeners have a major resource available to them that writers and readers lack: prosody. Much of the structure expressed by pitch and rhythm in spoken language can be reflected only weakly in written language by means of punctuation. There it may be made explicit by elaborate syntactic constructions. But writers have the luxury of time to create dense syntax, and readers have the time to unpack it. In addition, some aspects of modern European literary styles have developed out of classical models, such as Latin.

Most currently endangered languages have developed for communication through the spoken channel. But in the modern world, revitalization work must often involve writing. In the absence of an immersion situation, when contact time is at a premium, language teachers can be more effective if they know something about the structure of the language they are passing on and can produce coherent classes, even if students are not taught grammar overtly. Such analytical knowledge is usually acquired most easily as a visual skill, by carefully examining and comparing written forms of the language. Where accreditation is at stake, writing is often specifically required of administrators, teachers, and students, in the form of reports, curricula, and tests.

Should the style of the new written language reflect the traditional rhetorical devices developed in the spoken language over centuries, or should it match that of the majority literary language? A few years into their work building up the Mohawk language classes, several teachers, excellent speakers, one with a background in

English primary education, sat down to write up a story for a children's reader. The opening is in (30).

(30) Written story

Ronatiohkwá:nen ne ratiksa'okòn:'a
they are a large group the children
'A group of children

átste' kahentà:ke tsi teionweienstáhhkwa'
outside grass place at one teaches with it
were in the schoolyard

ate'èn:racon ronatakhri'tsherón:ni, thetèn:re'
fence interior they are playing yesterday
playing inside the fence yesterday

orhon'kè:ne wisk-iawèn:re' iotohétston ne oié:ri'.
in the morning fifteen it has passed the ten
at 10:15 in the morning.'

Such a sentence might not be unusual in an English primer. Part of what students learn when they go to school is a formal, literary style that can be quite different from their everyday conversation. Each word in the Mohawk in (30) is correct. But no Mohawk speaker would ever open a story with this information. It is perhaps not ungrammatical technically. It is simply not Mohawk. The extent to which traditional patterns of information structure should be maintained in new literacy is a complex decision that can be made only by educators and others community members. An awareness of the issue, however, can be helpful.

Later Mohawk materials have tended to embody more native structures. A children's reader created a number of years later for slightly younger children, has the text in (31).

(31) Early reader

Kanáhstatsi Howard and Wathahí:ne Nicholas

È:rhar né: akitshé:nen.
dog it is my pet
'My pet is a dog.

Rahòn:tsi ronwá:iats ne akitshé:nen.
he is black one calls him the my pet
He is called Blackie.

Tiótkon ratákhe's.
always he runs around
He's always running around.

Ratákhe's tsi rotkahri'tsherón:ni.
he runs around as he is playing
He runs around while he plays.

Ratákhe's tsi tehahthénno'ks.
he runs around as he ball plays
He runs around while he plays ball.

Iontiatkahri'tsherón:ni.
we two make ourselves amusement
The two of us have fun.

Kahentà:ke ratákhe's.
 meadow place he runs around
 He runs around in the meadow.

Ratákhe's tsi rató:rats.
 he runs around as he hunts
 He runs around while he hunts.

Ratákhe's tsi rákhsere's.
 he runs around as he chases me
 He runs around while he chases me.

Tehohwishenhé:ion.
 he is strength dead
 He is tired.

Ró:ta's.
 He is sleeping.

Rotétshenhs tsi ratákhe's.
 he dreams how he runs around
 He is dreaming that he is running around.'

This is a wonderful work in every way. It has short sentences appropriate for beginning readers. There is repetition of both words and structures. Just one new word is introduced on each page. Importantly, the structures are completely Mohawk.

Like the spontaneous speech of all good Mohawk speakers, it is predominantly verbs.

Word order within Mohawk clauses is pragmatic rather than syntactic: essentially the most newsworthy information comes first. We can see this principle in the first sentence *Ē:rhar ne: akitshé:nen* 'dog it.is my pet' for 'My pet is a dog', and in the second sentence *Rahòn:tsi ronwá:iats* 'Blackie one.calls.him'. In *Kahentà:ke ratákhe's meadow.place he.runs.around*, the word for 'meadow' occurs before the verb for running around. Running around had been mentioned in three of the previous four sentences.

The second sentence also shows a common Mohawk structure, an antitopic construction. After a primary topic has been established, such as the dog here, it can be reaffirmed in later sentences with a phrase after the nuclear clause. We see just that construction in 'He is called Blackie, my pet.'

The majority of the other sentences in this text show another basic Mohawk construction, in which a main clause is followed by an adverbial clause set off by *tsi* 'as' with a finite verb: 'he runs [as he plays]. This little story provides five examples.

The text also shows appropriate use of the particle *ne*. At first glance, *ne* appears to be a simple definite article comparable to English 'the'. Sometimes the functions of the two overlap, but they are not precisely the same. Mohawk *ne* means essentially 'the aforementioned'. It occurs not just before nouns, but also before possessed nouns as here (*ak-itshé:nen* 'my pet'), kinship terms,

proper names, and even clauses. It did not precede *akitshé:nen* 'my pet' in the first line, because that was the first mention of my pet. (The particle *né:* in the first line, with stress and vowel length, is a different word.) This little book fits Mohawk beautifully.

6. Pride in the Complexity

Awareness of the richness and complexity of the Mohawk language has had a powerful effect on Mohawk communities and even on the fate of the language. Speakers often comment that before they began writing the language they had never given it much thought and had no idea of its complexity.

(32) A *Iah ki' tetewattó:kas.*
 not in fact do we notice
 'We're not conscious of it

nó:nen iáh teiokwahiatonhátie'.
 the when not are we all writing along
 when we're not writing.

Kwáh ionkwahiatonhátie' thó: ne: ó:nen.
 just we all are writing along there it is when
 Just when we're writing, that's when.'

B *Tewattó:kahs ki' tsi nikanontsistí:io's,*
 we notice in fact how so they're each good heads
 'We realize how smart we are,

wáhi'.
 TAG
 don't we.'

A *Tóka'ni iáh tekanontsistí:io's.*
 or maybe not are they each good heads
 'Or how not smart we are.'

At a certain point, Mohawk language teachers and curriculum designers, all of whom had had courses in the structure of Mohawk, requested a full-scale reference grammar, in which all that is known about the language would be available. There are ongoing discussions about the delicate balance between including every detail on the one hand, and making it accessible to non-linguists on the other. A suggestion that it should 'user friendly' initiated the exchange recounted in (33).

(33) *Wa'ì:ron'* "Mohawk for Dummies".
 She said, "Mohawk for Dummies."

Hánio!
 Come on!

Wa'ì:ron' né: nè:'e,
 she said that it is
 She said, that one,

"*Iáh tè:kehre'*", *wa'ì:ron'.*
 not do I think she said
 "I don't think so," she said.

"*That's an oxymoron.*"

7. New Generations

Mohawk speakers have been pioneers in language revitalization. In the early 1970's, when people in many other Native communities in North America had barely begun to realize that children were no learning their heritage language, they decided it should be taught in the schools. Some excellent speakers took on the challenge, but they soon realized that being a good speaker was not enough. An enterprising corps of teachers worked to institute a degree program through the University of Quebec specifically in Mohawk linguistics and language pedagogy, in order to equip speakers with the skills and credentials they needed to create a language program. Teachers for every level, from pre-K (nursery) through Grade 6 and adult classes, as well as supply (substitute) teachers and curriculum planners, enrolled in the program. The program consisted of intensive instruction during the summers and monthly weekend meetings during the school year.

As anyone who has ever undertaken such work knows, designing a curriculum for a language that is totally unlike the better-known European languages is no easy task. All participants were excellent speakers, but they had never thought about the structure of their language. The goal was not to teach grammar directly, but since time with the children was limited, it was recognized that instruction should match the structure of Mohawk. Children might think they were making paper airplanes, for example, when they were also learning singular, dual, and plural commands. They might be playing store, but also learning question and answer routines. The dedicated teachers created a full elementary curriculum that presented a coherent picture of Mohawk culture and language (both content and structure). The communities dedicated resources to curriculum committees that began producing beautiful, community-appropriate materials.

The Mohawks did not stop there. They realized that to produce fluent speakers, they should develop an immersion program. And they did. Children can now attend school in either English or Mohawk, even though most come from English-speaking homes. In the Mohawk stream, all subjects are taught in Mohawk. Children in this stream are generally outperforming their peers in all subjects, including English.

The community has now instituted an impressive immersion program for adults. Those accepted into the program are given a full-time, paid position for one year. Participants are emerging with astounding fluency in this polysynthetic language that is so unlike English. The course is now being taught expertly by graduates of the original elementary school immersion program.

The individuals who first initiated the revitalization work in this community, as well as those who have followed them, have asserted that learning about their language in depth has had a major impact on their lives.

8. Conclusion

In many ways the Mohawks faced extreme challenges in building their language programs. Perhaps the most daunting is the nature of the language. It is unlike English or French in so many ways, from the size of words to the way information is packaged, arranged, and managed. Learners cannot simply learn Mohawk equivalents of English words and string them together. Not everyone in the community has been behind language revitalization initiatives: many felt that knowing Mohawk would not provide their children with any economic or social advantages; time and resources would be better spent on French and computer skills.

Despite the odds, this extraordinarily dedicated and hardworking team of speakers has created a miraculous revolution in the community. It was never easy, and the struggles continue. But in many ways the community is a different place now than it was forty years ago. The language is visible everywhere, on traffic signs, store fronts, band documents, and of course in the schools. Forty years ago it was largely invisible. The language can now be heard everywhere: both first and second language speakers actually use it, in some cases just for routine greetings and pleasantries, and in others for regular conversation. Forty years ago, many good speakers never used it outside of the home, if there, and children had less interest in knowing it. It can now even be heard on local radio and television programs, from both first- and second-language speakers.

Importantly, there is a genuine sense of pride in this heritage, which has come with an appreciation of just how rich it is. Recognizing the specialness of a language can bring respect, not only for the language, but also for the culture it represents and for multilingualism in general, both within the community and beyond. And the effect of this respect on children growing up surrounded by it is palpable. They know who they are and are secure, competent, and successful in two worlds.

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