

## THE CONFEDERATED TRIBES LANGUAGE LESSON

(In our community, do we have people that are giving us an "A" for effort, but believe that it is futile to revive our languages, to where we are hearing it daily within the community? If so, what is the message to our children?)

There are 211 indigenous languages still extant throughout the United States and Canada, but only 20 of them are spoken by the youngest generation of their communities. The rest may well face oblivion in the next 50 years. "All 211 are in danger of extinction," said Akira Yamamoto, a professor of linguistics at the University of Kansas who works each summer at the University of Arizona's language reclamation institute.

(With 211 indigenous languages left in the US and we have three of them, will the three Warm Springs languages become extinct? What will that mean to our cultures?)

But even as the language revival movement is picking up steam, some scholars outside of linguistics are questioning whether people should try to save endangered languages at all. "Languages have died throughout human history, our own language bears little resemblance to the English of the 15th century," said Michael Blake, a professor of philosophy at Harvard University, who recently published a broadside attack on the movement to protect endangered cultures in Civilization magazine. "It is not immediately clear to me why we should try to preserve them," he said in a telephone interview. (As Warm Springs continues to teach and promote our languages, do we question why we should try to preserve them?)

One reason, Mr. Yamamoto said, is aesthetic: languages, like animal species, contribute to the richness and diversity of the world: "If you speak English, you have one world; if you speak Navajo, you have another world." For example, Mr. Yamamoto points out, in the Algonquin family of languages, noun endings are divided into two basic categories: animate and inanimate. So, while Romance languages separate nouns by gender, the Algonquin sees the world in terms of things that have spirit and things that do not. And, Mr. Yamamoto adds, "This is reflected in their culture."

(Language construction is wonderful in how it expresses more than just black and white ideas; do we understand that within our Warm Springs languages exists spirituality?)

Mr. Blake said it might be sad to lose languages but that sometimes it is a necessary price to pay for progress and freedom of choice in society: "I think we can acknowledge a sense of loss, but I think these are losses that we suffer as a free people, when we decide what norms to adopt and to leave behind. There are reasons that these languages are dying out, that members of these communities have decided to assimilate, and those reasons have to be respected, too." (Do we want to pay the necessary price of progress and freedom of choice, if it means losing our identity and assimilating to the larger population?)

But supporters of language revival respond that the idea of "freedom of choice" is highly problematic, especially in the case of American Indian languages, which were frequently aggressively suppressed. "As an Indian, to hear about languages 'dying' or becoming 'extinct' hits at our core," said Mr. Baldwin. "The federal government has always wanted Indian people either to become extinct or to assimilate." (As languages die or become extinct, will we as Indian nations follow?)

The history of the Hawaiian language is an example. It had dwindled to about 1,500 fluent native speakers by the 1980's, and today, there are 150,000 fluent speakers of the Hawaiian language. They set up a preschool in which elderly Hawaiian speakers taught the language to the children. Gradually, by adding a new grade each year, they succeeded in creating a preschool-to-high school system in which Hawaiian is the primary language of instruction. (If we were to follow this example, could we The Confederated Tribes of Warm Springs move from 20 fluent speakers to 1,000 or more in a given time? And wouldn't that be a success?)

But wouldn't it be more useful for young Hawaiians to learn languages like Spanish or French, which are spoken by millions of people, rather than a language used by only a few thousand? And are language revival programs holding youngsters back from acquiring the skills they need to succeed in mainstream society? Mr. Blake said that children "are going to lose some of the opportunity that English education gives them."

Advocates answer that students in the Hawaiian program score slightly higher in standardized tests than native Hawaiian students from English-language schools. (When our children learn one, or all three of our Warm Springs Tribal languages, will they have a higher success rate in school? Will it demonstrate that having self-confidence and cultural self-awareness is indeed a factor in the success of our Indian children?)

Diane Ravitch, a professor of education at New York University a critic of progressive educational fads has a strongly positive view of language revival. "I think cultural retrieval is an important thing that people need to go through, as long as it is voluntary and the children also learn English, which they need to go to college," she said. "The language sustains their culture and their link with the past, which is an important aspect of who we are." Ms. Ravitch states, "I find the argument that we should do nothing to preserve languages and culture, toxic. Otherwise, we are just left with mass culture, pop culture and the whims of the marketplace." (As bottom line, do we want to be blended into the melting pot of America, and be left with

mass culture, pop culture and the whims of the marketplace? What do we want for the future of our tribes as compared to our past and how we live today?)

Culture and Heritage program would like to thank those who write compelling stories and ideas that give us something to think about.

### My Family Dauda Itkiukdiksh

My name is Radine Marrietta Johnson, everyone here in Warm Springs know me as "Deanie." I was born in Seattle, Washington in 1962 when my father was attending carpentry school. My father was Robert Johnson, and my mother is Marcia Minthorn. My father is deceased and I have a stepfather that raised me his name is Roger Minthorn (Ricky).

My mom's mother and father are Joseph Thompson and Gladys Miller Thompson. My father's mother and father are Buford Johnson Sr. and Louella Johnson. My mother has one older brother, Rico Thompson. She has two older sisters, Irene Towe and Lola Sohapp. She also has one younger brother, Dennis Thompson and two younger sisters, Christine Scott and Marlene Thompson (deceased). Four other children who are deceased as young babies.

My Father's mother and father is Buford Johnson Sr. and Louella Johnson. He has four older brothers, Buford, Reuben (deceased), Cyril (deceased), and Delford Johnson. He has one older sister, Sadonia David.

I have one older sister, Reva Johnson. I have two younger sisters, Jolene Johnson and Maria Minthorn. I also have two younger brothers, Mark Johnson and Dion Minthorn. I only have one child, which is my daughter, Sharice Johnson. I have lived here most of my life here in Warm Springs. I grew up with my grandmother and grandfather, knowing to gather foods and work hard. Today, I am working hard at learning my grandmother's language, Kiksht. I would also like to learn Ichishkin, and Numu as I have blood in all three tribes.

Would you like to see more biographies of our teachers?

