The Tunica Language Working Group
Mediating a Shared Understanding of Minority Language Importance

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Overview

Minority language ideologies

The Tunica language

Tunica Language Working Group

Benefits of collaboration

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Solutions & future directions

Minority language ideologies

Hegemonic tropes

- Hill (2002)
  - Universal ownership

  - Hyperbolic valorization

  - Enumeration

  - Human rights issue

- Used in both academic and popular contexts

Minority language ideologies

Hegemonic tropes

- Hill (2002)
  - Universal ownership
    - ▶ Personal ownership
  - Hyperbolic valorization
    - ▶ Economic value
  - Enumeration
    - ▶ Environmental parallels
  - Human rights issue
    - ▶ Fundamental rights
- Used in both academic and popular contexts
  - Property, capital, environmental disaster, human rights

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Minority language ideologies
Why are these tropes problematic?

- Divorce language from the community that speaks or identifies with the language
    - Analyzed and valued as a discrete object
- Omit the the reasons that communities themselves find the language valuable
- Human rights is the only trope that centers the language community

Minority language ideologies

Why do these tropes persist?

- Both academic and popular audiences belong largely to the hegemonic culture and speak a hegemonic language
- Tropes make use of robust, powerful, ubiquitous discourses

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Minority language value and importance are best expressed as the language's value to the people who speak or identify with that language.

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The Tunica-Biloxi Tribe of Louisiana

- Tribal reservation in Marksville, Louisiana
- Amalgamated tribe consisting of Tunica, Biloxi, Ofo, and Avoyelles
- Federally recognized in 1981
- Enrollment of around 1200 people
- Communities Marksville, Houston, and Chicago

The Tunica language

- One of four official heritage languages of the Tunica-Biloxi Tribe of Louisiana
    - Tunica, Biloxi, Ofo, Avoyel
- Tunica is arguably the best documented
    - 1886 – William Ely Johnson works with Swiss linguist Albert Gatschet to document Tunica.
    - 1910s – Johnson and several other informants work with John Swanton to further develop the work done in the 1880s
    - 1930s – Sesotrie Youchigant, the last known native speaker of Tunica, works with Mary Haas. This collaboration produced:
        - Tunica Grammar (Haas 1940)
        - Tunica Texts (Haas 1950)
        - Tunica Dictionary (Haas 1953)

The Tunica Language

Early Tunica language revitalization efforts

- Last known native speaker, Sesostrie Youchigant, dies in 1948
- Others retain some of the language, songs, etc.
- Individual efforts to revitalize Tunica
  - Alejos Lopez
  - Edgar Barbre
  - The Pierite family
- Newsletters, self-teaching, teaching families
- 1990s – Donna Pierite appointed tribal language coordinator
  - Ran language and culture camps out of her home

Kuhpani Yoyani Luhchi Yoroni

The Tunica Language Working Group

- Umbrella group of academics, students, and tribal members who share a common interest in the revitalization of the Tunica language.

Kuhpani Yoyani Luhchi Yoroni

The Tunica Language Working Group

- 2010 – Councilmember Brenda Lintinger approaches Dr. Judith Maxwell at Tulane
- 2011 – The Pierites contact Dr. Maxwell
- 2012 – Beginning of regular videoconference calls between Pierites and Dr. Maxwell
  - Creation of pedagogical materials for summer camps
- 2014 – Creation of Tunica-Biloxi Language and Culture Revitalization Program (LCRP)
- 2017 – Creation of a position for a linguist employed by LCRP
- 2018 – Beginning of Tunica Master-Apprentice program

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Benefits of collaboration

- For the Tunica-Biloxi Tribe
  - Teachers for summer camp
  - Expertise in making linguistic documentation accessible
  - More manpower
- For Tulane University
  - Opportunity for community-based research and scholarship
- Successes
  - Teaching methodology (based on Communication-Based Instruction)
  - Standardized orthography
  - Online dictionary
  - Forthcoming textbook

Benefits of collaboration

Creation of a shared understanding of why the language is important.

Ideas of language importance is a dialogue where the community takes the lead.

Publications

- Publications about Tunica by members of *Kuhpani Yoyani Luhchi Yoroni* are largely devoid of Hill's tropes.
  - see, e.g. Anderson 2017; Heaton and Anderson 2017; Whitaker 2017

Issues & Solutions

Issues

- Multiple language ideologies (Kroskrity 2000)
- Undue deference to expertise (Whitaker 2017)
- Numerical imbalance
- Physical distance

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Solutions & future directions

- On-site linguist
- Master-Apprentice Program

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