LANGUAGE SURVEYS & WELLBEING

A TalkStory led by Keren Rice and Mary S. Linn

At ICLDC5 2017
University of Hawaiʻi at Mānoa
What is a Survey?
What is a Survey?

- Gathering information directly, by asking questions
- Other ways of gathering information may be indirect, such as observations or experience
- We advocate using both, by situated IN and WITH the community who know what to ask and how to ask and how to listen, and incorporating interview-style survey taking with any survey
Here is an example of a the type of survey we will be discussing...

Please see CoLang files, Seminole Language Survey
Language Vitality

Language vitality is determined by a number of factors, including:

• The number of speakers
• The age of speakers (particularly whether children are learning)
• Language resources (curricula, etc.)
• Attitudes or belief systems ("ideologies") about the language
• Where the language is used, how often, and who people use it with
• The role of language in education

Based on UNESCO Factors, via First People's Cultural Council
Language Vitality or Language Status?

- Using ‘vitality survey’ emphasizes all those factors (and more)
- Vitality comes from 'vital' or 'living'
- Focusing on all vitality indicators, helps us understand more holistically where we are now (both positive and negative), where we are going, and how to get to where we want to go

- Often ‘status survey’ emphasizes the number of speakers, and the proportion of speakers to the total population.
- If we focus on just the number of fluent first-language speakers, of course, the number will be going down as elders pass on.
Why do a Language Vitality Survey?

- There are a lot of positive reasons, not just funding
Why do a Language Vitality Survey?

• There are a lot of positive reasons, not just funding
• Things have changed so much
  • Capture emerging new speakers and what they need
  • New ways people are using the language (social media, theater)
  • Changing attitudes towards language use (kids want to learn)
• What are the ways programs can respond?
• What are the appropriate materials?
• Bringing community together
  • Helps educate them on issues and options
  • Gets their buy-in
• Get baseline data for future comparisons
Surveys and You

- Have you given or taken a language survey?
- Were there questions that didn’t work?
- Did some of them make you or others feel uncomfortable?
How do we address pain?

- Issues of responsibility and burden
- Issues of shame, embarrassment, and loss
In this TalkStory...

- We will talk about questions that cause discomfort.
- Do we need to ask them?
- And if so, how can we ask them in a way that minimizes the discomfort.
- We will use examples from community language vitality surveys. Not all of the questions used are necessarily bad or good, but we want to discuss them.
In this TalkStory...

• We won’t
  • Give answers
  • Talk about the types of questions (ranking, scaling, multiple choice…)
  • Talk about length and much more that we cover in longer Survey Methods courses at CoLang. Please see the references at the end for more information on developing and giving vitality surveys.
HOW DO WE FRAME THE QUESTIONS ABOUT FLUENCY?
Questions about Fluency

- Often the main reason we are asked by leaders or funders to do a status survey
- What are problems with these questions?
1.4 How many words do you estimate you can say in the language?

- □ 0
- □ 1–20
- □ 21–40
- □ 41–100
- □ 101–200
- □ 201–300
- □ 301–400
- □ Over 400
1.2 How well do you estimate that you can understand the language?
- Very well; understand everything someone says to me
- Understand most of a conversation, but not completely
- Understand some words and phrases only
- Not at all
II. LANGUAGE BACKGROUND: Please fill in the blank and circle your answer.

A. Language(s) Spoken
18. My Native language is ____________________________
19. How well do you understand your Native language?
   a. Understand everything someone says to me.
   b. Understand most of the time.
   c. Understand some words or phrases only
   d. Not at all
20. How well do you speak your Native language?
   a. Fluently
   b. Well enough to make myself understood.
   c. Not very well: know words and phrases, but have a hard time making myself understood.
   d. Not at all
21. I can read this language:
   ______ YES, very well
   ______ YES, somewhat well
   ______ NO
22. I can write this language:
   ______ YES, very well
   ______ YES, somewhat well
   ______ NO

23. Where do you speak the language?

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Location</th>
<th>Always</th>
<th>Frequently</th>
<th>Sometimes</th>
<th>Never</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Church</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Ceremonial Grounds</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>Community Center</td>
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</tr>
<tr>
<td>Funeral</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
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</tr>
<tr>
<td>Home</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>At other family members’ homes</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>At friends’ homes</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
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<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Walmart</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>Tribal offices</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>Other (please specify)</td>
<td></td>
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<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

24. To whom do you speak your Native language?

25. List any other language(s) you can speak fluently: ____________________________
Questions about Fluency

- The choices are often
  - confusing or unclear
  - leave out new and emerging speakers
- The questions are almost always
  - painful for people to 'rank' themselves
  - the first questions and thus leave people demoralized at the start
Wording Matters

• How do we talk about the large class between completely fluent (elder) speakers and people who have no target language abilities?

• What words do we have, and how do they differ?
  • Semi-Fluent Speaker
  • Emergent Speaker, or Emerging Speakers
  • New Speaker
  • 2\textsuperscript{nd} Language Speaker
  • 2\textsuperscript{nd} Language Learner
  • 2\textsuperscript{nd} Language User

• What are terms that younger people are choosing?
  • SQ2 (Squamish 2\textsuperscript{nd} language user, pride in )
  • Choclish (Choctaw with English borrowings; often seen as negative by older generations, but can be made positive to include what younger people can do)
ATTITUDE QUESTIONS WITH AN ATTITUDE
17. Who was the last relative to speak X? ________________
   • Include self.
Biasing and feelings

66. We need official support to keep X language alive.
67. I am proud to be a X speaker/I admire those who speak X.
68. I like friends with whom I can speak in X.
69. People who speak X are more trustworthy than those who don’t.
70. People who speak English are smarter than those who don’t.
71. People who speak English are more successful than those who don’t.
72. It is essential to speak English in order to succeed in modern world.
4. When you were a kid, which language or languages did you usually use when you talked to your father?

(1) ___ Dene Soun'line (Chipewyan)
(2) ___ Cree
(3) ___ English
(4) ___ Other ________________________________
(5) ___ Not applicable

5. What language or languages did he usually use when he talked to you?

(1) ___ Dene Soun'line (Chipewyan)
(2) ___ Cree
(3) ___ English
(4) ___ Other ________________________________
(5) ___ Not applicable

6. If he's still alive, which language do you usually use when you talk to him now?

(1) ___ Dene Soun'line (Chipewyan)
(2) ___ Cree
(3) ___ English
(4) ___ Other ________________________________
(5) ___ Not applicable
How we ask is important

- Wording
- Written versus interview
- How the questions are phrased (whether written or asked)
- Where we ask
- Follow up
HOW DO WE LISTEN?
Finding Meaning in Language

• Sometimes we can learn about a person’s perceptions, attitudes, and feelings about something simply by noticing the words they use to express themselves.

• The people who you are interviewing probably have their own way of expressing themselves. The way in which they refer to specific things or events can reflect attitudes or behaviours.

• Every language and culture has expressions with meanings different than the obvious.

• **Listening is important.**

From A step-by-Step Guide to Qualitative Data Analysis, O'Conner and Gibson, p. 7
Chickasaw survey, some youth results

- Chickasaw youth participate fully in ‘being Chickasaw’ by participating in activities such as stickball, church, and so on, regardless of learning and using Chickasaw.

- (See next slide)

- This is positive in that youth are participating fully as Chickasaw citizens no matter what their language priorities are.

- But how did they feel about this? The survey givers wanted to find out more...
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Activity</th>
<th>Percentage</th>
<th>Percentage</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Culture and History classes</td>
<td>58.22%</td>
<td>57.02%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Language classes</td>
<td>49.77%</td>
<td>50.44%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Arts and crafts</td>
<td>39.91%</td>
<td>40.35%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Preparing traditional food</td>
<td>38.03%</td>
<td>35.53%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Telling or listening to Chickasaw stories</td>
<td>36.15%</td>
<td>34.21%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Genealogy</td>
<td>28.17%</td>
<td>26.75%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Indian Church</td>
<td>27.23%</td>
<td>26.32%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Land activities in Chickasaw Country</td>
<td>24.41%</td>
<td>22.81%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>(harvesting, hunting, fishing, etc…)</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Stomp dance</td>
<td>21.60%</td>
<td>20.18%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Stickball</td>
<td>15.96%</td>
<td>15.79%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

(Fig. 15 - Frequency of responses to Q10: “Do you participate in the following Chickasaw cultural activities?”)
Chickasaw follow-up questions to youth in interviews

2. Follow-up question(s), if applicable

• **A/ Shame**: Do you feel ashamed for not speaking the language? Explain. Why do you think you (or other people would) feel like that? Do you think that shame is coming from outside (e.g. the community) or from inside the individual (personal’s feelings)?

• ‘Why’ from the survey? Shame listed as the third most important reaction upon hearing language spoken (Q17)

Ivan Ozbolt, doctoral dissertation research with Chickasaw Nation
Listening

- Myself I feel right now that it’s a very big responsibility for us because as our elders are getting older [...] they’re not gonna be here very much longer [...], we need to get in there and learn as much as we can from them because like I said, we’re the next ones to pass it on to the younger ones.

A young Chickasaw parent in Ozbolt 2014
Listening

• Some people don’t have access; I have some good friends in South Dakota and they don’t have anybody to speak to, to learn from, whether it’d be on culture or language question, they don’t really have anybody out there to go to, so I don’t think you can hold them accountable ... I guess in some ways there is a little less responsibility on them than the ones like us who are close and we do have access, we can talk to people, or even those whose family are speakers.

A young Chickasaw adult in Ozbolt 2014
Cultural Contexts are different, though

- In places where you have to have the language to participate in ceremony, youth may have a much more heightened sense of responsibility or even shame about not having the language.
  - How do you ask so that there isn't the sense of loss?
  - How do we respond to their sense of loss?
  - How we embrace them as fully citizens even if they don’t speak the language?
CIRCLING BACK
How do we take back control?

- How do we take back control of vitality surveys?
- Where do surveys fit in taking back control of our futures?
- How much are surveys (and language programs) about having the language and the process of getting the language?
How do we take back control?

• Looking at our language from the ground up (roots grow deep and spread)
• Tapping into our knowledge and our knowledge ways to solve our own problems
• Looking at the positive growth and changes, not just loss
  • Look at language in a non-deficit way
• Making it part of our healing
• In any kind of assessment, you are asking, “How are you doing?”
• Vitality surveys ask the community and each person, How are you doing?

From a meeting with Lakota educators at the National Endowment of the Arts
Resources

- CoLang Survey Methods class – with lots of surveys to look at

  - [http://www.ilinative.org/merchandise/handbooks.html](http://www.ilinative.org/merchandise/handbooks.html)

- First People's Cultural Council Template

- A Step-by-Step Guide to Qualitative Data Analysis, Pimatiziwin: A Journal of Aboriginal and Indigenous Community Health 1(1)