Documenting Language, Visualizing Culture:
Shooting Digital Video in Two Endangered Language Communities in Western North America

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1. Introduction
Southern Columbia Plateau
2. Language Documentation
Fieldwork

Language Documentation is a set of goal-oriented research practices which govern:

- **HOW data is gathered**
  - collaborative linguistic & ethnographic fieldwork
- **WHAT KIND OF DATA is gathered**
  - documentation of speaker behavior
- **WHAT TO DO WITH DATA collected**
  - the creation of multipurpose, legacy data resources
Seeking Fluent Speakers
1 Man Camera Crew

AGD VX100b Panasonic MiniDV
Sennheiser Boom Mike
Manfrotto Tripod
Marantz PMD660 Recorder
PowerBook G4 laptop
500 GB external hard drive
Lenovo PC laptop
MiniDV to DVD deck
Analog equipment
M-Audio Monitoring speakers
Hard cases
3. Language Endangerment
Nu·mí·pu· (Nez Perce)

Dialects: Upper and Lower River

An estimated 50 (1% of pop.) fluent speakers are accounted for. Majority are aged individuals (60+ yrs of age).

Current Status: severely endangered.
Ičiškí·n (Sahaptin)

Dialects: 15 with 3 major divisions

Sahaptin has an estimated 250 (1.7% of pop.) fluent speakers. Majority are aged individuals (50+ years of age).

Current Status: severely endangered.
Plateau Indian Sign Language

Distinct dialectical form (5 signers identified)
Current Status: rare & severely endangered.
4. Language Use
Traditional Multilingualism

Nez Perce & Sahaptin

English
Contemporary Multilingualism

English

Nez Perce & Sahaptin
Restricted Usage

Ceremonial Language Use:
- Longhouse ceremonies
- Winter Ceremonies/Spirit Singing
- Sweathouse
- Subsistence activities

Public Language Use:
- Classrooms
- Tribal General Council
- Intertribal dances (powwows, etc.)
Speech of Cayuse Chief Jesse Jones

Celilo Village Longhouse, OR
March 18, 2006
Chiefly speech

*interperformativity*
(distributes attention and talk)

*anticipatory discourse*
(projecting future good)

*“trail of words”*
(virtues of respect, leadership)
“Longhouse Talk”

Ritual

Ritual Opening

Nez Perce/Sahaptin

Multilingual Plane

(interpretive stance)

English

Ritual Closing
Speech of
Josiah Blackeagle Pinkham

Honoring the Nez Perce Youth Buffalo Hunters
Lapwai, Idaho
March 25, 2006
“Longhouse Talk”

Ritual

Ritual Opening

Nez Perce/Sahaptin

Multilingual Plane

(interpretive stance)

English

Ritual Closing
“Visualizing Talk”

Digital film has the added affordance of *visually capturing* the complexity and duration of spoken language samples.

Elementary units—*from utterances to discourse*—are directly linked to the context of their production.

Documentary process is broadened to allow speakers to *select, situate, and model* discourse as it emerges in the fieldwork setting.
“Visualizing Talk”

- Content
- Interactional Meaning
- Context
Mythic Narrative Performance
by
Thomas Morning Owl

Umatilla Reservation, Oregon
March 17, 2006
5. Conclusion
Filmic Language Documentation

Finding(s):

As a form of documentation, digital film reveals a dynamic and contingent relationship between discourse and action, one that is located at the nexus of social practices, identities, and social goals.
Citations
