

Bridging the Gap: How the Digitalization of Language Revitalization Programs Can Connect the  
Displaced and Disconnected in Native American Communities

by

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## THESIS ABSTRACT

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Title: Bridging the Gap: How the Digitalization of Language Revitalization Programs Can Connect the Displaced and Disconnected in Native American Communities

This research examines how the digitalization of language classes that use communication technology can help bridge a gap between Native American community members who feel displaced or disconnected from their culture while understanding the relationship that language, place, and identity have on this issue. For this research, I conducted a series of ethnographic interviews with two participating groups: Two language teachers belonging to the Confederated Tribes of Coos Lower Umpqua and Siuslaw, and three participants who have expressed feelings of displacement or disconnection from their culture. Along with my interviews, I include my own experiences with this topic and feelings of displacement and disconnection. This study analyzes and explores these topics using a folkloric lens in order to understand the relationship that Native American language revitalization efforts have on identity, highlighting the importance of cultural and community connections. My analysis shows that there is a strong correlation between issues with identity in Native Americans and their connection to place, native language, and connections to culture. I conclude that the inclusion of online forums such as online classes, social media, and meetings that utilize communication technology such as Zoom, within Native American language revitalization efforts, aids in

feelings of connection to culture, language, and community for displaced or disconnected community members, ultimately aiding in their views of identity.

*Keywords:* Folklore, Folklife, Language Revitalization, Native American, Identity, Language, Place, Displacement, Culture, Disconnection

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## Introduction Chapter: From the Sapling to the Old Growth Forest

### Project Background

This work began because there was this small wound inside of me that yearned for a language that was in my heart, but not my mind, and one my tongue could not speak. When I saw that same wound in another, with hers starting to heal I saw a promise and hope for a journey I was yet to begin. For many Native Americans, we have wounds of various kinds, some passed down through generations of hurt from those before us. Some look different and feel different. Mine is that of a cut-down tree, I can see my roots and the roots of my ancestors. I can see down into the past of those who made me and made my family. I can see the scars, the pain, and the hurt of my grandparents and before them. I can see where my great-grandmother cut it down to survive. This is the image that comes to me when I think of my connection to my culture, to my family, and community. I see a tree that was cut down from the traumas of family members looking for survival in a world that was hostile to them or their people. Now generations later, I see a sapling in me. A sapling growing out of the cut stump striving towards the forest to learn and reconnect. This sapling looks to the tree line and sees the others who have also seen traumas and battles, and it waits to grow and reach the tree line with the others.

My family is disconnected from our culture now. They moved away from their cultural community, and after the deaths of grandparents, the ones who remembered and told, our connections are lost. We feel that loss like an open wound, like the grief you feel after losing loved ones. We feel the wound ache at various times during our lives. Every time my mother goes to our Indian clinic for an appointment and sees people who look like her. When we hear on TV a Native American actress speaking her native language for a speech, a language that is not



even our own speaks to us more than the only one we know. It is this ache to know something, to have something that is lost that we never had to begin with.

At one point in my life a great aunt whom I had never met but spoken with before, sent my mother this hand-bound book, created by a family member who, as a linguist, worked with our tribe and community to preserve our language before it died. Her work became a book and I later found out classes were being held on the reservation to bring the language back. I felt overjoyed that there were efforts to bring the language back. However, I remained hundreds of miles away and was unable to attend those classes. Now more than ever I felt this longing to be in a home I had never experienced, to truly be part of that community that my family left decades before my birth.

Life went on, as it tends to do, and in the back of my mind, an ever-present feeling and desire for language grew. It spoke out during my undergraduate years during a linguistic anthropology class where I learned more about revitalization efforts. It spoke out when hearing another Native American woman named Dr. Deana Dartt whom I will talk about later, speak about her journey towards reconnecting with her culture after moving and attending online language classes. It spoke out hearing of a language teacher, taking her apprentice around historically significant sites that correlated to the oral stories of their people. All these things swirled together in my mind and heart telling me that there was something there, that what I was feeling was felt by others.

During my work at my state's folklife agency, the Oregon Folklife Network, I reviewed an application for our apprenticeship program which detailed a project for a master storyteller to teach the stories to her cousin in order to teach these stories to their full capacity and depth, they needed to visit the places referred to in these stories physically. The relationship between place

and these stories was a key factor in teaching, understanding them, and connecting to them on a greater level. I began to see these strings connecting the land and language together, to see how our stories are embedded in place and vice versa. I could see the importance of place to that of learning your language. However, I was also faced with that wound inside myself that was torn from my ancestor's native land, this feeling of not knowing what the land felt like, I wondered what could be done for those like me who were far away. For many Native Americans being near and on the land that language was born from is extremely important, as is being with the cultural community, however, that is not always an option for many in the modern world (Basso 1996). The reality is that there are diasporas and people move away, what could be done for them so that they can still feel connected, and still learn. It brought me back to hearing Deana Dartt, mentioned above, who learned her native language through an online Zoom course during the pandemic. I thought about how she was able to reconnect to her culture, her community, and her language, through these online courses. I realized there needed to be discussion around the use and need of these online courses to help those who, like me, feel disconnected from their land and culture due to distance or issues such as traumas or politics. I also realized that physical distance was not the only reason for someone to feel disconnected from their culture. I saw so many other reasons, even within my own family's history.

I then went to Robert Elliott; the director of the Northwest Indian Language Institute (NILI) in Eugene, OR, where they work with the Native languages of the Pacific Northwest tribes and language teachers to provide support and help them learn how to teach their native languages. I proposed this thesis idea to him, explaining that I wanted to examine the relationship between language, place, and culture, and how online classes could be used to help the displaced and disconnected feel more connected to their culture through language learning.

He encouraged me to develop this idea further and to go with it, seeing through his own experience that this research could be beneficial to others. As the months went on, I began to plan the logistics of this research and began thinking about fieldwork and how I would want to talk to others. Eventually, I asked Robert if I could come to the NILI Summer Institute where I could meet some language teachers and see who would be interested in participating in this research and we worked out days that I could volunteer my help there. This allowed me access to a variety of different language teachers and allowed me to assess the merits of my research by discussing it with them informally. Initially, it had been a goal to work with a few of them and get a wider variety of language teachers, not just those who teach online classes. However, with research permits and time constraints, I ended up working with Enna Helms and Patricia Phillips who had helped inspire this work.

Luck and determination led me to request an internship with Dr. Deana Dartt, the scholar who also helped inspire this work when she talked about her journey learning her native language when online courses became available. She has a Ph.D. in Anthropology, a specialization in Museum Studies, and she created Live Oak Consulting, a business that helps to decolonize museums and large institutions. In this work, I gained a breadth of experience in the field of museum studies and Indigenous studies research and gained a trusted relationship with her as she gave valuable advice about my research and agreed to participate in it personally.

### **Statement of the Problem**

When the world was shut down during a pandemic most were unprepared for, Native American communities were hit especially hard. With Elders who can have comprised immune systems, and who play vital roles in the keeping of knowledge, traditions, and language, their

safety needed to remain a priority. With face-to-face communications being halted, it led to creative forces producing alternative strategies for the continuation of cultural revitalization. The pandemic forced communities into learning more about technological advances and communication technologies such as Zoom that moved their communities into an online realm not seen before. Because of that, they learned how technology can be used to sustain part of their culture in a variety of ways. This led to the dramatic increase of online language classes that allowed community members living in distant lands access to learning their language and being connected to others across said distances.

For many Native American communities, diasporas resulting in the separation of their people to different lands make it increasingly harder for newer generations to learn the traditions and languages of their culture while being physically separated from their culture and community. With the lack of traditions in one's life, their claim on ethnicity and identity becomes strained (Nagel 1994), leading to a decline in population and a decline in the sustainability of said traditions. This is true of languages as well. Thousands of languages are facing endangerment (Moseley and Nicolas 2010) and as time goes on, more will continue to die. Language revitalization efforts for many Native American communities here in the United States are ongoing with varying degrees of development and support. Access to one's native language is a principal factor in their identity, but due to the current and sometimes underdeveloped nature of revitalization efforts, access can be insufficient for those living away from their cultural community or who are not connected to the community for a variety of reasons. In my research I show that for these community members who are displaced physically or disconnected culturally, learning their language can serve as a bridge toward reconnecting them to their culture, land, and identity. The issue today is that many language revitalization efforts are still in

developing phases where their classes are available only on reservations or in smaller local communities and are inaccessible to many community members for varied reasons.

This research examines the relationship between language, place, and identity within language revitalization efforts in Native American communities to understand how online forums can bridge the gap between displaced and disconnected community members in order to reconnect to their culture and identity. It is based upon ethnographic interviews I conducted in 2023-2024 with Native American community members who feel disconnected from their communities of origin, and who are actively learning their native language online or hoping to do so, as well as Native American language teachers. The related questions I explore include: Can online classes or online programs be used to help displaced and disconnected community members reconnect with their culture, community, and aid in their construction of identity? What is the relationship between language, place, and identity present in language classes? How does physical distance or a diaspora affect the connection between culture and identity? And how can Native American communities implement these online classes/forums in an accessible and sustainable way?

### **Purpose of Study**

As language plays such a vital role in cultural traditions, this research will be using language revitalization efforts within Native American communities in the Pacific Northwest of the U.S. as its focus. Language can be used as a first steppingstone toward learning other cultural traditions or feeling more connected to those traditions once you have the native language surrounding it. This plays an influential role in how one views their Native American identity, as one's connection to culture and traditions is rooted in identity. The traditional ways of learning

the language and how these communities choose to teach them now are rooted in tradition. There are communities today that in order to reconstruct and revitalize their language, employ the language alongside other traditions such as cooking traditional meals, preparing materials for weaving, or telling traditional stories.

My research includes two groups of people: 1) Those who feel displaced or disconnected from their Native American culture, who are learning their native language, trying, or wishing to learn it in order to gain a better understanding of the role that language can have on cultural identity, and 2) Native American language teachers currently teaching their native language in an online program. My goal in working with Native American language teachers is to understand their capabilities, current programs, and what kind of sustainable programs can be created to help said community members. I will begin by researching the effects that physical or mental displacement or disconnection can have on community members' identity and connection to culture when traditional methods of learning the language or culture are unavailable to them. There are multiple ways one can be displaced or feel disconnected from their culture such as physical distance, family traumas, family loss, and many more. Next, I will work with language teachers who are teaching their native languages, in order to gain a better understanding of how Native American languages are taught and their connections to culture and identity.

My larger goal in undertaking this research is to demonstrate the benefits that online language programs can have on the accessibility and sustainability of languages and cultural traditions in Native American communities. In this research, I have attempted to make collaborative efforts with the language teachers and community members I interviewed and to understand how we can best serve them and foster the continuity of Native American traditions in the contemporary world. It is my hope that my research can offer solutions and inspiration for

other Native American communities to incorporate more communication technology into their language programs in order to promote accessibility and sustainability.

## **Methodology**

For this study, I have conducted a series of ethnographic interviews with Native American language teachers, and participants who have either learned their language through online classes or wish to do so, but who feel a sense of disconnect from their tribal community of origin. From November 2023 to January 2024, I conducted three interviews with two language teachers belonging to CTCLUSI, and three interviews with community members who feel a disconnect with their culture, including the director of NILI, Robert Elliott who also gave insight into language revitalization efforts. Along with these interviews, I included my own experience in this section with the disconnected. As part of this, I applied for a research permit from the Confederated Tribes of Coos, Lower Umpqua, and Siuslaw, and gained their approval to collaborate with their tribes and online language programs.

Part of my methodology included fieldwork at the NILI summer institute to observe the language teachers here in the Northwestern states who are involved in teaching their Native American languages. NILI acts as a resource for others to provide support and guidance on best practices, methodology, and revitalization efforts for Native American communities. The summer institute involves a weeklong program that allows teachers to spend the week here at the University of Oregon to get hands-on work with other teachers to develop their programs. This fieldwork was conducted over three days, and I was able to volunteer my hours to help a few of the classes. This fieldwork gave me an insider view into the development of language programs in the revitalization process. Here I was able to speak with many teachers about this project and

gauge their interest and thoughts on the research. Although I was not able to work with many of the wonderful people I had met, the experience was invaluable.

The reality of fieldwork is that sometimes plans do not work out as expected. As a result, you change and adapt, you alter things and reach out to others, and you do the best you can with what you are given. In Folklore, we are taught that during fieldwork, we must be adaptable to multiple changes and opportunities that come our way. There were so many more people that I wanted to work with, and more areas I wanted to cover and discuss, but due to one reason or another I was unable to. Despite these setbacks, this research remains a dream made reality for me, and one step closer toward achieving healing for myself and others who may feel the same wound caused by the loss of their native language. I did not realize how common these feelings were until the NILI Summer Institute, where most of the people I spoke to, told me their own stories, their own feelings of loss, or the stories of others in their community that they know who are struggling with these feelings about identity. But most commonly, I got responses from people telling me how important it is to talk about these things, how important it is to talk about the ways in which traditions can be adapted so that they are more accessible. They were seeing in their own lives and communities how traditions and these claims toward identity were being lost, and that current revitalization efforts have not been able to reach far enough. As many revitalization efforts are just in the beginning stages still, this is the time to start thinking of alternative ways for engagement, accessibility, and sustainability of those cultural traditions.

For my interviews, I created lists of questions to ask the separate groups of participants. There were two lists: one for the language teachers, and one for displaced and disconnected community members. It is important to discuss some of those questions in this thesis. That said, most of the questions would not get answered directly and instead served as a guide for me and



my participants while discussing these topics. Many times, I would ask a question and they would answer it alongside other questions. I will not list each question here but rather describe them more generally, why I chose them, and how they were answered.

At the beginning of each interview, I would ask participants to give me some background information on themselves, where they grew up, if they were well connected to their culture growing up, and why or why not. Most would tell me of their childhoods, where they grew up, and their age during that time, but it was always the part of connection that threw them off. When I asked them about their connection to their culture growing up or now, it yielded a mixture of results, as was its intent. This question and what it implied was questioned itself by one of my participants as it has an undertone of assumption. The assumption is that one grew up connected with their culture, but the purpose in asking that was to establish that there is sometimes a lack of connection while growing up and offer them the opportunity to open up about that. Sometimes I would ask a similar question about their community, if they were close to their cultural community and again it yielded mixed results as some people grew up close to it, while others often did not. For those who are students or someone who wished to learn their native language, I would ask them what learning that language means to them, and how it may affect how they see themselves and their identity when being able to speak the language. The interviews with those who feel displaced or trying to learn their language dived into the thoughts and feelings of those participants, while the ones with the language teachers examined their capabilities, the relationships they saw between language, place, and identity, as well as the importance of online accessible classes. Some questions included the kinds of traditional methods/practices or materials used in language classes, examples of lesson plans, and the hopes they have for their language in the future. Overall, I am grateful to the participants who provided

me with their time and insight into this research. It is my hope and sincere belief that this research will be valuable to other Native American communities and be a valuable contribution to the current literature related to this topic.

### **Folklore Background**

When someone asks me, what folklore is, they have an idea in their mind already, with swirling images of the Odyssey, Greek myths, and old-timey folk music, but rarely a mirrored image of themselves, their childhood, and their family. I tell them that folklore is the parts of our lives that teach us how to be human, to be human in a specific way. The discipline of folklore, however, is described differently, such as one “devoted to the identification, documentation, characterization, and analysis of traditional expressive forms, processes, and behaviors” (Georges, Jones 1995). Folklore itself is primarily learned through face-to-face interactions in what are deemed “informal” interactions. However, the use of “informal” notes a Western ideology in association with institutional entities such as educational institutions, government, and religious sectors that does not always translate into Native American cultures, especially ones in today’s age. We all use folklore in everything that we do, no matter what the culture, or the areas in which we live. We use it in the ways we tell jokes, celebrate events, gather as a family or community, how we use language and the stories we tell. Our uses of folklore are diverse and representative of our connections to our culture, family, and communities, it is how we distinguish ourselves, and how we represent and identify ourselves. Our folklore is our identity, the foundation of who we are, the lack of it affects our identity and how we view ourselves.

Within this study, the use and identification of folklore is informed by the four foundations of Folklore: historical artifact, describable and transmissible entity, culture, and behavior. Even though the folkloric aspects I study in this research do not all relate to each type of folklore, it is important to note and understand the various kinds and how my study fits into the folklore field.

Folklore as Historic Artifact refers to the development of folklore through time and repetition, it includes the myths and legends we grow up hearing, and the stories we are told as glimpses into the past. It gives us clues as to the cultures of the past, the morals, and the realities around them. For Native American stories, they are oral histories that tell new generations about the culture, morals, principles, and how to view the world. It tells them of their histories, the way their ancestors did things, and how they viewed the world. With historical artifacts, folklore can be seen as a survival, continuity, revival, and historical source. The revitalization of cultural traditions and oral histories is vital to the continuation of culture and can only be done so due to proper documentation.

Folklore as describable and transmissible entity refers to the categorical nature of Folklore and expressive traditions such as fairytales, ballads, jokes, and legends. Folklore is transmissible through time and space and influential to itself and other forms of folklore. Within this research, the inclusion of traditional stories and oral histories, as well as the place names are all examples of folklore as describable and transmissible entities that as time has gone on, have shaped, and influenced their culture, way of life, and knowledge of world views.

Definitions of culture have changed throughout time and every individual and field has a different version, for this research I am using the one included in Georges and Jones' Folkloristics, "This complex of interrelated behaviors that human beings create, learn from, and

teach each other and that serve as bases for collective social identification is what is commonly called culture” (Georges and Jones 1995, 159). Our culture embodies that of our customs, laws, morals, art, knowledge, and habits that are acquired through our connections to our communities and families, they make up our identity. In this research, the folklore I study is that which is influenced and made up of our culture such as the language, the land, oral histories/tradition stories, and worldview knowledge. They are the foundations of our culture and influence our behaviors, how we act, how we view ourselves, and how we connect with others and ourselves.

Folklore is behavioral, created through our behavior and passed down through it. It is passed because others find it beneficial. The various genres of folklore are all present in different cultures as they are how we, as humans, express ourselves. The discipline is concerned with how individuals choose the folklore they keep and express, as the individual is just as important to the survival of a tradition as a community. We see this with how languages are continued in Native American communities, often surviving through a single remaining elder or the remnants of a recording of an individual.

### **Defining of Terms**

In this section, I lay out some of the terms I use in my research, including definitions and interpretations, and how I use them. I include in this section the reasons I use these terms and how I use them. It is important to include these definitions and uses of the words as they may not align with other definitions and give the reader an understanding of some of this research's terminology.

Folklore and Folklife: While the goal of this research is not to define nor debate any definition of folklore or to propose a new one, the definitions of folklore and folklife are a necessary foundation for this research. As Dan Wojcik has written,

The term *folklore* has been defined in varying ways, and folklorists are known for their ongoing debates about the problematic nature of the word, but most agree that the concept refers to vernacular culture and expressive behavior that is largely informal, usually related to communal or local identity, and frequently regarded as traditional. Folklorists study cultural heritage, traditions, and symbolic behavior in everyday life, and provide critical analyses of important cultural practices that often have been neglected or devalued (Wojcik 2002).

In my research, I examine more like what is known more specifically as folklife, rather than folklore. For this work's purposes, I will use the Oregon Folklife Network's definition of what Folklife is. As Riki Saltzman writes,

Folklife encompasses the everyday knowledge, art, and lore in communities whose members share a common language, ethnic heritage, religion, occupation, or geographic home. Our folklife changes as people change, as our environment changes, and as groups interact. Folklife includes forms as new as hip-hop and as ancient as Native American basket weaving (Saltzman).

Language Revitalization: Within this research, although I am primarily studying efforts toward language revitalization, it is important to note that language revitalization encompasses more than just language. Language is the foundation for many cultural traditions and can act as a basis for one's community identity and the identity of oneself. Language reflects the world around us, it tells us about the land we are on, the plants and animals that have been part of our existence and culture for millennia, and it conveys what is important to us, our priorities, and morals. Even learning a language through "untraditional" means such as a class or online class, still includes many traditional and cultural aspects that are important to the community's Folklife. The revitalization of language in a Native American community revitalizes more than just language. With it, it can bring back and strengthen other cultural traditions through its connections.

Indigenous and Native American: Both terms are used within this research for various purposes. Although I am working with Native Americans in the Pacific Northwest of the United States of America, this research includes literature and examples of other indigenous peoples and can be applied to indigenous populations more broadly.

Displaced/Displacement: My use of the term displacement is the forced or voluntary moving of persons from their place of origin. It is used to speak about community members who are a physical distance away from their cultural community. While the distance may sometimes not seem great geographically, even being an hour away can cause a strain on the connection to one's sense of community.

Disconnection: This refers to the lack of connection and the feeling of being isolated or detached from one's community of origin. I use this term to describe those within my research that relate to these feelings.

Communication Technology: Throughout most of this study, I use the term online classes/forums to describe the use of "communication technology" which is defined as technologies that provide the opportunity for people to communicate in real-time with others using online applications such as Zoom (Tech Terms Computer Dictionary, 2006, in TechTerms.com).

Language Revitalization: Language Revitalization refers to the development of programs designed to revive and re-establish a language that has declined from use in the community back into use (Hinton 2003).

Language Maintenance and Sustainability: I use the terms language maintenance and language sustainability during this study to refer to the continuation of the Native American language in communities to counter the dominance of a dominant language. The use of the term

sustainability is to refer to the accessibility of the programs as well as levels to which can be maintained.

Traditional: Tradition refers to the passing of customs, beliefs, and knowledge, also known as folklore, from one to another across generations. For something to be traditional, it follows the process of traditions with concerns over the continuity and adaptation of traditions. Folklorist Henry Glassie defines tradition as “the creation of the future out of the past” (1995, 395). Within this study, the process of language learning, origin stories, and other aspects of the culture are traditional in manner and are subjected to the same concerns about continuity and how to adapt them to present needs.

## **Chapter 1: History of Pacific Northwest Tribes and Language Revitalization**

This chapter goes over the brief histories of two Pacific Northwest tribes, the Confederated Tribes of Coos Lower Umpqua and Siuslaw, and the Confederated Tribes of Grand Ronde from which many of the participants in this research are descended. It likewise examines the histories of language revitalization here in the U.S. and the early American Anthropology's approach to Native communities. It is important to understand the history of the tribes to understand the societal pressures and issues that can contribute to the themes of this research. Likewise, it is key to include a brief history of language revitalization in the US and the involvement of anthropologists with Native American Tribes. Our histories tie us together, and they inform others of what makes us up. We cannot be separated from them, and to do so would be to miss key elements and features. Each person that I worked with was part of a history and had their own. They belonged to different tribes and were born in different decades, resulting in different lives. Even two of my participants who are part of the same tribe, and same family, had vastly different childhoods separated by different decades, influencing their lives in different ways. It is not possible to write all the histories that are part of the Native American experience, nor that of all the work that anthropologists, folklorists, or even linguists have done, but by providing a bit of background for them, allows us to see clearer the various agents of change that influenced all Native Americans to some degree.

The United States of America has a riddled and untrustworthy past in relation to the treatment of Native Americans. European settlers colonizing these lands caused the near-complete destruction of hundreds of diverse and unique cultures. Colonization is not a single event; you cannot pinpoint it to a single time in our Native history but rather a process that continues into today's age. Our history is filled with genocides and boarding schools that



eliminated our people, stripped our languages and traditions from our children, and strived for complete assimilation. That history shows colonization in the past, but it is still present today in our society. Efforts towards a dominant and “standardized” English in the United States is part of this contemporary colonization, as it eliminates dialects, accents, and the indigenous ways of knowing things and encountering the world. U.S. society demands the use of English as the dominant language. Even if an Indigenous child knows and uses their own language at home, it is reported they often will discontinue its use once they become of school age due to U.S. societal ideologies toward a monolingual mindset, and the overall disinterest in multilingualism (Hinton 2008). This shows that even if there is a Native language still present and used in the home, it often does not survive in the face of the colonial powers that continue to seek to eliminate Native languages in the U.S. That is why not only the maintenance and sustainability of language programs is important, but also maintaining a Native American identity, connections to one’s land and community, and advocating for Native American rights.

### **Confederated Tribes of Coos, Lower Umpqua, and Siuslaw**

The Confederated Tribes of Coos, Lower Umpqua and Siuslaw have inhabited the south-central coastal regions of Oregon for time immemorial. There were three languages spoken among their people: miluk and hanis (Coos), quuiich (Lower Umpqua) a dialect of sha’yuushtl’a (Siuslaw). The miluk and hanis languages share similarities but are two distinct languages spoken within the same ancestral boundary. The miluk language was primarily spoken on the lower Coos River to the mouth, but also up the South Fork of the Coos River, South Slough, and along the south coast. In addition, miluk was spoken within another ancestral boundary from Whiskey Run Beach to the mouth of the city of Bandon. The hanis language was primarily

spoken from Empire of Coos Bay, all the way up the North Fork of Coos River, and along Tenmile Creek and Lake. The Siuslaw and Lower Umpqua Tribes spoke two dialects of the same language that were mutually intelligible and known as sha'yuushtl'a uł quuich. This language was spoken across two different ancestral boundaries.

Like many other Native American tribes, the Coos Lower Umpqua and Siuslaw histories are riddled with treaties and betrayals. In August of 1954, Congress passed the Western Oregon Termination Act and terminated the Coos Lower Umpqua and Siuslaw without allowing them to vote on the matter, termination came into effect in 1956. When a Native American tribe becomes terminated, they lose federal recognition, and in many cases, allotted land is sold. Without federal recognition, federal support, and funding ceased as well, having detrimental effects on the communities. Years of issues ensued after this until the tribes were reinstated in 1984, however, the years of termination had lasting damages to the land, funding for programs, and even buildings, that currently still require rebuilding what was lost.

### **Confederated Tribes of Grand Ronde**

The Confederated Tribes of Grand Ronde (CTGR) comprises several tribal communities from all around Western Oregon, from the Willamette Valley to the Rogue Rivers and its tributaries. As many as twenty-seven tribes and bands can be traced to the Confederated Tribes of Grand Ronde. In 1856, officials rounded up hundreds of individuals with the current Yamhill residents on the reservation near Spirit Mountain, which later became the Grand Ronde Reservation. Within this group, there are multiple language groups, such as:

Three Kalapuyan languages and several dialects: Northern, consisting of Atfalati (now called Tualatin) and Yamhill; Central Kalapuyan including Santiam, Luckiamute, Ahanchuyuk,

Chepanefo, Chelamela, Winnefilly, Mohawk, Tepola, Calopooia, and others, and Southern, groups of Molalla speaker representing seven dialects throughout the Cascade range, and from several interior valleys adjoining the Yoncallas came speakers of Upper Umpqua and other Athabaskan languages. In addition, there were speakers of Takelma, and Penutian language related to Kalapuyan, who lived mainly in the upper Rogue River and Cow Creek area, with groups of Athabaskan speakers interspersed. From the same general Rogue River area came some Shasta speakers. In addition to their native languages, many of these Indians—especially those from northwest Oregon--also spoke Chinuk Wawa (commonly known as Chinook Jargon. (Merril and Hajda 1991, 122)

After decades of betrayal, assimilation, and abuse, the reservation was closed and terminated in 1954 in association with the Western Oregon Termination Act mentioned above. As a result, much of the land was allotted and sold. During the 1960s and 70s, Native Americans across the country worked to restore the tribes and reservations that had been terminated around the country and worked towards their federal recognition and sovereignty. The Confederated Tribes of Grand Ronde were restored in 1983, and it was important to the Elders that the time of termination was remembered so that they never forgot what it was like when they did not have support. The CTGR have gone through decades of cultural recovery work to try and regain their culture and language after years of termination and colonial powers working against them.

### **Early American Anthropology's Approach to Native America**

The history of American anthropology starts with Franz Boas, a German Jewish anthropologist who came to America in the hopes of documenting and “saving” Native American cultures before they disappeared in the modern age, along with Native American people themselves. The field emerged in the late nineteenth century, at a time when the model of Social Darwinism dominated thinking in Europe and the U.S. In this model, Indigenous cultures across the world were conceived of as “primitive” and thought destined to be eliminated by the encroachment of modernity, which only “modern/civilized” Euro-American cultures were

thought to have the ability to survive. The new field of Anthropology responded with what is now known as salvage Anthropology. In the U.S., anthropologists such as Boas associated Native American cultures with our past as a species, and thought these cultures were thus in danger of dying out. As a result, early anthropologists sought to salvage Native American cultural traditions, folklore, and languages through documentation before they disappeared forever. This history is tied to colonial interests and acts as a direct reaction to the effects of colonial powers on Indigenous cultures, showing both the destruction and the documentation of these cultures. In Rosemary Levy Zumwalt's book, *American Folklore Scholarship: A Dialogue of Dissent*, she discusses this tumultuous history and ideology, writing:

The living lore of the American Indians would soon become an “essential part of history” [Folklorist William Wells] Newell saw this life passing away: “For the sake of the Indians themselves, it is necessary that they should be allowed opportunities for civilization”. And for the future, it was imperative that “a complete history should remain of what they have been” since their “wonderful life” would soon be no more, and their uniqueness would be absorbed by the modern world (Newell 1888a, 6) (Zumwalt 1988).

Boas created a school for American Anthropology with the intent to preserve the Indigenous cultures here in the Americas. However, it was his student Edward Sapir, a linguistic anthropologist, who looked toward preserving Native languages. Sapir saw the connection between these languages, their cultures, and Native American knowledge and world views. This sparked a movement of documentation that many years later led to the revitalization of these languages.

### **History of Language Revitalization in Native American Communities**

Paralleling the history of American Anthropology, the history of language revitalization for Native American communities was born from the perceived need to document and “save”

languages from extinction. As mentioned above, Edward Sapir was one of the first linguistic anthropologists to see the need to “save” and document Native American languages. In the early 1900s, there was a surge of work trying to document Native American languages before they went extinct, however, it usually wasn’t until decades later that many communities began the revitalization process. For many Native American communities, researchers such as anthropologists or social linguists outside of the cultural community would come in and document the language. Notes and recordings were sometimes the only things left for many communities from which to recreate their language. However, for some, there were internal efforts along these lines, with languages documented by anthropologists or linguists who were members of the community (Hyde 1971). However, much of what was documented is not conducive to language learning and teaching, which requires effort of their own.

Due to the effects of colonization, these Native American languages began to slip away as the dominant language (English) was forced upon them in place of their native language. Boarding schools were the primary agent in this language shift, requiring the use of only the dominant language such as English, and destroying any connections to culture that they could. These schools forcibly removed children from their families and communities. They engaged in the intentional elimination of Native culture and languages, attempting to take “the Indian” out of the man. Decades would go by where Native languages were eliminated or went underground, not being uttered in public out of fear of retribution and as part of an attempt to survive in a time that was not kind to them.

Every Native American culture, language, and community is different, with different histories, different priorities, and support, either federally or within in terms of effort and funding. Efforts towards Native language revitalization will reflect specific community histories

and efforts of support. For some communities, their languages have always lived, always been spoken even if only in hushed tones. However, for some, their efforts are newer, and younger, with only a few decades of revitalization work—pulling documents and recordings in attempts to recreate the language out of what they have left.

When I was at the NILI Summer Institute, I informally discussed with some of the teachers there about the process of language revitalization. Each teacher had a different story, and each tribe and community were different. Some would tell me that their tribe had no documents left, no elders who spoke the language, and nothing that was saved or preserved to bring the language back. One teacher told me how they had to reconstruct their language from the oral histories and stories that were preserved by anthropologists or other members and that they would tear the stories apart to be able to reconstruct a language from them. The reality of this is that most of the languages were not perfectly preserved. There will be much of the language that was lost, and it is through these notes, recordings, and stories preserved by others, and some by the community itself, that these languages are revived. Rarely was the whole language saved, some were silenced with only whispers spoken in private, while others were dead, leaving the world with the last speaker.

## **Chapter 2: Literature Review**

As we saw in my introduction, this thesis examines the relationship between place/displacement, identity, and language to understand the importance of online language classes for Native American community members in the United States, specifically the Pacific Northwest. In doing so, I review practices and theories for creating online programs, classes, and platforms for language revitalization in Native American communities to discern which efforts could be used toward reaching displaced community members. My research examines these relationships to understand what could be useful for displaced community members to connect/reconnect with their culture. It is my goal through this that other Native American communities recognize and understand the importance that these connections to language, culture, and place can have on one's identity and can help ensure the survival and sustainability of cultural traditions and native languages. In this chapter, I explore literature and theories that inform my research on this topic. My aim is to analyze relevant themes in the literature and identify gaps that my and future research may expand. The literature I consider here includes Indigenous language revitalization, Native American or Indigenous identity, folklore, and identity, affect theory, and folklore in education.

### **Indigenous Language Revitalization**

Language revitalization within Native American communities cannot be studied or understood in a completely linguistic or scientific field. Their languages are not one separate being, one aspect of the culture that can be taken out of context, taken out of the culture or the people. Language revitalization is not to be understood separately from history or politics (McKenzie 2022). Because of this, the sources I have gathered are mostly on Native American

communities where the researcher understands this connection between the language and the people.

The book *We Are Our Language* (2010) by Barbara A. Meek details her work with language revitalization in a northern Athabaskan community. Introduced to this seminal work as an undergraduate student, this book has been fundamental to my own knowledge of linguistic anthropology and language revitalization. Meek's ethnography explores the political, linguistic, social, and pedagogical aspects related to language revitalization programs with an emphasis on Indigenous and Native American communities. The title of the book comes from the slogan of the community Meek researched with, and while it was used and created with good intentions to promote the community's language revitalization programs, it came with the recognition that it may make community members who do not know the language feel excluded. The paradox of the slogan, with its intent to make whole their identity through the inclusion of their native languages yet inadvertently engaging in exclusion, provided me with an understanding of the importance of language while also understanding the potential politics that accompany language revitalization efforts. We are our language, as we are our culture. Our identity as Indigenous people is made up of this, and when it is taken away from us through no faults of our own, it deeply affects us. It is this exclusion that has led me to believe that online language learning that utilizes communication technology can help ameliorate our sense of identity and is a driving factor in choosing this topic as a displaced community member myself.

Another work fundamental to my research is Keith Basso's (1996) *Wisdom Sits in Places*, which explores language and place among the Western Apache. This work paved the way for my research and my understanding of the importance of place to language. Through his encounters with community members who guided his efforts to create native maps with Apache place



names, Basso discovers how inextricable these place names are from Western Apache culture and history. His research shows the deep connection that culture, and particularly language, can have with place. The people he works with show him how their language is embedded within their culture, history, and land. This book highlights how being on their original land allows Indigenous communities to feel more connected to their culture and to learn the language through its association with the land in a more traditional way. The Western Apache understand that being connected to their physical landscape allows them to be more connected to each other, their ancestors, and their culture. Likewise, being away from their land culminates in a deep loss of more than just physical distance. It culminates in a distance from their culture and ultimately their identity. Basso works with the theory that due to the connection between place, language, and culture, the displacement of community members will also affect language, culture, and identity. After examining how important the relationship between land and language is, my research seeks to understand if the language learning that online Indigenous language courses provide from a distance can offer displaced community members a chance to reconnect with their culture and community through the medium of language, although their connection with the physical land may remain absent.

The current literature around the role of technology in language revitalization has been focused on the use of technology as a tool to help revitalize and digitize languages and to help language revitalization efforts more broadly. However, the latter—literature exploring the use of technology as a tool for the revitalization effort—has been limited. In her article, “The Use of Technologies in Language Revitalisation Projects: Exploring Identities,” Marcela I. Huilcán Herrera (2022) discusses how technology can be used by language revitalization programs to extend beyond the typical use of technology as a tool for furthering research and development.

She suggests it be used to further embed language programs into the cultural communities as a resource for support and reclamation. Herrera reviews the literature surrounding language revitalization and technology to gain a deeper understanding of the role and uses of technology already in practice for revitalization programs and development efforts but finds that the uses of technology in practice are limited and not to their full potential. She also reviews the literature around language revitalization and its ties with identity, uncovering direct links between political power and activism, self-determination, and community relationships and building. She concludes that the use of technology in language revitalization efforts must be expanded and their impact on and for identity must be considered. Through technology within language revitalization programs, communities can help maintain their culture and reclaim their voices. Although there have already been studies and papers done on the relationship between language revitalization within Indigenous communities and their links to identity, ones that include the examination of the relationship that place and displacement have as well, have not been studied further. Through adding the use of technology such as communication technology, communities can better aid in this relationship between language and identity by reaching farther audiences and those affected by displacement.

Olko and Sallabank's (2021) edited volume, *Revitalizing Endangered Languages*, discusses how language is linked to identity through its link to culture, emphasizing that you cannot separate the two in most cases. Janne Underriner, the author of the chapter "Culture Place Based Language Basketry Curriculum at the Confederated Tribes of Grand Ronde Community," outlines how, for many, rituals, and traditions such as traditional food gathering, are embedded within the language and one cannot exist without the other. The book likewise discusses place-based learning and its importance to the community through an example from Oregon's

Confederated Tribes of Grand Ronde (Underriner 2021). Through working with place-based learning (learning in and on the reservation and cultural community), students learn about tribal affairs, values, traditions, and the sense of community that one does not always get in a classroom. While engaging with diverse community members, students learn more than just what is important to the tribes; they learn from elders and leaders, they learn about jobs and government positions. Place-based learning does not have to be connected to sites but must be connected to the community, to ancestors, and to home. In this thesis, I argue that there can be ways to include displaced community members within these place-based learning incentives. I argue that the physical place is not the most important factor. Rather, the concept of community and support that contributes to immersive learning is. Online communities cannot replace the physical ones, but in a modern age where diasporas are common and people lead busy lives led by technology, technology becomes a solution to bridging that gap.

### **Native American or Indigenous Identity**

The article by Kimberely Huyser, “A Real Native American” (2017), describes the author’s uncomfortable experience while participating in an exhibition meant to display a photo of herself and other Native Americans. Huyser expresses a concern when, while looking at her photo next to another Native woman who was in full regalia, she thought to herself, “I wish I was a real Native”. Despite being Native herself, she grappled with her identity. This was partially due to her mixed heritage, but more to do with the controlling images of American society that perpetuate stereotypical images of Native Americans. When thinking of what a Native person looks like, she had various stereotypical and popular images in mind, not an image of herself or others that she grew up with in the Navajo Nation. As Huyser reflects: “My racial and ethnic

identity has been challenged at different times of my life. Despite being a formal member of the Navajo Nation, people have questioned my Diné identity: my father is White, I am not a fluent Navajo speaker. They ask questions like, “Are you sure you’re American Indian? You don’t look like you’re Native”, (Huysler 2017). This is something many Native Americans feel and relate to, including myself. Our identity is always questioned, including our connection to our culture, which is often compared to stereotypes and ancient relics. In a Cultural Communication course, I took as an undergraduate, my professor had a unit on Native American women specifying that Native Americans are the only ethnicity in the U.S. that are questioned about their ethnicity. Those of us claiming this ethnicity are often met with accusatory questions meant to dissect our true identity and to answer the question, “How Native are you?”. It is this line of questioning that we internalize within ourselves, and this line of questioning that I base much of my research around, with an understanding that many others feel this way as well. I harbor a great hope that my research can provide aid to those who question their indigeneity and connection to their culture.

A large part of my research grapples with the rights and responsibilities of Native Americans in claiming their identity as well as with the question of what constitutes a Native identity, such as “what is a real Native” or the question Joane Cardinal-Schubert (1990) asks in her installation, “what does part Indian mean?”. The notion that many Native communities prioritize cultural connection over “blood quantum” is something that others have spoken about (Tallbear 2003). However, not everyone is privileged to be connected with their culture, and there are a variety of reasons why someone might be disconnected from their communities of origin in this modern age.

## **Folklore and Identity**

In Alan Dundes' article, "Defining Identity through Folklore" (1984), Dundes examines the creation of identity and how ethnic identity is formed, questioning, "But how are a group's symbols communicated? Folklore is perhaps the most important vehicle for the communication of a group's symbols: 'Folklore is a function of shared identity.' Pronounced differences (linguistic, religious, economic, and political) are central in the creation of feelings of common ethnicity and notions of kinship", (Dundes 1984, 150). Ethnic identity consists of customs and traditions that are shared within a certain group and used as symbols to others that they belong together, as well as to differentiate themselves from others. As Dundes writes, "Notions of 'customs' and 'traditions' fall under the rubric of folklore because folklore is responsible in large measure for creating ethnic identity" (Ibid).

Folklore tends to be an important part of Indigenous language revitalization efforts. Yet, the word "folklore" is rarely used within Indigenous communities outside of academia. Native American communities have their own categories of oral histories, oral stories, and creation stories, as well as traditional knowledge and cultural traditions that are a part of their everyday lives. In the field of folklore, attempts have been made to categorize and conceptualize the folkloric traditions present across the world into analytical genres and modes of communication. However, in doing so scholars these genres and categories unify traditions that are culturally bound and specific to each culture and tradition bearer. In his article "Analytical Categories and Ethnic Genres," Dan Ben-Amos critiques this practice:

We attempted to construct logical concepts which would have potential cross-cultural applications and to design tools which would serve as the basis for scholarly discourse,

providing it with defined terms of references and analysis. In the process, however, we transformed traditional genres from cultural categories of communication into scientific concepts. We approached them as if they were not dependent upon cultural expressions and perception, but autonomous entities which consisted of exclusive inherent qualities of their own, as if they were not relative divisions in a totality of an oral tradition but absolute forms. (Ben-Amos 2020, 275).

He instead argues that exploring ethnic genres and using emic, or insider cultural terms for a folkloric tradition are important to establish its connection and importance to the culture it is bound to and cannot be understood separately from it. Although my research primarily uses the term “traditional stories” as that is the term used within the cultures I work with, it is important to note that these traditional stories are examples of folklore. These traditional stories are important aspects of culture and language revitalization as they can serve essential functions such as the reconstruction of the language. When I was beginning this research, I spoke with some of the language teachers who came to the Northwest Indian Language Institutes Summer Institute program. There we talked about the process and reconstruction of Indigenous languages. They told me about their languages, and how some tribes used the old, preserved stories to reconstruct the language around it during the revitalization process.

This research draws from the identity constructionist theory whereby identity can be constructed and reconstructed through internal and external processes. Considering ethnic identity, Joane Nagel’s (1994) article, “Constructing Ethnicity: Creating and Recreating Ethnic Identity and Culture”, reveals the numerous ways in which internal and external factors can instruct and influence an individual's cultural identity. Because my research deals with the disconnection from culture and associated feelings of displacement, it is important to understand how cultural identity can be affected by these factors. When dealing with Native American culture and identities, we have to understand the historical and political factors that construct and reconstruct these identities. Through the reclamation of cultural traditions and Indigenous

languages, individuals and communities can reconnect with those lost traditions, and also renew their identity after experiencing the loss of traditions and languages.

Many cultural traditions have been taken from and denied Native Americans throughout history. Some were able to be reclaimed and brought back, however many of them were not. Others are still being revitalized. Some traditions no longer have primary uses in this modern world but can be practiced as a way to honor the past and ancestral ways of doing things. The reality for many communities is that these traditions may be hard to practice today, especially for those who are physically distant from the community practicing them.

In “‘Tradition’ in Identity Discourses and an Individual’s Symbolic Construction of Self”, Michael Owen Jones defines tradition as “symbolic construction in the activities and lifestyle of an individual who intentionally selects elements of what he or she conceives to be a tradition to fashion an identity articulated through various media” (2000, 120). Jones’s theory of tradition focuses on individual choice and intention in the shaping of identity. I adopt this theory, in a slightly altered form, in my research on displaced Native American community members. These members, in their attempts to reclaim their cultural origins, select the traditions and aspects of their culture that they can reproduce and perform as individuals, such as language learning and speaking. Considering individual agency in performing tradition for the sake of individual identity-building and maintenance is key to my exploration of language learning among displaced tribal community members, who may not feel well-connected to other community members or their cultures of origin. Traditions, at least those you can perform, are resources that individuals and communities use to construct and reconstruct their identities.

Folklore can look like a variety of different things. As the American Folklore Society states,

... folklore is one of the many ways we communicate who we are. ... Every group with a sense of its own identity shares, as a central part of that identity, folk traditions—the things that people learn to do largely through oral communication and by example: believe (religious customs, creation myths, healing charms), do (dance, make music, sew clothing), know (how to build an irrigation dam, how to nurse an ailment, how to prepare barbecue), make (architecture, art, craft, music), and say (personal experience stories, riddles, song lyrics) (<https://whatisfolklore.org/>).

As such, folklore can be used by individuals or a community in many ways. One of the most important and useful ways folklore is used as a resource in Native American communities is to teach the morals and values of the community to the next generation. These connections to folklore, and thereby to values and morals, are what help make a person who they are, as members of a particular community. In a paper I wrote during my undergraduate studies, I researched the connection between Syilx oral stories and the community's environmental and ethical philosophies (Miller 2021). I found clear connections between oral stories and the education of the Syilx people in terms of morals and values pertaining to the environment and Syilx identity and membership claims. To be Syilx, one needs to follow clear laws or rules that are described in their traditional stories. The connection between folklore and identity does not only impact what we do or what we make but how we act. Folklore reflects and communicates culture in a way that connects community members and instructs them on how to be a particular kind of human.

### **Affect Theory**

In her book, *In the Hands of God: How Evangelical Belonging Transforms Migrant Experience in the United States*, Johanna Bard Richlin (2022) describes the history of affect theory and its applications. She writes that the theory emerged from both anthropology and feminist and queer studies. She describes how affect theory emerged in part from the



anthropology of emotion, which “inspired generations of anthropologists to take the feelings of their research subjects seriously and to investigate emotion as key human data” (2022, 9). It similarly arose from feminist and queer studies, thereby “grappling with the underlying socioeconomic and political realities that impact public and private feeling. ... [with] scholars approaching affect as bodily and psychic ‘traces’ of much larger social structures and histories” (2022, 9).

Scholars employ affect theory to analyze emotions, feelings, or sensations in direct relation to the political, historical, or social contexts in which they are embedded and inseparable. In my research, I use affect theory to analyze the feelings of disconnection concerning displacement or to a broader context of diaspora and life in the twenty-first century. Within this research, there is no separation between the historical, political, and social events that surround Native American communities and individuals from what they are feeling. I will be applying this theory when looking at the various reasons for the disconnection between community members and their culture, and the feelings that this brings up for them.

### **Folklore in Education**

The intersection between folklore and education is a topic many folklorists, especially public folklorists, have taken an interest in. The majority of folklore in education literature describes the process of introducing folklore into teaching materials for students in K-12 schools and programs. This literature considers how introducing folklore into curricula is especially beneficial for teaching language and teaching practices more generally. Evidence shows that

teaching narratives to students benefit their education, just as the use of oral stories and tales we grow up with helps us develop our reading and writing skills (Baron et al. 2007).

This literature highlights how folklore can be used in education to benefit the student's well-being, self-esteem, and identity. In Norman Studer's (1962) article, "The Place of Folklore in Education", he describes two ways that folklore is especially useful for students, by aiding 1) the development of roots within the region and 2) the development of roots within one's group. Through folklore in schools, students learn more about their region, which nourishes their belonging to the land and area through local stories, legends, songs, jokes, and phrases. We see Studer (1962) emphasize the importance of place throughout the region. He writes that with the growth of America, regional folklore began to recede, separating many from their roots, traditions, and communities. Through folklore and education, students can begin to revitalize and reclaim traditions from their region or groups. Studer emphasizes how folklore helps minority groups reclaim and develop their roots within their groups and communities. When including folklore in the education of students, especially those of minority groups, it benefits the students' self-esteem, helping them establish connections to their cultural backgrounds and thereby giving them a sense of pride. While this article deals with an urban school example where the author says there was never success in wiping out the community's past, this cannot be said for many of the native communities I have worked with. Most native and Indigenous communities in the United States have had their past erased. As part of this, their traditions, and most of their folklore, have either been lost or forced into serious decline and are now in the process of revitalization.

T.J. Majasan (1969) emphasizes the importance of folklore use in education outside of the United States as well. Majasan makes a case for how the Yoruba can use folklore within their

educational goals and materials to teach their youth Yoruba cultural ways, morals, ways of life, and attitudes. This is especially important for the smaller ethnic group to continue teaching their youth their ways in Nigeria which is concerned with an ever-growing framework for national cohesion. When talking about the educational goals of the Yoruba, Majasan writes, “One of the most appropriate instruments for achieving such a goal is folklore. Folklore explains the common rules and the etiquette of society and helps in several ways to instruct and direct the young to be able to grapple effectively with varying conditions of life” (1969, 41). Aspects from the above studies resonate with my own research. Studer emphasized the importance of folklore in place-making throughout the region, writing that with the growth of America, regional folklore began to recede, separating many from their roots, traditions, and communities. The importance both Studer (1962) and Majasan (1969) give to the use of folklore in education, especially for minority groups, is extremely helpful for Indigenous groups as well. This allows them to maintain cultural cohesion during times when dominant cultures overpower minority ones.

Within my own research, the use of folklore within the educational practices of Native American communities is not just to teach the old stories, nor just to use these stories because they are often the parts of the language they have left. It is also because their folklore, traditions, and stories are an integral part of how community members act and are expected to act, with their morals and values embedded in their culture and thereby taught to one another.

I would like to clarify that, within this research, it is important to acknowledge differences in terminology and concepts. This section on folklore and education pays attention to the use of folklore in educational practices. However, it should be noted that within many Native American communities, their traditions, ways of teaching, and practices are not always seen or described as folklore. Therefore, the search for such materials was difficult to find and was often

related to larger topics discussed in this literature review outside of the subject of folklore in education despite overlap.

## **Conclusion**

In summary, my research exploring the relationship between language, place, and identity in Native American communities in their process of language revitalization complements existing literature in multiple ways. First, it examines the effects that place, and language can have on the identity of Native Americans in order to understand how displacement can affect how someone views their connections and roots. Secondly, it looks at how folklore is used in Native American language classes and how the implementation of said folklore, can help community members feel more connected to their culture and gain a deeper understanding of their language. Thirdly, it fills the gaps within the current literature to bring together online language classes with those of communities with displaced members and allows us to see the connections they bring to identity issues.

### Chapter 3

#### **The Healing of the Wounds Left by Time and Space: Examination of Language, Culture, and Identity**

This chapter will examine the relationship between place, language, and identity among the displaced/disconnected Native American community members that I worked with as well as discuss my own experiences with this topic. I review the various interviews I conducted with my participants, examine the information they have given me, and analyze my findings. As we saw in the thesis' introduction, this research was heavily inspired by my own feelings and experiences of disconnection, distance, and imposter syndrome around my identity as a Native American. Even now, claiming that identity is scary for me, and those old feelings still tend to come up. One of the points of this research is to help others who are also going through these same feelings. I am Native American on both sides of my family; my father's family is descended from the Confederated Tribes of Grand Ronde and my mother's family is descended from the Pechanga tribe in southern California. My great-grandmother, a member of Grand Ronde, suffered under the society and time she lived in. As a response to multiple traumas she experienced as a result, my great-grandmother cut herself off from her community and raised her kids as non-traditionally and removed from that identity as she could. It wasn't until later in her life that she reconnected with the community, but by that point, the family's ties toward the community were severed. Although we were close physically to the reservation and community, we had no more connections to the community. Some wounds and traumas span across generations, not just in my family, but in others as well. I have read these in literature and have heard them from the mouths of my participants and friends. This chapter and the next can deal with heavy topics and personal and emotional information, but it is important to recognize that

these factors directly affect identity and feelings of displacement and disconnection among Native Americans removed from their communities of origin.

### **Participant Interviews**

My first participant was Dr. Deana Dartt, with whom I had the pleasure of working and forming a good relationship with. During our time working together, we talked multiple times about topics relating to Native American identity and feelings of disconnection from our tribal communities and how being away from California where both of our tribal communities are, could be extremely hard. I remember once, she shared something that her cousin had told her about the language, that the language used to be an old-growth forest that was cut down, and in its place was planted a tree farm. There is still potential for the forest to grow again, the trees now newly planted, but it will never be the same. The language will never be the same as it was before everything happened, before it was forcibly cut down. There is still the soil, the original and ancient soil that carries the DNA of the old-growth forest that carries on in the new trees, just as the revitalized language still holds ties to the ancient language of our ancestors. However, what grows in its place will always lack the complexity the old-growth forest gained from millennia of growth.

At the beginning of our interview, Deana told me about her childhood and how she grew up near her mother's ancestral land in California but was not well connected to her cultural community. She tells me how her people are not a federally recognized tribe and how that affects their identity, tribal support, and funding. While growing up, she had a very abstract view and understanding of her identity, and knowledge of cultural traditions. She knew there was a language for her people (Smuwich), yet she knew that most people were not speaking it. Her

mother knew a few words in Smuwich but did not have exposure to anyone speaking the language. It wasn't until later when she became involved with her tribe, that she heard people singing it, greeting others in the language, and learned that people were attempting to revitalize a language that hadn't had a fluent speaker since the 1950s. The language at that point was preserved mostly on wax cylinder recordings and a couple of hundred-year-old linguistic dictionaries. When she was in her mid-twenties, Deana reached out to her tribe, the Coastal Band Chumash, and became more connected with them. She started working with the Tribe's Cultural Resource Management (CRM) business, Hutash, started attending Tribal council meetings and eventually was elected as Tribal secretary. In 1999, the Tribe selected her to attend the University of Oregon as a steward for a large archaeological collection that had recently been excavated and sent there for analysis. She planned to get a degree in archaeology so that she could return and run Hutash, although those plans changed. However, she did discover that many people in her community were in various stages of learning and revitalizing the culture and language and realized that her people were largely invisible to non-Natives in California, especially with the lack of federal recognition. She sought to rectify that, claiming "No one knows about us, no one knows about our history".

Although she grew up disconnected from her culture and community, having been raised in Los Angeles, Deana feels more connected to it now. Years ago, Smuwich language classes were being taught in Santa Barbara and Long Beach (where the teacher, Deborah Sanchez lived), and at the beginning of the pandemic, Deborah's three students started offering their own tutoring and eventually began classes of their own. One of them, Isa Wel, started offering the classes weekly via Zoom. With Zoom classes available to her in Oregon, Deana was excited to finally begin to learn her ancestral language. As she shared in our interview, "It was awesome

because it made language learning available to those of us who are living outside of the area". In-person classes were being taught, such as one taught by Deborah Sanchez, but for many that was a few-hour drive and it only happened once a month. With busy schedules and across great distances, offering some classes on Zoom allowed more community members to access the language. Even though Deana does not live in California anymore and feels that distance, she can work on many projects with her community to help her feel more connected. Most of her projects are professional where she can work with her family and her tribe in her nonprofit businesses, one of which works to bring land management practices back to their tribe. She was also involved with helping Isa Wel bring her classes to Zoom after Deborah Sanchez told her about how Isa Wel wanted to teach but didn't know anything about technology, so Deana helped her set up a Zoom and do outreach to the community to let people know an online class was becoming available. She joined that class and learned some of the language for around a year. She had to stop due to her busy schedule but plans to rejoin when she can.

Deana knows both vocabulary and the structure of the Smuwich language and says, "It is important to note how community-building it is to have and be able to share language and to struggle together". Not everyone can pick up the language easily especially as one gets older, but to do so as a community in a class allows them to do it together and help each other. It was a sweet thing to be able to be together again once a week even through a screen, and she was able to get close to people she otherwise would not have been able to. Deana admitted that while it is hard for her to remain connected with her community while in Oregon, the language classes helped, and when she had to stop going to those, she joined a community prayer group that takes place over Zoom. The prayer group started because one of her Chumash Elders was ill during the pandemic, she and some of her community members wanted a way to gather together safely in



order to bring their elder a sense of community during that troubling time. At the prayer group, they sing the language to her and use the language for their prayers. Deana tells me how hearing the language is especially important to her elder and these meetings with the prayer groups are healing for her as well as the elder, “it has been very beautiful and healing for her and us, and again it is thanks to technology”. As Deana reflects, “Language is key”—the key to the culture and the relationship to the land, and states to lose it is to lose history. As the last fluent speaker died in the fifties, the language has been reconstructed by members of the Chumash community through anthropologists' notes and associated wax cylinder recordings. However, Deana claims that this is not their language, but simply remnants of it that have been pieced together like a collage. It may not be the original language in a holistic sense, but it does teach them about the world, and their ancestors. She shared with me a Smuwich word that the Chumash use as a greeting. It is a verb that means “to do health”—they use it as a greeting because they cannot do health without another, and this helps teach them that they are dependent on one another. When you greet someone, you establish a connection with each other, a relationship not just with people but with the animals and land around them, which are interdependent. The language may be “a shadow” of what it once was but that does not change their connection to it and Deana emphasized that those who love their culture ask themselves if they are being accountable, to the land, to each other, to their language, and if they are being a good Chumash.

There was a moment when, as mentioned above, Deana brought up her cousin's metaphor for the language being like an old-growth forest and we discussed those changes further. Deana emphasized how amazing it is to see people still trying, learning, and fighting to be able to speak their language. She reflected, “Do the ancestors know what we are saying?”, maybe not, maybe the language now is so different they would not be able to understand us, but they hear us, and

they are proud. Just as Deana is proud when she hears the younger generations learning the language, making music, creating new things, and re-establishing that connection. She feels their ancestors are looking at them with that same pride she feels looking at the younger generations, proud of what they accomplished and proud of what they have endured, overcome, and created.

The theme and question of adaptability is ever-present in my work, as it is present in works pertaining to traditions and traditional teachings. For languages around the world that were never cut down, never killed, adaptation is common and necessary to reflect the changes in society as time moves forward. These languages do not carry wounds passed down from generations suffering from colonization and linguistic genocide. However, for many Indigenous languages, this adaptation is not always voluntary and is another connection to ancestors and ancient ways that were taken from us, causing another form of grief. One thing that Deana told me stuck with me, namely that she believed her ancestors would still be proud of them for speaking their language and creating new songs, even if they could not understand the language as it has been reconstructed today. She feels that pride and a pride of her own telling me “I feel it in my bones when I speak the language... I feel a sense of pride, but not ego pride, the kind of pride of being proud of your kid or niece for learning something hard”.

Deana explained that the Māori “say that our language is in our DNA and that as we start learning it—and I really felt that, as I started learning it, it was awakening in me, it awakens in you”. Deana tells me how learning the language was not as hard as she thought it would be, as the language did feel like it was waking up from inside her, “it wants to wake up, it wants to be awakened”. Our language is a part of us even when we do not know it, it is in our DNA, and it is our connections to our ancestors, our relatives, and our community. In her paper “Hear Our Languages, Hear Our Voices: Storywork as Theory and Praxis in Indigenous-Language

Reclamation,” Teresa McCarty reflects poignantly, “To lose a language is to lose many things other than vocabulary. To lose a language is also to lose the body, the bodies of our ancestors and of our futures. What I mean is: language is more than an extension of the body; it is the body, made of the body’s energy and electricity, developed to carry the body’s memories, desires, needs, and imagination” (2018, 163). Our language is not just embedded into our bodies and hearts, but within our land and our culture, it tells us how to behave, and how to be human.

When she can get back to California, Deana usually spends a lot of time with her family. By family, she means her extended family that goes back a few generations, her “community of choice”, as most of her immediate family is gone. Her Chumash community is incredibly involved and supportive of protecting their people, animals, and land. However, not all her relatives and community members identify as Native anymore, as it is “too hard”, and they become mainstream Americans. This has happened in my family, in the family of a friend of mine, and it continues to happen to many others. This is due to societal expectations that many disconnect with their culture. While it is a difficult journey, I assert that it is a responsibility to continue, to continue passing on traditions, to continue to be, and to perform that Native American identity to the world.

When we talked about the connection between language and identity, Deana told me how for the Chumash, there is pride in who they are and in each other. The pursuit of learning her Native language gives Deana pride as a community member sharing that connection and as a Chumash woman. There is something there when she can speak her native language to others, to speak it in her profession and as part of her claim as a Chumash woman. To have the ability to assert to non-natives, that, “Yes, we are still here”, the Chumash are still connected to the land, and their ancient culture. But this privilege is not accessible to everyone, and she spoke on that

as well. To be able to learn your native language is a great feat, but it is not always an accessible path for everyone.

Something that I noticed with my participants is a sense of imposter syndrome when claiming their Native American identity. As Deana elucidated, "There is shame associated when you do not know your language when you are native... there is a part of us all that feel a little like an imposter because we don't know the language. Like can I really claim this identity when I don't know the language, I don't live on a reservation, we have all these kinds of discriminatory images about what it means to be native". One of the goals of my research is to help others bypass these feelings, recognize them, and work to create solutions that can aid in the elimination of imposter syndrome.

Language is such an integral part of our identity but can also be something almost impossible to obtain. For some, their language may never be brought back, as there was not enough of it preserved or saved. There is this grief associated with one's native language. There is a grief we feel when we do not know it, and even a grief when we know the language could connect us further to our identity, yet it is not accessible. Language is who we are, Deana says, "Language is an anchor to our land and our people, and if we have it, we feel more connected, if we don't, it's another layer of disconnect, of grief". As I mentioned in Chapter 1, Barbara Meeks explains how the title of her book, *We Are Our Language: An Ethnography of Language Revitalization in A Northern Athabaskan Community* (2010), was a slogan created by the people she was working with as a measure of empowerment, to show pride and support in their language program and revitalization efforts. Community members soon realized that the slogan could work against them because it accidentally shamed those community members who did not know the language. By claiming that Athabaskan identity is tied to the language, they

inadvertently encouraged imposter syndrome in fellow community members for not knowing the language. The slogan perfectly highlights a major dichotomy in language revitalization, this imbalance between showing support for language learning while also trying not to add to any feelings of shame, disconnection, or grief in community members who do not speak their native language.

As I wrote above, learning our native language is not always accessible, and we can see that not knowing one's language can drastically affect how one views their identity and connection to their culture. For those who are like Deana and others who are displaced and disconnected, learning one's native language can be a source for reconnecting to their culture and identity. But like Deana, learning the language is not always easy, especially when physically a distance away. As we saw here, it was only through online classes that Deana was able to learn her language and gain that form of connection. Even when she stopped language classes, she was still able to use an online forum to stay connected with her community through a prayer group. Without technology, Deana "would feel completely cut off". Even though she feels the difference in being connected through technology rather than physically present, she finds it better to have a technological connection to her family and community than none. Deana still feels disconnected but is grateful to her relatives who consider her a cousin despite the generational distance that the Western world would not consider cousins.

Deana sees that the community is stronger now than it was years ago when she lived there and was part of the physical community. She wishes she could be a more integral part of the community when she sees how they can come together to learn the language, eat together, and watch the children grow, but because her own family such as her child, is here in Oregon, she cannot leave.

Language is deeply embedded in the land and the culture, and through learning it, one can regain not only a connection to one's Native community after being displaced but also reconnect to the culture on a deeper level. Native American languages often describe the world around them—in the form of place names, greetings, etc.—and they can tell you about the world and how their ancestors saw it. The Chumash know the land belonged to their ancestors because they interacted with it and described it in the place names. Deana told me how the word Malibu comes from an Indigenous word that means “the surf is loud here”. Now whenever she goes there, she notices the sounds more clearly and the world becomes more visible.

After all the talk of grief and hurt and wounds that were inherited along with our language, I opened my interview with Deana up to that of hope. Hope for what our languages could become, hope for our cultures and communities. For Deana and her cultural community, however, hope is slippery. It can be hard to have hopes and goals for language in the future when there are so many obstacles in the way. The Chumash are not federally recognized, and without that recognition, they have no federal funding, support, or sovereignty. Without federal recognition, they have no access to funding for jobs or programs, making it difficult to create language revitalization programs. Without that, hope, dreams, and visions for future programs can be difficult. Deana says it is like “dreaming up dessert when you haven't had a good meal for a long time”. Before her Chumash community can dream up visions and goals for creating a more accessible or sustainable language program, they need to overcome obstacles that obstruct their funding, federal support, and resources. Without federal support, grants are hard to obtain to create such programs without relying on unpaid time and effort. This all raised questions for myself and my research that likely cannot be answered. How can communities expand and revitalize without proper resources such as funding? Where is the line between individual and

communal responsibility towards revitalization, and the burnout of a culture that cannot sustain itself solely from the unpaid time and effort of its members? And how far can they reach without the proper tools?

One participant whom I had not foreseen being involved in this research turned out to be a friend of mine who is an enrolled member of Grand Ronde. We have often spoken together about our feelings of disconnect from our tribes and how we want to learn more and become more connected. It happened that one day she was asking me about my research. After telling her the premises of it, she responded with her own related feelings and agreed to participate in my research and talk about those feelings.

Ayahna is 21 years old, and a member of the Confederated Tribes of Grand Ronde. She is also descended from Siletz on her father's side. Growing up, she did not have a lot of connection with her culture or community. She went to powwows where she would see her family, but other than that did not have much involvement. As time went on her family began to shrink as they got older and passed, her connections to the community going with them. Ayahna didn't grow up learning cultural traditions or the language, despite a desire to. Her father grew up traditional and used to dance and have his own regalia. However, he expressed that his parents had forced him to do so, and he never wanted to force his children as he had been. As a result, his children grew up without the traditions and culture even though they wanted them. Ayahna feels disconnected from her culture and her community and wishes to become more connected in the future. For now, her sibling who works for the tribes tells her things and is her small connection to the culture. She expressed her wish to learn the language but told me how difficult it can be when there is no one to teach her. She has a few books given to her by the tribe in the language with pronunciations, but without hearing it, she doesn't know how to speak it properly. She tells me

how she is in the process of learning Spanish, but she cannot learn Chinuk Wawa well on apps or webpages without audio or personal connection. While she is learning Spanish, she often watches videos on YouTube and goes to her coworkers who speak Chinuk Wawa for help and answers to her questions. This personal connection she has with her coworkers where she can often come to them to answer her questions about how to say things, cultural questions, and having someone to speak the language to has helped her learn the language tremendously. With apps, books, and videos, she has been able to learn vocabulary and the structure of the language, but truly knowing how to speak the language is something she can only learn from other speakers of the language.

Due to our personal connection, my interview with Ayahna took on a different nature, one that was less formal and allowed us to discuss these issues easily. We talked about her busy schedule and how her new job had her moving farther away from her cultural community and working hours in which classes would generally be scheduled for. This meant she would not be able to join any online Zoom classes. She told me how she would love to have videos where she could learn the language in her own time where she could rewatch it and access it anytime. Through this, learning would be more accessible, but she would still run into the same problem she has with learning Spanish. Through this form of online learning, one that operates without a personal connection with a community member, it is difficult to learn the language correctly. As Ayahna admitted, “If I wasn’t able to ask them, I don’t think I would be able to speak their language the correct way”. She appreciates learning from native speakers and just wants to have that connection with someone in her own culture. She expressed how she wants to be connected, to know what is happening, and how to do things.



As I mentioned earlier, a common theme I found during this research was the feeling of imposter syndrome with Native American culture and identity. As Ayahna shared with me, learning her native language would help her feel more connected to other community members by being able to speak that language together, but also feel more connected with herself. Throughout our interview, themes appeared often like imposter syndrome and feelings of not being native enough. We talked about how hard it is to reconnect with our culture as an adult and to find information without being directly told by a community member. As Ayahna described, “I know I can only get information and answers from people within the culture...but it's so hard to get a hold of them online”. Looking online for information yields a little bit, but no connection to the culture or the community that way. She learned a bit from her sibling, but it isn't enough. There is no way for people like her and I to find and connect with someone from our culture when we no longer have living relatives in the community. There is no one online, nor any resources for us to be able to connect with someone. Reconnecting to one's culture in adulthood is especially hard and is a privilege that not many have. Ayahna told me that all she wants is someone to talk to and to ask questions of, saying, “It'd be so cool to connect online and talk with each other...just be able to be practicing with someone, makes it a million times easier to learn”. I spoke with her about program ideas such as the Master-Apprentice Language Learning Program conducted in California, where they match up young Native language learners with Elders and spend a few hours a day working together in the language. Seeking this type of personal connection, this interested Ayahna. This theme of connection kept coming up in our interview, the need and want to have someone within the community that she could talk to, and learn from, whether it is through a program such as the one mentioned above, or just able to create connections and relationships with others in the community.

Even though it is her wish to connect with community members, those feelings of not being enough are ever-present. As she expressed, “I want to know more, but I just feel like a stupid white person”. For many Native Americans, mixed heritage is common and can contribute to feelings of disconnection and can help with those feelings of imposter syndrome. This theme of feeling like you do not have the right to an identity claim, or a right to learn and access the culture is something I came across while interviewing Robert Elliott as well.

Robert Elliott, the director of NILI and a language teacher with the Yamada Language Center, kindly helped me develop this research and volunteered to participate in it. His background as both a Native American who grew up disconnected from his community and a language teacher who is involved with NILI gave him unique views as someone who fits into both categories of participants I worked with for this project. Robert told me about his family’s history of being both Navajo and white. His family story, like many others, included traumas from the past such as the separation of children from their mothers, and the disconnection of generations. As a result, Robert and his family grew up unconnected with their culture. He knew his history and ethnicity but had an abstract view of his culture and his connection to it. As he explained, “I’ve got this Native heritage, but I don’t know what it means, there was not a way to access it through the family... [and I have] no connection other than a big question mark”. While growing up in LA, he took whatever connections he could in learning about Native American culture, but the diversity of LA made the local Native American population disappear into the fold, so the representation was limited. It was not until he came to Oregon, where there was less diversity, that it allowed the Native American population to become more visible. With this new visibility of the Native American population in Oregon, Robert began to work with NILI’s

language revitalization efforts and in the process to gain deeper connections with Native communities for the first time in his life.

Robert told me how growing up not well connected to his culture has affected how he views his identity, and “checking the box”. He recounted a moment when he had to fill out a form that asked for his ethnicity, and he debated between checking the “white” box or the Native American one. He felt that neither truly represented who he was. He was not fully white; nor did he feel that way, but he also didn’t feel that he had the right to claim his Native American identity, as he grew up so disconnected from it. He ultimately left the box blank and handed the form to a lady, who looked at him and checked the “white” box based on his looks. This quick decision made by a stranger upset him. He thought about how she had no right to assume his identity and choose for him, essentially choosing to erase his heritage based on looks alone. This theme of not feeling like we have the right to claim our Native American identity is common and already seen in this research, but that right extends beyond identity. With Ayahna, we saw that she felt she had no right to reach out or to reconnect with others. Robert told of a moment when he questioned his right to claim his identity in another way. He shared that, when he started working at NILI with Native communities he was meant to represent, he felt he had no right to represent these communities, saying “I don’t really feel like I have a right to say anything about Native American experience”, when there could be someone else better suited or more “authentic” than himself. Maybe someone who was raised on a reservation or someone with a stronger connection to Native communities. At the time, he voiced these concerns to a Native American student of his. She told him that it was not about a right, it was about the responsibility—a responsibility to speak up and speak out about these issues because there are other kids who are like him, unsure if they can claim this identity, who are trying to connect and

learn. He realized then that he needed to step up to help others like himself and assume this responsibility.

Robert and I talked further about the imposter syndrome that many of us feel, and he revealed that he has felt it for most of his life, looking for a place to belong and fit in, having been cut off through no fault of his own. Despite growing up thinking that these experiences and feelings were uncommon, he realized through working with others that these feelings were not as uncommon as he thought. When Yakama Elder and NILI founder, Virginia Beavert, passed away, Robert attended the ceremonies in her honor. While there, the man who was leading the ceremonies came up to him and asked him a few questions. Questions surrounding his heritage, his language, his clan, and his identity. When Robert replied honestly that he did not have the answers, the man simply accepted him, welcomed him, and related with him about stories and connections to Robert's heritage. Robert revealed that he felt he had somehow passed a test, and that despite not having the answers to these questions, he was accepted anyway.

### **Analysis and Findings**

Within my research, multiple common themes have come up including the connection between various traumas and societal issues causing initial disconnection between family members and their cultural community. This leads to later generations not having any contact, or connection with their culture, further leading to issues with identity due to the abstract conception of their culture and community. The participants of this research, including myself, have told stories that show various realities of Native American life and how societal structure, stereotypes, and expectations can sever ties to one's culture and community. It reminded me of the third-generation phenomenon that happens with immigrant families. By the third generation,

the mother tongue is no longer known or able to be spoken and only the dominant language is used (Alba 2002). I learned of this during a linguistics class during my undergraduate years. While discussing this in class, we also discussed the possibility of including a fourth generation in this mix, one where the fourth generation chooses to reconnect the lost and severed ties. This phenomenon can be used to understand how culture and community ties can be lost a few generations after the moment of disconnect. While not immigrants, Native Americans are made foreigners in their homeland, treated as second-class citizens instead of indigenous to the land. The dominant culture has sought to eliminate and assimilate them in a variety of ways, as we saw earlier. Although not the aim of this research, it shows that there can be a fourth-generation phenomenon occurring in Native American communities as well, where this later generation, after seeing how their history and culture have been lost in previous generations, seeks to reconnect, learn, reach out, and heal the wounds of their parents and grandparents. It is this desire to heal and reconnect that drives many to learn their Native language and to seek some sort of connection to the culture they did not have growing up.

After reviewing these interviews, it is apparent that the use of online classes or programs utilizing communication technology, particularly those taught in real-time with community members over applications such as Zoom, is a desired and sustainable way to connect displaced and disconnected Native American community members back to their culture through the learning of their native languages. Although online classes and programs may not be the most desired options for language teachers or communities, they serve an important purpose for those who have left or been left behind by the cultural community and wish to be a part of it again. Even with those who may still be on a reservation or within a physical community, the distance between rural areas and schedules of busy lives leaves online classes to be desired. We can see in

these stories that there are many reasons why one may be displaced from the community. Being a Native American or Indigenous person can be hard in this contemporary world, there is prejudice and racism, and colonial structures still in place to hinder the development of sovereignty, which in turn hinders the development of programs to revitalize traditions, language, and other cultural aspects. Especially in past decades when it was more dangerous to be a Native American, we can see in these examples how family members have cut themselves off or been cut off from the community in an effort to survive. However, for their children and children's children who grew up with this family history, abstract connection, and views of identity, re-establishing that connection is vital.

For many, efforts towards reconnection are made in adulthood. At a time when many of our family members have passed away, and the last community connections with them, younger generations can be desperate to find ways to reach out, and people to reach out to. Providing resources for this reconnection process is important for the continuation of cultural traditions and the revitalization and maintenance of Native American languages. The access to online classes that use communication technology to bring personal connections to those physically outside of the community is a necessary step for communities to take in order to have accessible and sustainable language programs for their members.

This chapter has shown how online classes and forums that use communication technology can be vital to helping displaced Native Americans feel more connected with their communities of origin, which in turn aids in their views of themselves and their identity. Without these connections, feelings of grief and imposter syndrome can lead to even further disconnection through beliefs negating their rights toward the culture and language. Tying this back to my field of study, the language, culture, and traditions present in this study and these

online classes are examples of folklore. To be able to learn and perform examples of folklore from one's culture is an important part of creating and maintaining identity, without which these connections and claims to identity, cultural communities may dwindle even further.

## Chapter 4

### **The Teachers Are Learners: Understanding and Analysis of the Language Teachers and their Program**

This chapter analyses the fieldwork and interviews I did with the language teachers who participated in this research. Here I explore the experiences and topics that were discussed in these interviews. Topics include the language programs currently offered, the capabilities and capacities of language teachers, and the ways in which they utilize folkloric traditions in their teaching methods to combat the “impersonal” nature of online learning. I interviewed two language teachers, both within the same language program at the Confederated Tribes of Coos Lower Umpqua and Siuslaw (CTCLUSI)—Enna Helms and Patricia Phillips.

This chapter begins by examining what programs are currently being offered at CTCLUSI, and the connections the teachers see between language and identity in their own lives, and within their communities. During the summer of 2023, I was able to volunteer my time to help with NILI’s summer institute for a couple of days. It was there that I was exposed to many Native American teachers and learned more about what goes into language revitalization efforts. Being in a room full of Native teachers, Elders, and people who are still willing to learn, was a very healing moment for me. The energy in the room was the most inviting and humble feeling that I have ever experienced. I realized quickly that it was an energy I had not been around in a while. I remember one particular moment that held a specific power, that still sits in my heart to this day. During a presentation about a book of Ichishkiin lullabies, someone in the audience asked the speakers to sing one of the lullabies. When they did, others who knew the language and the lullabies began to sing along and do the coordinating movements. Hearing them sing a lullaby in their native language was such a beautiful remarkable sight as well as a



healing moment to have this piece be brought back to them. It was at this moment that I felt the power of having your native language spoken in the world again, and to be able to give that gift to the others in the room.

NILI's summer institute is a week-long program that invites Native language teachers to come and work with NILI on how to teach their native languages, develop teaching practices, lesson plans, and more. With a focus on building and rebuilding supportive relationships, teaching, and revitalization practices NILI helps new and experienced language teachers build skills and practices for teaching and supporting their students. There were two sets of classes when I attended, one for experienced teachers and one for beginners, I was placed in the beginner group to help the teaching guides during their lessons. Each day had a different teacher that would lead discussions and exercises to help the attending teachers conceptualize teaching practices and lesson plans for their students, while also checking in with themselves and their capabilities as a teacher. In these classes, I was able to meet so many amazing people who are doing incredible work to bring their languages back. It showed me the reality of this work as well. One of the teachers who led the discussions talked about her language and culture and how her language was not documented, so there is nothing to pull from or bring back for her language; she does this work simply to help other languages. Some teachers had varying degrees of support for their languages—some had written documentation, some had recordings of elders, and others had living elders who still spoke the language. Each tribe and each language are different, with its own community and language histories; each is at a different spot in the revitalization process and needs different things. Observing this process opened my eyes to all the work that needs to be done to even get started, and all the work that needs to be done to sustain it. People always compared teachers to heroes, which is certainly true, and I saw this

especially with these Native teachers bringing back their native languages. There is so much that goes into it, so much unpaid labor to bring something back from the dead and give it new life as a hero would.

Another part of the NILI program is the Tuxámshish Revitalization Learning Series (TRaiLS), which is a series of talks and presentations focusing on language revitalization. The two that I was able to attend provided examples and resources for others as a guide for their own work. This series is held online through Zoom and in person, allowing more people to access it and join who otherwise were not able to make the week-long trip, or are on the other side of the world.

These few days of fieldwork where I got to see the realities and makings of language revitalization gave me an invaluable experience of connection with Native communities, but also a sense of belonging. When I spoke to people about my research project and what my hopes were for it, they all told me their own stories and relations to the topic. They emphasized the importance of this work and led me on the right path for this research.

This research was likewise born in part due to the Oregon Folklife Network's Traditional Arts Apprenticeship Program, more specifically when I read the application of Enna Helms and Patricia Phillips who belong to CTCLUSI. When I learned of their apprenticeship regarding traditional stories and the Native places they are connected to, it seemed only fitting to try and work with them. Robert was able to put me in touch with Enna Helms, as our paths never crossed during the summer institute. With his help, he introduced us through email which allowed me to tell her a bit about my project and my goals. We were able to meet through Zoom to discuss my thesis proposal and how I would like to work with her and her language program. After I had submitted my research proposal to the Confederated Tribes of Coos Lower Umpqua and Siuslaw,

I was able to meet with their Culture Committee to speak more about my research and answer any questions they may have. This was also a time for me to ensure that the work I aimed to produce would be useful to them. It was also particularly important to me that my finished work was approved by not only the participants of this study but also the CTCLUSI tribes to ensure that everything I produced yielded accurate information and did not contribute negatively to the Native American “narrative” that other researchers in the past have produced before me.

Since this research is about online classes, and the importance of digitalized learning, it was only fitting that most of my interviews were done over Zoom as most of the people I was interviewing had busy schedules or lived quite a distance from me. I met with Enna Helms and Patricia Phillips in separate interviews to talk about various themes and topics relevant to this work. One of my main foci in working with language teachers was to explore their capacities as language teachers in order to understand what kind of realistic programming and courses other cultural communities could implement and take inspiration from. Another focus was centered around the relationship between place, language, and identity, and how to implement those relationships in an online learning environment. One of the issues with online learning is that one can still feel isolated through a screen even while meeting with someone in real-time, and while teaching is traditionally done face-to-face, there are ways in which language teachers can add elements of connection and community in their classes.

The work that Enna and Patricia do cannot be examined without understanding their backgrounds and how they grew up, as these are integral to how they perceive their identity. Along with identity, background is needed to understand priorities and how these priorities translate into how they teach their classes. These elements influence their classes, how they teach, and how they see the traditions and traditional elements they include. Enna and Patricia

both teach Zoom classes together a few times a week for 10-week terms. The classes are for the hanis, miluk, and siuslawan languages belonging to the CTCLUSI. The next sections of this chapter go over Enna and Patricia's backgrounds separately and then analyze the work they do in their classes as one. Enna and Patricia are of miluk Coos descent and reference of their language is referencing the miluk language as the one they feel most connected to.

Enna grew up on the Siletz River and the Coos Bay area and traveled between coastal towns but stayed close to the reservation. She grew up in a traditional household and her family lived out in the woods near Siletz where they were able to collect their water and live off and with the land. While later living near Coos Bay, they were actively involved with building their plank house. As a child, Enna grew up exposed to Native languages being spoken in the home and recalls speaking miluk with her dog. Her dad and brother were involved in revitalizing Chinuk Wawa and miluk in the home. There was a cultural surge at CTCLUSI in the late nineties to bring back certain traditions such as basketry, regalia making, and dancing, and with this brought more attention to language and storytelling. Enna says that she was exposed early on to the language, her cousin Patty would tell a lot of traditional stories throughout her youth, and she remembered the way Patty would slip certain native words into the stories. Enna left home to continue her higher education and in 2007 she began work with the CTCLUSI Elders. In that work, she was reminded of language every day. She went on to study Chinuk Wawa at Lane Community College and after her time there they asked her to co-teach. It was then that she realized she could do this with the languages of her tribe, and that she needed to start somewhere. She was fortunate that Eugene had valuable resources for teaching Native languages such as NILI and she started working towards bringing language programs to CTCLUSI, she received a grant from the National Science Foundation after three years of trying to help the tribe

get started on documenting the Elders in two tribal communities. The project allowed her to document around forty-four elders within the CTCLUSI and Coquille.

When I asked Enna about her classes, particularly the participants, and the goals of those classes she spoke about accessibility and how they wish to broaden the scope of their classes. Because the classes are on Zoom, if someone has an internet connection, they can join other language learners and members of their cultural community. In Enna's words, "People are able to connect to their culture regardless of where they live", which is one of the many draws toward online classes; they are more accessible for people both time- and distance-wise. Enna has students who live in areas where they are in the cultural communities but may not be able to leave the home for hours at a time, who have busy lives, and other commitments. Enna and Patricia even have some students who live in different countries, some who live on the other side of this country, and some who live and travel on the sea. As long as they can connect to the internet, such students can access these classes/recordings and can have a connection to their cultural community with others who share their traditions and priorities. The goal for both Enna and Patricia as well as CTCLUSI right now is to broaden the speech community and be able to offer miluk language classes and services to their people, through this they would be able to create a sustainable speech community within their tribe. Because they are a smaller tribe with a small population that has been spread out, they need an accessible language program. Even though they cannot open it up to everyone they wish due to limited capacity, they hope to expand, and at the moment they can open it to a limited number of their tribal members and others in the neighboring tribes who may share a language or linguistic interest such as the Coquille.

In the past, they collaborated with a teacher at Mapleton High School who contacted them to add some of the CTCLUSI native languages to the school. Enna has already started creating a labeling project with the school to bring back that connection between language and place, connecting the land the school is in, to the original languages spoken there. It is important to have the original languages taught in the public schools of the area to bring back those connections between the land and the original language. CTCLUSI hopes to bring more of a language program to the public schools so that more of their children can learn in an immersive program. This project was not one that they saw coming or planned for, but it was brought to them, and when it was, they realized their dreams could be bigger. This project opened their eyes to see that this was already part of their plan; they just had not realized it yet, but it made sense.

One project that will greatly impact their people is where Enna and Patricia created playing cards in all their languages, hanis, miluk, and siuslawan, where the cards can be used for either a matching game or as flashcards. The cards have been made but have not been sent out yet. Another project that is very beloved and talked about often is one with refrigerator magnets that included various words from the languages. It is projects like these, though small, that make a lasting impact on the community to have tangible connections to their language that supplement the intangible nature of online classes.

Despite the structure and format of the language program being online, miluk is still taught in a very traditional manner with traditions and values at the center of what they do. When asked about the program, Enna reflected, "The curriculum is based on our values...based on our cultural identity in a big way". She then emphasized, "Language is our identity". Enna includes lessons about the traditional foods that her people have been eating since time immemorial. She and Patricia emphasize the home in their curriculum, with learning traditionally from elders,

parents to children, and from one community member to the next. Enna claims that she does not feel like there is such a hierarchy in the class, although she and Patricia are the teachers, they also feel as though they are still learners of the language, a phenomenon unique to language revitalization. Enna sees herself more as a collaborator than a teacher, she checks in with her students to see what is working in the class and what they might need instead and values their feedback, seeing their curriculum as student-led. CTCLUSI's goal is to build capacity for more teachers, create more support for language teaching environments, and support learning their languages in the home and for other members of their community. Through this, they can gain a larger speech community and have more support through these teachings.

In their respective interviews, Enna and Patricia both talked about their traditional foods and emphasized home, however, they are not the only traditional aspect that they use in the language program. Because Patricia is a storyteller, she often uses traditional stories in the program and many of their lessons. These stories are used not only to reconstruct the language and create new translations for the students but also as a center for the class to relate it back to their cultural identity. The stories are used in multiple lesson plans but one that is a particular favorite for them is using the story and transforming it into a puzzle for students to translate and move around recreating interesting translations of the stories. This is done as a team effort and all the students work together to create and recreate the story, making it one of the most memorable lessons in their program.

It was this connection between traditional stories and the land that initially drew me to this research topic, and to working with the CTCLUSI language program. In 2015, Enna and Patricia were awarded the Traditional Arts Apprenticeship Program for a project that focused on five traditional stories that related to places in their ancestral territory. This allowed them to pay

attention to all four tribes and their ancestral boundaries that their confederation is made up of, along with the languages they share. Enna shared that she found it fulfilling to be able to see the places where the stories came from and the relationships they had with the place. Even though there are a lot of stories that have a clear connection to place, not all of them do; some of them have connections that relate to their identity, culture, traditions, and customs, things that are meaningful to them and who they are. Both Enna and Patricia maintain the curriculum based in the home environment and add traditional elements such as seasonal stories or other relevant topics to keep it related to their students' lives like the gathering of camas root. Even if the stories are not based on place, they are connected through traditional foods, the home and shelters, and other cultural aspects featured in lessons that aid in reinforcing their identity. This is the land that their people have always lived on and with, and they will continue to gather here and be together.

For Native American languages, where they originate and where their people are is home; they cannot always exist outside of this home. Hinton writes in *The Green Book of Language Revitalization in Progress* that “for Indigenous minorities, their languages are endemic to small areas and have no national status anywhere, nor is there anywhere to go to learn their ancestral tongue. When an Indigenous group stops speaking its language, the language disappears from the face of the earth” (Hinton 2001, 3). That is why the relationship between place, language, and culture is important. When displaced from the land, the language and culture can be difficult to connect to. It is not impossible to bridge these connections while displaced, however, nor is it possible to replace that connection with the land, but the effort to do so should remain due to the outweighed benefits.



One of the biggest questions I had for Enna and Patricia was about their hopes and goals for their language program in the future. As I have written above, one of the main goals for my research was to find solutions and understand how other communities could bring their language programs online, as this cannot always be easily done and the struggle for grants can greatly affect the outcome. Enna and Patricia both have clear goals for the future and consider themselves part of a community of “dreamers”, but living in the moment is also especially important to them. They emphasize that they need to take one step at a time in order to be able to recognize what goals are needed within their community in the present. Enna reflects on how she visions their goals and said “I live in the moment so much and I think that...if we can just embrace the moments, and yes we have these goals and we have these stories in the past, but if we can embrace what it is we need to do in the moment, every day, and we listen and actively listen and are alert, we begin to see the things we cannot see for us”. Initially, she had not envisioned the labeling project with the Mapleton School District. The project was not one she had initially envisioned, it was a goal, but not one that she envisioned being needed more urgently in the present.

Enna said they “breathe life into the language every day”, and the work they have done so far has greatly inspired their people already. When Enna thinks of the future and the hope of her people, the CTCLUSI she thinks of the babies and children, her own and others. She is raising her two-year-old daughter to speak miluk and already her daughter is teaching her things as well. For example, once, after seeing a helicopter up close, her daughter called it tixmil, which she created to resemble the word bee, for its size appearance in the sky and the buzzing sound and ability to fly. Enna was amazed at the way her daughter was able to recognize and reflect on the world around her and adapt her miluk language to fit the modern world. This small story is a

beacon of hope for many communities that are working with language revitalization, evidencing the ways in which a child can create innovative words that reflect the current and modern world within their native languages. This is a feat many would not have imagined.

During my interview with Patricia, I saw similarities between the two cousins but also differences that show how environmental factors can drastically affect one's life. Like Enna, she is of miluk Coos descent from the Lower Bay Area. Unlike Enna, Patricia did not grow up hearing the miluk language. She was born when the tribes were terminated and although they were reinstated in 1984, the language was more silent at that time. She tells me how her dad was taken from his mother when he was four years old, so he was not well-connected with his community or culture until adulthood. As an adult, he began to get involved in tribal politics and joined the council. The fact that her father was disconnected for so long was a contributing factor to Patricia not hearing miluk being spoken. Her cousins knew some of the language but did not speak it in public as at that time, as the speaking of native languages had more of a stigma around it during that time. She grew very curious about miluk, wondering why only a few people knew it, and why it was so silent even in the community.

Patricia's curiosity led her to get a degree in Linguistics at the University of Oregon and she began learning more about miluk. After she graduated, she moved to Sonoma, California, and worked with the CTCLUSI remotely. She would help them with small language projects if they needed translations or certain words for something. Although she was physically far away, Patricia had her work with the tribes to keep connected with the community. She did not feel as though she was disconnected from her community due to distance, because she was constantly connected through her work and asked to do projects around language. Patricia also expressed

how being in California, whose environment and native plants are similar to where she grew up, she was constantly reminded of home. Even though she still felt connected, Patricia recognized that it was different in a significant way from her experience growing up, when she was constantly surrounded by relatives and other community members.

In 2020, Patricia asked Enna if she could help with the language class full-time. Enna already had a framework in place due to her other classes and meetings that she had done. They started the online class and shared with me how amazing she found it being able to offer them to people that way. The cultural community spans five counties, so even those living there can be hours apart, which seems an insurmountable distance amidst busy schedules. This is why Patricia told me that even though she and Enna tried, the in-person classes never stuck—everyone's busy lives did not always allow for a set schedule. Much like Enna, Patricia shared that the goal for their program is to create more teachers so that miluk will thrive.

Patricia expressed “My generation and younger weren't learning any words, so it's been kind of amazing, for me I have learned more than I ever thought I could learn, especially working on three languages (hanis, miluk, siuslawan)...It is so much fun to be able to share it with other people, and hear it being spoken again, because for a long time, the languages were pretty silent if not wholly silent, and now we are speaking them again”. For Patricia, she was not able to hear the miluk language growing up, however, that is not the case now. Now there are classes for adults and children to learn and be able to speak miluk and bring it out into the world. Patricia tells me how CTCLUSI runs culture camps where they give the community's children immersive experiences with the land and culture and part of those experiences include learning some of the languages. These opportunities did not exist when Patricia was younger, so she is

glad she can provide the younger generations with this. She talks about the culture camps and exclaims “For me, it's like wow this is amazing to bring back, and for them, it's just their normal, of course, this is what we do (at camp)", she did not have the opportunity to learn these traditions and be involved with the community in this way when she was young. So, to see the younger generation able to have this is amazing, they are experiencing the culture in a different way than the older generations had. Each person has an individual experience that molds and affects their identities. Even within the same Native American community or family, people have different experiences with their language and culture. With their language classes, Enna and Patricia are changing the narratives for younger kids in their community, giving them more opportunities to learn and be involved in their traditions. Patricia has always been involved with stories and storytelling, so including traditional stories within her class curriculum was especially important and allowed her to use stories to have fun and play around with words and translations to make things new. She likes seeing other storytellers play around with the stories and words after learning the languages to create new interpretations.

The goal of online language programs and classes is to be able to provide community members with a way to access and connect to others while learning their language. Language is such a vital part of identity and part of the community, but in the modern world, it is not always easy to find ways to connect and learn. Although there is a great connection between language and place and place-based learning, not everyone in a cultural community can stay within the physical space of said community and this intimately impacts identity, as we saw described in detail in the last chapter. For many communities, having so many members scattered across great distances, it can be hard to have larger community events and to have these kinds of immersion programs. It is important to have these kinds of online classes and online programs to serve as a

bridge for physically distant community members so that cultural traditions can continue to be passed on sustainably. In order for these traditions to live and carry on, there needs to be active efforts towards their survival and sustainability. While distance is not the only obstacle preventing community engagement, online classes and programs can serve as bridges for reconnecting. Even though it is a goal for Enna and Patricia to be able to have in-person classes and in-person programs to teach and learn the language as a community, they are amazed and feel grateful for the online classes they have now and the work they are able to bring to members all over the world. These online classes are sometimes one of the only connections displaced or disconnected community members have that can reconnect them to their culture, and the community through the learning of their language. Language traditionally was meant to be learned through immersion from family and community members, but as time went on, we learned languages in classrooms. However, adaptability is sometimes necessary for cultures and languages to survive. The adaptability of Indigenous languages is necessary, and this adaptation of methods does not have to mean that the languages are not taught traditionally. There are ways to include traditional elements within online classes. As we have seen in this chapter, the inclusion of folklore is an excellent way to incorporate traditional elements into the classes when the “traditional” way of teaching is no longer optimal.

Our native languages are unique and important to us, and they tell us how to see the world. They are glimpses into the past and the minds of our ancestors before us and they have a home. These languages do not exist outside of their homes, they do not travel as well as other languages during diasporas, and they are part of the community and part of the land. They tell us about the land that existed before us and the land we are on now; the plants, rivers, and animals are a part of our languages. As a storyteller, one of the last things Patricia talked about during our

interview was a story about a kid during one of their culture camps. While they were learning about some of the local plants, she told them about one of the berries that some tribes used for dyeing because the berries were too bitter. Even though the native name was lost, they had a story that went along with them to tell the new generations of its bitterness. The student then asked her if it was poisonous. After telling him no, it was just bitter, he took one of the berries and ate it, discovering that it was in fact, extremely bitter, and spit it out. This story was a joy to hear and a joy to tell from Patricia, showing the curiosity of children and the interaction between the children and the knowledge of ancestors. Curiosity is one of the main things Patricia wants to inspire the new generations with, to make them curious so that they will want to protect these aspects of culture later. It is their duty and privilege to protect these traditions, the stories, the land, and the language so that they can take care of future generations.

### **Analysis and Findings**

One of the main reasons I wanted to study this relationship between language, place, and identity was because I saw how there was this guilt or imposter syndrome in claiming a Native American identity for many community members, and that we often feel we are not enough due to these relationships. Not being connected enough, not traditional enough, all these aspects and more affect how we see our identity. When talking with my informants, as I mentioned in the last chapter, there came a common theme that many of them did not grow up well “connected” to their culture—perhaps they did not grow up learning traditions and being active in the community, or they grew up physically away from their community. There is such a strong emphasis between place and identity, and being away from one's community can greatly impact

and affect how one views oneself. For those in the classes who are not able to be in the physical area anymore, hearing stories that are place-based acts as a thread to tie them back to the land and give them opportunities for community engagement. As we have heard from Hinton (2001), Indigenous languages often cannot survive outside of their homes, they cannot be learned in other places, and they cannot easily travel with you when you leave. Learning the language through a connection such as communication technology that gives personal connections back to the land and community, is vital to continuing and creating speech communities that are separated by great distances. Just as Native American languages are rarely accessible outside the land, culture is as well, and there should be programs and resources in place to help the displaced and disconnected community members reconnect and have access to their language and culture.

## Chapter 5

### **Bridging the Gap Bridging the Gap: Solutions and Conclusion**

This concluding chapter explores options for solutions and examples of programs, projects, and ideas given by the language teachers and participants that I worked with on this research project. These “solutions” are recommendations and are a plea toward Native American communities to consider implementing some form of distance-learning program or resource to aid in the well-being of their community members. It is my goal that others may see this research and understand that there is a need for resources and programs designed to connect and reconnect their community members who are displaced and or disconnected for whatever reason. Without these resources, the sustainability of cultural traditions and native languages diminishes, as do-claims of Native American identity.

There are many instances within the field of Folklore, where we must ask ourselves where the line and balance are when dealing with the vitality and sustainability of traditions. How far do we let ourselves change and adapt, and when do we keep the virtues of traditions intact? Do we allow the modern world to change us, or do we let ourselves adapt to it to sustain ourselves? Do we as folklorists have a responsibility to try and keep traditions as traditional or ancient as possible? Or can we help the communities do what they must to maintain and sustain said traditions? These are questions I have often asked myself during this research and when thinking of what solutions might work.

Robert Elliott's work within NILI is to provide support and help Native language teachers teach their languages, so when asking Robert about the traditional ways of teaching language and its differences with online, he said it requires asking instead, “Do we have to do things



“traditionally” or can we adapt and change?”. Some communities he has worked with have Elders come in during projects and say that they cannot write the language as that was not how it was done, that they cannot record the language, or create programs that teach the language outside of the traditional methods of face-to-face interactions, learning through talking with family members and the community. Robert believes that by not taking advantage of writing and audio recording, they could be denying a point of access for other learners to use to continue the language for generations to come, however, each community needs to understand what works best for them. Although online classes are not the ideal choice, if it is between online classes or having no classes at all, like during the pandemic, you must accept that online classes can serve as access points for language learners. Without them, linguistic communities will continue to dwindle as members are displaced, busy, or disconnected. Online classes that utilize communication technology such as Zoom, and prerecorded videos are needed to reach community members who are spread out in the diaspora, so the traditions and language are able to be sustained.

However, like with anything, the upkeep of using technology requires time, money, and training. Due to the pandemic, most of the world had to learn how to utilize technology to their advantage as the world turned remote. This meant that many turned to Zoom as it was the most accessible and cheapest alternative to replace in-person communication. However, much of the technology that exists outside of the use of Zoom yet is required for this type of language revitalization work—computers, apps, websites, and audio recordings—also needs to be updated and properly maintained, which requires funding. Getting a grant to provide computers for a small school is great, until a few years later those computers need upgrades to their software and there is no money or resources to do so. As such, getting grants to provide a community with

technology for a program that does not have sustainability in mind falls short, as the upkeep will prove to be more work than realized. The development of programs can be done through acquiring grants; however, the sustainability and maintenance of programs require other forms of resources.

Right now, NILI stands as one of those resources that can help develop and maintain language programs here in the Northwest Native communities. Because they are an umbrella organization connected to various tribes and communities in this area, NILI has many resources in terms of diversity of examples and ways of doing things. This allows them to help communities who may feel isolated or struggling to figure out the best way for them to proceed with language revitalization efforts. NILI can help Northwest Native communities find solutions to their problems that have been inspired by work others have done that they may not have known about. However, it is also important for there to be communication and relationships between the tribes here and elsewhere, not only so that they can learn together and create things together, but also so that they can see the mistakes of others and learn from them. Not every option created will work for every group or culture. The purpose is to create solutions, and this is the purpose of this chapter—to provide options for solutions for communities to use as a resource. Not every solution will work, but they can give inspiration, where they can be changed and adapted to fit one's needs and goals.

Although Robert does not teach a native language himself, part of his capacity as director of NILI is to teach Native teachers, how to teach their native language. This allowed him a unique position to understand the complexities and capacities of Native American language teachers involved in language revitalization efforts. When talking to Robert in his interview, we discussed the differences between trying to learn and recreate language through written

documentation alone. It is hard to learn a language solely through written documentation when certain sounds can be uncommon in your dominant language. Through audio recordings, Robert said it opens this “cornucopia of colors and sounds and images”; each language has its own music that you cannot experience through written form. Learning through an app without audio would be difficult, as you can learn vocabulary, and the structure of a language, but the heart of the language and its music is not there. This audio input is an important feature to include in these endeavors and as seen in early chapters, so is the personal connection with others while learning a language. It is these two factors that allow one to truly learn Native languages as the ancestors intended. As seen in my interview with Ayahna, her craving for personal interaction, to learn from someone, and to be able to ask community members the questions she would like answered, is necessary to learning languages. Providing online classes that meet through Zoom and have recorded meetings for others to watch would be a helpful solution for many communities with displaced or disconnected community members.

Traditional ways of knowing and teaching are through face-to-face interactions, however, in today’s age, this may not be a viable solution for the continuation of cultural traditions. There is a need for adaptation in a modern and technological sense that allows communities to spread their traditions across boundaries and distances to reach members in an accessible way by taking advantage of the affordance technology offers. Through the use of communication technology that allows for these face-to-face interactions to happen through technological platforms such as Zoom, allows that personal interaction to prevail while also creating an accessible and sustainable solution for language learning. For cultural traditions, some states will have state folklife agencies that have master apprenticeship programs designed for this blending of modern and traditional ways of passing on traditions and bypassing obstacles such as funding and time

by providing the necessary resources. For languages however, master apprenticeship programs have been done in small experiments with mixed results, but I employ others to consider the implementation of such a program, of finding ways to provide connection and ways to learn the language from a native speaker.

As stated before, the development and continuation of any cultural heritage program like a language program takes time, money, personal dedication, and commitment, and it is both a responsibility and right to continue them with the right resources. Not every community will have the availability to have online and/or in-person classes, and grants are competitive with no guarantee of receiving the money or resources needed to do so. That is why one of the things Enna hopes for most is that there will be a collaboration between different tribes that will allow them to be able to share and work together on ideas and solutions for Native language revitalization so that when there is grant money and hands on deck to help, they know what to do.

### **The Implementation of Folklore within Language Revitalization Efforts**

Our language is our voice, and who we are. It is our connection to our ancestors, family, and land, and is an important aspect of our identity. We have seen in this study that the connection between language and our identity is important and can help others connect when they have felt lost, displaced, or isolated. The learning of native languages is a crucial step to reclaiming and reconnecting with your heritage and identity, the feelings of imposter syndrome are apparent and intense in some cases, and through reconnecting with the language, those feelings can lessen and create a more secure and sustainable bond to the culture. However, language is not just made up of our vocabulary and the structure of its sentences, but in its ability

to build world-views and its connection to the land and how our ancestors saw the world. It is in the way the language describes a place, how it teaches us about how to be a human in a particular culture and tells us about our morals and principles. It connects us to our other traditions and our storytelling; it tells us about our traditional foods and our families.

The online classes conducted by CTCLUSI include examples of folklore such as traditional stories, connections to traditional foods, and an emphasis on the home and familial ties. It has been shown in other studies that the implementation of folklore within language classes, and other classes is helpful to students and allows them to relate more, be more fully engaged, and help build their connections to their culture even through dominating institutions (Kusmana 2020). The implementation of folkloric lesson plans in language classes can add an extra layer of connections to the culture and cultural traditions, aiding in views of identity, and connections to place and culture. These examples of folklore that are embedded into the classes and lesson plans are part of what makes a language understood during the learning process. You can learn the vocabulary, look at a dictionary, and understand a few sentences, but without hearing it, without speaking it with others, in the home, or during activities, you cannot truly connect with the language on a deeper level.

When beginning this research, I had ideas of what kinds of solutions I would offer, nor what kind of programs and options I would offer, thinking that they could be what one community needed or could use. However, now that this research has concluded and I am able to understand the nuances, backgrounds, and work that goes into these programs and efforts toward revitalization, I am not sure I have any right to make any authoritative claims. I can only speak of what I believe may benefit displaced Native American community members such as myself and those that I worked with in this study. Finding ways to implement some kind of mentor-

apprentice program that can pair disconnected or displaced individuals with a community member would be a great start for those who are able, so that disconnected community members may have some form of connection, individuals to ask their questions and to teach them the language and other parts of their traditions. Especially for those who do not have family members left living in the community and thus no more concrete ties to it, something along this caliber would be greatly beneficial, for what is the point of a community if not to be there for all of its members in order to ensure the survival of what makes it unique.

## **Resources**

Other than NILI, there are other resources available that can help communities with revitalization efforts such as the Miromaa Aboriginal Language and Technology Center ([Miromaa.org.au](http://Miromaa.org.au)). Miromaa works as a resource center that can help store your language into a safe software platform created by First Nations people for First Nations people. Along with their help with software, they can help communities develop techniques to help with interviewing, filming, recording, and other forms of documentation and archival work. With their help, communities can create dictionaries, apps, and more to help reach wider audiences and gain support and help in their revitalization process. They are a non-profit organization designed to help Indigenous languages around the world stop language loss. One part of this platform that I value the most is that its software can store and categorize data with limited access based on ethical and cultural principles. This means that communities can upload and share their songs and stories and allow their community access during the appropriate times for those songs and stories to be told.

Another free online platform designed for Indigenous communities is Murkutu, which is a “grassroots project aiming to empower communities to manage, share, and exchange their digital heritage in culturally relevant and ethically-minded ways” (Mukurtu.org). This is an open-source resource designed to allow Indigenous communities to manage and share digitally their cultural heritage safely and ethically.

## **Conclusion**

As I have answered some of the research questions, I began this study with, more questions have come to mind as well. Some of these new questions are: Who is the bridge? What is the bridge? What or who is that connection that people can turn to when they are lost and seeking this journey toward reconnection? As Ayahna said, you cannot just look online and find a community member; there is no resource to guide you, no name or contact for someone to which you could talk. For the people who have no one left, no ties to their communities of origin, who do they turn to, who teaches them? As Robert emphasized, there may not be a right but there is a responsibility, one for us all to act as the bridge for another. Patricia told me about how she runs a Facebook account for the miluk language where she tries to post a video a day of a miluk word. The account is private and for members of the community to learn a little bit each day. This was a great example for me to see, to observe that there are other ways to have online resources for language learning, and to see a step toward the direction many of us want to see—an online resource, easily accessible and easy to find, that serves as a point of connection for others; to learn, to ask questions, to have someone there. Or one can be like Deana and participate or create a group where you can meet online, see each other’s faces, hear their voices,

Speak the language, eat together, be together whenever you can, and work towards providing even a small connection for someone else.

For those like me and the others in this research who are disconnected, my advice is to reach out to whoever you can find, in whatever capacity is available. The journey towards reconnection is a long one, but a bridge needs to be constructed and needs to be started where it can grow and become stronger for others. For those reading this that have power, have an influence, have the capacity to do and create—create programs that can help your community members who are displaced; create programs that can help those members who have no one left, for those who want to connect but do not know where to start. We have a responsibility toward our culture, our language, and our community, for all to thrive and live with us and to surpass us. A responsibility to those community members who are left out, left behind, to help them and ensure that our traditions are passed on.

This research has barred its soul to you, barred the souls of myself, and the participants who graciously spoke of their traumas, histories, fears, feelings of isolation, and disconnection. They have shown their wounds left by society or inherited from generations ago. They have spoken about how being in a different place can affect their connection to their culture, and their languages, and how this all affects their identity, how they see themselves, and their claim of being Native American. They have spoken about their feelings of being cut off from the community through no fault of their own, desperate to connect to them now, and their feelings of loss and grief over family members who took with them their knowledge and connection to the culture. This research constitutes an effort and a plea to forge a deeper understanding of what can help displaced Native Americans reconnect with their communities of origin, and how native communities can create more beneficial programs to facilitate this. It is with that thought that I



ask other tribes to consider implementing online language classes that utilize communication technology to benefit their community members who are either displaced or disconnected. I also ask that they consider other online programs and forums that could be useful to these groups as well, such as a master-apprenticeship program, online groups that meet for a specific cause or to provide company, social media pages that allow others to interact and communicate with others in the community, or recorded videos that provide a deeper level of interaction and learning experiences. I ask that you be the bridge.

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