

HOW CAN LINGUISTS SUPPORT LANGUAGE REVITALIZATION EFFORTS IN THE BRAZILIAN CONTEXT? *COMO OS LINGUISTAS PODEM APOIAR OS ESFORÇOS DE REVITALIZAÇÃO LINGÜÍSTICA NO CONTEXTO BRASILEIRO?*

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ABSTRACT

In the last 20 years, language revitalization efforts have grown to the point where we can now talk about a global movement to save the linguistic diversity that exists in different parts of the world. Linguists have long benefited from this multilingualism and in many cases have helped preserve it. In Brazil, we see a growing number of linguists from different subfields trying to find ways in which they can support indigenous communities in their efforts to reverse language loss. As part of a volume on linguistics and education, this paper discusses the potential roles linguists can play in language transmission scenarios where there is a minoritized, endangered language involved. It uses a language planning frame to describe revitalization efforts and to present suggestions to linguists that would like to explore and expand the impact of their work. It is an attempt by a linguist to establish a conversation with other linguists. The perspectives presented here do not represent the point of view of local communities and should be taken for what they are and who they represent.

KEYWORDS: Language revitalization. Language planning frame. Indigenous languages. Education

RESUMO

Nos últimos 20 anos, os esforços de revitalização linguística cresceram num nível que permite falar em um movimento global de salvação da diversidade linguística existente em diversas partes do mundo. Os linguistas vêm se beneficiando há tempos desse multilinguismo e muitas vezes vem ajudando a preservá-lo. No Brasil, temos visto um número crescente de subáreas investidas em oferecer suporte a comunidades indígenas que se esforçam em reverter perdas linguísticas. Como parte de um volume de linguística e educação, este artigo discute o potencial papel que o linguista pode assumir em ambientes de transmissão linguística envolvendo uma língua minorizada e ameaçada. Lançando mão de um quadro de planejamento linguístico para descrever os esforços de revitalização, sugerimos aos linguistas caminhos a explorar para expandir o impacto de sua atuação. Esta é uma tentativa de estabelecer uma conversa de linguistas com outros linguistas. Os pontos de vista presentes aqui não representam o pensamento das comunidades locais e devem ser vistos pelo que representam e pelo que são.

PALAVRAS-CHAVE: Quadro de revitalização linguística. Línguas indígenas. Educação.

Introduction

In an introspective paper, Speas (2009) describes how the expertise of linguists might be completely irrelevant to language revitalization efforts. According to her, “linguists have very specialized training in the analysis of language and are generally fascinated by languages, but it is not clear that their skills are the skills that a community needs for revitalizing a language.” She cites several pitfalls faced by linguists when trying to apply their linguistic knowledge to real-life revitalization issues, including the way they describe and organize information about language structures. She

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convincingly argues that you do not have to be a linguist to pass on a language to future generations, and she rightfully criticizes the attitude of linguists who present themselves as helpful outsiders, who are “more enlightened than the missionaries, teachers, administrators and soldiers of the past.” Rather than disagreeing with Speas (2009), this paper presents an alternative view of the roles that linguists can play in revitalization efforts. There is a significant gap in the training of linguists when it comes to studying and understanding revitalization processes. In most linguistics programs in the US and in Brazil, the area is either completely ignored or treated as a side issue that could even become a major distraction to the “real” work linguists are supposed to do. Very few linguists take the time to seriously educate themselves on the topic, and most who do, focus on their personal experiences during fieldwork or anecdotal evidence from cases they know. To be fair to us, linguists, it is also not entirely obvious how one would learn about the field, since the academy has taken its time to very slowly incorporate some of the issues that were raised more than 20 years ago (e.g., FISHMAN, 1991; NIEDZIELSKI, 1992; PAULSTON, 1992; HINTON and HALE, 2001).

However, for the past decade there is a growing number of scholars interested in language revitalization and the topic has gained significant international recognition after the United Nations declared 2019 the year of the indigenous languages, and subsequently established the decade of indigenous languages from 2022 to 2032. We see new, extensive volumes in the area (e.g., HINTON *et al.*, 2018b; OLKO and SALLABANK, 2021), and the literature is being extended by existing and new venues for scholarly articles². Perhaps it is time for linguists to start receiving some academic training on language revitalization and try to avoid some of the missteps described by Speas (2009). For that to happen, there are at least two prerequisites that seem inevitable. On one hand, linguists in general and field linguists in particular must be open to the idea that exploring the applied dimensions of their work is significantly important and deserve their attention. Secondly, we need to academically develop ways to study, describe and understand revitalization processes, considering epistemological approaches to the field so that individual observations about specific experiences can be represented and understood systemically. It needs to be highlighted that the goal should never be to impose academic perspectives or practices on the work that is done by local communities to maintain and strengthen their languages, but rather to help external scholars, who are sometimes clueless about their potential roles, understand the work that needs to be done. In some cases it might mean closely examining the tensions that can exist between their research goals and the linguistic support needed by local practitioners, and allowing the research project to be influenced by and modified through community collaborations. In this paper, we explore some potential roles of linguists in language transmission efforts³. All considerations presented

² Besides Language Documentation and Conservation hosted by the University of Hawaii, Language will have a section dedicated to revitalization soon, and a new journal Living Languages will be the first international, multilingual journal entirely dedicate to the topic.

³ I will use the term “language transmission” as a general term to describe the goal of language revitalization efforts, and I will only use “language instruction” or “language teaching” when discussing ways in which the endangered language is acquired in a formal educational setting. Ideally any language can be passed on to future generations in multiple contexts that are not limited to schools or any kind of formal instruction. As seen throughout the paper, it is important that the

in the next sections are based on a framework that describes revitalization initiatives using a language planning frame, as explained in section 3.

Before we consider the role of linguists in section 4, we need to remember that language revitalization is done by and for a language community. There are different types of communities involved with different characteristics (FARFAN and OLKO, 2021), however, extensive evidence has shown that the degree of success of revitalization efforts depends heavily on the involvement, availability and perseverance of local practitioners from the communities (HINTON and HALE, 2001; TSUNODA, 2005; GRENOBLE and WHALEY, 2006). All activities require the direct leadership by community members, and the linguist, whether from the community or not, will have to understand the practices and goals put forth by the local leadership (CZAYKOWSKA-HIGGINS, 2009; DOBRIN, 2008; DWYER, 2006, 2010; RICE, 2011, 2010, 2006). The nature of the work might be difficult to deal with. Differently from a traditional academic project designed and performed by linguists, where we can establish a research plan and control (to a certain extent) its outcomes, we are not the protagonists of revitalization efforts and it is not our role to establish the goals and the steps that should be taken. Revitalization work requires an incredible commitment of the part of the community members, as well as the availability of human and financial resources, and linguists have to accept that they will face situations where the necessary conditions for such work do not exist⁴.

This brings us to an important caveat about this paper. As the title suggests, it was written primarily focusing on interactions between linguists and indigenous communities in Brazil. Although the paper is written in English, it does not focus on the North American context and several of its considerations are not meant to be suggestions to linguists working in the US or Canada, though some colleagues working in other Latin American countries may find familiar scenarios to the ones described for Brazil. For historical and cultural reasons, the kind of relationships and collaborations established between linguists and indigenous communities in Latin America are very different from the ones existing in North America, and it is a mistake to assume that similar dynamics take place. Another relevant caveat is that this paper is an attempt by a linguist to establish a conversation with other linguists. The perspectives presented here are not representative of the point of view of local communities and should be taken with a grain of salt for what they are and who they represent.

This paper is divided into six sections. After this introduction, there are two sections that briefly present some basic information for those who are not familiar with previous literature on language revitalization. Section 1 presents some basic terminology in the field, and section 2 brings a brief summary of existing language revitalization programs, activities, efforts and initiatives. The goal is not to describe in detail the different ways in which communities have been trying to maintain their languages, but rather to give the reader an idea of the different scenarios that exist. Section 3 presents

linguistic work done can support different types of transmission strategies and is not limited by the local school systems.

⁴ The existence of the necessary conditions for revitalization work to take place is a very complex topic. Several authors listed in the bibliography have discussed it from different angles. For those interested in reading about it in Portuguese, Amaral (2020a) describes in further detail some of the steps involved in language planning and revitalization initiatives.

one perspective on how to use language planning to describe revitalization efforts in order to advance the academic debate and the exchange of ideas. Based on the epistemological assumptions discussed in section 3, section 4 explores some ways in which linguists can directly support community projects to maintain their languages. Finally, section 6 brings some concluding remarks.

1. Some basic terminology

Before we explore a way to academically organize the area of language revitalization, let's define the term. There have been many terms used when describing actions to revert language loss, from "revitalization" to "maintenance", "reclamation", "sustainability", and even "awakening" in cases of languages that were no longer spoken. Although there are certain situations where these distinctions are necessary to describe the community efforts in relation to their history, cultural characteristics and even the degree of language loss, academically it is important to be able to refer to the whole set of initiatives that support the use and transmission of endangered languages. In this paper, I will use "language revitalization" as a catch-all term.

Another important key concept to be defined is the one of "speech community." If we observe the revitalization efforts that are taking place around the world (PEREZ BAEZ *et al.*, 2019), we will notice a multitude of scenarios where endangered language transmission is taking place. Some traditional notions of speech community used in sociolinguistics (LABOV, 2001; HUDSON, 1996) do not apply in many of these scenarios for different reasons. First, in revitalization, we frequently need to refer not only to the current speakers of a language but also to the potential speakers, i.e., those who will learn the language. Second, as Hinton *et al.* (2018b) remind us, the notion of speech community established in a specific geographical location cannot describe revitalization scenarios where a group of people in a diaspora (or even interacting online) is trying to maintain and pass on their language to future generations. Independently of the number of people or their location, it is crucial to recognize that the transmission of an endangered, ancestral language usually happens in a context where cultural, communal practices have to be taken into account, and the recognition of a "community of speakers" (in some cases potential speakers) will be central to the revitalization effort.

A third important notion that is central to revitalization is the one of "language vitality," in other words, when we consider a language to be endangered and how we classify the degrees of endangerment for each language. There are several methodologies that have been presented throughout the years to measure the degree of endangerment of a given language (cf. eg., FISHMAN, 1991; TSUNODA, 2005). It is beyond the scope of this paper to discuss the details of these methodologies. One recommendation for people unfamiliar with them is to start with the UNESCO (2003) report that lists a set of criteria to evaluate language loss and endangerment. A robust analysis of the current situation of the language is always an excellent point of departure for any revitalization initiative.

A fourth topic to keep in mind is the impact of external and internal factors that affect language vitality in a given group. In the second chapter of their book, Grenoble and Whaley (2006) present a list

of those variables that directly affect language use, transmission and revitalization. This is another topic that goes beyond the scope of this paper, but anyone interested in revitalization should learn more about those variables since they present a series of elements that could directly influence the decisions made for revitalization projects in different contexts⁵.

Last but not least, in their comprehensive survey of revitalization efforts around the world, Pérez Báez et al. (2019) show that there is a variety of potential goals to be achieved depending on the specific scenarios where the actions take place. We must abandon the “all or nothing” metrics in which success can only be measured by a full scale intergeneration transmission with the language regaining all its previous uses. As Grenoble et al. (2021) remind us, there are many benefits to revitalization work that go beyond the preservation of a given language, and several of them can be achieved with initiatives that simply initiate reclamation processes or provide further support for community activities that are linguistically motivated.

2. Language revitalization efforts

In order to better understand the general activities involved in revitalization efforts, it is important for linguists to learn about previous and existing initiatives by communities in different parts of the world. Differently from the topic in section 3, where more needs to be done for us to academically understand and discuss language revitalization, the literature showcasing efforts to reclaim and/or maintain endangered languages has grown significantly. In their *Global Survey of Revitalization Efforts*, Pérez Báez et al. (2019) show the diversity of revitalization initiatives around the world, and ever since Hinton and Hale (2001), other compilations bringing various revitalization efforts have illustrated this diversity. It is beyond the scope of this article to discuss all of them in detail. So in this section, I just mention some well-known examples and encourage the readers to educate themselves about these and other initiatives.

The choice of revitalization approach is due, for the most part, on the specific situation of each language. In order for a language to be endangered, there has most certainly been a break in the intergeneration transmission. One of the most well-known attempts to reverse this situation is the so called *language nest*, where young children spend part of their days in an environment where the endangered language is the only one spoken. Some of the most well-known examples are the Maori (KING, 2001), the Hawaiian (WARNER, 2001), and the Mohawk (JACOBS, 1998) language nests. More recently, in an ongoing collaboration with some Maori activists, the Kaingang (in Brazil) have started their own language nest (NASCIMENTO et al., 2017). There is a growing literature on language nests as the model is being adopted and adapted by different communities around the world.

There are other initiatives that have been implemented by local communities in an attempt to revert language loss. Some work directly with families to support language use in the home by

⁵ It is worth reading Leonard (2021), who describes the interactions between local power relations, the community and other stakeholders. One does not have to be an expert in all those topics to work with revitalization, but it is good practice to be well informed.

multi-generational groups of people (e.g., PETERS and PETERS, 2013; O'REGAN, 2018), while others are creating community spaces for adults to use the language they are learning (ZAHIR, 2018). Several interesting examples combine specific cultural practices with language use, such as theater (BAKER, 2018) and dance (HARRIS, 1977). Revitalization efforts that are based on existing practices have shown great potential to get people involved and excited about the activities proposed. There are many more examples that could be listed to illustrate the potential of a community-based, culturally motivated approach.

The use of formal education in school settings for language transmission is another very popular strategy chosen by different groups. As Hornberger and De Korne (2018) remind us, this choice has its limitations and does not necessarily provide a straightforward path to revitalization. There are many obstacles in implementing educational programs that can effectively reverse language loss, and usually deploying a program at a school is not enough to create the necessary conditions to do so (HINTON and MEEK, 2018). However, many communities identify the formal education strategy as something worth trying, and linguists are frequently asked to support those efforts. This is particularly true in Latin America, where many stakeholders consider that governmental policies and institutional participation should play a central role in language preservation (CASTAÑEDA, 2013; ZUÑIGA *et al.*, 2000). The two most common types of language programs are either based on bilingual education, where the instruction time is supposed to be divided by the dominant and the endangered languages, and second language instruction, where, as the name suggests, the endangered language is taught as a second language to non-speakers.

In situations when there are almost no speakers left and the conditions for community-based transmission efforts or formal educational programs do not exist, the *master-apprentice* model can help create a new generation of speakers by pairing-up learners with older speakers (Hinton, 2001b). Some of the limitations of the model are addressed in newer iterations of the program, such as the one described by Hinton *et al.* (2018a), where the master-apprentice approach was used to foster future adult language instructors that could later pass on the language to children in other types of educational programs.

Another situation where linguists can provide crucial support is in language reclamation scenarios, where the language is no longer spoken by the community, but there is previous documentation that can support the process. Amery (2000) describes some of the basic properties of available documentation materials for reclamation initiatives. Creating a community of speakers where there are none left is not an easy task, and the coordination of necessary actions to make it happen requires a good deal of language planning and human resources. Grenoble and Whaley (2006) emphasize the importance of having realistic expectations and an understanding that the whole process requires much more than good language transmission strategies, since the sociolinguistic environment to support language use needs to be built from scratch. Amery (2016, 2017) present some details of the Kaurna reclamation process, their goals, expectations and the current uses of the language. In Brazil, the Pataxó case is one of the more advanced examples of language reclamation where the language had almost entirely

been forgotten by the communities (BOMFIM, 2017).

As previously mentioned, this list briefly presents a fraction of the existing diversity in revitalization efforts around the world. Hopefully it is comprehensive enough for the reader to realize that there are many ways in which linguistic work can be used to support such efforts. If we, linguists, want to explore the full potential of our contributions, we need learn about the diversity of scenarios where revitalization work can take place, and the multiple approaches different communities have been using to preserve their languages.

3. An academic view of language revitalization

The western academic tradition is built on certain epistemological premisses that require specific ways in which we divide and organize information. This is obviously not the only way human knowledge can be organized and transmitted. However, we, academically trained linguists, can have a hard time understanding alternative ways of knowledge structuring and dissemination⁶.

Language maintenance, reclamation or revitalization can be very unique to its environment. This section is an attempt to use a western epistemological approach to understand common properties of language revitalization efforts through a language planning perspective. Again, this is not an attempt to force this framework onto local practitioners. The ultimate goal is hopefully achieved in section 4, which presents pointers to help linguists think about ways in which they could support such efforts.

If one explores the international literature in the field known as *language planning and policy* (LPP), it is not hard to see that a lot of what is said will have little relevance to the work that needs to be done with endangered languages at the community level. However, several authors who work in the field have highlighted the relevance of language planning for revitalization efforts, with a special emphasis on those efforts guided by community-based approaches (HORNBERGER, 1996; HINTON, 2001a). Hornberger (2006) reiterates the relevance for the connection of planning and policy, while Penfield (2021) and Hinton (2001a) describe important steps in planning revitalization initiatives. However relevant all those perspectives are, in this paper we will explore the approach used by McCarty (2013, 2018), where she highlights the three essential types of language planning activities: (i)*status planning*, (ii)*corpus planning* and (iii)*acquisition planning*. She also reminds us that “LLP processes are not discrete or autonomous but are interconnected and co-occurring within broader, social, political, and economic systems” (p. 23). This observation is going to be important in section 4.

A language to be classified as endangered has lost at least some of its ground in relation to a dominant language, usually for political, economic or historic reasons. Some of the traditional

⁶ Once I was with a colleague in an assembly at an indigenous community in the Brazilian Amazon. After hearing a couple of hours of long speeches, my colleague expressed her frustration with the dynamics and how little she had understood of what was going on. I confessed to her that I was also at lost, but called her attention to the reaction of the local participants. We were clearly the only two people in the assembly that could not understand what was being proposed, although everybody was speaking Portuguese, our native language

uses for the language may not exist anymore or the language might have been displaced in certain communicative contexts. The *status planning* will deal with issues related to the current and potential uses of the language⁷. It basically requires that we ask when and where a language will be used, and for which objectives. If the language cannot reclaim some spaces or create new ones where it needs to be used, it will be hard to come up with real incentives for people to learn it. Recreating opportunities for the language to be used usually requires a combination of factors that may deal with its prestige among different groups of speakers, the incentives for potential speakers to use it and even the availability of physical spaces. It may also require people to creatively use new medias and/or expand the uses of the language to official documents, to certain places (workspace, schools, courts etc.) or to certain services (for medical or financial assistance for example). Moreover, if we take the considerations presented by Baldauf (2010) in relation to macro and micro language planning at the local level, we see that the success of experiences with endangered languages are highly dependable on the principles for community-based language planning, such as the ones presented by Lewis and Simmons (2016) and Hornberger (1996), which focus on grass-roots, bottom-up actions motivated by perceived needs and in sync with the available human, financial and physical resources.

If the *status planning* focuses on where and under which conditions language revitalization can take place, *corpus planning* deals with what will be revitalized, in other words, the language forms that will be used, including vocabulary, pronunciation, morphosyntactic forms, sociolinguistic norms, orthography, etc. To better understand it, let's imagine an unrealistic, science fiction scenario. Though the same scale of documentation would never occurs with an endangered language in real life, let's imagine a catastrophic future where the English language is either no longer spoken or it is spoken by a very small number of people. If you were responsible for organizing a corpus to a revitalization project of English, which materials would you include and how would you organize them if your goal was to facilitate language transmission? What orthography and which language samples would you use? How would words be pronounced? Where would your lexicon come from and which varieties of the language would it contemplate? How did the language evolve and which structures would you prioritize, i.e., would you go back to a more Shakespearean style or would you prefer Eminem's syntax? These are just some of the questions you would have to answer to plan a corpus for the English revitalization in this hypothetical scenario. Similar questions should be asked by documentation projects whose goals include revitalization efforts. Language documentation is frequently listed as one of the preconditions for the revitalization of languages with a dwindling population of speakers (AUSTIN and SALLABANK, 2018). However, it very important to remember that language documentation and corpus planning are two distinct activities that can support one another, but that can also be done in a way that they are completely blind to each other's needs. Finally, the third crucial type of language planning activities is *acquisition planning*, which addresses issues related to how language

⁷ The UNESCO criteria 4 and 5 for evaluating the degree of endangerment of a language deal directly with issues that pertain to its status.

transmission can take place in a scenario of language loss. There are several questions that need to be answered in acquisition planning, such as: (i) Who will acquire the language? Children? L2 adult speakers? One, two or groups of apprentices? (ii) What are the strategies used to pass on the language? Through language instruction? Through immersion? (iii) Where will transmission activities take place? Formal language programs in schools? Community language nests? Family homes? (iv) What is the structure of the activities and what resources are necessary? These are just some of the many questions that need to be addressed in acquisition planning. The scope of the questions depend on the type of program that is chosen for each scenario. In section 2, we saw some of the initiatives that exist in revitalization, which should give the reader an idea of the diversity of the issues that need to be addressed by acquisition planning. One common misconception is to think about language revitalization solely as acquisition planning, i.e., the belief that one is only supporting revitalization efforts if one is preparing pedagogical materials for language teaching or helping develop programs for language transmission. As we will see in section 4, there are several things that linguists can do that directly support language revitalization and are not directly within the area of acquisition planning.

4. The potential roles of linguists

If we look at the variety of revitalization efforts through the language planning lenses, we can start exploring ways in which linguists can support such efforts. It has to be said that this will require that we consider new dimensions to our own work. When we engage in a research project with an endangered language, we usually establish procedures and evaluative criteria to achieve certain academic goals, such as document traditional uses of the language, describe language forms or provide formal analysis to linguistic structures. Data elicitation during fieldwork is never an easy task, and the conditions found in the field do require that the researcher manages complex procedures and prioritize certain aspects of the work.

All suggestions presented in this section are based on the premise that in our decisionmaking process, we will include goals, procedures and evaluations that also take into consideration the revitalization efforts proposed by the community. Moreover, it will require an effort on our part to find strategies to combine the academic and the revitalization goals in a way that they do not compete with, but rather complement one another. This is not a new proposal in any way, Grenoble (2009) had already called for “a reassessment of the goals and methods of linguistic research on endangered languages” (p. 61) as a way to create more collaborative research agendas. The suggestions presented here do not constitute an extensive list and there are certainly more ways in which linguists could actively participate in revitalization efforts.

4.1. Corpus planning

During an informal conversation with a linguist friend, where we were discussing the support linguists could provide to language revitalization initiatives, he told me that he strongly believed that

linguists could only support corpus planning efforts, and that both acquisition and status planning activities were beyond the scope of a linguist's work and capability. Although I strongly disagree with such assessment, I do agree that corpus planning is the most straightforward area where linguists can have a positive impact.

There are basically two ways in which linguists can help with corpus planning. The first one is to actively consider the needs of the revitalization initiatives during documentation and language description work. As seen in section 4, corpus planning actions are responsible for establishing the lexicon and language forms that will be used in language transmission, as well as organizing materials that document the uses of the language for revitalization purposes. The potential synergy with linguistic research is obvious, but not automatic. Austin and Sallabank (2018) summarize some of the tensions that might happen between documentation projects and the expectations of local language activists interested in revitalizing their languages:

In the view of many documentary linguists, materials for reference and revitalization are ideally based on a corpus from language documentation. However, much material in LD corpora and outputs may be unsuitable for revitalization, for several reasons. First, it frequently contains genres or topics such as sacred materials, discussions of death or sexual relationships, as well as gossip, that are inappropriate for language learners, especially children. Second, the outputs of LD tend to consist of linguistic analyses published in academic journals, or descriptive grammars written in a major, typically Western, language, using terminology that is obscure to non-linguists. They tend to focus on grammatical or phonological features rather than on conversational gambits, communicative competence, or notions and functions.” (p. 210)

Several authors emphasize other problems with documentation projects that do not incorporate revitalization needs into their goals. Dorian (2009) mentions that the attempt by linguists to document “purer” forms of the language leads to creation of corpora that are disconnected from the language use of younger generations. Cope (2014) reminds us that very few corpora bring language samples of learner-directed speech or even samples from younger generations that could be more appealing to language learners. Sugita (2007) and Amery (2009) present some interesting ways to make corpora more useful to revitalization, such as including language samples from daily interactions, with different registers and for different communicative functions. They also emphasize the importance of documenting intergenerational interactions. Nathan and Fang (2009) suggest that some useful metadata could be incorporated to facilitate the development of pedagogical materials later on, such as information about the type of social interaction that is taking place, and the topics discussed, especially if the topics are commonly used in language instruction. Mosel (2012) emphasizes the benefits of having documentation projects consider the needs of language instructors and the development of pedagogical materials.

Regarding language description and analysis, a similar phenomenon happens. Linguistic studies often use a narrow and in depth focus to describe language forms that are considered unique to

a language. These descriptions tend to be filled with theory specific terms and references to other works in the field. Even more robust works, such as doctoral dissertations that describe multiple properties of the endangered language, tend to heavily emphasize the language forms deemed more interesting for theoretical discussions. From an academic perspective this approach is obviously desirable, however from a practitioner's point of view this may lead to the creation of documents that are rarely useful. One of the root causes for this disconnect is the research methodology preferred by many linguists when doing fieldwork. The informant-researcher dynamics is clearly not suitable any more in many contexts where local communities are well organized and have their own list of priorities. Amaral (2018) describes a possible alternative to the work dynamics between linguists and local language activists that can help both sides find common ground to advance their individual goals. By focusing on the creation of materials for perceived needs by the community, it is possible to advance one's theoretical work by using elicitation techniques that can provide both more research data and the necessary corpus for language instruction. However, it is necessary for the linguist to have a clear idea of what kind of data can be more easily incorporated into pedagogical materials. In general, contextualized examples of everyday language use and language descriptions that focus on regular and commonly used language forms tend to be more helpful, but the specific characteristics of the data that is necessary will also depend on the kind of materials that need to be created and the audiences for such materials. Amaral (2020b) presents a framework that can be used by linguists when trying to decide the properties of the pedagogical materials necessary for different language revitalization scenarios.

That leads us to the second way in which linguists can support corpus planning. It is in fact a very simple one since it only requires that linguists do not overreach or interfere with community decisions while trying to impose a more "well-informed" point of view. One of the most famous cases in Brazil is described by Bomfim (2017), where the Pataxó community decided to exclude all linguists from the Patxohã reclamation efforts because their "help" was creating a lot of problems to language activists. The Pataxó situation is unique but it nicely illustrates how linguistic zeal for the "appropriate" language forms can be a huge deterrent for younger generations of language learners that have a herculean task of redesigning the language corpus that will be used in a language reclamation project. Even in less extreme cases, linguists have to be careful not to over emphasize their own interests for certain language forms in the materials they are helping create. They need to take a step back and remember that the phonological, morphological or syntactic properties of the language that they study are just a tiny fraction of what needs to be learned in order for a language to be used by a community, and that there are several learning theories out there that can help you find the right balance between explicit focus on language descriptions and the other elements that need to be considered to facilitate language learning (see AMARAL, 2020a,b).

4.2. Acquisition planning

If one takes a limited view of the linguistic work as exclusively focused on documenting and describing the endangered languages, the work that needs to be done in acquisition planning for

language revitalization is surely a little further detached from it. However, when linguists are aware of the tools and techniques that can be used to facilitate language transmission, they can significantly increase the impact of their work on endangered language preservation.

There are at least two ways in which a linguist can participate in acquisition planning. The more basic one is by helping develop materials that can be directly used in language transmission. The nature and characteristics of linguistic materials that are needed for each scenario are based on the kind of revitalization effort undertaken by the community. There is no general formula that can be used, but if linguists are attuned to the needs of the language activists and/or teachers, it is easier to establish a more collaborative dynamics that can produce the necessary documents. The kind of approach proposed here is based on the needs of the revitalization efforts, which should be established before the material is designed and created. Some experiences in Brazil (and in other parts of the world) have shown to be less successful when people try to find or justify a potential application for language materials that were created beforehand. Each material prepared for language documentation or description is always based on a set of requirements that take into consideration their audiences and future uses. This is obviously true for the corpora, dictionaries and grammars that have been produced as part of academic research. The problem to adapt the existing materials for revitalization work is that their intended audiences and uses were normally established with the needs of other linguists and academics in mind. In some cases, simpler materials with targeted uses for language transmission can be more helpful than more complex ones that are based on established linguistic requirements. For example, for transmission activities that combine the acquisition of lexical items with specific cultural practices, such as cooking, fishing or singing, a list of 50 target words with translations and several examples can be more useful than a formal dictionary with 3000 entries⁸. Similarly, when designing activities to teach people the linguistic elements necessary to perform certain tasks, such as weaving a basket or preparing a traditional drink, language teachers can profit more from language materials that are organized by language uses than language forms. These useful materials usually bring lots of examples in the language, including longer written texts and audio samples, and present morphosyntactic forms by focusing on regular patterns and with few technical terms.

The criteria presented by Amaral (2020b) to evaluate pedagogical materials for language revitalization efforts can also be used as a guideline for us to think about the information that linguists should consider when supporting language transmission. The listed criteria include: the *context of use*, the *pedagogical goals*, a *learner/user model*, *learning theories*, *instructional approaches*, and a *theory of language*. The more informed linguists are about learning theories and instructional approaches, for example, the easier it is to create materials in a helpful, straightforward way. These two topics are at the core of the decision making process for material design and knowing just a little bit about them goes a long way in terms of thinking about how to structure such materials and how to present linguistic

⁸ By no means I am saying that a dictionary with 3000 entries is useless. It is a very useful tool that can even be used to create the list of 50 words for the language transmission activity. However, for that specific activity, and many others, the information is not organized and presented in the most helpful way.

information to a non-specialized audience⁹.

It is totally understandable if some linguists believe that these topics are completely out of their area of expertise and they do not feel comfortable (or even motivated) to work with them¹⁰. However, it is important to acknowledge it, and establish the right partnerships to compensate for it. In any case, to achieve the best results in terms of the quality of the material, it is highly recommended to establish a collaboration with multiple partners that could contribute with their expertise, from community leaders, to indigenous language teachers, applied linguists, educators and anthropologists¹¹.

The second way linguists can have a positive impact on acquisition planning is by providing direct support for activities, actions and programs that deal with language transmission. This will require further expertise in language instruction or in language program development at the community level, but it also allows for a more direct collaboration with community members and it opens up the possibility of numerous types of activities. There seems to be a growing interest in Brazil for this kind of collaboration, and many linguists have shown their support for workshops, courses and conferences where language revitalization efforts are at the forefront. The Brazilian Linguistic Association (ABRALIN) is currently co-sponsoring a bi-annual conference called *Viva Lingua Viva* that will happen for the second time in 2021. There is certainly a growing number of indigenous communities interested in the topic all over the country as well.

The considerations and methodologies proposed here presuppose that there is a revitalization effort going on at the community level. In cases where specific actions have not been established, it is much harder to guess the kind of language document or pedagogical material that could be helpful, and linguists might want to initiate a discussion with community members about status planning.

4.3. Status planning

Status planning is the area of language planning where linguists might really need to get out of their comfort zones if they want to support revitalization efforts. Despite that, there is a growing number of scholars in Brazil whose work is having a direct impact on it. For once, there are notably more collaborative projects between external linguists and local language activists to support revitalization efforts throughout the country. By engaging more directly in status planning, linguists can significantly improve these collaborations. In existing projects, one can easily find the use of sociolinguistic questionnaires to evaluate language transmission and shift. We also see lots of initiatives to help

⁹ I would highly recommend that linguists do not base their decisions solely on their previous experiences as language learners and/or anecdotal evidence about what it is to teach or learn a language, especially if it happened entirely in a formal school setting. There are many problems with certain instructional practices still in use today and replicating them in a completely different cultural environment can be very problematic.

¹⁰ Perhaps this is what my colleague, whom I mentioned earlier, was referring to when he said that linguists can only help with corpus planning.

¹¹ Amaral *et al.* (2017) describe how language teachers, linguists, anthropologists and applied linguists worked together to design early literacy materials for the Sanoma (Yanomami) language.

create pedagogical materials or to repurpose existing documentation products for revitalization goals. We even see several workshops and continuing education courses for language teachers, with some more focused on formal linguistic training and some on teacher education or school administration. What seems to be missing in most cases is a more detailed discussion about the core aspects of status planning to answer questions like: (i) Where and when is the language going to be used? (ii) What is it going to be used for? What communicative functions will it regain? (iii) Who is going to be using the language in these “reclaimed” linguistic spaces?

One of the most complicated aspects of language revitalization is to reverse language shift in non-educational spaces. Although many initiatives begin with designing educational programs to transmit the language to new speakers, only the most successful ones manage to make the language regain some of its ground in public spaces or inside households. For most initiatives in Brazil some crucial elements of status planning are still not under people’s radar, but linguists could play a significant role in incorporating this discussion into the existing efforts.

Another area of status planning where linguists should not minimize the potential of their impact is related to influencing the change in language attitudes both inside and outside the indigenous communities. In Brazil, we still find a lot of resistance to promote the dissemination of indigenous languages from both people inside the communities and the non-indigenous populations surrounding them. The problems are diverse and very complicated to discuss in detail here. But in an oversimplified perspective we could highlight some of the issues we see in Brazil that prevent the transmission and maintenance of endangered languages. The first one is a series of complex negative attitudes towards the languages from within the communities. It is not uncommon to find indigenous parents and even teachers that have a very negative view of bilingualism, especially the one involving the indigenous language. Negative attitudes towards the language itself are also common¹². If those negative views can still be found within the communities, it is not hard to imagine what surrounding, non-indigenous ones think about the endangered languages and the people who speak them. Linguists have a very important role in educating the population of one of the largest monolingual countries in the world about the advantages of multilingualism, especially in cases involving minoritized, indigenous languages.

The other very complicated issue related to status planning is the notion of language ownership and the political role it can play as a deterrent to language transmission, sometimes within a single community or within neighboring communities. There are usually historical, social and political reasons for such scenarios, which can be marked by serious disputes. What is always forgotten in such cases is the fact that the greater the number of (younger) speakers, the easier it is for a language to survive. Although linguists cannot do much to resolve historical conflicts, they could help disseminate certain notions that support language vitality through their work. For example, instead of exclusively

¹² Some parents in one indigenous community I worked did not believe it was possible to write a pedagogical grammar in their language, because according to them, indigenous languages did not have a grammar (whatever that meant to them), only Portuguese had one that could be represented in a book and consequently was worth teaching at school. They were obviously surprised when a pedagogical grammar book for their language was written by school teachers and other language activists.

documenting and valuing the language spoken by a certain subgroup of the population (usually elderly speakers in more isolated areas where bilingualism is not the norm), it would help if linguists through their actions could spread the message that language varieties are the norm and are important, and that the language of younger generations and bilinguals are equally valuable and deserve to be studied and documented.

This is just a small subset of ideas where linguists can support status planning. Whether they want it or not, linguists do play a role in status planning by their interactions with the language community. It is important that they learn more about status planning to better understand the consequences of their academic choices and to contribute to a more conducive environment for language preservation and revitalization.

Conclusion

Recent experiences in Brazil have shown that despite the fact that language revitalization does not exist as an academic field yet, linguists are well positioned to have a significant impact on initiatives to preserve what is left of the multilingual nature of our society. No other academic community has shown the same degree of interest on language preservation specifically. This paper uses some common notions used in language planning with a specific focus on language revitalization to suggest areas where linguists could be more effective should they decide to directly engage with such initiatives. Much more needs to be done for us to advance the studies and projects in language revitalization in Brazil, but with the International Decade of the Indigenous Languages (2022-2032), there will be many opportunities to foster this debate and to implement actions that will bring together the work done at the university and the needs of language activists who are eager to guarantee the future of their languages.

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