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FLUTES OF FIRE

ESSAYS ON CALIFORNIA INDIAN LANGUAGES

Leanne Hinton

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Mulidom maʔu ʔul- šiba·ma· bakʰe ʔama· qan ʔṭ'o cahno cóʔdoqon dubíhladuʔ:̂ mu·ʔemˇ ya maʔu haʔdíʔdi qan ʔṭ'o lowa·c'am ʔul men- ʔama· mu·kinʔ c'óc'qaw in:ˇ mulidom cahno cóʔdoqon- mílhqʰaʔ dubíhladuʔ:̂ hadu· cahno lowá·c'al mul šiba· dubíhladuʔ̂ heʔen ʔacaʔ mul ku tol men lowaʔ ʔíʔkʰe tʰin nihcénʔba= mens'iba yal pʰala men cahno díhqaba ya bíʔamatol- be·li ʔiw:ˇ maʔú ya cahno lowa·c'al mul ya lówaʔ:̂ hadu· ʔel má·caʔ pʰala pʰalahá mens'in ya heʔen bayatáʔkʰe tʰin ma·caʔkʰe ya kúʔmul s'iʔí ʔnati:̂*

He gave them languages for different places and sent them off. That's why we talk in different ways—he created things that way. Giving [one group a certain] language, he sent them off [to one place]. Those speaking another language he sent elsewhere, saying that the people can't all be together when they speak [differently] like that. We, too, having been given a language, stayed here at this place. We spoke the language that we are speaking now. Other people have different languages and we can't understand theirs even though we are of one flesh.

—Herman James in Robert Oswalt's *Kashaya Texts*, pp. 42–43

* See Appendix for general discussion of symbols.

I

Living California Indian Languages

by Leanne Hinton and Yolanda Montijo

The continued existence of almost fifty Native Californian languages,* with their alternately rollicking and beautiful linguistic creativity as characterized in the following essays, is an indication of the great cultural strength of California Indian communities. Their survival is especially amazing when we realize that it is now over two centuries since the deeply disruptive establishment of the Spanish missions, and nearly a century and a half since the Gold Rush and its tragic aftermath. But despite their endurance, the California languages are at the brink of extinction. The fifty living languages are what remain of around a hundred spoken here in 1800. And it appears that there is not a *single* California Indian language that is being learned by children as the primary language of the household. Even those who know the languages rarely use them: they may have no one to talk to, and the habits of native language use may wither. In a recent interview, Chemehuevi elder Gertrude Leivas talked about the last time she made full use of her native tongue, ten years before at her brother's funeral. "I surprised myself," she said. "The words came out like a string of beads." (*Los Angeles Times* article by Paul Feldman, 1993).

With no new speakers, most California languages are spoken now only by the elders. When the elders die, the languages will likely vanish from the face of the earth.

Still, people have a tenacious loyalty to their languages. Although no one is learning the California languages natively any more, there are many young people around the state who are trying to learn them as second languages. If these community and individual efforts succeed, the California languages may be around much longer than predicted. To paraphrase Mark Twain—reports of their death might be [we hope!] greatly exaggerated.

* Exactly how many there are depends on whether we define some varieties as separate languages or as dialects of a single language.

It would seem reasonable to try to inform readers exactly how many speakers there are of each California language, but this is not at all an easy thing to do. For one thing, what do we mean by "speaker"? Take Yurok, for example, a language spoken in the northernmost part of California. Yurok has only about fifteen fluent speakers, but there are many "semi-speakers" who have a large vocabulary in Yurok and may be able to carry on a simple conversation. There are also some who speak Yurok as a *second* language—people who learned the language as teenagers or young adults. Do we count second-language learners as speakers or not? And even if there were no fluent speakers at all, the language would not be completely "dead"—for there are many who don't speak the language of their heritage, but do know some phrases and words; some have a passive knowledge of the language that could be awakened into active usage with some work.

A second problem is that most surveys are by necessity based on casual estimates given by linguists or community members. Such estimates are rarely accurate, as the people forced to make them usually point out. A good case in point is a story told by linguist Marianne Mithun about her work with Cayuga people in Ontario, Canada. She kept asking people in the community how many there were that still spoke the language, and people generally estimated that there were around thirty speakers left. However, when she asked who the speakers were, the names were often different. Finally, a Cayuga man she told about this discrepancy decided to do a house-to-house survey on his own. He found that there were 376 Cayuga speakers!

A survey of speakers of Native American languages was made in the 1960s by Wallace Chafe, but the situation of endangered languages changes very rapidly, and this survey is now thirty years old.

We conducted a telephone survey in July and August, 1993 to determine as closely as possible how many fluent speakers there are *now* for California languages. We spoke to seventy tribal officers, native scholars and linguists to get the closest possible guess for each language.

Another source of information, but a highly questionable one, is the 1990 U.S. census. In 1990 these language questions were included in the census survey:

> Does this person speak a language other than English at home? ( ) yes ( ) no
> What is this language? (for example: Chinese, Italian, Spanish, Vietnamese)

This wording is slightly wrong for our own inquiry, for two opposing reasons. First, since speakers of endangered languages often do *not* speak their language at home, they might not report it. Second, the question does not ask about fluency—a person who knew only a few words and phrases, but tried to use them around the house, might report using another language. The first problem could lead to under-reporting the number of speakers of a language, and the second could lead to over-reporting.

Another difficulty is the fact that the questions about language were only on the "long form" of the census survey, which was given out to an average of one in seven households (the actual percentage of households surveyed with the long form differs from place to place). Thus, for each area, the number of responses was multiplied by seven or some other constant. This sort of statistical procedure can give reasonable results for large populations; but if, for example, there is only one speaker of a given California language, the census would state that there are none, or seven, depending on whether or not that particular household got the long form. As the Census Bureau pointed out to us, there are various other sources of error as well: for example, people may write down language names that the census tabulators can't recognize, and may put in the wrong categories.

It turns out that the census reports considerably *more* speakers of California languages than our telephone survey indicated. It would be wonderful to think that this is due to the Cayuga syndrome—that there are more speakers around than a casual estimate by informed people is likely to disclose. But it is much more likely that the discrepancies are due to sampling and statistical errors by the Census Bureau, coupled with the nonoptimal (for our purposes) wording of the question.

With the information from these sources, we created a table of all Native Californian languages which have at least one living speaker, and some of those with no living speakers. The extinct languages that we show here have been included for one of several reasons: either the last speakers died just recently, or the language has some fame and is therefore of general interest (such as Yahi, the Yanan language spoken by Ishi), or most importantly, the descendents of the speakers are studying the language and possibly attempting to revive it.

It is important to reiterate that all of these numbers involved some guesswork and none can be taken as unquestionable. Even the people most

closely involved with a language may not know if a certain person speaks it fluently or not. There may well be people who know the language but have never been heard to speak it by their associates. In some instances where members of a tribe live far away from each other, people may not know for sure if a speaker is still alive. People also have different ideas of what constitutes "fluency," or even what language is spoken. For example, Modoc and Klamath people are on the same reservation, and there is disagreement among the people we spoke to as to whether some individuals counted as Modoc or Klamath speakers. (The two languages are closely related, so it hardly matters, except that we count Modoc as a California language and Klamath as a language of Oregon!)

Because of the various sources of uncertainty that are built into this task, we include three sorts of estimates in the table in this chapter:

Conservative estimate: People's best estimate of the number of *fluent speakers*. When more than one number is given, it means either that informed people differ in their estimates or that one person guesses the number falls between these two extremes. For example, in Cahuilla, "7–20" is a combination of estimates by two people, one of whom estimated "7 or more," and the other "around 20."

Liberal estimate: This is an estimate that may include less fluent individuals—semi-speakers and second-language speakers. Alternatively, it may include situations where the language spoken is a matter of interpretation.

1990 census figure: These numbers are taken from Series CPH-L, #133, Table 1 ("Detailed language spoken at home and ability to speak English for persons 5 years and over: 1990 United States") and Table 10 ("Detailed language spoken at home and ability to speak English for persons 5 years and over: 1990 California), Bureau of the Census. Sometimes this figure is dramatically different from the best estimates of knowledgeable people, for the reasons described above.

The census figure for California differs in some instances from the figure for the United States as a whole. In that case, we list both figures. This can sometimes be interpreted as meaning that there are Native Californians living outside of California who report themselves as speakers of these languages. However, sometimes the differences seem improbable and may be due instead to some error or difference in interpretation.

Note that we say nothing in this table about population size: for example, there are no fluent Chumash speakers, but there are of course many Chumash people. The number of people on the tribal rolls always exceeds the number of speakers by far.

There are many Native American languages spoken in California besides Native Californian languages. The census reports more speakers of Navajo in California than all Native Californian languages combined! Here is a list, from the 1990 census, of the other Native American languages spoken in California by people who have migrated from other parts of the country: Aleut 40, "American Indian" 1995, Apache 297, Arapaho 34, Arikara 20, Blackfoot 41, Chasta Costa 61, Cherokee 478, Cheyenne 63, Chiricahua 21, Choctaw 183, Comanche 8, Cree 60, Crow 61, Dakota 447, Eskimo 109, Fox 18, French Cree 7, Han 16, Hidatsa 17, Hopi 76, Inupik 18, Iroquois 9, Jicarilla 16, Kansa 5, Keres 139, Kickapoo 6, Kiowa 76, Menomini 55, Micmac 9, Mohawk 22, Muskogee 259, Navajo 1834, Nez Perce 5, Ojibwa 94, "Other Athapascan-Eyak" 10, Ottawa 2, Picuris 3, Pima 138, Potawatomi 29, Puget Sound Salish 5, Sahaptian 25, Salish 2, Tewa 111, Tiwa 35, Tlingit 22, Towa 40, Ute 28, Yavapai 5, Zuni 39.

Cocopa is spoken almost entirely in Arizona and Mexico, but we include it here because the tribe was originally on both sides of the Colorado River, and so partly in California. (The tribe has about 700 members in Arizona; our contact says about 60% speak or understand the language, with a third of those being fluent speakers.) Children have passive knowledge of Cocopa and can use some words and phrases; and a few may be learning fluently, but most fluent speakers are middle-aged or older. There are also about 700 Cocopas in Mexico who are not affiliated with the tribe on this side of the border. Little is known about their linguistic status, although we are sure there are many speakers.

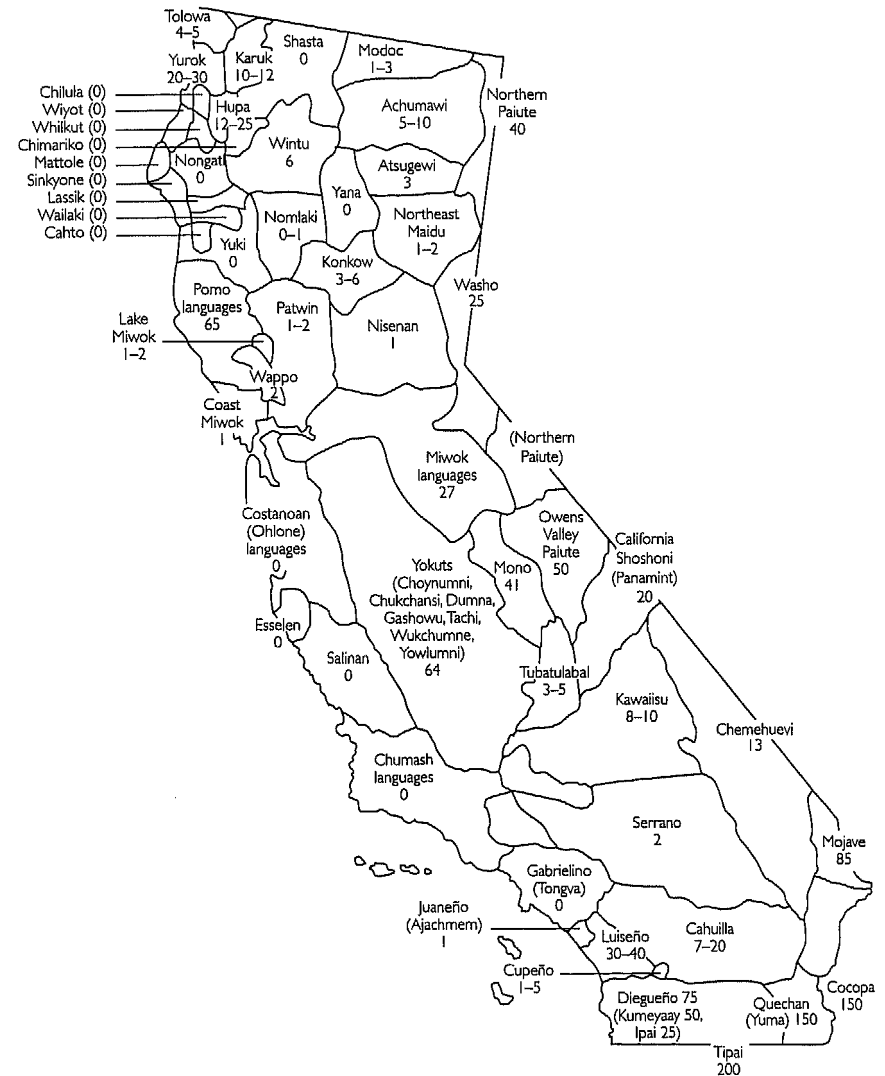
The number of speakers of California languages might seem depressingly low, and it is sad to note that the speakers of these languages are almost all elders—as was noted at the beginning of the chapter, not a single California language is being learned by children as the primary language of the household. But Native Californians are waging a battle to keep their languages alive. In the table, we have included short notes about language preservation and restoration activities taking place

within the California Indian communities.* We also note when we know that traditional singing, an activity closely related to language usage, is occurring. Many singers have begun to learn their languages as adults because of their commitment to singing. We include this column as evidence that California is in the midst of a great language revival, indeed a general cultural renaissance. If these "community-based language activities" efforts succeed, the California languages may be around much longer than the low numbers shown here indicate.

Our deepest thanks for their willingness to share their knowledge with us in this survey go to Cindy Alvitre, Craig Bates, Margaret Baty, Lowell Bean, David Belardes, Gordon Bettles, Brian Bibby, William Bright, Parris Butler, Catherine Callaghan, Linda Charles, Michelle Cisco, Gilbert Cordero, Betty Cornelius, Alan Daugherty, Eric Elliott, Kay Fowler, Hector Franco, Geoffrey Gamble, Lillian Garcia, Jeannine Gendar, Victor Golla, Ron Goode, Marlene Greenway, Bill Jacobsen, Albert James, Louise Jeffredo-Warden, Darrell Johnston, Michael Krauss, Paul Kroskrity, Jean LaMarr, Cindy Lamebull, Julian Lang, Margaret Langdon, Mel Lavato, Michael Lincoln, Frank Lobo, Sue Lobo, Mark Macarro, Martha Macri, Malcolm Margolin, Helen McCarthy, Ernestine McGovran, Wick Miller, Marianne Mithun, Pamela Munro, Angie Osbourne, Robert Oswalt, Pauline Owl, Lillian Parra, Victoria Patterson, Jean Perry, Stephen Quesenberry, Susie Ramirez, Nancy Richardson, David Robinson, Noel Rude, Alice Shepherd, Florence Shipek, William Shipley, Shirley Silver, Ernie Siva, George Somersall, Terry and Sarah Supahan, Julie Tex, Bernice Torrez, Kathy Turner, Norma Turner, Agnes Vera, Matt Vera, Ron and Carol Wermuth, Ken Whistler and Darryl Wilson.

* We do not include mention of works by linguists on these languages, since that would increase the size of this table a hundredfold! References to linguistic publications on these languages are readily available elsewhere. But both published works and linguistic field notes are playing a very useful role in community language restoration and preservation efforts.

Speakers of California Indian Languages



Shown here are conservative estimates of the number of fluent speakers of close to fifty Native Californian languages. In addition to those shown here, some of which have no fluent speakers, there were probably at least fifty other languages in California when Europeans arrived. A more detailed chart follows.

LANGUAGE	NUMBER OF SPEAKERS			COMMUNITY-BASED LANGUAGE ACTIVITIES	COMMENTS
	CONSERVATIVE ESTIMATE	LIBERAL ESTIMATE	1990 CENSUS FIGURES		
Achumawi	5–10	15–17	California: 70 U.S.: 81 —	Singing is being revived; work is being done with old anthropological field notes.	
Atsugewi	3	—	—	Work is being done with old anthropological field notes.	
Cahto	0	1	—		
Cahuilla	7–20	50	California: 32 U.S.: 35	Some individual language learning efforts.	
Chemehuevi	Colorado River Reservation: 10 or less Chemehuevi Res.: 3	approx. 20	3	A group at Colorado River is working on a dictionary.	As is true of many California languages, there were hundreds of Chemehuevi speakers a mere twenty years ago.
Chumash	0	—	—	The daughter of the last Chumash speaker is working with her mother's notebooks.	The Chumash languages include Obispeño, Barbareño, Puriseño, etc.
Cocopa	approx. 150	approx. 400	"Delta River Yuman:" California: 15 U.S.: 321	Introductory college course on Cocopa at nearby college; summer youth program with some language retention activities.	Most U.S. Cocopa speakers live in Arizona.
Cupeño	1–5	—	9	Language materials have been made; singers, including young people.	Our contact said Cupeño has "a handful of speakers."
Diegueño	Kumeyaay: 50 Ipai: 25; Tipai: 200	Kumeyaay: 75 —	Diegueño: 97 —	Language program in Barona; some language revival activity elsewhere; singers.	The Tipai figure includes Baja California.
Esselen	0	—	—	Language revival group.	
Gabrielino (Tongva)	0	—	—	Some individuals are collecting and studying language materials.	Gabrielino is also known as Tongva. The last speaker died in the 1970s.
Hupa	12–25	35–40	93	Adult and school language classes, including language immersion camps; many singers; Hupa education committee deals with language issues; Master-Apprentice team summer 1993.	The Master-Apprentice program is being piloted in summer 1993. Teams of elders and younger tribal members are working intensively together so that the apprentices can learn the language.
Juaneño (Ajachmem)	0	1	—	Some individuals have collected tapes and done other language preservation work. In 1992, part of a mass at San Juan Capistrano was conducted in Juaneño for the first time.	Juaneño is also known as Ajachmem. In the 1960s there were four speakers left; now there is one.
Karuk	10–12	40–60	California: 59 U.S.: 26	Many singers; Language Restoration Committee; language materials and programs, including summer immersion camps; official writing system taught in schools. Master-Apprentice team summer 1993.	
Kawaiisu	8–10	20	—		
Luiseño	30–40	—	43	Language preservation work (dictionary, grammar, narratives, lessons) and language learning by some individual adults; singers.	Juañeno and Luiseño are very closely related.

LANGUAGE	NUMBER OF SPEAKERS: CONSERVATIVE ESTIMATE	LIBERAL ESTIMATE	1990 CENSUS FIGURES	COMMUNITY-BASED LANGUAGE ACTIVITIES	COMMENTS
Maidu languages	Konkow: 3–6 Nisenan: 1 Northeast Maidu: 1–2	Konkow: up to 15 — —	Northeast Maidu ("Mountain Maidu") California: 74; U.S.: 108	Instructional language materials; singers.	
Miwok languages	Coast Miwok: 1 Lake Miwok: 1–2 Bay Miwok (Saclan): 0 Plains Miwok: 1 Northern Sierra Miwok: <6 Eastern Central Sierra : 6 Western Central Sierra : 6 Southern Central Sierra : 7	— 4–6 — — 6–8 — 7 —	"Sierra Miwok:" California: 65 U.S.: 105	Some singers among Northern, Central and Southern Sierra Miwok; Northern Sierra Miwok have some teaching materials. Computerized Miwok language program with schools being developed.	
Modoc	1–3	5	The census lists 88 Klamath speakers in the U.S., which would include Modoc.	Active language programs and materials development for Modoc/Klamath.	The Modocs originally lived in California, but were sent to a reservation in Oregon. Led by the famous Captain Jack, they resisted this move, but eventually the government prevailed. All Modoc speakers now live in Oregon with the Klamath tribe. The two languages are closely related and have become more similar during their 100 years of close association.
Mojave	Fort Mojave Reservation: 30–35 Colorado River Reservation: 35–50	— —	California: 53 U.S.: 234	Language materials, active language programs for children; both communities have writing systems; Master-Apprentice team summer 1993; singers.	Mojave people live along the Colorado River, with the majority in Arizona.
Mono	North Fork: 10–12 Auberry: about 15 Big Sandy Mono: 7–8 Dunlap Mono: 5–6 Waksachi: 0	North Fork and Auberry: 50-100 — —	California: 184 U.S.: 193	North Fork Mono: informal language classes; dictionary under development, audiotapes and videotapes being made for preserving aspects of verbal and nonverbal culture. Big Sandy Mono: language classes; collection of word lists.	Linguistically, closely affiliated with Owens Valley Paiute. Our contact says there are about a hundred North Fork Mono speakers with "some command of the language."
Ohlone languages	0	—	—	Some Ohlones are collecting and studying language materials.	The 8 Ohlone, or Costanoan, languages, most of which had several dialects, were Karkin, Chochenyo, Tamyen, Ramaytush, Awaswas, Rumsen, Mutsun, and Chalon. All lost their last fluent speakers in the 19th or early 20th centuries.
Paiute languages			"Paiute:" California: 317 U.S.: 1631	Owens Valley Paiute: informal language programs; singers. Northern Paiute (Gidutikad band): language classes, written language materials.	Linguistically, the Owens Valley Paiute are most closely related to the Mono. The 1000 Northern Paiute speakers are in Nevada, Oregon, Idaho and California, with the majority in Nevada and Oregon. California Shoshoni people are also known as Panamint. A handful of speakers live in Nevada, but the rest are in California. The large U.S. Census figure includes other Shoshoni languages too.
	Owens Valley Paiute: 50	—			
	Northern Paiute: 25–40	Calif.: approx. 100 U.S.: approx. 1000	California: — U.S.: 27		
	California Shoshoni: 20	40	California: 58 U.S.: 2284		

LANGUAGE	NUMBER OF SPEAKERS CONSERVATIVE ESTIMATE	LIBERAL ESTIMATE	1990 CENSUS FIGURES	COMMUNITY-BASED LANGUAGE ACTIVITIES	COMMENTS
Pomo languages	Kashaya Pomo: 45 Southern Pomo: 1 Central: 8; Northern: 1 Eastern: 5; Southeastern: 5 Northeastern Pomo: 0	Kashaya: 65 Central: 10–12 — —	"Pomo" California: 118 U.S.: 165	Several active Pomo singing groups. Eastern Pomo and Kashaya have some teaching materials. Intermittent Central Pomo language teaching at Hopland. Kashaya has strong ceremonialism with lots of singing.	
Quechan (Yuma)	150	400–500	California: 249 U.S.: 343	No language program yet, but developing interest; singers.	
Salinan	0	—	—	Developing interest in language revival.	
Serrano	2	8	2		
Shasta	0	1	"Shastan" California: — U.S.: 12		
Tolowa	4–5	—	—	Lots of language teaching; language materials development; active scholarship, including recent book on Tolowa language.	Tolowa straddles the California-Oregon border. It is strange that the census does not list Tolowa. There is a general "Athabascan" listing for the U.S. (but not California), but since there are many Athabascan languages, we have no way of knowing if Tolowa was lumped in with them.
Tubatulabal	3–5	up to 12	—		
Wappo	2	4–5	—		
Washo	approx. 25	—	California: — U.S.: 111	Informal language classes taught by elder; a group of Washo parents is making plans for a pre-school.	Most Washo speakers live on the Nevada side of the border.
Wintun languages	Wintu: 6 Nomlaki: 0–1 Patwin: 1–2	— — Patwin: 3 or more	"Wintun" California: 9 U.S.: 10	Singers; Master-Apprentice team summer 1993.	
Wiyot	0	—	—		
Yanan languages	0	—	—		These included the closely-related languages of Northern Yana, Central Yana, Southern Yana and Yahi. The last speaker of Yahi was Ishi, who died in 1917. Robert Oswalt recently interviewed a woman of Yana ancestry who remembers a few words she learned from her mother.
Yokuts languages	Choynumni: 8–10 Chukchansi: approx. 12 Dumna: 1 Tachi: 3 Wukchumne: 10 Yowlumni: 25–27 Gashowu: 1	up to 20 approx. 18 — — — 30–40 —	"Foothill Northern Yokuts:" 78 Tache: 25	Chukchansi: trying to start language programs; singers. Tachi: headstart language program; grammar book; singers. Yowlumni: Master-Apprentice team summer 1993; singers; tribal education committee deals with language issues.	Dumna is considered a dialect of the Chukchansi language. Gashowu is considered to be a dialect of Yowlumni, heavily influenced by the "Foothill" languages, such as Wukchumne.
Yuki	0	2	6		
Yurok	20–30	approx. 100	California: 152 U.S.: 160	Master-Apprentice team summer 1993; many singers.	

PART I

California Languages at Work and Play: Four Portraits

So Coyote made people. He shut himself in his house while he carved people of wood. He used all kinds of wood: white oak, redwood, fir, pine, black oak, sugar-pine, buckeye, maple, live-oak. He carved them like sticks and stuck them in the ground all around the house. Then he sang and danced the rest of the night.

"In the morning you will be people," was what he sang.

Next morning they were people.

Then Coyote proceeded to give them names.

"You are Bluejay, and you, you are Deer, and you, you are Dog," he said, as he named every one of the sticks.

But these people did not know how to talk. So Coyote made a big dance. He made these people dance all night, while he was singing.

"Tomorrow, you will talk," he said.

When they awoke the next morning, the people were all talking.

"The fleas were terrible last night," they were saying to each other. "Those fleas nearly finished us."

Then Coyote spoke: "Good morning."

But the people were still talking about the fleas. Coyote was vexed at this.

—a Lake Miwok origin tale from Gifford and Block, *Californian Indian Nights*, pp. 99-100

The "pattern number" of European and European-American lore is three: fairy tales have three brothers, or three sisters, or three good fairies; a hero makes three attempts before reaching his goal. "The third time's the charm," we say in English, or, "Bad things come in threes." But in most of Native California, the pattern number is four. It is the fourth try that succeeds; characters and episodes come in fours. So in keeping with California style, I introduce this book with four portraits of language in action, four essays that show how the use of language helps people make their way in the world of nature and society and values.

We begin at the edges of language: an investigation of the use of song in intertribal gatherings, as a way of removing the barriers to communication across languages. Second, I write about how storytellers represent animal talk, to demonstrate how California languages are used to have fun.

While the first two essays show how people construct their social world through language, the third shows how Native Californians use language to make sense out their *physical* world. I present an essay on how Californians speak of location and direction, and finally, we examine how language and thought relate to each other, and show how the structure of language reveals and influences the world view of California Indians.

Together, these four linguistic portraits give a glimpse into the culture of language in Native California.

"Now then, enough!" said Earthmaker.
"There will be songs—
there will always be songs,
and all of you will have them."

And after that, he sang—and sang—and sang;
then he stopped singing.

"These are the songs that you human beings will have,"
he said.
And then, he sang some other songs;
singing some other songs, he started off.

He went a long way
until he finally came to the middle of the world.
When he got that far,
he sat down and stayed there.

But, telling about the world,
Meadowlark sang very beautifully.
He was the first being created,
the first being to go across the meadows.
He was the being who saw the dry land,
very beautiful;
singing from the beginning—
a being who sang songs.

—William Shipley, *The Maidu Indian Myths and Stories of Hanc'ibyjim*, pp. 29-30

2

Song

Overcoming the Language Barrier

In California, the border between the United States and Mexico is clearly visible in satellite photographs. You can see a startling boundary line between the green crops of Imperial County, watered by the mighty canals that empty the Colorado River, and the brown fields of Baja California where, due to the barriers of international politics, the canals never reach. From the ground, barbed wire fences and armed guards make the location of the border obvious.

From the point of view of Native America, this boundary is arbitrary and alien. It clearly defines the division between the dominance of Anglo and Hispanic peoples, and the English and Spanish languages, but it simply runs right through the middle of American Indian linguistic and political divisions. Diegueño is spoken on both sides of the border, and so is Cocopa. Relatives are separated from each other by that border. It is not possible to write about the native languages of California and ignore Baja California.

Once, years ago, I went with a group of Diegueños and other friends from San Diego to visit the Kiliwas in Baja California. The Diegueño group included such illustrious people as Rosalie Pinto, singer and medicine woman, and Delfina Cuero, narrator of the book *Delfina Cuero: Her Autobiography* (Shipek 1991). It was Rosalie who was the motivating force for this trip—energetic and intense, full of intellectual curiosity, she wanted to visit the Kiliwa because she had heard they spoke a language related to Diegueño, and was interested in their isolation and traditionalism.

The Kiliwas live in the Arroyo Leon, located in the foothills south of Valle Trinidad in the heart of northern Baja. Nowadays, the paved peninsular highway goes through Valle Trinidad, cutting away its previous solitude. But back then, the Kiliwas were very isolated, both geographically and socially. Their dealings with Mexican institutions had not been particularly happy. It was a constant battle to keep their

land base from being completely eroded away by the surrounding interests. During the Mexican Revolution, Kiliwa men were known as great fighters; but over half died in a massacre, and since they had fought with a radical fringe group that never gained any power in the new government, their families received neither recognition nor reparation. Embittered, ignored by the rest of Baja California, the tribe was alienated both socially and economically from the Mexican mainstream.

Some people left to work in the towns, but those who stayed lived almost completely without money—they built thatch homes, depended largely on wild foods, and for the most part, spoke no Spanish. At the time of our visit, there were only nineteen Kiliwas in Arroyo Leon, and only a few spoke Spanish fluently. From the vantage point of our over-populated cities here on the other side of the border, it boggles the imagination to think what it must be like to have only eighteen other people in one's entire social universe to communicate with.

But wait. Did I say communicate? One of the many things I learned on that wonderful journey was how many different ways there are to communicate. And what I learned most stunningly was how important *music* is as a form of communication.

The Kiliwa village in Arroyo Leon, in the early 1970s. Photo courtesy of Margaret Langdon.

Song is an ancient form of intertribal communication, here between Kiliwa and Diegueño people. Photo courtesy of Margaret Langdon.

Speaking presented an interesting translation problem. None of the Diegueños knew Spanish; none of the Kiliwas knew English. Some of the Kiliwas and one or two of the English speakers spoke some Spanish. When the Diegueño elders wished to say something, they spoke in the Diegueño tongue; one of the younger Diegueños translated it into English; someone else translated that into Spanish; and one of the Kiliwas would then say it in their language. Who knows how many meaning transformations a given speech went through!

But maybe the mishaps of translation through four languages weren't all that important, for most of the talk was formal and polite, and the main message was surely understood: I respect you, I feel kinship with you, I am glad to be here with you.

People didn't spend all that much time trying to talk to each other. Most of the time together was taken up with other forms of communication: gesture, smiles, touch, eating and drinking together, dancing and singing.

Singing *together*. These two tribes shared no language in common, and most of the individuals who were at this gathering had never seen

each other before. Yet they all knew the same songs. And the songs that weren't known to both tribes nevertheless belonged to genres known to both, so singing along was easy.

All night long the singers from the two tribes sang the Bird Songs—songs that tell of the migration at the beginning of time. All night long the party formed their opposing lines and danced back and forth beside the fires and lanterns out there under the summer stars in a black, black sky.

You can't help but realize, as you are dancing back and forth, vibrating with music, that this form of intertribal communication has been important for thousands and thousands of years—song overcoming the barriers of language and creating unity, asserting kinship, passed from one community to the next by decades and centuries and millennia of intertribal gatherings. We see it going on all over Native California. The Bird Songs themselves are sung throughout southern California, by people of many different linguistic heritages. Diegueño, Quechan, Mojave, Cahuilla, Cupeño, Luiseño, and Chemehuevi are among those California groups that sing the Bird Songs. In Chumash country, along the Santa Barbara coast, there are records from Mission days of gatherings where tribes came from all over southern California, and even as far away as Tucson and northern Mexico.* Today we can see the use of song in intertribal communication in the powwows of the California urban centers, attended by people from tribes all over the country. The same kind of unification through song has been going on for centuries in the Deerskin Dances and Brush Dances of northwestern California, where Yurok, Karuk, Hupa, and Tolowa people traditionally come together; and in the Bear Dance of the Maidu, Pit River and Northern Paiute tribes in eastern California—all tribes separated by language, but united by song.

Thus, many song types are universally known across large geographic areas by people who speak many different languages. Songs can travel fast from group to group. They can be traded just about as easily as a basket, or a bundle of corn, or a string of dentalium shells. People all over California know the songs of many tribes, and can sing them well. Some songs became widespread so long ago that no one knows which tribe they started with. Others, traded perhaps a hundred years ago or

* José Ignacio Rivera, KPFA interview, September 1993

less, are of well-known origin from a specific tribe, often with a fine story attached as to how they got to other communities.

The best story I know about song travel is the one the Havasupais tell about their Horse Songs. In the winters, the Havasupais would camp on the plateaus above their summer canyon home. One time in the early nineteenth century, Navajos raided a Havasupai camp and carried off a baby boy. A Navajo family adopted that boy and raised him as their own. But as a young adult, Hopis came to tell the boy about his origins, and he decided to go home to his people. In the dead of night he took his adopted father's best saddle blanket and saddle, and rode off on his best horse. When he arrived at the Havasupai camp, he dressed and rode like a Navajo, and spoke only Navajo. This was a dangerous moment: if they thought he was a Navajo enemy, the Havasupais might have killed him then and there. But when he saw his people, he just sat on his horse and folded his arms, and bent his head down and wept. So the Havasupais knew him for a long-lost relative and took him down off his horse and welcomed him. He lived with them the rest of his life. One of the gifts he brought for the Havasupais was a set of songs, changed now but still recognizable as being from the Navajo Blessingway. He had not only brought the Navajos' best horse, but also their best songs. The Havasupais have sung these ever since, and they call them the Horse Songs.

Now that English serves as a lingua franca in California, spoken communication between tribes is not so limited. But it is easy to imagine the old days a couple of hundred years ago, when a visit between tribes was like the meeting between the Diegueño and the Kiliwa—a very special time, where feelings are warm but words are few; but the singing can flow and flow.

This is one reason, no doubt, why so many Indian songs have no intelligible words.* Words are barriers to unity; words separate people, sorting them out by language and by opinion. But music unifies. Songs without words are vocal music in its purest form, music that brings people from different tribes together, brings out their fundamental unity, and communicates that important message far better than language ever can: I respect you; I feel kinship with you; I am happy to be here with you.

* For more about these "songs without words," see Chapter 14.

Then afterwards, he said,
"All right, I'm going now; be sure and stay here."
Then he left, going
  " t̪ʰónononononononon,
   t̪ʰónononu,
   t̪ʰónonononon,
   this Old Man Coyote."
He went somewhere on the other side of the hill.
When he went somewhere near Sacramento, what they heard was Coyote going
  " t̪ʰónononononono,
   t̪ʰóncononono
somewhere through the field—that's how he went.

—Callaghan, "Coyote the Imposter" (Lake Miwok), p. 10

Leanne Hinton

3

Coyote Talk

Like song, humor can cross emotional barriers. Using language to make people laugh must be a practice as old as language itself. Native Californians have always had lots of funny stories to tell, and there is a tradition in California and throughout the West of making animals in the old stories talk in characteristically humorous ways.

Old Man Coyote is especially prone to speak in a funny voice. In the Yahi tales that Ishi used to tell, Coyote lisped so that his **s**'s sounded a bit like **sh**, as if teeth were missing. And wherever normal Yahi would have an **l** or an **r**, Coyote used **n** instead, so that, for instance, the phrase **yap'lasa:sitʰi** (it is well done) came out as **yap'nasha:shitʰi*** in Coyote talk. So if Yahi Coyote were to speak in English, he might sound something like this:

> *Nateny I've nosht a not of annowsh. Wenn, then, I'n make shome annowsh now. Okay, thatsh enough wonk! Nooks nike it'sh time fon shomething to eat! Ah, thatsh nishe and wenn done!* (Lately I've lost a lot of arrows. Well, then, I'll make some arrows now. Okay, that's enough work! Looks like it's time for something to eat! Ah, that's nice and well done!)**

Of course, writing can't do justice to Coyote talk, because voice quality is important too. We don't know what kind of voice quality Ishi's Coyote had, but there are plenty of people around who still tell Coyote stories and use funny voices. In Hualapai, every word in Coyote talk has a **th** sound in it, either replacing an **s** sound or else added on at the end. And words also have an extra long **iiiii** sound, said in a high falling voice that sounds like the howl of a coyote.

Hualapai: **miviyama!** (Run!)
Coyote: **miviyamiiiiiiith!**

So an English translation of a Hualapai Coyote might sound like this:

* Changed sounds are underlined. See Appendix for explanation of spelling conventions.

** The theme for this utterance by Coyote comes from the tale "Coyote Rapes his Sister," from the unpublished Yahi version (Sapir 1917).

Oh, ye-iiiith, thith ith your old friendiiiith, Coyotiiiiith, jutht talkiiiiiithing up a thtormiiiiith! (Oh, yes, this is your old friend, Coyote, just talking up a storm!)

It's not only coyotes that do funny talk. In Cocopa,* people talk to domesticated animals with special sounds, and portray animals as talking that way too (Langdon 1978). Cocopa animal talk uses a special slurpy **l** sound sort of like **ly** (see Appendix for description of **ly**), but strongly whispered instead of voiced. We'll write it here as **lly**, using the Diegueño practical writing system. At the same time, the speaker twists the lips and talks from the side of the mouth. So a Cocopa woman might say to her cat:

Cocopa: **Makáy mwayá:ts myu?** (Where have you been?)
animal talk: **Makálly mllyá:ts mllyu?**

And she might imagine her cat saying back:

Cocopa: **Nyasáw pmwí:a?** (Have you seen my babies?)
animal talk: **Nyallyáw llypmwí:a?**

The rule is that each word must have one and only one instance of **lly**. If a word has sounds like **s**, **l**, **ts** or **y**, the first occurrence of that sound is replaced by **lly**. Otherwise, **lly** is added in front of the word.

A quote from a Cocopa cat translated into English might sound like this (read aloud, and don't forget to sound slurpy and say it out of the side of your mouth):

Llygee! LlyI'm jullyt llyadmiring llyou llymaking tortillyas! Llyoon llyou willy frylly llye llymeat, llyou willy llyget llye tortillyas llyand llyrap llye llymeat llyin llyem llyand llyi llyget llyto llyeat llyome! (Gee! I'm just admiring you making tortillas! Soon you will fry the meat, you will get the tortillas and wrap the meat in them, and I get to eat some!)

Cocopa Mountain Lion speaks with extra r's in his speech:

Markáy mmá:xmyú? (Where are you going?)

Treat this **r** as a low lionish growl, so that in English we might say it like this:

Wherrrre arrrr you gorrrring?

Cocopa Rabbit talks with a lot of **f** sounds, as befits his buck teeth:

* Cocopa is spoken just over the California border in Arizona and Baja California, and is closely related to Diegueño.

Ofooh, Fountain Fion, I'm juft gofing to fee my fick grandmofer.
(Oh, Mountain Lion, I'm just going to see my sick grandmother.)

All up and down the West Coast, the animals are portrayed with these special voices. In the Northwest, Deer, Mink, Bear, Fox, and Skunk all have their particular ways of speaking. In Nez Perce, Skunk speaks in a high-pitched, nasal voice, and changes consonants, such as **s** to **ts** (Aoki 1979).

Pleatsed to tsee you, I'm Tskunk!

In the Coeur d'Alène language, Skunk talks with a lot of extra glottal stops (the breaking off of sound for a split second, indicated with apostrophes:

'I' ju'st go't ba'ck fro'm' Wa'shing'to'n.

Deer and Mink in Nootka change **s** and a lot of other sounds into "slurpy l" sounds (Sapir 1958), while in Kwakiutl it is the reverse: **l** sounds become **s**. In Takelma, a whispered **l** is placed before any word spoken by Bear. Nez Perce Coyote changes **n** to **l** (just the opposite of Yahi), and, like Yahi, changes **s** to **sh**.

Of course, this sort of animal talk is not limited to Indian languages. Just watch any cartoon and hear all the animal voices in English: Mickey Mouse and Donald Duck talk just like mice and ducks should talk if they spoke English; and don't forget Porky Pig's stutter. There is Tweety Bird's **t** and **d** substitution in "I tought I taw a puddy tat!" and Sylvester the Cat's wet lisp might as well have been borrowed straight from Cocopa.

Having begun this chapter with Old Man Coyote, we will end with him. In Quechan,* Coyote adds a lot of **ly** sounds to his speech (not the whispered kind like Cocopa, but more like the "lli" in "million"). If Coyote decided to combine the speech mannerisms attributed to him from all the different languages we have discussed—and that is the sort of thing that Coyote would be likely to do—then some winter when we are sitting by the fire telling stories, we might hear something like this out of the darkness.

Lyish ilysh Conyotiiiith, tlyanking to lyou-iiiith. I lyam hlyere to thtlyay flyoneveniiiiith, mlyaking mlyithchief lyevenywhene! Iiiiiiith! (This is Coyote, talking to you. I am here to stay forever, making mischief everywhere!)

* Quechan is another Yuman language spoken along the Colorado River just north of Cocopa.

First direction names taught.—[Mastamho] said again: "Now we are here in this house: all will know and hear it. Now when I mean here," and he pointed his hand to the north, "all say: 'Amaihayame.'" But they did not do so: they kept their hands against their bodies; they wanted another name; they did not like that word. Then he said: "And there is Amai-hakyeme; all say that!" And he pointed south. But again all sat still: they did not want to call it that. He said again: "Well, there is another: there is the way the night goes. I do not know where its end is, but when we follow the darkness that is called Amai-hayime." He said that, but none of the Mohave said a word: they sat with their hands against the body. Then Mastamho said once more: "You see the dark coming. I do not know where it comes from: I did not make it. But where darkness comes from, I call that Amai-hayike." Again they sat still and did not point.

Final direction names taught.—Then Mastamho said once more: "I have named all the directions but you have not answered. Well, there are other names. Listen: I call this (the north) Mathak. Can you say that?" Then all said, "Yes," and stood up, and pointed north, and said, "Mathak." He said again: "This (to the south) I call Kaveik. Can you say it?" Then all said, "Yes," and pointed and called the name and clapped their hands and laughed. He said again: "I told you that the night went in that direction. I gave it a name, but you did not say it. There is another way to call it: Inyohavek. All of you say that!" Then they all said: "Yes, we can say that. We can call it Inyohavek," and all pointed as he directed them. He said again: "Where the dark comes from, you did not call that as I told you to. There is another way to call it: Anyak." Then all said: "Anyak," and pointed east and clapped their hands and laughed. Then Masthamo said: "That is all."

—A.L. Kroeber, *Seven Mohave Myths*, p. 60

4

Upriver, Downriver:
The Vocabulary of Direction

Having introduced California languages through song and story telling, we now go to what might be thought of as a more basic and mundane function of language—that of referring to and describing the world around us.

I finished writing this essay on the day of the vernal equinox, when the sun rises due east and sets due west. The perception of this basic fact about the solar system is shared by everyone in the world: no matter where one is on earth, the sun rises due east on the equinox, and sets due west. And while the precise location of the sun varies on other days, it nonetheless rises and sets in the general vicinity of the east and west all the time. Because this is part of all human experience, words for east and west are extremely common (though not quite universal, as we shall see) in the languages of the world. In some languages the terms for east and west would translate literally as "place where the sun rises" and "place where the sun sets." Note, on the other hand, that in the Mojave tale that introduced this chapter, the creator explained east and west as being where the *dark* comes from and goes!

Most languages also have words for north and south. This may of course be due simply to the logical need to talk about directions other than east and west, and that may be coupled with an innate sense of geometry that leads humans to set up lines at right angles to each other. But also, just as with the words for east and west, there are natural phenomena that lead to the establishment of the terms for north and south. Many animals—birds, for instance—have a sense of direction based on ability to perceive the magnetic field of the earth, which means they perceive north and south directly through this sense. Geophysicists are now trying to determine whether or not humans also have this magnetic sense. And whether we do or not, humans all over the world see birds migrate every year from north to south, and then south to

north. Native Californians have a long tradition of astronomy as well, and anyone who often sleeps under the stars knows the North Star (Polaris, the Pole Star), that always stays in the same place while all the constellations wheel around it.

Directions in relation to the land and water

The importance in many California languages of words showing direction of movement is demonstrated by this brief excerpt from a Wintu tale:

> They went to the east side of the house, they went around to the east side, and after that they went up the hill to the north, following him running. They went northward at a running pace over the north flat, wishing to see the man who had gone down the hill northward. And the man was not there but there lay his tracks going forward. And they ran, they went at a running pace, they went rapidly. And at the South-slope-climb, when they came in full view of the north, they looked northward but they did not see him. (Lee 1959, 139)

While the cardinal directions are used with great frequency in this passage, it also contains many words that talk about direction with regard to features of the landscape instead—"up the hill," "down the hill," and "over the flat," for example. For many languages of California, direction words are not based on the sun, but rather on geographical features, and the direction of flow of the watercourses. The use of riverine direction words is mainly the case in northern California, and during a recent trip to Hupa, Yurok and Karuk country, the reason for this was borne home to me clearly. The mountains are innumerable, steep-sided and high, ranging from difficult to downright dangerous to climb. The river terraces are the only places where towns can be built, and the only way to get anywhere is and always has been to travel in or along the river. People used to travel in boats and on foot; now winding roads along the watercourses add cars to the same routes. On our trip, we travelled upriver or downriver. Whether we went east or west or north or south at any given moment was fleeting and irrelevant to our general direction.

A.L. Kroeber explained the riverine direction terminology very well, and I quote him at length here.

> The Yurok, and with them their neighbors, know no cardinal directions, but think in terms of the flow of water. Thus **pul** is the radical meaning downstream; **pets**, upstream; **hiko**, across the stream; **won**, up hill, that is, away from the stream on one's own side; **wohpe**, across the ocean, and so on. Such terms are also combined with one another. If a Yurok says "east" he regards this as an English word for upstream, or whatever may be the run of the water where he is. The name Yurok itself—which in its origin is anything but an ethnic designation—means "downstream" in the adjacent Karok language. The degree to which native speech is affected by this manner of thought is remarkable. A house has its door not at its "western" but its "downstream" corner. A man is told to pick up a thing that lies "upstream" from him, not on his "left." The basis of this reckoning is so intensely local, like everything Yurok, that it may become ambiguous or contradictory in the usage of our broader outlook. A Yurok coming from O'men to Rekwoi has two "upstreams" before him: south along the coast, and south-southeast, though with many turns, along the Klamath. When he arrives at Weitspus, the Trinity stretches ahead in the same direction in the same system of valley and ridges; but being a tributary, its direction is "up a side stream," and the direction "upstream" along the Klamath suddenly turns north, or a little east of north, for many miles. Beyond their Karok neighbors the Yurok seem to have a sense that the stream comes from the east. At least they point in that direction when they refer to the end of the world at the head of the Klamath.
>
> This plan of orientation is characteristic of all the northwestern tribes, and is followed in some degree in central California. The Yokuts terms of direction, in the far-away San Joaquin Valley, are at least shifted from the cardinal points in accord with the flow of water, if indeed they do not refer to it. The cognate Maidu words are said to have the same meaning as our own. But it is possible that the Maidu have given a sun-determined meaning to original drainage terms under the ritualizing influence of the Kuksu cult. This may also be what has happened among southern Wintun, Pomo, and Yuki, who constantly use words like "north," while the central Wintun think in terms of waterflow. It has been customary among inquirers to assume that Pomo **yo** means "south" because a group consistently uses it for that direction; which, of course, is no proof. In any event it is likely that exact south, when they knew a south, was

determined for most California tribes by the prevailing direction of their streams as much as by the meridian of the sun. The rectangular and parallel disposition of drainage in the greater part of the State must have contributed to this attitude. Only in southern California, where water runs far apart and intermittently, and the ceremonializing symbolism of the southwestern tribes is a near influence, is it certain that we encounter true terms of solar orientation. (Kroeber 1925, 15–16)

Along rivers with innumerable bends and curves, landmarks can be a better reference than cardinal directions. Here, the rock Oregos, at the village of Requa at the mouth of the Klamath River. Courtesy of Phoebe Apperson Hearst Museum of Anthropology.

A redwood dugout canoe, probably Hupa, on the Trinity River. 1902 photo by P.E. Goddard, courtesy of Phoebe Apperson Hearst Museum of Anthropology.

My friend Jean Perry says that she learned a good lesson in the Yurok river-oriented directionals one day when she was staying with Florence Shaughnessy in her lovely home near the mouth of the Klamath River. Jean was trying to cook dinner on a stove that was still unfamiliar to her, and was having a hard time figuring out which way to turn the knobs to reduce the flame. Florence finally clarified it for her by saying, "It's like this: you turn it down by turning the knob 'downriver', and up 'upriver.'"

The use of landmarks instead of cardinal directions makes perfect sense in a country like northern California, where there are rivers and mountains everywhere, where people follow watercourses in their journeys, and where travelling in a straight line is simply impossible. But in fact, speakers of northern California languages still must have had the concepts of the cardinal directions, at least with regard to movement of celestial bodies, because they have a strong tradition of astronomy. Nancy Richardson pointed out to me that, in the following Karuk tale where Coyote kicks dirt in four directions to celebrate arriving home, he kicks dirt in the four *cardinal* directions—but the directions are named for landmarks.

And Coyote jumped up. And he said, "My country!" And he kicked earth out towards the river. And he kicked it out from tishánniik [a village-site at Camp Creek, below Orleans]. He kicked it out from káttiphirak [a village site across-stream from Camp Creek]. He kicked it out from túuyvuk [a village-site at Ullathorne Creek, below Camp Creek]. Coyote was so happy, when he came back to his country. That's why he kicked it out. (Bright 1957, 169)

Kunpiip, "Xâatik 'áppap yúruk 'uvuunúpahitih, káru 'áppap káruk 'uvuunôovutih.
(The gods) said, "Let (the river) flow downstream on one side, and flow upstream on the other side.

Xâatik vaa 'ukupitih."
Let it do that."

Kári xás "chémmi."
Then (they said), "All right."

Vaa 'uum vúra payúruk tá kunvíitrup tuthívruuhrup yúruk.
When they traveled downstream by boat, they floated downstream.

Ithyáru k'na 'úpviitrooveesh, 'uthívruuhrooveesh káru, káruk 'uvuunôovahiti pa'íshshaha.
They would travel back upstream on the other side, they would float upstream also, the water was flowing upstream.

Kári xás pihnêefich 'uppiip, "Pûuhara.
Then Coyote said, "No.

Xáyfaat vaa 'ukupitih.
Let it not do that.

Kôovúra yúruk kámvuunupahitih.
Let it all flow downstream.

Vaa 'uum vúra káan 'ifmaaráppiit kamíktaatroovutih, káruk 'uvítroovutih."
Let the new married man push his way upstream there, (when) he is traveling upstream."

—Bright, *The Karok Language*, pp. 200-201

Directional affixes

To the English speaker, one of the most amazing aspects of the grammar of most California languages is how much can be said in a single word. Verbs, especially, through processes of affixation, are incredibly rich in meaning. Directional affixes are part of this complex verb structure in many languages. For example, in Yana, directionals are obligatory on verbs of motion. One cannot simply say that someone is "going" without saying which direction he or she is going in. So in Yahi (Ishi's language, a variety of Yana), there is a full set of suffixes that go on verbs of motion, one set for going in a cardinal direction, and another for coming *from* a cardinal direction. And these are also different from the independent words for the cardinal directions.

tʰéndji "west"
  -pdji "to the west, in the west"
  -haucu "from the west"

Doors of traditional Karuk houses are on the upriver side of the house facing the river. Yurok doors are at the downstream corner of the house. Photo of Karuk house at Kat'im'îin courtesy of California State Parks.

t^{h}é:nauna "east"

-hau, -au "to the east, in the east"

-t'k^{h}i "from the east"

t^{h}éndjam "north"

-sdjam, -djam "to the north, in the north"

-gam "from the north"

Directional suffixes in Karuk

-mu thither
-rupu hence downriverward
-unih down from a considerable height; hence downhillward
-uraa up to a considerable height; hence uphillward
-rôovu hence upriverward
-sip(riv) up to the height of a man or less
-kath hence across a body of water
-kara horizontally away from the center of a body of water
-kara into one's mouth
-rámnih into a container
-vara in through a tubular space
-rúprih in through a solid
-fúruk into an enclosed space
-vrin in opposite directions
-várayva here and there within an enclosed space

-raa hither; hither from downriver; hither from downhill
-faku hither from uphill
-varak hither from upriver
-ish(rih) down from the height of a man or less
-rina hither from across a body of water
-rípaa horizontally toward the center of a body of water
-rúpaa out of one's mouth
-ríshuk out of a container
-kiv out through a tubular space
-rúprav out through a solid
-rúpuk out of an enclosed space
-tunva toward each other
-thuna here and there in an open area

—Bright, *The Karok Language*, p. 95

t^{h}ént^{h}p^{h}a "south"

-t^{h}p^{h}a "to the south, in the south"

-wacu "from the south"

Like the Yurok language, Yahi also has many directional affixes that are in reference to landmarks rather than the cardinal directions. But Yahi, unlike Yurok and Karuk, combines the landmark directionals with the cardinal directionals. Here are a few examples out of hundreds that can be found in texts:

bah-du-wíl-gam'
(run-back-across stream-to north)
He ran back north across the stream.

bi:-lo-t^{h}p^{h}a-'anti'
(go-up on mountain-south-then)
Then they went south up on the mountain.

néh-du-ri-hau'
(walk-back-down hill-east)
He went back east down hill.

djé:-ye:mai-c^{h}it'-gam
(came dancing-in midst-off-from north)
He came dancing into their midst from the north.

Directional prefixes or directional suffixes take up pages of description in grammars of California languages. In the box on the previous page is a rich set of such affixes from Karuk. As in the other languages of northern California, the directional affixes of Karuk tend to refer to landmarks such as rivers and hills, and to other types of objects that movement occurs in reference to. So for example, **path** means 'throw'; **pathfaku** 'to throw down from uphill', **pathfuruk** 'to throw into the house', etc.

Egocentric directionals

> It was interesting to see that he was aware of the differences due to tones, but of course he had no idea of arranging tones in a sequence or scale. And *my* conception of a tone as "low" and another as "high" was extremely puzzling to him. "Why don't you say that one is to the right and the other to the left?" he asked. I had no answer, of course. (de Angulo 1932, 24)

In English, besides our words for cardinal directions and all our prepositions, we have the words "left" and "right," which refer to the two sides of our own bodies. These are used as direction words as well, so that we can tell people to look left, or turn right at the third stoplight. Unlike all the other directionals we have mentioned here, "left" and "right" are egocentric terms: they are about orientation on the human body rather than environment. The problem comes when we are talking face to face with someone—our left is his right and vice versa. The order "Look left!" confuses conversational participants. My left or yours?

Some languages of Native California don't talk about right and left hands at all; they talk about east and west hands, or north and south hands, or upriver and downriver hands. So the hands change names depending on which way someone is facing. As Dorothy Lee eloquently states it in *Freedom and Culture*:

> The Wintu use of *left* and *right*, as compared with ours, shows again the difference in orientation. When we go for a walk, the hills are to our right, the river to our left; when we return, the hills change and the river, while we remain the same, since we are the pivot, the focus. Now the hills have pivoted to the left of me. This has been English practice for many years, since at least the fourteenth century. To the Wintu, the terms left and right refer to inextricable aspects of his body, and are very rarely used. I think that only once the term left occurs in my texts, referring to a left-handed mythical hero; I cannot remember any occurrence of the term for the right. When the Wintu goes up the river, the hills are to the west, the river to the east; and a mosquito bites him on the west arm. When he returns, the hills are still to the west, but, when he scratches his mosquito bite, he scratches his east arm. The geography has remained unchanged, and the self has had to be reoriented in relation to it.* (Lee 1959, 139)

* My father recently pointed out to me that in baseball parlance, a naming reminiscent of Lee's description has developed: a left-handed pitcher is called a "southpaw." This is due to the old practice of putting home plate on the west end of the field, thus decreeing automatically that a pitcher's left hand will always be to the south. The name still holds nowadays even though, in some of the modern indoor fields, home plate is put somewhere other than in the west.

Most Native American languages do have constant names for their hands, but as Lee says, these are not directional names. The Havasupais call the right hand **sal gahána**, the "good hand," thus revealing the tendency for right-hand preference common to all human societies, and the left hand is **sal gathát**, "Coyote hand." But a Havasupai would never tell somebody to turn "Coyote" or "good" at the corner! I bet the long-ago Europeans who first named their hands thousands of years ago didn't say "go right" or "go left" either when they were giving travel directions (after all, "right" means "good," just as in Havasupai). Using these words as directionals probably only came about when people started losing their sense of closeness to the land, so that movement oriented to their own bodies became easier to understand than movement oriented to natural features. Maybe it was the development of city streets laid out as grid lines, often ignoring both the cardinal directions and the land forms, that led to this use of body orientation for directionals.

Earthmaker said:
"If I could but see a little bit of land
I might do something very good with it."

Floating along, then,
they saw something like a bird's nest.
Earthmaker said:
"It really is small.
It would be good if it were a little bigger,
but it is really small.
I wonder how I might stretch it apart a little.
What would be good to do?
In what way can I make it a little bigger?"

As he talked, he transformed it.

—Shipley, *The Maidu Indian Myths and Stories of Hanc'ibyjim*, p. 20.

5

Language and the Structure of Thought

Language has enormous power: "As he talked, he transformed it." As this line from the excerpt opposite this page indicates, language was an important accompaniment to the creation of the world. Or, to quote from another religious tradition: "In the beginning was the word, and the word was with God, and the word was God" (from the Gospel according to St. John).

Ursula LeGuin, the daughter of California anthropologist A.L. Kroeber and author Theodora Kroeber, is an author whose life and imagination have been deeply influenced by Native Californian language and culture. She based her novel *A Wizard of Earthsea* on the notion of the power of words. Her hero Ged speaks of the nature of power:

> My name, and yours, and the true name of the sun, or a spring of water, or an unborn child, all are syllables of the great word that is very slowly spoken by the shining of the stars. There is no other power. No other name. (LeGuin 1968, 185)

As for the linguistic view, it is not so much that language has power to shape the world, but rather that language has power to shape our *perception* of the world. This is known as the linguistic relativity hypothesis—that language influences our thought, our world view. It is also known sometimes as the Sapir-Whorf hypothesis, since linguists Edward Sapir and Benjamin Lee Whorf were the two developers of the idea. Sapir put it like this:

> Human beings do not live in the objective world alone, nor alone in the world of social activity as ordinarily understood, but are very much at the mercy of the particular language which has become the medium of expression for their society. It is quite an illusion to imagine that one adjusts to reality essentially without the use of language and that language is merely an incidental means of solving specific problems of communication or reflection. The fact of the matter is that the "real

world" is to a large extent unconsciously built up on the language habits of the group. No two languages are ever sufficiently similar to be considered as representing the same social reality. The worlds in which different societies live are distinct worlds, not merely the same world with different labels attached. (Sapir 1929, 209)

One of the most lyrical writers to apply this notion to specific aspects of language was Dorothy Lee, who described how the Wintu language expresses Wintu philosophy:

> Among the Wintu Indians of California, the principle of the inviolate integrity of the individual is basic to the very morphology of the language. Many of the verbs which express coercion in our language—such as to take a baby to (the shade), or to change the baby—are formed in such a way that they express a cooperative effort instead. For example, the Wintu would say, "I *went with* the baby," instead of, "I *took* the baby." And they say, "The chief *stood with* the people," which they have to translate into English as, "The chief ruled the people." They never say, and in fact they cannot say, as we do, "I have a sister," or a "son," or "husband." Instead, they say, "I am sistered," or "I live with my sister." To *live with* is the usual way in which they express what we call possession, and they use this term for everything that they respect, so that a man will be said to live with his bow and arrows. In our society, when we try to express respect for individual uniqueness, we have to do it in so many words, and even then we have to grapple with an uncooperative language. This is why we have to resort to terms which actually defeat our ends; terms such as *permissiveness*, or phrases such as *to give freedom to the child*. In Wintu, every interpersonal reference is couched in grammar which rests on the principle of individual integrity. Yet, for this people, the emphasis on personal inviolability does not mean that the individual was an isolate. There was such pervasive empathy among them that this, too, was expressed in the grammatical forms; if a boy was sick, the father used a special form of the verb phrase *to be sick*, and thus said "I-am-sick-in-respect-of-my-son." (Lee 1959, 7)

The differences between English and Wintu world view become apparent even when one simply tries to translate words from one language to another. The phrase **p^{h}oyoq te:luna:** is given as the Wintu equivalent of

"to shave the head," but whereas the English idiom means to use a tool to take off all the hair, in Wintu it literally means "to make the head shine." It can also be used to describe someone with sweat on his forehead. The English phrase focuses on tool use, the Wintu phrase on the visual features of the result.

When using English, we are required to state whether or not there is more than one of the entities expressed by a noun, such as "girl" or "girls." Only a few objects are expressed as "mass nouns," such as rain, snow, wheat and rice, which aren't pluralized. Wintu, on the other hand, does not mark nouns as singular or plural; instead, words have what have been described as *generic* and *particular* forms. The generic word **wimay** means "grizzly bear," in general, without referring to any specific individual bear. To point out an individual bear or small group of bears, one says **wimah**, "a bear, that bear, those particular bears." As Lee describes it in *Freedom and Culture*:

> A hunter went out but saw no deer, **nop** (generic); another killed a deer, **nopum** (particular, object case). A woman carried deer, **nop**, to her mother; a hunter brought home deer, **nopum**. Now the woman's deer was cut in pieces and carried, a formless mass, in her back-basket; but the man carried his two deer slung whole from his shoulder. Some brothers were about to eat venison; they called, "Old man, come and eat venison, **nop**." The old man replied, "You can eat that stinking venison **(nopum)**, yourselves." The brothers saw it just as deer meat; to the old man it was the flesh of a particular deer, one which had been killed near human habitation, fed on human offal. (Lee 1959, 123)

A speaker has free choice of whether to use the generic or particular forms; Lee recorded two versions of the same story, one told by a man, the other by a woman. The man referred to men's weapons and tools using the particular forms; the woman referred to them all in generic form, perhaps thereby showing that she viewed them as less important than the man did.

Sometimes the generic and particular forms get specialized meanings. The root **se** in its generic form refers to the hand, but in the particular form it refers to the fingers. Similarly, **ma** in generic form is "feet," but in the particular it is "toes." The root **t^{h}uli** in the generic form refers to

swimmers, but in the particular it means "otter." Generic **sede** is the coyote, but in the particular it is Coyote, the mythical hero.

So the language reflects and encourages a certain world view on the part of its speakers. Where English, with its distinction between singular and plural, divides the physical universe into individual items, Wintu instead describes unified categories of beings, to be viewed as such unless one is specifically pointing to an individual member of that category. Lee says this is one of many examples of how the Wintu language expresses concern with the whole, as opposed to English, which tends to assert the isolable individuality of all beings. On the other hand, as pointed out in Lee's earlier passage, the Wintu language conveys a sense of humans as individuals, in that they are not to be coerced or owned, while English often asserts relationship as ownership. We talk about "my sister" or "his father" with the same construction as

Some words in their generic and particular forms:

	GENERIC	PARTICULAR
Blue grouse	**niri**	**nirit**
Mother	**ne:h, ne:t**	**ne:n**
Slingshot	**bimchus**	**bimchut**
Grizzly bear	**wimay**	**wimah**

Some special meanings for generic and particular forms:

	GENERIC	PARTICULAR
tu	face	eye
ma	foot/feet	toe
se	hand	finger, hand
k'aha	fingernail	quick of nail
łal	shell	mussel
nur	salmon meat	live or whole salmon
nop	venison	live or whole deer
chi:r	fish; fish meat	live suckerfish; a specific spirit
t^{h}uli	swimmer	otter
wi	men, people	chief ("*the* man")

—Pitkin, *Wintu Grammar*, p. 212

A general sense of "deerness" is conveyed by "Deer Dance Spirit," a painting by the Wintu artist Frank LaPena. Photo courtesy of Carla Hills.

"my house" or "his books." We also talk about body parts in the same way: "*Her* hands are dirty"; "*My* head aches." But in Wintu, the possessive construction is not used with things that are attached to the body; it is used with things you *own*, not things that are part of you. If one used an expression like "my head" in Wintu, it would sound as if the head had been severed! One does not say, "My head aches" but rather, "I head ache" (using the generic form of head rather than the particular). Similarly, when clothing is on the body, it is not to be talked about as a separate thing, but as part of the body. When talking about a girl wearing a dress, one could not say, "Her dress was striped," but would say instead, "She was dress striped." Only when the dress is not on her, such as when it is hanging in the closet, can it then be viewed as a separate object, and can therefore be called "her dress."

In English, we think of verbs as having past, present and future tenses. "Now" is the universal reference against which all events are measured: either they are happening now (present tense), or happened

before now (past tense), or will happen in the future. But in a large number of languages around the world, including Wintu, how an event relates to "now" is not automatically expressed; instead, the language may express how events relate in time to each other. In Wintu, a speaker can set up any time as the point of reference, and then use aspect suffixes on the verbs to show whether an event preceded, followed, or was simultaneous with that point of reference.

A whole range of other ideas is also expressed with suffixes on verbs. One of the most interesting is a set of "evidential suffixes" that state how one came by the evidence for some claim. If you saw the event you might say, "The child is playing in the sand," with no suffix. If you perceived it through other senses you might say, "This is sour" or "he is yelling," adding **-nte** to the verb. If your information came from logical deduction: having seen their tracks, you said, "A doe went by with two fawns," you would add **-re**. If it was hearsay: if you said, "They fought long" because someone told you so, you would add **-ke**. Unless you saw something in front of your very eyes, you could not say a sentence like, "It was bread." You would have to use evidentials to say, "It feels-to-me bread," or "I have-heard-it-to-be bread," or "I infer it to be bread." Thus any statement a Wintu speaker makes must bear with it the evidence for the speaker's claim—a greater responsibility than English speakers have!

There are many verbal endings in Wintu that cannot be easily translated into English. Take the suffix **-m**, which generally means that the verb has a generic object. Lee noticed that one interesting use of this suffix was to show "a relationship of great intimacy between self and other." The word **birama:lebo:sken** would translate as "Your children shall hunger," but literally means "Children you shall hunger in respect of." Or, as Lee states above, when a man says, "My child is ill," he would say **koyuma:da ila:m**, literally, "I am ill in respect to my child." This may seem like a strange way to say things, but it might seem more familiar if I point out that in English we sometimes express a similar close relationship between ourselves and our cars, such that if his or her car breaks down, an English speaker might say, "I broke down on the way to work today." Because we ride around in cars a lot and because their movements reflect our own movements and our own wills, they become extensions of ourselves. This may be why English speakers say things

like, "I'm not parked very far away from here," which might seem very strange to people who don't come from car cultures. In Wintu it is not cars, but relatives who are identified with.

The concept of linguistic relativity should not be carried too far. We know that people can express any concept in any language. To illustrate, let us look again at the evidential suffixes the Wintu use to indicate how they got the information they are conveying. In English we are not required to provide this information, but we can and very often do express the same thing by using slightly more complex constructions: "I *hear* that they had a fight," or "It *tastes* sour," or "It *looks like* a doe with two fawns passed by here." It is not at all difficult for an English speaker to express the same thing expressed in Wintu evidentials. On the other hand, given that a Wintu speaker *must* state the source of his knowledge whenever he makes a statement, it could be argued that constant usage and exposure to evidentials make him more sensitive to the source of evidence.

The strength of the linguistic relativity hypothesis is much debated among linguists. Our thought cannot be *completely* constrained by our language; after all, we are capable of changing language to match new thoughts, such as names for new ideas in science. California Indian languages have sometimes been cited as counter-evidence to the linguistic relativity hypothesis—Sapir himself pointed out that the Hupa, Yurok and Karuk of northern California have extremely similar cultures but completely unrelated languages with very different grammars:

> The cultural adaptability of the Athabaskan-speaking peoples is in the strangest contrast to the inaccessibility to foreign influences of the languages themselves. The Hupa Indians are very typical of the culture area to which they belong. Culturally identical with them are the neighboring Yurok and Karuk. There is the liveliest intertribal intercourse between the Hupa, Yurok, and Karuk, so much so that all three generally attend an important religious ceremony given by any one of them. It is difficult to say what elements in their combined culture belong in origin to this tribe or that, so much at one are they in communal action, feeling, and thought. But their languages are not merely alien to each other; they belong to three of the major American linguistic groups, each with an immense distribution on the northern continent. Hupa, as we have seen, is

> Athabaskan and, as such, is also distantly related to Haida (Queen Charlotte Islands) and Tlingit (southern Alaska); Yurok is one of the two isolated Californian languages of the Algonkin stock, the center of gravity of which lies in the region of the Great Lakes; Karuk is the northernmost member of the Hokan group, which stretches far to the south beyond the confines of California and has remoter relatives along the Gulf of Mexico. (Sapir 1921, 214)

Such sweeping generalizations about language and culture do not negate the much more detailed examination that scholars like Dorothy Lee have made about the relationship between grammar and world view.* Furthermore, as William Bright has pointed out, a closer examination of the languages and cultures of northwestern California shows some striking linguistic convergences of Karuk, Hupa and Yurok and also that despite apparent cultural similarities, there are some definite differences in their world views that could in fact reflect structural differences in the different languages (Bright and Bright 1965).

We can certainly point to aspects of English grammar that people believe are influential on thought patterns and feel very strongly about. There is an example of one in this chapter: "...given that a Wintu speaker must state the source of his knowedge..." Many people are convinced that the use of "he" as the generic, impersonal third person pronoun not only reflects the history of Anglo-American culture as male-dominated, but even encourages the continuation of this cultural pattern. And the detractors of "he" point out that just by virtue of being built into the grammar, it is all the more insidious, a sort of subliminal suggestion. Some writers have argued that "he" really can be used to imply a genderless general referent (this is called the "generic *he*"), but psychological experiments have shown that people never really interpret "he" as generic. It is so important in the eyes of people seeking social equality for the sexes that various attempts have been made to replace generic *he* with other alternatives, such as written *s/he*, or the awkward "he or she," or the grammatically questionable "they" as a singular pronoun. The difficulty of replacing the male-biased "he" with a neutral alternative might make English speakers jealous of Wintu and most other California languages, because they have always had a neutral third person pronoun, one where the referent can be either male or female.

Our minds are not puppets whose actions and beliefs are guided entirely by the strings of our language. We are capable of going beyond our language in thought, and we can in fact consciously change language, especially by adding new vocabulary, to match our thinking. Nevertheless, in a myriad of both obvious and subtle ways, the words and grammatical patterns of our language do influence the way we view the world. Our language does not limit us to certain viewpoints, but it does guide us strongly along particular mental pathways. And from this perspective, languages are far more than words and arbitrary rules of grammar—they are windows to whole systems of beliefs and values. And if the California languages disappear from our land, we lose along with them all their special and wonderful ways of portraying our world.

* One criticism made of Lee is that she drew her conclusions about Wintu world view only from the language itself, and did not corroborate her conclusions by independent studies of Wintu culture (Lucy 1992, 72). Lee herself was the first to admit this:

> The Wintu Indians of northern California have a conception of the self which is markedly different from our own. I have attempted to arrive at this conception through analysis of linguistic form and structure, as well as a consideration of biographical texts and recorded mythical material. My study is incomplete, since I have no other record of actual behavior. The ethnography of the Wintu as we have it, is an account of a dead and remembered culture. (Lee 1959, 131)

("Dead and remembered culture" puts it a little too strongly!)