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**Native American Languages in Crisis:  
Exploring the Interface between Academia, Technology  
and Smaller Native Language Communities**

to be held at

**Penn Museum  
University of Pennsylvania  
33<sup>rd</sup> and Spruce Sts  
Philadelphia PA**

**May 2, 3, and 4**

Language loss is arguably the most pressing issue faced by contemporary Native nations within the present borders of the United States. According to surveys summarized by the Indigenous Languages Institute, 89% of 175 Native languages in North America are in imminent danger of falling silent because they are no longer spoken by children. Of the 20 languages still spoken in Alaska, only two—Central Yupik and St. Lawrence Island Yupik—are being taught to the next generation. Similarly, in Oklahoma only four of the remaining 23 Native languages are being learned by children in a few traditional homes.

Many of the solutions offered to stop language loss and often supported by granting agencies promote technological solutions focusing on visual and audio recording, creating databases, and developing internet and archiving schemes. But there are significant limitations to the capacity of the technology to fulfill its elusive promise, and the effectiveness of these digital tools in producing new fluent speakers is not very clear. And, importantly, there are under-considered questions relating to the foreign and artificial nature of the digital media itself, particularly in light of Indigenous self-understandings regarding the power and proper usages of language. What is the message borne by depersonalized digital media, and does such media carry corrosive influences that work against the intended goal of perpetuating an Indigenous language, complete with its ancient ways of understanding the world?

In a similar fashion, the implicit promise of support from academia for revitalizing Indigenous languages turns out to be difficult to harness directly to the urgent needs of Native communities seeking to develop new fluent speakers of their original languages. While linguists and community members can easily share a broad common goal of perpetuating Native languages, they operate out of surprisingly separate agendas. Many of the efforts from academia rely on long-standing strengths for producing lexicons and grammars, generally in the service of the demand for scholarly publications for career advancement. But for Native communities in the very late stages of language loss, with few resources and only handfuls of elderly speakers, much of the arcane academic output may be of little use in their hands-on, urgent struggle to pass their languages to the youngest generation.

How can a competition over the limited time of the elders pulled between separate agendas be turned into a more productive arrangement that can help ensure the development of new, fully-competent speakers with the depth of knowledge offered by breath-to-breath learning in face-to-face exchange with gifted elders?

All of these promises and challenges presented by technology and academia reach their highest intensity in relation to the smallest language communities. They are facing the highest threats of language loss, most often with the fewest resources. Indeed, these smaller language communities represent, by far, the embattled majority of Native languages. For small language communities each choice represents a fateful decision bearing a high impact on the future of the language as a living language

This conference will provide a special, though not exclusive, emphasis on smaller Native language communities as it brings together a wide range of scholars and community language activists for analysis and open discussion of the impacts and trade-offs related to technology and academia in Native language revitalization work. Conference presentations will be built on prepared papers and lead to roundtable discussions, engaging both presenters and audience. Papers and proceedings of the conference are to be published in order to help clarify how the digital resources from technology and the intellectual resources from academia can help revitalize Native languages.

## **Preliminary Conference Schedule**

**FRIDAY Opening Session, May 2 (9:00 –10:00),**

**Welcome:** Lenape Nation Members

**Welcome:** Penn Representatives

**Charge to Conference:** Richard A. Grounds (Euchee Language Program)

**FRIDAY AM Session, May 2: (10:00-12:00)**

**The Urgency and Importance of Language Revitalization and Best Practices**

The first panel session will lay out the broad outline of the predicament and the importance of Native languages which are now in extreme crisis, leading to a discussion of best practices and prospects for renewal.

Alice Anderton (Intertribal Wordpath Society)  
overview of community efforts

Marcus Briggs (Seminole, University of Oklahoma grad student)  
Why languages matter, traditional perspectives

Mary Eunice Romero (Cochiti, ASU)  
Report on best practices, immersion and academic achievement

Ryan Wilson (Lakota, National Alliance to Save Native Languages)  
Overview of legislative and political progress

**FRIDAY PM - Session A (1:00 - 3:00?)**

**The Problematic of Engaging the Academy in Native Language Revitalization**

The conference will culminate in a panel session focusing on the interface between the academy and Native communities, both of whom have a deep interest in the survival of Indigenous languages and the Indigenous knowledge systems born by them. However, the demands of the academy and the needs of the community represent surprisingly separate agendas. The session will hold up crucial issues concerning access to materials, ethics, collaboration, outreach, and funding. The goal here is not only to take seriously the deep challenges within this critical interface, but also to explore new ways forward that will be beneficial for the interests of both the academy and Native communities

Daryl Baldwin (Miami, Director, Myaamia Project)  
Contributions of the academy in awakening the Myaamia language

Jacob Manatowa-Bailey (Sac & Fox, Dir. Sauk Language Dept)  
Challenges for communities in working with academics

Leanne Hinton (Linguistics, UC Berkeley)

Historical arc of engagement and current interface between linguistics and local communities

Inés Talamantez (Apache/Chicana, Religious Studies, UC. Santa Barbara)  
The politics of Indigenous language acquisition in the academy

**FRIDAY PM – Session B (3:30 - 5:15?)**

**Roundtable Discussion:** How can the academy and smaller language communities work together in the most productive ways? Discussion begins with panel presenters and expanded cast, then opens to full audience.

**FRIDAY PM – Dinner and Keynote Addresses (7:00-9:00 pm)**

K. David Harrison (Swarthmore)  
The value and challenges for smaller languages in global context

Jessie Little Doe (Wampanoag, Dir. Wampanoag Language Program)  
Contributions of the academy in awakening the Wampanoag language

**SATURDAY AM Session, May 3 (10:00-12:00):**

**The Challenges of Smaller Language Communities: Case Studies**

This session focuses on the special challenges presented by smaller language communities. These smaller language communities represent the majority of Native languages in North America and the majority of these are now on course to fall silent within the next ten to fifteen years. They also, typically, have little access to significant funding and represent special challenges in terms of methodology and working with academic supporters.

Shelley DePaul (Lenape Nation of Pennsylvania)

Richard and Nora Dauenhauer (Tlingit, University of Alaska, Juneau)

Tachini Pete, (Snqwiqwo Salish Immersion School)

Leslie Harper, (Bug-O-Nay-Ge-Shig Ojibway School)

**SATURDAY PM - Session A (1:00-3:00?)**

**The Promises and Perils of Digital Technology for Language Revitalization**

The afternoon session will take up the promises and perils offered by digital technology. This panel will begin an examination of the little-considered question of the trade-offs made by oral communities in using much-heralded technological solutions to pass forward their world views and the traditional beliefs and values encoded in their languages.

Bernard Perley (Maliseet, University of Wisconsin, Milwaukee)

The problematic of technology in language revitalization?

Lamont Laird (Shawnee, Red Star language program)

On the non-recording of Shawnee language

Larry Emerson (Navajo)

Recognizing the power of language

Laura Graham (Anthropology, University of Iowa)

Intangible heritage/adapting technology in Indigenous South America

**SATURDAY PM – Session B (3:30-5:15 pm?)**

**Roundtable discussion of technology issues:**

Discuss issues of technology among panel presenters and expanded cast, then open to full audience of attendees.

# **Lenape Language Workshop**

## **SUNDAY May 4- Lenape Language Workshop**

The final day is reserved for a Lenape Language Workshop organized by Ann Dapice. The purpose of this workshop is to provide a forum for members of different Lenape communities across the US and Canada to compare information on the ongoing efforts to preserve the Lenape language and develop best practices.

Ann Dapice (Lenape Nation of Pennsylvania)

Curtis Zunigha (Past Chief, Delaware Tribe of Indians, Oklahoma)

Bob Red Hawk Ruth (Chief Lenape Nation of Pennsylvania)

Shelley DePaul (Lenape Nation of Pennsylvania)

Bruce Stonefish (Delaware Nation, Thamesville, Ontario, Canada)

Shawn Stevens (Stockbridge-Munsee Community, Wisconsin)