The Green Book
of Language Revitalization in Practice

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Teaching Methods

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INTRODUCTION

Language revitalization usually must include as its largest task the teaching and learning of the endangered language as a second language. Second-language teaching (a cover term for what of course could for some individuals be the teaching of a third, fourth, or fifth language) is a big industry throughout the world, and a large body of literature exists on the research and documentation of effective teaching methods. People who are going to teach a language seriously would be well advised to read some of this literature or undergo training in good methodology. A few of the many excellent books available on the topic of language teaching and learning and that can give you some good ideas on how to teach or learn a language are Asher 1977; Brewster and Brewster 1976; Brown 1987; Hadley 1993; Krashen and Terrell 1983; and Richards and Rodgers 1986.

Most of the literature on language teaching methods is about either the teaching of foreign languages or the teaching of English (or other national languages) to immigrants. Teaching endangered languages has important differences from teaching foreign languages or ESL, and someone who is going to teach an endangered language must keep those differences in mind and adapt whatever is read to the specific situation at hand—some information will be useful, some will not. (For a discussion of some of the differences between teaching foreign languages and teaching endangered languages, see Hinton 1999.)

MODELS AND METHODOLOGY:
A BRIEF ACCOUNT OF INDIGENOUS LANGUAGE TEACHING IN THE UNITED STATES

Informal Language Classes

In the effort to maintain and teach a language which is no longer being learned at home, speech communities have often started the process with informal gatherings of speakers and nonspeakers. I remember, for example, when I was a graduate student, going to weekly small gatherings with Ted Couro, then one of the few remaining speakers of Northern Diegueno. The gatherings were run by Couro and Margaret Langdon, a linguist who specialized in that language. The participants included some Diegueno young people and some other locals with an interest in the language, and the sessions consisted mainly of elicitation of words and phrases from Couro, with Langdon writing them on the board and the participants copying them down. The Hupas have a similar Wednesday evening get-together—a few native speakers, a few young Hupa second-language learners and interested tribal members, and sometimes one or two linguists. As with the Northern Diegueno sessions, the Hupa sessions tend to be informal language reminiscences by the speakers and elicitation of vocabulary by the learners, who often write the words down as they hear them.

These informal language classes are meaningful gather-
ings, and participants get great pleasure out of them. They are also potentially useful for documentation of the language. However, they are not a way for someone to learn to speak the language. Learning to speak the language can only come through intensive exposure and practice to connected speech and real conversation.

Bilingual Education

Classroom teaching of endangered languages was extremely rare until the advent of bilingual education in the United States and elsewhere in the 1970s. Given that the schools were one of the main instruments by which indigenous languages were purposely eradicated by governments, the previous lack of presence of indigenous languages in the classroom is tragic but not surprising. As discussed in Chapters 1 and 3, the civil rights movement of the 1960s and related political events resulted in a slow but strong liberalization of educational policy, one aspect of which was the development of bilingual education. While bilingual education was originally conceived by legislators as applying mainly to immigrant groups and Spanish-speaking populations, it also created a flowering of opportunity for indigenous languages to enter the classrooms for the first time. However, the main thrust of bilingual education from its inception was the teaching of classroom subjects in children’s native language, not the teaching of the language itself. Thus bilingual education flourished mainly in communities where children spoke the language at home. Teaching school subjects in the language necessitated language engineering: many indigenous languages had no writing systems, so orthographies, literature, and curriculum materials, as well as new vocabulary and genres of writing such as essays and poetry, had to be developed. Thus new genres and literature were developed even as spoken language was in decline in indigenous communities. From the outset, those speech communities whose languages were in decline used this opportunity to try to teach the language to children who did not know it, but the bias of bilingual education was often toward the written word, and there was little training available to the teachers in language teaching methods. In fact, inadequate training has been a problem that has plagued bilingual education among the smaller language groups for years. Speakers of indigenous languages of the United States or of immigrants who had a minority language heritage in the old country (such as the Hmong and other minority groups from Asia, or indigenous people from Latin America) rarely had teaching credentials. Usually they were only teachers’ aides, a status that gave them little or no authority over curriculum and little access to relevant and useful training programs. Sometimes actual damage was done to the health of the language through bilingual education programs. As an example, colleagues and I have on a number of occasions observed bilingual education classes in communities where the children were quite strongly bilingual in their language (let us call language X) and English by the time they reached kindergarten age. Adults were concerned, though, about attrition of indigenous vocabulary among the children, who often used English rather than language X for such things as numbers, colors, kinship terms, and so on. Thus it was considered a priority to make sure the children learned these terms in language X. A teacher’s aide (a fluent bilingual) often ran the class but spoke mostly in English and gave the words only as translations from English. This meant that the children were hearing much more English than language X during the class and were also learning the words in terms of English concepts. For example, language X might use different words for “grandmother” depending on whether it is the mother’s side or the father’s side, but only one set would be taught, so that the children learned to use the same word for both, as in English. The end result is that the children were learning English concepts, and language X only provided alternative labels for these concepts. This is a much better lesson about English than about language X!

Despite these problems with some indigenous language bilingual education programs, there were also many programs that were excellent, such as the Hualapai program and the Rock Point Navajo bilingual education program, among others. (For a good description of the excellent Hualapai program, which was chosen as a model program by the government, see Watahomigie and McCarty 1997, and see Crawford 1997 for an excellent description of good bilingual education practices in general, along with the political forces acting against them.)

But in general, because of the transitional emphasis of government policy and the assumption that the ancestral tongue is learned at home, the development of effective language teaching methods for indigenous languages was not supported under bilingual education, and most programs for indigenous bilingual education have found that it has not stopped the erosion of the language from the community.

Immersion

The old methods of foreign language teaching used to be the “text and translation” methods, where students learned to read, write, and understand the grammatical structure of the language, but did not learn to speak it. During World War II, the U.S. government had a great need for American military personnel who could speak the languages of the countries in which they were stationed, and whole new methods of intensive, orally based language teaching were developed. Since then, orally based language teaching has slowly begun to enter the school system, as at least a part of the foreign language curriculum (although a great many schools are still using the old “text and translation” methods only—change is slow). Since the late 1970s, when changes in immigration policy allowed a great influx of new immigrants to the United States, the need for oral language skills has increased. 

This has led to the development of immersion programs, where children are placed in an environment where the language is the primary means of communication. These programs have been shown to be effective in a number of ways, including:

- Improved language skills
- Better academic performance
- Increased cultural awareness
- Improved social skills

Immersion programs have been successful in a number of settings, including:

- Native American reservations
- Mexican-American communities
- Immigrant communities

However, there are also some challenges to immersion programs, including:

- Limited availability of qualified teachers
- Resistance from parents who prefer traditional methods
- Difficulty in maintaining continuity of instruction

Despite these challenges, immersion programs continue to be an important tool in the bilingual education toolkit.
States, intensive and effective methods have also been developed for the teaching of English to children in the schools. ESL (English as a second language) is now a specialty in which future teachers can receive a degree. (Again, many schools lack the resources for effective English teaching; good methodology is available in general, but training programs and funding to pay for well-trained ESL teachers is missing in many schools.)

There is now a huge body of literature on second-language teaching methods, but mostly on the languages of the national majorities—for instance, English, Spanish, and so on. Nevertheless, much of the theory and methodology of teaching world languages can also be applied to endangered languages.

**IMMERSION SCHOOLS:**

**INTRODUCTION**

A model that is being used increasingly in the United States and elsewhere is the full immersion program, where all instruction in the classroom is carried out in the endangered language. There is no doubt that this is the best way to jump-start the production of a new generation of fluent speakers for an endangered language. There is no other system of language revitalization that has such complete access to so many members of the younger generation who are the best language learners for so many hours per day. There are an increasing number of programs worldwide where immersion preschools teach children to communicate in the endangered language, and for a number of programs it has been possible to develop an immersion schooling system all the way through high school and even into college. Hawaiian and Maori are two languages discussed in this book that have developed a whole generation of new speakers through this type of program.

The main activity of any language revitalization program is to teach people the language who have not learned it as a first language. The question of how to teach the language to others is one of the central questions in program design. Most of us have had the experience of being taught a foreign language as a subject in elementary or high school, but—and this is especially true if we attended public schools in the United States—if that was our only exposure to the language, we came away knowing very little. My own experience with learning Spanish began in elementary school, where we all got paper nameplates with Spanish versions of our first names on them and learned colors, animals, and the numbers from 1 to 10. In high school we focused on Spanish grammar and reading and on answering test questions involving grammar and reading comprehension. Neither of these experiences taught me to understand what a native Spanish speaker was saying or to carry on a meaningful conversation in the language. It was not until I went to South America for a year that I felt as if I had really learned how to speak and understand Spanish. What happened that year was that I was immersed in Spanish. The language was all around me all the time, and if I wanted to communicate anything to anyone, I had to do it in Spanish. This was a kind of sink-or-swim immersion. Even better would have been structured immersion, which I experienced years later in French immersion classes at the University of California at San Diego and at Aix-en-Provence. In both these immersion situations, learning to converse was treated quite differently from learning to read. Conversation was taught entirely in immersion style: the teachers spoke only in French, and students had to respond in French. Taped lessons added more exposure time, but in the conversation component we learned everything by ear, not by reading it. In order to understand the tapes, a written English translation was provided; but we never saw them written in French. We learned to "shadow" the tapes: we would practice saying the taped excerpt along with the speaker until we could keep up. Grammar was not explained to us in the conversation section of the class; even though we understood what a given sentence meant, we did not necessarily know which word meant what, or even where one word stopped and another began. Like first-language learners, we assimilated the information that allowed us to understand and construct connected speech without prior conscious analysis. We also received separate lessons in grammar, but the grammar lessons allowed us to recognize constructions we were already using rather than showing us constructions for the first time.

The main point to be made here is that the way most of us have been taught languages in the public schools has not provided a very good model for an ideal language-learning program. Many attempts at teaching endangered languages have had disappointing results because of poorly developed teaching methodology. The programs involve overly repetitive review of a small range of vocabulary or spend too much time "explaining" the language in English rather than actually using the language, or depend too much on writing things down rather than aural learning, or never get to the point of teaching people how to talk in complete sentences or how to communicate about real things.

In recent decades there has been a great deal of research on effective language teaching. Reading some textbooks for future teachers who are learning how to teach bilingual education or ESL or methodological texts on foreign language teaching will show some of the teaching theories and methods that can help a good language teaching program get off the ground. But there is no absolutely set program that will work for all languages. Endangered languages, in particular, may have certain restrictions on resources, opportunities, and cultural conditions that will place specialized demands or present specialized opportunities for teaching. And because the languages we are concerned about are endangered, time is also of the essence. Rather than waiting until the best
possible program has been thoroughly planned in advance, it is often best to just start right away with whatever knowledge and resources are available and learn, plan, and grow as you go.

Teaching the Language in the Schools

There are many school programs around the country now that are involved in the teaching of local endangered languages. There are three main types of language programs: teaching an endangered language as a subject (like a foreign language), bilingual education, and full-scale immersion programs. Different goals, benefits, limitations, and results characterize these three types.

Immersion schools solve all the problems discussed above for the other types of school program: they provide sufficient exposure to the language to produce fluent speakers, and they also provide a venue for using the language in real communication. In the immersion schools, the presence of the target language is so strong that children tend to use it with each other outside the classroom as well as in.

The immersion schools and classrooms also have certain limitations. Because of educational laws and regulations, immersion schools are not easy to found. Hawai‘i had to change a state law mandating English as the only allowable language of instruction in order to allow the Hawaiian language immersion classes to exist. Any community who has an immersion school in mind must realize that it will involve years of legal wrangling and figuring out ways to comply with all the local and state regulations. But it can be done—and there are a growing number of successful immersion schools to attest to that.

As indicated earlier, it is not enough for children to know a language; they must also use it robustly with others if the language is to continue. Problems develop if the immersion classroom is in a school where other classrooms are in English, for in those cases English is the language of the playground, and children become used to talking to their peers in English. Developing that habit does not bode well for hopes that these children will grow up to use their language in the home, even if they know the target language fluently.

The school is a specialized setting that makes strong demands on subject matter and interaction style. When a language is chosen as the language of instruction, that language must be developed to accommodate the needs of education. Thus a language that might never have been used to communicate such things before must develop vocabulary for math and science and must develop discourse styles that fit the situation. (For example, giving oral book reports or writing essays may be things that have never been done in the language before.) Developing new vocabulary and discourse styles is not that hard, but it does change the language. People who wish to revitalize their language because of a desire to return to traditional culture and values must be aware that language revitalization does not automatically bring people back to these traditional modes of thought. If the language is learned solely in school, then it is school culture and school values that are learned along with it. Even when a conscious effort is made to teach traditional culture and values, the schoolroom agenda imposes its own culture on the students.

Another problem is that for some families and communities, devoting all education to the endangered language may seem like too much—they fear that children will not get sufficient English-language education to keep up in the higher grades or in college. This is a constant debate in communities that have immersion schools. But this level of intensity in language teaching may be the only thing that works in turning around language death: it is essential that the families play an active role as well. Students whose families are unwilling or unable to reinforce the language at home do not fare as well as students with active families. Thus, the successful immersion programs also usually have a family component in which parents are asked to learn the language in night classes, to volunteer in the immersion classroom, and to reinforce at home the lessons the students learn in school.

To make a final general point about language revitalization in the classroom setting, the classroom is the most efficient place to teach the target language, but no classroom program is sufficient unto itself; it must be accompanied by family commitments and other community programs. One reason that Maori and Hawaiian programs have worked so well is that their school programs have developed out of grassroots community movements that include other components to language revitalization. A number of families who were second-language learners of their ancestral languages chose, even prior to the establishment of the schools, to raise their children in the language at home. Bringing the language back as the first language of the home is the true heart of language revitalization. No school can make that happen; only families can. However, the schools can play a vital role in helping to make that transition to home speaking possible. They can provide a new generation with the fluency to make such a transition possible, and since the fear of having their children enter schools without knowing the language of the school was one of the main reasons that previous generations switched to English at home in the first place, just knowing that their children will go to a school where the ancestral tongue is the language of instruction will make it safe now for parents to speak it to their children at home.

Other Kinds of Immersion Programs

Schools are not the only place where language immersion can take place. Where language programs in the schools are impossible or insufficient, after-school programs may be cre-
ated. While children are often tired at this time of day and less attentive, a well-designed after-school program (especially one that combines language with recreation) can help children develop skills in the target language. Intensive summer language programs for children are increasingly utilized to supplement school programs, or if school programs are impossible, to do instead of them. A great deal of language can be learned in a two- or three-month summer program; however, what is learned is soon forgotten if the language is not reinforced during the school year. But an intensive summer program reinforced by a nonintensive school program might have quite excellent long-term results.

Another common kind of program is evening classes for adults or families. In practice these are usually held once a week and rarely involve immersion; but of course they can be taught in that manner. As mentioned before, the best school programs have a family component that is often a weekly evening class.

In Hawai‘i, a group on O‘ahu recently received a grant for a community recreation program that would be run in Hawaiian: they are holding regular events such as baseball and cookouts where only Hawaiian is spoken (see Chapter 12). This kind of program, where immersion-style learning is combined with other activities, is especially promising for endangered languages, where the language has to be brought into real communication situations again if it is to survive. A program such as this takes language learning outside of the classroom situation and puts it into daily life.

A program in California that has had good results is the California Master-Apprentice Language Learning Program, run by the Advocates for Indigenous California Language Survival (Chapter 17). In this program, the last elderly speakers of California Indian languages are paired with young relatives who want to learn the language, and they are taught immersion-style techniques of language teaching and learning to do together, one on one. It is stressed that rather than do “lessons” most of the time, the team should do activities together—cooking, gathering, housework, taking a walk or a drive—and communicate at all times in the language during these activities. In this way, as with the O‘ahu community recreation program, language learning takes place in the context of real communication, thus doing both jobs that a revitalization program must do—teaching the language and bringing it into use in daily life.

There are a number of talented individuals who have completely managed their own language learning. One of these is Loren Bommelyn, who decided as a young man that he wanted to learn his ancestral language, Tolowa, fluently. He managed his learning program by asking the elders how to say things, by then practicing those things with the elders and on his own, and later by the ingenious method of deciding to say everything in Tolowa before saying it in English, no matter who he was talking to. This way he both practiced the language extensively and also found out what he did not know yet; he would then ask the elders when next he was with them. His technique involved a rather brave act, for it tended to create a strange interaction between himself and other people, many of whom were not Tolowa and none of whom knew the language (other than the few elders that he had taken on as his teachers)—but when there is no way to learn within a real communication situation, this unique method works very well. By this means, Bommelyn created an immersion situation for himself even when the language was not spoken by anyone else around him. And the end result was that he has become a fully fluent speaker—one a good 50 years younger than any other fluent speaker of Tolowa.

**SOME BASIC TEACHING METHODS**

There have been many theories and methods of second-language teaching developed in recent decades, most of them related to language immersion techniques. There are many different models, but most of them share basic similarities.

We find the key factors in successful language teaching and learning to be:

1. If the goal is to develop oral competence, the main methods of teaching should be oral (rather than written).
2. Language lessons should be “immersion” style, where the target language is used solely, without English translation. Still, the learners must be able to understand, at least partly, what is being said, through contextual clues. Thus the teacher must use gestures, miming, actions, pictures, and so on, to make himself or herself understood. (This is called “comprehensible input.”)
3. Learners need to be engaged in real communication efforts, rather than just hearing and spouting language. Learning lists of words alone does not help a person learn how to communicate. (For example, you do not just teach students a list of kinship terms; once you show them the vocabulary, you immediately engage them in communicative activities such as having them ask each other to tell who their family members at home are.) Communication-based teaching and learning leads to much more thorough learning of vocabulary and of grammar. Let me give an example. In Havasupai, while it is possible to learn kinship terms as nouns, if they are used in conversation they often occur as verbs. For example, the word *jita* translates as “mother,” but that word alone would almost never be heard. If you want to say “she is my mother” in Havasupai, you cannot translate that from English word for word; instead, you say “ñaj *jita’wi*”—literally, “I ’mother’ her” (which perhaps makes more sense if it is translated something like “I call her mother”). A construction like this is so different from English that special attention must be paid to it. It
is obvious that just learning the nouns for kinship terms is not enough to allow a learner to actually use that vocabulary in meaningful conversations. The only way to learn meaningful conversations is to engage in it.

(4) Repetition without repetitiveness: one formula is the “20 × 20 rule”: that a learner has to hear or use a word 20 times in 20 different situations before he or she masters it. But just saying a word 400 times does not do the job. Classes should always have a review component, and old vocabulary must be included in activities that also practice new vocabulary. Thus, if last week’s lesson was about numbers and this week’s is about kinship terms, some activities can include practice with both—for example, asking each person how many brothers and sisters they have.

(5) Activities, active physical work, and games related to the vocabulary or phrases being learned help the learning process in many ways, by making it more interesting, keeping up the attention level, associating words with actions, and so on.

(6) Comprehension precedes production. That is, a student first understands a word and then starts being able to say it. For comprehension, there are two stages: first, coming to understand what the teacher is saying (because of nonverbal cues, etc.); and then coming to recognize the word or sentence without the verbal cues being present. For example, the teacher may say “Stand up!” and make gestures with her arms that make the students understand what they are expected to do, and then they do it. After a while, the students will recognize the word without any nonverbal cues. Production also has two stages: mimicking and true production. A student may be able to mimic what the teacher says right after the teacher says it, but may not yet be able to dredge the word up from memory without that immediate cue from the teacher. Later, a student can say the word voluntarily without the teacher’s saying it first; that is true production. Activities regarding new material should keep this in mind: the first presentation leads to understanding, and later activities test recognition. Mimicking may begin with the first presentation, but only after recognition will true production finally develop. While all four stages of learning can be practiced during a single lesson, the final stage, long-term retention, may take longer. A student may forget in-between lessons, and it may take a lot more practice in review before he or she can retain the material for the long term.

The teacher provides practice and tests comprehension through activities involving commands (which the students then perform) and yes-no questions (e.g., pointing to her ear and asking “Is this my nose?” and students answering “yes” or “no”). Mimicking practice can be given by instructions such as saying in the target language “Say ‘nose,’” or asking either-or questions such as “Is this my ear or my nose?” (students answer “ear” or “nose”). Production practice is exemplified by whole questions: “What is this?” (the student must answer with the appropriate word), or “What am I doing?” and so on. Various activities and games can be designed for practicing and testing either comprehension or production.

(7) Teaching grammar can be implicit rather than explicit. There is much debate in the literature and among learners about the role of grammatical analysis. Should students be taught explicitly about grammatical terminology and taught things like “To form the past tense, add such and such a prefix”? Or should they instead be taught implicitly, without grammatical terminology, so that they will acquire the patterns inductively, and often unconsciously, through mere exposure to them? The latter is the way children learn their first language, and there is a great deal of good evidence that a second language can be learned the same way. But some adults prefer explicit grammatical analysis and get frustrated and uncomfortable without it. And since a positive attitude is also important to the learning process, sometimes a teacher must cater to a learner’s desires. For this reason explicit explanation of grammatical processes might sometimes be necessary, but in fact the real learning takes place through exposure and use, not through memorizing a stated rule.

Many endangered languages have no grammatical analyses available anyway, or perhaps only linguistic grammars, which are not geared the same way that teaching grammars would be. The only speakers who are available to teach the language may not have any explicit grammatical knowledge (that is, they may not know what counts as a noun, verb, or relative clause, or what a prefix or suffix is), even though they have mastered the grammar of their language as native speakers. Thus they may not be able to explain the grammar very much. It is therefore important to remember that grammar can be taught without explicit grammatical analysis. See Chapter 18 for a detailed example of how to teach grammar implicitly.

(8) Criticism discourages learners from speaking and participating and thus discourages them from learning. Praise and positive forms of correction enhance the learning process.

Planning Lessons

For most (but not all) endangered languages, teachers are pretty much on their own with regard to planning what they will teach and how they will teach it. There are few or no books or materials available to them from which they can work. Teachers must use their imagination and their ingenuity to develop effective language courses.
### TABLE 14.1 Approaches to Lesson Planning

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<thead>
<tr>
<th>Vocabulary</th>
<th>Grammar</th>
<th>Situations</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Numbers</td>
<td>Plurals</td>
<td>Everyday life:</td>
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<tr>
<td>Colors</td>
<td>Past, present, future</td>
<td>Greeting people</td>
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<tr>
<td>Kinship terms</td>
<td>Case (object, subject, etc.)</td>
<td>Shopping</td>
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<td>Animals</td>
<td>Adjectives</td>
<td>Talking on phone</td>
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<td>Plants</td>
<td>Word order</td>
<td>Planting garden</td>
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<tr>
<td>Clothing</td>
<td>Transitive and intransitive verbs</td>
<td>Cooking</td>
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<td>Seasons, months, days</td>
<td>Irregular verbs</td>
<td>Driving car</td>
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<td>Weather and astronomical terms</td>
<td>(etc.)</td>
<td>Traditional life:</td>
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<td>Kitchen utensils</td>
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<td>Language usage for a particular ceremony</td>
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<td>Household objects</td>
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<td>Traditional crafts</td>
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<td>Actions (stand, walk, give ...)</td>
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<td>Prayer</td>
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<td>(etc.)</td>
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<td>Traditional medicine</td>
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<td>Traditional cooking</td>
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<td>School life:</td>
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<td>Sharing</td>
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<td>Reading and writing</td>
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<td>Math, history, and other subjects</td>
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<td>Hanging up coat</td>
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<td>Washing hands</td>
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<td>Using bathroom</td>
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<td>Snack time</td>
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<td>Playground activities</td>
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<td>(etc.)</td>
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The first stage in lesson planning is to figure out what exactly you plan to teach in a given lesson. There are at least three ways to come up with ideas on topics: the vocabulary-based approach (e.g., animals, colors, numbers); the grammar-based approach (e.g., adjectives, plurals, word order); and the situationally based approach (e.g., greetings, talking on the phone, making a basket). Table 14.1 provides a few of the many ideas that will come to mind depending on which approach you take.

When planning a course, a language teacher should probably use all three approaches. Thinking about vocabulary sets is useful for beginning classes, but you run out of inspiration very soon. Thinking of lessons in grammar is also of limited productivity (though it can be important). When thinking about lessons in terms of grammar, it is very important to think about the grammar of the particular language being taught. For example, some languages might have no noun plurals but would perhaps have ways of marking on the verb if more than one participant is involved. Some languages have no simple past separate from present tense. Some languages have verb stems that change in form depending on what affix is added. Some languages have special obligatory affixes for things an English speaker would never think of—such as evidentials, which are affixed to verbs in statements in order to communicate how the speaker knows what he is stating: whether he saw it, inferred it from indirect evidence, heard it from someone else, or learned it in some other way. Thus, what is important to teach in the way of grammar differs from language to language.

Thinking in terms of situations is the most fruitful of the three strategies. Besides the everyday activities that most people do and the traditional activities that may be part of your community heritage, a given speech community might have other situations specific to it: perhaps the community does cattle ranching, or herding of some domesticated animal, or horseback riding and packing, or perhaps it has a timber industry. Whatever is important will provide a situational base of interest for language learning. Each situation will provide inspiration about what vocabulary and what grammar is necessary to master in order to communicate.

One reason situationally based teaching is so beneficial is that what is learned is immediately usable in real communication. If the teaching is taking place in a classroom, for example, everything you do in the classroom can be done in the target language. If you call roll, instead of having students answer "Here!" in English, find an equivalent phrase in the target language to teach them to use instead. If the teaching is being done on a one-on-one level with
adults (Chapter 17), a coffee-serving ritual might be developed, so that students learn how to say all those things we say around coffee, such as, "Would you like a cup of coffee?" "Do you want cream?" "No, I drink it black," and so on. Terry and Sarah Supahan (Chapter 15) write that before planning a lesson they ask themselves what it is that they want their students to communicate—what the function of the language is that they want their students to learn. Once they have answered that question, then they can have a clear idea of what to teach. Arviso and Holm's essay in this volume (Chapter 16), gives excellent exemplification of situationally based classroom activities done in the target language (in this case, Navajo).

Each lesson should have:

1. a review component (possibly embedded in (3));
2. presentation of new vocabulary, phrases, and/or grammatical constructions, perhaps tied to a particular situation (also possibly embedded in (3)); and
3. communicative activities allowing practice of the new items (and review of old items); these activities should first test comprehension of new material and then go into production practice.

So after you have decided on the topic you will be teaching (such as animals, plurals, traditional cooking, or some other subject), plan the following:

1. specifics of vocabulary, phrases, and so on;
2. specific activities you will do, making sure that some of them are for comprehension and some for production; and
3. props you need for the activities.

Sample Lesson: Clothing

Initial Presentation and Practice

1. Indicate your own clothing and that of students, while saying in the target language, "I'm wearing a shirt." Continue to say sentences containing "shirt" while going around the room and indicating several shirts. "Julia and Marv have on pants. Who else has pants? Mary has a skirt. Joanne has a dress. These are shoes; those are sandals..." and so on.
2. Comprehension: Right from the beginning of the presentation, get students active too by having them point out who else has on a skirt, and so on.
3. If you have done colors in a previous lesson, insert a review component by asking "Who has blue pants?" "Does anyone have brown pants?" and so on.
4. Production: Ask students questions that demand the use of the new vocabulary in their answer, such as "Is that a shirt or a jacket?" "What is this?" (while indicating a piece of clothing). "What is Julia wearing?" or "Julia, what are you wearing?"

Possible activities (do not do all of these in one lesson, just choose two or three at most before going on to some other topic. These are just a few ideas out of dozens of possibilities; think up your own, but always ask yourself how they will be useful in enhancing the practice and use of the target language):

1. Do commands relating to clothes (props: bring extra-large clothing of various types): "Julia, put on this jacket" (help her put it on if she doesn't understand). "Mary, put on these pants."
2. Other commands could include: "Julia, take off the jacket"; "Fold the jacket"; "Give the jacket to Marv"; "Hang the jacket up on this hanger" (props: jacket, hanger). This exercise gives practice in comprehension.
3. Clothes-washing activity (props: clothes, laundry tub, soap, pitcher, clothespins, clothesline): In this activity, the teacher can improvise a lot; the goal is to get the students to hear long sequences of connected speech, including but not limited to clothing words. Even if they do not follow every word, nonverbal cues will make the gist of everything understandable. The patter, along with nonverbal cues and activities, could go something like this (all in the target language, of course):

   "This is a clothesline, Mary, would you help me hang it up over here? Thank you. I brought a washtub. John, bring that washtub over to this table. Put it down on the table. That's good. Now we can pretend to put water in the washtub. Julia, would you take this pitcher and pour in the water? [said while gesturing to Julia to get her to come take pitcher and pretend to pour in water]. This is soap. Julia, put some soap in the washtub. Marvin, get that jacket and bring it over here. Mary, get the pants, shirts, and dresses and bring them here. [Pick one up, smell it, and make a face.] Eew, that shirt's dirty! Put them in the tub. Good. Stay here now and we'll wash the clothes together. Scrub them well. Now wring everything out. Wring out that shirt; good; now put it aside. Wring out that jacket; put it aside. Wring out those pants; put them aside. Now we'll hang the clothes up. John, Mary, here are some clothespins; take these clothes to the clothesline and hang them up. Hang up the skirts. Hang up the dresses..." and so on.

   [Later]: "OK, everything is dry. Julia, Marv, take down the clothes. Marv, fold these pants. Julia, fold the dresses. Mary, fold the shirts [etc]."

Note: In an informal program like the master-apprentice program, instead of pretending to wash clothes, the teacher and learner can really wash clothes together.

(3) Vocabulary race (props: large sheet of paper on wall with pictures of different articles of clothing on it): Divide
children into two lines by some criterion, for instance, people born from January to June versus those born from July to December; the front of the line is 15 feet or so from the picture. When the teacher calls out the name of an item of clothing, the front two children race to the picture and try to touch their finger to the correct one; the first one to touch it wins a point for his or her team. Then they go to the back of the line. This is a fast game that gets children's heart rate up, which is good for overcoming afternoon sleepiness. This exercise is for comprehension practice.

(4) Memory: In this old game, a bunch of cards are lying spread out face down on the table, and players take turns turning up two cards. If the cards are the same, they get to keep the pair. This can be adapted to the learning of nouns: for example, you could make pairs of cards with the names of items of clothing and other vocabulary the students have been learning. An added task would be that students get to keep the pair only if they can name the item depicted.

(5) Paper dolls (props: sets of paper dolls): This is good to do with kids, but boys will not like it unless they can play with paper dolls of G.I. Joe or some other action figure. In the right atmosphere, adults will enjoy this too. Hand out paper dolls and scissors—probably one set of paper dolls and two pairs of scissors to each pair of people in the class (if you have a big class and little money for paper dolls, the groups can be larger). Tell everyone to "cut out a dress," or "cut out a skirt," or "cut out pants," and so on. Have people dress their paper doll and then tell you what it is wearing. While people are cutting things out, go around the room engaging the students in simple conversation about the clothes, saying, for example, "Show me a skirt," testing comprehension, or "What is this?" (pointing to a piece of paper doll clothing), testing production. This is mostly comprehension practice but also can involve some production, depending on what questions the teacher asks.

(6) Clothing musical chairs (props: chairs in a circle with students sitting on them. There needs to be one fewer chair than there are people): This game allows students to actually speak, whereas most of the other games above test their comprehension rather than production. Whoever is "it" (probably the teacher will be the first "it") stands in the middle and has to say in the target language some item of clothing and perhaps its color, like this: "Everyone wearing white socks get up!" (For beginning students it could be something simpler, like "White socks!") So everyone wearing white socks has to get up and find another chair (they are not allowed to sit back down in the chair they just vacated). Meanwhile, the person who is "it" also tries to grab one of the chairs, so most likely another person will end up being "it." Then that person says, for example, "Everyone wearing a skirt get up!" and so on.

(7) Have students mill about and ask each other "What are you wearing?" This gives production practice.

*Grammar note:* A given language will have different kinds of grammar that will show up in a lesson like this. In some languages, nouns will take different forms depending on whether it is the subject or the object. So in "Put on the dress," the word for "dress" in the target language may, for example, have a suffix. Thus the activities above will teach people how to use words with these suffixes on them. Other languages may have other things going on. In Havasupai, for example, you cannot just say "I'm wearing [pants, a dress, shoes, etc.]". There is no word for "wear." You must instead turn the word for "pants" or "dress" or "shoes" into a verb. For example, *mahiho* is "shoes," but "I'm wearing shoes" is *taj mahiho* 'wi, literally "I'm shoe-ing." So for people learning Havasupai, the grammar implicit in the lesson would be that of turning nouns into verbs.

Depending on the length of time a class meets, the illustrated lesson on clothing terms may just be one out of two or three topics that would be focused on during class time.

Inexperienced teachers having to make up their own curriculum often focus too much on the teaching of nouns, when the core of real language tends to be in the verbs. No one can utter a sentence without a verb in it. There are many ways to make sure that your teaching involves verbs.

(1) If you do have a noun-based lesson (such as clothing), make sure that your practice and activities involve a lot of full sentences, such as actions that can be done to clothes (putting them on, taking them off, washing them, hanging them up, folding them, etc.).

(2) Think about verb-based lessons, such as various actions people can do.

(3) Situationally based lessons involving conversational development will always be verb-focused in large part.

(4) Some teachers base a whole lesson or series of lessons around a story. The teacher can tell the story using pictures or props (e.g., puppets) to make the story understood. Students can do projects around the story such as turning it into a play, which they later perform. Stories give students good exposure to long stretches of connected speech that contain lots of verbs.

The above are just a few ideas for classroom activities and lesson development. Other ideas can be found in many essays in this book. Read up on methodology and use your imagination. Make sure your lessons are active, interactive, entertaining, and rich in the target language. English should be barred from the classroom.

**When the Teacher Is Not Fluent**

Unfortunately, for endangered languages of small speech communities, especially those that only have a few speakers (and those few elderly), the people who end up teaching in
the classroom are usually not fluent speakers. Of course, every effort should be made to have fluent speakers as teachers, but we have seen many instances where this is not possible. Rich immersion-style teaching cannot be done if the teacher is not fluent.

If there are speakers of the language who for one reason or another cannot be the teachers, a number of strategies can be used to enrich the learning situation.

(1) Have a fluent speaker as a teacher's aide or visitor, and plan with that speaker various ways in which they can actively participate, using the full richness of their language. For example, the speaker and teacher could prepare a storytelling lesson, with the teacher making pictures or props to go with the story. Or the speaker might teach songs to the children (if it is culturally appropriate to do so) or do sessions based on traditional crafts. The teacher may have to work with the speaker first to train him or her in ways to be understood without reverting to English.

(2) Hire a speaker as a consultant to the teacher to help the teacher prepare lessons. A nonfluent teacher will never be able to teach the language as effectively as a fluent one (assuming the fluent speaker knows the principles of teaching), but by working closely with a fluent speaker, there can still be fresh materials for each class session, and the teacher can remain a step ahead of the students.

(3) The teacher is honor bound to increase his or her fluency level as much as possible. Thus the teacher must expect to spend a great deal of time outside the classroom learning the language. If there are no formal classes anywhere, the teacher must do this through any available materials and working closely with native speakers. A learning program like the master-apprentice program (Chapter 17) is one way an adult can learn the target language from a native speaker. The teacher might learn from the speaker during school terms between classes, and/or he or she could do intensive summer sessions with the speaker.

Chapter 15 is a lovely discussion of excellent teaching methodology through immersion principles, taught by teachers who when they started out were not fluent in the Karuk language. They have done all the suggestions above, have created an excellent language teaching program, and in the process have continually become more and more proficient in Karuk.

When Immersion Is Impossible

Immersion of any sort may simply be impossible for the teacher, if he or she does not know the language well and it is difficult or impossible to get the assistance of a fluent speaker. In that case, what the students learn will have to be more limited. It is common when the teacher is not fluent to fall back on teaching vocabulary items alone, so that students learn to name things but not to put those names into sentences. We strongly recommend that even without immersion, communicative practice be a strong component of the language teaching sessions if at all possible. The teacher can learn and then teach pattern commands fitting some of the activities shown above for the lessons on clothing, for example, “Give me the X,” “Pick up the X,” and “Put down the X.” Also, the teacher can learn and teach questions relevant to a particular vocabulary set, such as “What is this?” or “What are you wearing today?” Knowing just a few commands and questions gives the interactive basis needed for interesting exercises and practice routines for the class, and once students learn how to utter these commands and questions themselves, they have the potential to use the language in communicative situations.

Even if nonfluent teachers decide they must focus on vocabulary for most of the class time, they might be able to develop some specific communicative goals for themselves and their class. Here are just a few out of hundreds of possibilities:

(1) Greetings could be done in the target language. Many languages have no words for “hello” or “goodbye,” but every language has greetings of some sort, such as telling people it is good to see them again, announcing that you are leaving now, and so on.

(2) It is very empowering for a student to learn how to introduce himself appropriately in his language. In Navajo, for example, students would learn how to introduce themselves according to their ancestral clan affiliations. In some cases, one may just learn how to say in the target language, “My name is X, and I come from Y.”

(3) A ritual that could be done in every class would be to ask someone what the weather is like today. There might be just a few weather terms that are taught to the class—sunny, raining, foggy, cloudy, windy, hot, cold—and each day a different student could be asked to say which of those terms applies to the weather today.

(4) Some kind of communicative question-answer sequence could be developed for every lesson on vocabulary. For example, I have already suggested “What are you wearing?” as a good question to ask students so that they can practice saying clothing terms. If you can, teach the students to answer in sentence form in the target language—for example, “I'm wearing pants and a shirt.” If you are doing colors, each student could be asked to name the colors he or she is wearing. Other kinds of questions would be “Who is wearing blue?” or “Do you have blue on?”

CONCLUSION

Immersion methods of teaching have been most successful in teaching endangered languages. However, one of the
problems with conversationally based immersion methods is sometimes that although conversational proficiency is developed, grammatical correctness lags behind. One of the major differences between the teaching of endangered languages and foreign-language teaching is that the students learning an endangered language are probably going to one day be the only speakers of that language. Thus any kind of error in grammar, pronunciation, communicative practices, and so on will actually become part of that language in the future. There is therefore a more solemn responsibility for the teachers to teach, and the learners to learn, the language as completely, as competently, and as correctly as is humanly possible. This is not said to discourage anyone from doing what they can even if they know it is not perfect. Rather, it is important not to be complacent about what is being taught. Evaluate frequently, add new components to the program whenever possible, and realize that every success is a step, and never the last step.

References


