



6-2014

Review of Leanne Hinton, *Bringing Our Languages Home: Language Revitalization for Families*

Nancy H. Hornberger

University of Pennsylvania, nancyh@gse.upenn.edu

Follow this and additional works at: http://repository.upenn.edu/gse_pubs

 Part of the [Education Commons](#)

Recommended Citation

Hornberger, N. H. (2014). Review of Leanne Hinton, *Bringing Our Languages Home: Language Revitalization for Families*. *Language*, 90 (2), 540-543. <http://dx.doi.org/10.1353/lan.2014.0033>

This paper is posted at ScholarlyCommons. http://repository.upenn.edu/gse_pubs/406
For more information, please contact repository@pobox.upenn.edu.

Review of Leanne Hinton, *Bringing Our Languages Home: Language Revitalization for Families*

Abstract

How does one concretely go about reclaiming a heritage language with no living speakers? or with only a few members of an elder generation of native speakers? How does one do this within a family? an extended family? a school? a community? The authors in this book have tackled these questions in their own lives and share with us their wisdom, strategies, achievements, challenges, and hopes from the vantage point of twenty and more years of experience in these endeavors.

Disciplines

Education

Department of Cherokee and Indigenous Studies
 Northeastern State University
 Tahlequah, OK
 [montgomb@nsuok.edu]

Bringing our languages home: Language revitalization for families. Ed. by LEANNE HINTON. Berkeley, CA: Heyday Books, 2013. Pp. xx, 264. ISBN 9781597142007. \$20.

Reviewed by NANCY H. HORNBERGER, *University of Pennsylvania*

How does one concretely go about reclaiming a heritage language with no living speakers? or with only a few members of an elder generation of native speakers? How does one do this within a family? an extended family? a school? a community? The authors in this book have tackled these questions in their own lives and share with us their wisdom, strategies, achievements, challenges, and hopes from the vantage point of twenty and more years of experience in these endeavors.

The book, beautifully edited by Leanne Hinton, takes us through language reclamation projects that range from individual families working from scratch to recreate a sleeping language within their own home—the Baldwin family reclaiming Myaamia and Jessie Little Doe Baird and her family reclaiming Wampanoag—to families working with the last generation of native-speaker elders—the Albers family remembering Karuk elder Auntie Violet, and Richard Grounds and his daughter Renée recounting purposeful strategies their family adopted to learn Yuchi. Other families benefited from a context of community support in reclaiming Mohawk (the Peters), Māori (O’Regan), Hawaiian (Wilson and Kamanā), Anishinaabe (Noori), and Irish (Mac Póilin). Or they found support in structured family language-learning programs—the Hernandez family learning Kawaiisu (as told by Grant and Turner) and the Taic/CNSA organization reviving Scottish-Gaelic (Macleoid). There are also two cases of efforts by parents to teach their child a language far from the speech community—the Bielenberg Pittaka family attempting to raise their son as a fluent speaker of a fading Greek dialect, Kypriaka, and Ken Hale teaching his twin sons Ezra and Caleb to speak Warlpiri, a central Australian aboriginal language.

It is now more than twenty years since that same Ken Hale and colleagues (1992) drew linguists’ attention in the pages of this journal to the ‘worldwide erosion of the languages spoken by indigenous and minority populations’, as Hinton puts it in her introduction (xiii). This book is about ‘another pattern emerging ... of individuals and communities striving to strengthen or regain aspects of their heritage cultures ... a movement away from ... cultural annihilation’ (xiii). Most of the languages included here are Native North American languages, complemented by cases from Māori and Hawaiian, Irish and Scottish Gaelic, Kypriaka and Warlpiri.

Among the memorable lessons in the BALDWIN family’s account of their multidecade experience recreating Myaamia in their home are teaching/learning how the language thinks, staying in the language, and moving ‘away from language being the target to language just being part of life in the home’ (13); and among the favorite practices remembered are the penny jar from which one earned a penny for using the language and had a penny taken away for forgetting to. In the second chapter of Part I (‘Starting from zero’), JESSIE LITTLE DOE BAIRD speaks of accepting responsibility for making a place for her language to be welcomed back into her community, giving it to her children, and patiently communicating with nonspeakers. She began learning her language by teaching herself, studying Algonquian linguistics to access documentation from the seventeenth to eighteenth centuries, and she went on to teach others, continue her research, and write a layperson’s grammar. Today the Wampanoag Language Reclamation Project has embarked on a master-apprentice fluency program with future plans for children’s television programming, an after-school theatre program, and an immersion school.

In Part 2 ('Learning from the elders'), PHIL and ELAINA (SUPAHAN) ALBERS tell a poignant story of the inspiration and bountiful Karuk knowledge Elaina's Auntie Violet passed on to them and their first child, but also of the pain of her unexpected death in a house fire, and the fear of losing in her their strongest language tool and their 'confidence in Karuk language survival' (36), a pain and fear surmounted only after a time by the joy of seeing their own young children thriving in the language. RICHARD GROUNDS and his daughter RENÉE dialogue about the language reclamation strategies their family used. These included giving the children face-to-face Yuchi language sessions by regularly visiting the few fluent elders still living in the 1990s, reinforcing the language at home by replacing commonly repeated English phrases with Yuchi—phrases that once learned in Yuchi would never again be said in English (45), and occasionally taking the children out of public school for homeschooling to focus on the language and to work against the intrinsic bias of a colonial historical perspective 'dismissive of Indigenous knowledge, history, religious rights and governance systems' (49).

The power of school and community contexts to impede and constrain, but also to shape and sustain, Indigenous language reclamation projects comes through clearly in the five chapters of Part 3, 'Families and communities working together'. As part of the 'use it or lose it' generation (64) of Kanien'kéha (Mohawk) speakers, MARGARET and THEODORE PETERS were inclined toward speaking English with their children in the belief that their own language would hurt them academically, but this trajectory was reversed when Margaret was recruited to teach Mohawk at the Ahkwesáhsne Freedom School. She ended up teaching there for fifteen years, going back to school to learn to read, write, and teach the language, and with Theodore ultimately raised their children—and now grandchildren—to speak Kanien'kéha.

HANA O'REGAN, of Kāi Tahu Māori ancestry and a lifelong activist for Māori language revitalization, speaks eloquently of 'the anxiety, the pessimism, the fear, and the pain of language loss' (100) that have impelled her vigilance in raising her two young children as Māori speakers, even to the point of 'spying on' their language use when she is not present, which she confesses to with some chagrin. She is all too aware from her family history of language loss and her lifetime of effort learning and teaching Māori that 'one generation's choice to not speak, promote, and transmit the language is a death sentence for that language' (99). Despite her self-critical stance, one can only be in awe of the vision, determination, and creativity that have enabled her to raise two children who are functionally bilingual, speak only Māori to her, and have a strong sense of Māori cultural and personal identity.

Educational institutions played a central role in the lives and Hawaiian language revitalization work of WILLIAM WILSON and KAUAO KAMANĀ, who met through Hawaiian language classes at the University of Hawai'i at Mānoa, went on to graduate studies in linguistics, and then developed the Hawaiian Studies major at the University of Hawai'i at Hilo. They later cofounded and led the Hawaiian immersion school movement. All of this, importantly for them, is the *hale* 'house' in which they raised their son and daughter as fluent Hawaiian speakers—one now the owner of a construction business specializing in building with a Native Hawaiian perspective and the other the director of cultural affairs for the State of Hawai'i Tourism Authority.

In a chapter packed with innovative ideas, MARGARET NOORI draws from her experiences as mother of Fionna and Shannon and full-time college teacher of Anishinaabemowin. She explores ways to extend the definition of family—by bringing everyone in the family circle into the language reclamation project and conversely finding the language in family beyond one's own four walls—and ways to focus on culturally relevant subjects by asking future speakers what terms and ideas they need to learn. She also suggests incorporating complex forms of the language into ceremonies being revived under the American Indian Religious Freedom Act of 1978, finding help in external, nonnative communities, and using new technological tools including social networking 'to understand the language and its speakers more fully, to create and share new data, and to continue moving forward' (134).

AODÁN MAC PÓILIN tells the remarkable story—from his vantage point as insider and father/grandfather of Irish speakers raised there—of the multidecade emergence and development of Belfast's Shaw's Road Gaeltacht. A group of families came together in the 1960s to raise their

children with Irish as their first language in the midst of an urban setting that had been English-speaking for centuries—a conscious act of language revival (147). Their greatest challenge was to create ‘a linguistic environment in which the children spoke Irish as a matter of course’ (152), a challenge tackled by organized opportunities for the children to play together and creation of an Irish-medium school in which Aodán and his wife were active—a move that ultimately had them facing the dilemma of choosing between language survival and language revival, between the inwardly focused goal of building an active language community and the outwardly focused goal of increasing the number of speakers, which implied opening the school to English-speaking students. This is a tension Mac Póilán sees as bedeviling Irish-medium education in general.

Part 4, ‘Variations on a theme’, invites us into two families who experienced the challenges and delights of teaching their child a language while far removed from the heritage speech community. BRIAN BIELENBERG and AIGLI PITTAKA were raising their son Aliosha in the US to speak Kypriaka, Aigli’s endangered heritage dialect of Greek spoken in Cyprus. Brian had a basic fluency, but they were increasingly concerned that ‘English was becoming a comfort zone’ (175) in their home. When Aliosha was four, they decided to move to Cyprus, though it meant declining an attractive job offer in California, a decision that Aliosha’s now thriving bilingualism and biculturalism confirm for them as the right one. EZRA HALE reminisces that though he and his brother never set foot in Australia with their dad, they grew up understanding ‘his favorite language’ Warlpiri ‘through his voice alone’ (184), a shared communicative practice that became a lifelong bond for them.

It is in Part 5 (‘Family language-learning programs’) and Hinton’s concluding chapter that a program for family language reclamation planning becomes increasingly concretized in a how-to guide for parents to follow the inspiring road mapped out by the ‘language pioneers’ (225) in the preceding chapters. In Ch. 12, LAURA GRANT and JULIE TURNER introduce us to the Hernandez extended family of thirteen, including Kawaiisu native speaker Betty, and the Language at Home team working with them, including Julie and her father Luther (Betty’s brother)—an experienced mentor-apprentice team, and Native Language advocacy trainers Laura and Leanne. The family’s individually tailored ‘Language revitalization in the home’ program includes ten general guidelines, yearly milestones, and smaller milestones such as ‘Use the survival phrases “What am I doing?” and “What are you doing?” to elicit information from Betty or another speaker’ (200). We get a glimpse into the step-by-step, incremental, immensely challenging—and rewarding—work for all involved. Ch. 13 continues the theme of family language plans as tools in language reclamation with FINLAY MACLEOID’s overview of Total Immersion Plus methodologies and targeted parent-and-child-centered language courses developed and offered to hundreds of students since 1982 by the Taic/CNSA organization dedicated to saving Scottish Gaelic language and culture.

In the concluding chapter, Hinton draws on examples and experiences from across all of the chapters to address questions that parents face in bringing the heritage language into their home: Who should speak the language and what pattern of use should we adopt? What community supports and materials can we draw on? How can I get started? Hinton directly tackles potential problems arising from the presence of English in the children’s lives and from criticism or lack of support from other heritage speakers, the heritage community, or beyond. In addition, there is the problem of children’s potential rejection of the language, or their use of styles, genres, or registers unfamiliar to the parent. In each case, Hinton’s fund of wisdom and the experience of the pioneers assembled in the book provide honest reflection and encouraging guidance: ‘You must not let the imperfections of your own knowledge of the language keep you from speaking it ... Even if you can never make the language your main language of communication, you and your children can still give this beloved language of yours a place in your home and hearts’ (236). Here is a book that inspires, leads, and guides gently but surely toward that end.

REFERENCE

- HALE, KEN; MICHAEL KRAUSS; LUCILLE J. WATAHOMIGIE; AKIRA Y. YAMAMOTO; COLETTE CRAIG; LAVERNE MASAYESVA JEANNE; and NORA C. ENGLAND. 1992. Endangered languages. *Language* 68.1.1–42.

Graduate School of Education
 University of Pennsylvania
 3700 Walnut Street
 Philadelphia, PA 19104-6216
 [nancyh@upenn.edu]

Singapore English: Structure, variation, and usage. By JAKOB R. E. LEIMGRUBER. (Studies in English language.) Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2013. Pp. xvi, 150. ISBN 9781107027305. \$90 (Hb).

Reviewed by ZHIMING BAO, *National University of Singapore*

Jakob Leimgruber's book is an updated version of his Ph.D. thesis entitled *Modelling variation in Singapore English*, completed in 2009 at Oxford University. The thesis title is a better fit with the content of the book, which is heavy on the traditional sociolinguistic descriptions of Singapore English, but rather light on grammatical structure and even lighter on usage. The book has six chapters and three appendices. Ch. 1, 'Singapore and its Englishes', narrates the history of Singapore since its annexation by the British in 1819 and the ethnic and linguistic composition over nearly 200 years. It also introduces the early views of Singapore English when the vernacular started to attract scholarly attention in the 1970s. These early views are covered in greater detail in Ch. 2. To collect data for his Ph.D. thesis, and the book, L conducted individual or group interviews in Singapore in the early 2000s, amounting to some sixteen hours of recordings. The interviews were carefully designed with due consideration to the usual sociolinguistic factors, such as register and formality. Though not large, the database of the recorded materials provides carefully calibrated data that supplement the data from published sources.

It is well known to students of contact languages that New Englishes exhibit enormous variation in terms of grammatical structure and user proficiency. Singapore English is no exception. How to characterize this variation has occupied the attention of linguists for the past half century, as L demonstrates in Ch. 2, 'Variation in Singapore English: Old and new models'. Of the models that have been proposed in the literature on Singapore English, L mentions four at some length, two 'old' and two 'new'. While the old models see the variability of Singapore English as a post-creole continuum or diglossia, the two new models approach the vernacular from the perspectives of culture and indexical field, respectively, and treat the inherited and locally derived morphosyntactic features as sociolinguistic variables that reveal the speaker's cultural orientation or social stances. In crucial respects, the four models introduced in the chapter are heavily influenced by the prevailing sociolinguistic theory—from postcreole continuum (DeCamp 1971) to diglossia (Ferguson 1959) to indexical field (Eckert 2008). But the indexical interpretation of the lexical or structural variables of Singapore English must be handled with care. Consider the conversational fragment shown in 1 (56).

- (1) We can eat *hor fun* there, I heard that the *hor fun* \emptyset quite famous. [to microphone] er
hor fun means rice noodles.

This fragment contains the locally derived word *hor fun*, a missing copula, and third-person verb agreement. L explains that the missing copula indexes the local stance, caused probably by the presence of *hor fun*; but the use of verb agreement, which represents the global stance, is an attempt by the speaker to break through the local stance for the benefit of outsiders. This explanation, though plausible, is not compelling. It requires a leap of faith to jump from the observed morphosyntactic features to the fine-tuned social meanings, or stances, that L attributes to them. Copula deletion, for example, is optional in Singapore English; that much can be established through even casual observation. The optionality, however, is not necessarily correlated with specific speaker intentions.