# Discussing Effects of Semantic Inquiry in O'odham Language Revitalization Contexts

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Background Language Information

- 'O'odham Language
  - Uto-Aztecan (Tepiman sub-branch)
  - Southern AZ/Northern Sonora
  - Ak-Chin Comm (≈1.1k enrolled members)
    - Language competence correlated with age demographics *(speakers tend to be above 40-50y.o.; 20 and under are English L1 monolingual)*
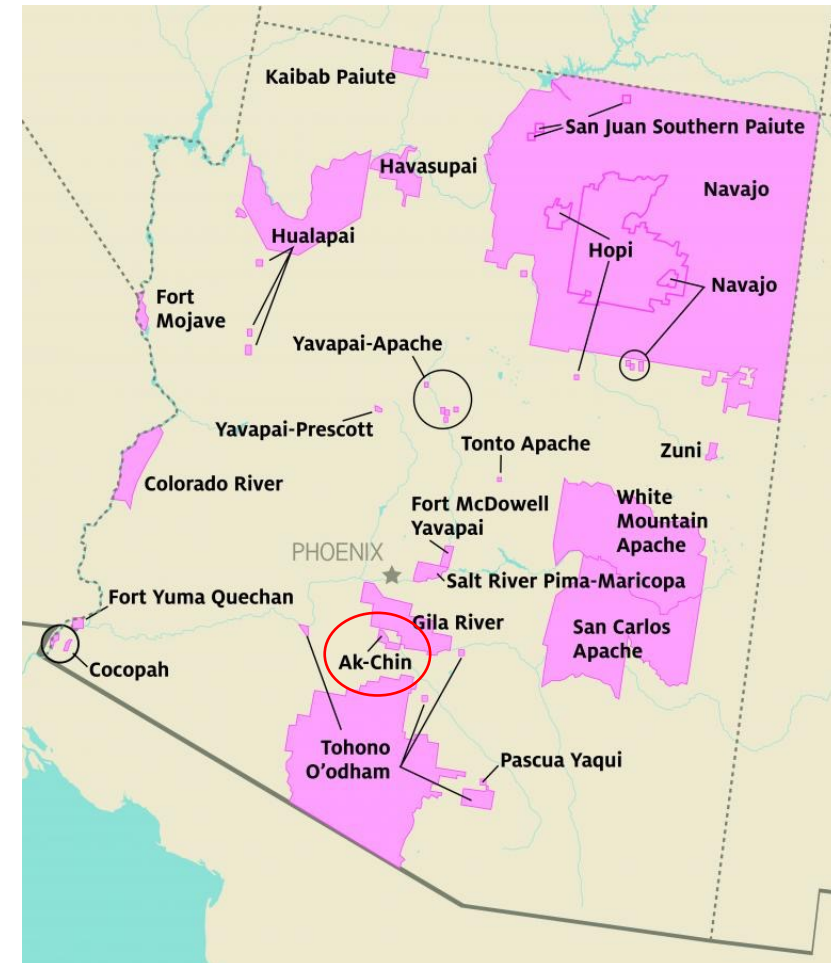
Semantic Theory in Language Revitalization Contexts

- Linguistic research on endangered languages presents a unique opportunity and responsibility to ethically perform such work.
  - Extending linguistics to community domain.

- Research should have as a goal community level deliverables.
  - Research guided by community interest.

- Symbiotic relationship between linguist & community is shaped by community specific linguistic situation
  - What is the state of the language? What contribution does research make to communities?

Case Study: Acquistion of O'odham determiner

- Learners in higher education engaged in implicit study of O'odham grammar (majority English L1 students)

- O'odham determiner use doesn't parallel exactly English determiner use
  - Learners grapple with meaning and use
  - Hi:nk 'o g gogs. (The dog is barking. / A dog barks.)

- Presentation of determiners focused on syntactic placement without overt discussion of semantic value
  - Common ungrammatical pitfalls:
    - Determiner stranding: Hi:nk 'o *(g) gogs → #Gogs 'o (*g) hi:nk. (The dog is barking.)
    - Use with demonstratives: #Hegi (*g) gogs 'o hi:nk. (That dog is barking.)
    - Use in syntactically prohibited ways: (*G) gogs 'o hi:nk. (The dog is barking.)

Case Study: Acquistion of O'odham determiner

- Commonly made mistakes suggest a lack of deeper understanding of the determiner among students

- Linguistic research can elucidate the question of "why" through semantic analysis (i.e., *What is a determiner and what does it do?)*

- Theoretically based explorations of semantics of determiner provides a more anchored approach beyond subtractive uses and rote memorization to aid in accurate acquisition.

From Theory to Revitalization

- This question depends on the level of awareness and interaction in the revitalization context:
  - Abstract – creation of speakers in endangered contexts through implicit study
    - Often instantiated in popular immersive approaches with little reliance on overt explanations of grammar
    - Paradigms emerge in analyses, e.g., we can define the types of language skills related to the grammatical phenomena studied to present in implicit acquisition contexts
  - Descriptive – creation of speakers in endangered contexts through explicit study
    - Study of heritage language in more "formal" settings (classroom-based lessons using written materials, often learning "through" another language)
    - Requires restructuring explanatory approaches in non-linguistic spaces, i.e., re-considering the importance of acquiring linguistic jargon in language acquisition.

Challenges/Rewards Working on Semantics of Indigenous Languages

- Rewards:
  - Increased documentation
  - Accessible language materials

- Challenges
  - Combatting "expert rhetoric" within community spaces
    - What gets studied & who gets included? (In what ways does this alter internal value of the language?)
    - How does linguist positionality affect community-level perceptions?
    - How do research priorities affect/respond to community needs?
  - Exploring holistic approaches to revitalization beyond research interests