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# Indigenous Language Revival: The Wôpanâak Language Reclamation Project as a Case Study in Indigenous Identity, Representation, and Place-based Knowledge

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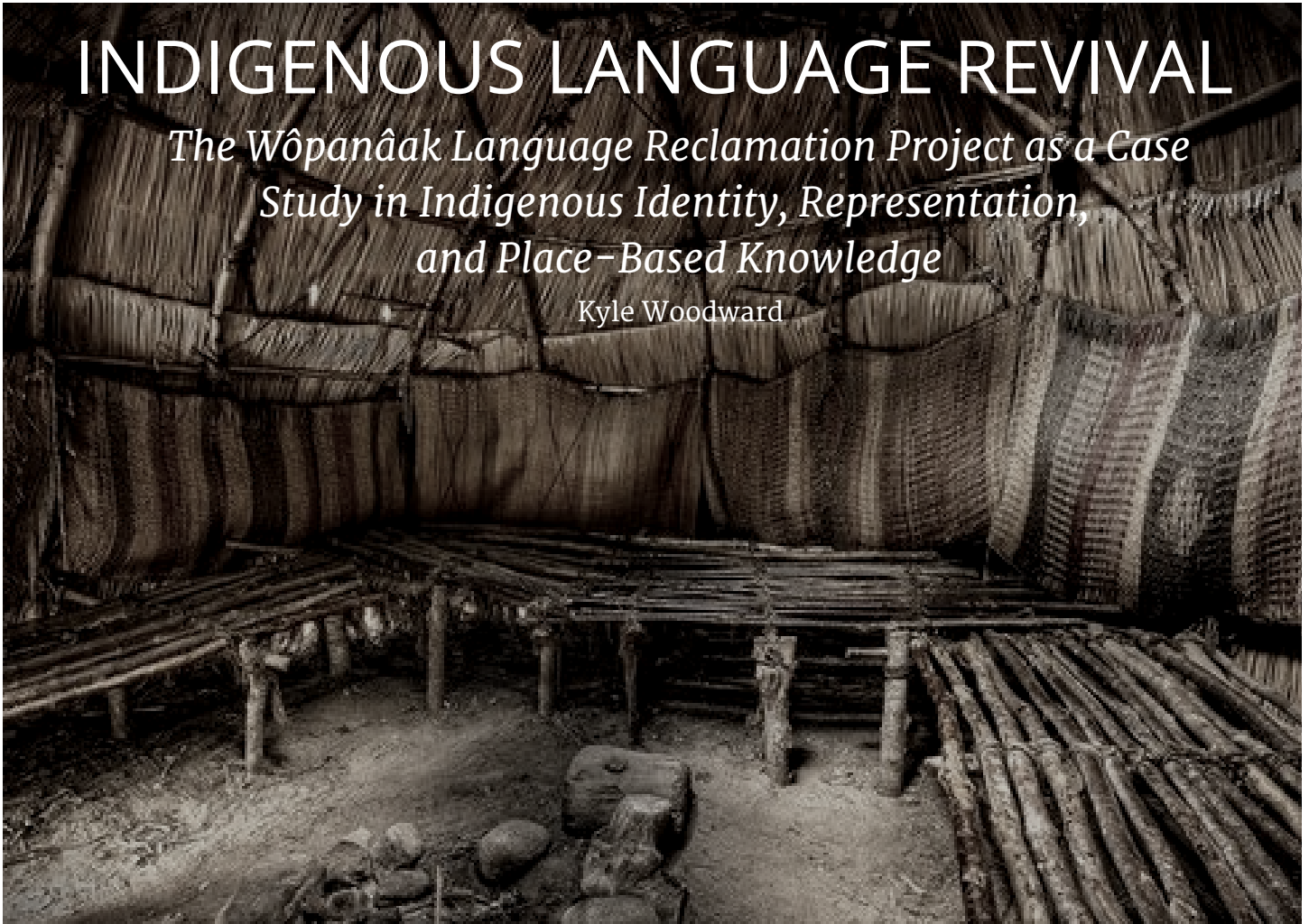
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# INDIGENOUS LANGUAGE REVIVAL

## *The Wôpanâak Language Reclamation Project as a Case Study in Indigenous Identity, Representation, and Place-Based Knowledge*

Kyle Woodward



## ABSTRACT

Indigenous societies face issues related to cultural preservation, representation, and declining autonomy in resource and land management. For most indigenous groups, native languages serve as the medium through which culturally unique identities are expressed, and allow a highly contextualized environmental knowledge base to be passed down intergenerationally. Native language preservation therefore facilitates the overall survivability of an indigenous group's culture, traditions, and collective knowledge. Unfortunately, many indigenous languages today are in danger of extinction or have already been lost. The Wôpanâak Language Reclamation Project serves as a prominent example of native language revival in the United States. Wampanoag progress in preserving indigenous knowledge and identity has important implications for other native language revivals in the future as we hope to further understand the role that traditional language plays for indigenous societies in the 21st century.

Linguistic diversity is declining at an alarming rate around the world. Most linguists agree that over 5,000 languages are spoken today; however, even the more optimistic of these experts expect this number to be cut in half by the end of this century (Woodbury, n.d.). According to UNESCO linguists, a language becomes extinct once it is no longer the first language learned by infants, and the last speaker who learned the language in this way has died (UNESCO, 2017a). Indigenous languages represent a sizable proportion of those languages in danger of extinction as well as ones that have already gone extinct.

Recent studies estimate that well over 300 indigenous languages were spoken in the United States and Canada before European contact (McCarty, 2008); however, in the last five centuries, 115 languages have disappeared in the United States alone (UNESCO, 2017a). A smaller number of currently unspoken languages are not classified as extinct; rather, they are termed “sleeping” languages. This means that the language is not spoken, but it still exists in written documentation and is claimed by a particular heritage community (UNESCO, 2017b).

*Scholars have brought to light the alarming extinction rates of indigenous languages, as well as the intrinsic value these languages hold for their speakers and the rest of the world.*

A more concerted effort has been made by linguists and geographers to preserve indigenous languages recently. Increased awareness has been a major part of this change; many scholars have brought to light the alarming extinction rates of indigenous languages, as well as the intrinsic value these languages hold for their speakers and the rest of the world (Basso, 1996; Davis, 2001; Harrison, 2007).

Revitalizing a language through conscious intention is possible, though each language revival project contains unique challenges. Despite progress over the last several decades, few sleeping or extinct indigenous languages have been brought back to life. The Wōpanāak Language Reclamation Project (WLRP), created in 1993, stands as a remarkable model for other indigenous groups in the future. Under the direction of its founder, Jessie “Little Doe” Baird, the four major tribes of the Wampanoag Nation of New England seek to regain fluency in their native language that has been silent for over 150 years (Weston & Sorenson, 2011).

This paper seeks to address some of the implications that the WLRP may have for important indigenous issues. In particular, indigenous representation and identity, as well as the appropriation of place-based knowledge through a shared native language, are common defining aspects by which indigenous groups demonstrate their uniqueness. Both of these aspects of “indigenous” serve an important role to the Wampanoag Nation, and through the revival of their language, they will likely show greater strength in such areas.

## IDENTITY AND REPRESENTATION

The United Nations chooses not to define the term “indigenous”; rather, it relies on a system of self-identification in which individuals or groups can credibly identify themselves as indigenous if they match a list of criteria. This list includes characteristics such as “distinct language, culture, and beliefs”; “historical continuity with pre-colonial and/or pre-settler societies”; a “strong link to territories and surrounding natural resources”; and a “resolve to maintain and reproduce their ancestral environments and systems as distinct peoples and communities” (United Nations, n.d.).

Any mental or physical act that contributes toward one’s own indigenous identity or the indigenous identity of a certain cultural group could be defined as “indigenous representation” within this context. Indigenous representation is a continuous battle for the world’s indigenous, as non-indigenous governments and economic markets hold significant influence over what will and will not pass as genuine indigeneity. The process Native Americans must go through to gain federal recognition in the United States is one such example (Mitchell, 2015).

The struggle for indigenous people to credibly identify and authentically represent themselves as “indigenous” is central to the fight for indigenous sovereignty and economic equality. There are many factors contributing to matters of indigenous identity loss. Assimilation pressures, both economic and cultural, have contributed to a progression of indigenous identity loss and inaccurate representations of indigeneity since colonialism. Native languages play a crucial role in forming the cultural foundation by which indigenous people hope to represent themselves and maintain their unique identities (Basso, 1996; Davis, 2001; Kipuri, 2009; Wongbusarakum, 2009).

The Urak Lawoi people of the Adang Archipelago off the coast of Thailand are an excellent example of indigenous identity being challenged through loss of native language in the face of nationalism and globalization. The Urak Lawoi’s language belongs to the Malayo-Polynesian language family and exists only in spoken form. The highly contextualized

environmental knowledge of their area exists primarily within the Urak Lawoi language. Therefore, in order to preserve this knowledge, the younger generation must be taught to use their native language (Wongbusarakum, 2009). The government of Thailand has instituted required education laws that place Urak Lawoi children in schools where they learn the Thai language, and does not allow many opportunities for learning Urak Lawoi cultural traditions, such as fishing, boat making, and subsistence food gathering (Wongbusarakum, 2009).

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For many Urak Lawoi youth, their schooling has elicited a strong curiosity for the outside world, replacing motivation to learn Urak Lawoi culture. In recent years, large portions of the younger generation have decided that traditional Urak Lawoi life skills do not translate to their present situation. Language, too, is neglected as young men and women enter jobs in commercial fishing, tourism, and hospitality, where English and Thai are most useful (Wongbusarakum, 2009). Because their language has never been written down, forms of Urak Lawoi cultural representation will be lost once the pressures of cultural assimilation succeed in allowing the last native speaker to die.

During the colonial period, external pressures on indigenous identity and representation existed largely in direct forms, such as government policies (Bragdon, 2009; Conliff, 1998). A more modern, indirect type of external pressure exists today in the form of tourism. Cultural tourism has been cited as a major influential institution, as tourists and tourism markets forcibly modify indigenous representations according to expectations and pre-existing cultural constructs (Martinez, 2012). Tourism expectations are still a controlling factor for many indigenous groups, influencing them to modify or adapt their forms of identity in ways that better suit outsider expectations and markets (Handsman, 2008; Martinez, 2012).

As explained by Handsman (2008), the well-established tourism industry in Plymouth, Massachusetts, has historically focused on the pilgrim perspective. Guidebooks and information presented on tours do little justice to Wampanoag history and culture, presenting them simply as

the Indians that greeted the colonial Pilgrims and helped them through the Plymouth colony's infancy. Handsman proposes that a more accurate and informational tour of Plymouth and its surrounding areas should incorporate visits to significant sites of Wampanoag cultural history, where current members of the Wampanoag nation would tell the story of their people in their own voices.

## INDIGENOUS PLACE-BASED KNOWLEDGE

A deep understanding of one's environment has been a consistently cited element defining all indigenous societies (Basso, 1996; Harrison, 2007; Kingston, 2009; Wongbusarakum, 2009). The native Alaskan inhabitants of King Island have names for over 80 different rock formations, and the Siona of the Putumayo in the Amazon Basin have 18 distinct classifications of one species of plant (Davis, 2001; Kingston, 2009). These are only two examples in a large list of instances where indigenous people attain and preserve place-based knowledge in their environments. Language holds indigenous place-based knowledge because it allows specific information to be learned, communicated, and applied.

According to Harrison (2007), the capacity "to describe, divide, and manage the local environment and its resources" is made possible through language. Although every language includes such descriptions, indigenous languages are distinct in that their unique grammar structures have evolved over millennia to be most useful in a specific geographic location. Prefixes, suffixes, adjectives, and adverbs become more efficient in their capacity to describe the speakers' surrounding environment and the ways in which they interact with it. For the Bantawa people of Nepal, names of people, places, and things are slightly modified depending on their elevation with respect to the speaker (Harrison, 2007). Similarly, the Tuva people of Southern Siberia take into account noises, textures, and the physical appearance of landscape features to create highly descriptive names for specific places and environmental phenomena (Harrison, 2007). Indigenous languages reflect the intimate familiarity with the landscape and provide a medium through which knowledge of places and their environment are transferred from person to person.

One particularly profound characteristic of indigenous language is its utility in creating highly descriptive names for places of significance. A study done by Kingston (2009) regarding place-name densities on King Island, Alaska, demonstrated that a large determinant of Inupiat people's success on the island was their ability to record and tell one another about areas to collect food and natural resources as well as places that should be avoided. Every place was given a name that described in detail what could be found



there, what it looked like, and the dangers associated with it. After many generations of living on King Island, the Inupiat people had compiled an encyclopedic knowledge of their surroundings. By naming almost everything, they were able to thrive in a harsh, unforgiving environment (Kingston, 2009).

Using Western Apache ethnography, Basso (1996) draws striking connections between language and its application for place-based knowledge. Moral stories of their ancestors and events of historical significance, are imbued into the surrounding landscape of Cibecue, Arizona. Each place had been given a particular name long ago. As Basso learned quickly, pronouncing these names correctly is crucial today, because quoting one's ancestors is not to be taken lightly. "Stalking with stories," Basso explains, is a method of communication using mutually recognizable place names which Western Apache community members can express their opinions and guide one another to make moral and socially acceptable decisions. These people rely heavily on their native language as a tool to conduct everyday social transactions. Therefore, places that hold meaning for the Western Apache are only significant when spoken of in their own language (Basso, 1996). Language fluency and use is on the decline among the Western Apache people, like many other indigenous groups around the world. Without their language, places and their names lose their meanings, and the moral infrastructure upon which the Western Apache community is built could crumble (Basso, 1996).

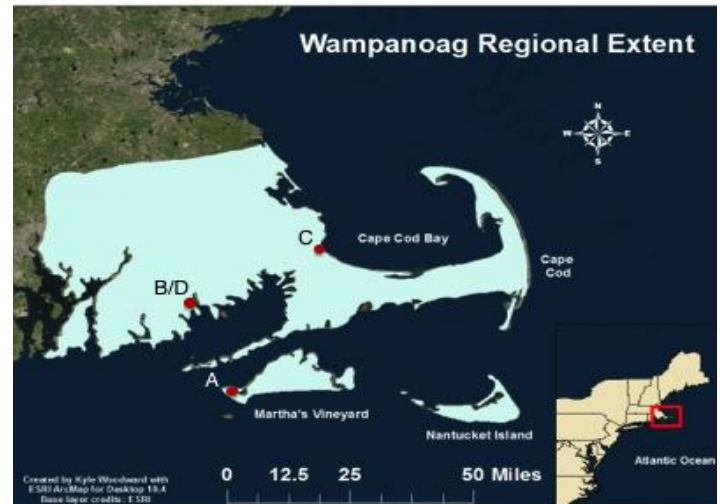
In 1997, Elizabeth Little conducted a place-name analysis for 86 documented Wampanoag place names on Nantucket Island, Massachusetts. At the time, the WLRP was in its early stages, and even its founder, Baird, had not achieved Wōpanâak language proficiency. By using what was known at the time of Wampanoag linguistic structure and meanings of root words, Little compiled a list of Nantucket place names and their variations over time, along with their possible meanings. Little does well in analyzing place names as products of the Nantucket Indians' familiarity with, and their desire to describe, the Nantucket landscape. At present, a review of this study by newly trained Wampanoag linguists could provide meaningful insight and further attest to the parallels between the Wōpanâak language and indigenous place-based knowledge.

## TRADITIONAL WAMPANOAG LIFEWAY

The Wampanoag Nation inhabited northern Rhode Island and southeastern coastal Massachusetts, including Cape Cod and the islands of Martha's Vineyard and Nantucket (see Figure 1). According to archaeological records, Wampanoag people have continuously inhabited this region since sedentism began as early as 8000 BP. Most recent research

estimates that the pre-contact population was around 15,000 (Conliff, 1998).

The Wampanoag lived in a diverse landscape holding a variety of inland and coastal resources that were available at different times of the year. Gathering resources in the upland forests, such as acorns and timber, played a crucial role for those living more inland (Bernstein, 1993). Shellfish harvesting, particularly quahogs, bay and sea scallops, and ribbed mussels, largely contributed to the diets of the more coastal living peoples for as much as three or four seasons per year (Bernstein, 1993). Fishing was a year-round subsistence activity both inland and on the coast.



**FIGURE 1.** Blue shaded areas indicate the estimated geographic extent of the Wampanoag Nation before colonial contact. Red dots and their corresponding letter keys indicate locations of the current Wampanoag communities that are involved with the WLRP (A: Aquinnah Tribe at Gay Head; B/D: Mashpee Tribe and the Assonet Band; C: Herring Pond Wampanoag Tribe).

Ocean fishing was predominately done in the summer, while the rivers, lakes, and ponds were fished in the fall, winter, and spring. Deer made up as much as 90% of mammal meat eaten throughout the year. Additional meat sources included whales that washed ashore and seals that were actively hunted for their skins as well as meat (Sturtevant & Trigger, 1978). Horticulture was also prevalent throughout the Wampanoag landscape. Early European explorers, such as Samuel de Champlain and John Smith, recorded extensive cultivation of maize, beans, and squash all along the coast of Massachusetts (Handsman, 2008).

Prehistoric settlement patterns in New England were complex and highly variable over time and space (Bernstein, 1993). Given existing archaeological research, therefore, the degree to which Wampanoag people migrated seasonally in the several thousand years before 16th century contact is not well known. Research at specific sites has occasionally indicated where certain seasonal subsistence activities occurred (Bernstein, 1993), but seasonal mobility patterns

for an entire cultural group is much harder to confirm. Archaeological research done along northern Atlantic Coast sites proposes that multiple-season or year-round coastal occupation may have occurred in the final centuries of the prehistoric period (Bernstein, 1990; Gwynne, 1985; Lightfoot & Cerrato, 1988). Scholarship based on European explorers' accounts suggests that seasonal mobility between inland and coastal areas did occur during the 16th and early 17th centuries (Handsman, 2008; Heath, 1963).

## WAMPANOAG CULTURAL DIMENSION

The Wampanoag shared cultural and social similarities with other New England groups. Their language, Wôpanâak, belongs to the Algonquian language family. Many correlating sounds and grammar rules have been found between Wôpanâak and languages spoken in other parts of New England, such as the Narragansett and Pequot languages (Goddard, 1996). Wampanoag society, like other eastern coastal native societies, was organized through a series of connected sachemships. Sachemships were headed by each tribe's *sachem*, responsible for the Nation's diplomacy, internal governance, and warfare; they are considered the leaders of Native American nations (Bragdon, 1996a). Sachems were usually men; however, scholars are not certain that political office was entirely patrilineal. The male nobility, or *ahtaskoag*, acted as advisors under the sachem and were believed to have influence over sachem succession (Bragdon, 1996b). Community members below the ranks of nobility were often referred to as *missinuok*, or "common people." These people did participate in decision-making regarding land transactions and disputes; however, Little argues that this role declined significantly throughout the 17th century (as cited in Bragdon, 1996b, p. 143). European explorers documented a social class resembling that of a servant or slave. This lowly status seemed to be reserved for foreigners, or those not descendant from Wampanoag ancestors (Bragdon, 1996).

## EUROPEAN INFLUENCES: 17TH CENTURY CONTACT

Exposure to European diseases occurred as early as 1612 when European exploration and trade became frequent (Strong Woman & Moondancer, 1998). A major disease epidemic from 1617 to 1619 hit large areas of Wampanoag territory. The people of the interior of Massachusetts and Rhode Island were affected the most, while the Wampanoag tribes living on Cape Cod, Martha's Vineyard, and Nantucket saw significantly fewer casualties (Sturtevant & Trigger, 1978). In 1621, Massasoit and Edward Winslow signed a treaty on behalf of the Wampanoag and the Plymouth Colony that outlined intentions of military peace and mutual aid in either entity's time of need (Humins, 1987).

By the mid-to-late 1600s, increased efforts by Christian ministers to proselytize the Wampanoag people began to see some success in particular areas. Early Christian missionaries sought to learn the Wampanoag language as a way to better communicate to the Indians the ideas of Christianity. Within a few short decades, many easterly Wampanoag villages, particularly those on Cape Cod, Martha's Vineyard, and Nantucket had become "praying towns" (Eden, 2014). However, the pursuits of Christian missionaries had mixed results across the entire Wampanoag Nation; in the proceeding decades, communities ranged widely in their degree of Christian acceptance (Winiarski, 2005).

In the large majority were communities in which both the Wampanoag and white colonists had adapted their traditions and worldview to include portions of the other's: colonists sought the advice of shamans and other Wampanoag spiritual figures; Wampanoags worshipped at "Indian Churches"; and the Indians and colonists alike subscribed to rumors of witchcraft, ghosts, and spirits (Winiarski, 2005). Exceptions to these communities existed on both ends of the spectrum. Some families completely internalized Puritan ideology and English colonial lifestyle, while others chose to continue living in their traditional ways in spite of missionary efforts (Winiarski, 2005).

## *Issues over land ownership and assimilation pressures from colonial expansion fueled frequent conflicts.*

After Massasoit's death in 1662, the peace treaty between the colonists and the Wampanoag was void and hostility began to grow. Metacom, who was commonly referred to by the English as King Phillip, became sachem in a much different era than his father. Issues over land ownership and assimilation pressures from colonial expansion fueled frequent conflicts (Bragdon, 2009). In 1675, Native Americans from present-day Rhode Island to Vermont united under Metacom to declare war against the colonists (Bragdon, 2009). King Phillip's War lasted about one year and resulted in King Phillip's execution, as well as massive Wampanoag casualties for tribes that engaged in battle. The Wampanoag tribes on Cape Cod, Martha's Vineyard, and Nantucket did not join the war. Consequently, the majority of the Wampanoag were significantly constrained to these three areas after 1676 (Sturtevant & Trigger, 1978).

Indian removal and socioeconomic marginalization occurred with greater frequency in the late 17th century, especially after the war ended. Initial reservations for Wampanoag people were created by the colonial government in the interests of both removing potentially threatening Indians from nearby colonial towns, and to gain access to the land and resources that a certain Wampanoag community controlled (Goddard, 1996).

## HISTORY OF LANGUAGE EXTINCTION: 18TH–19TH CENTURIES

By the early 1700s, Christian influence was strong in the majority of Wampanoag communities, making the Wampanoag the most Christianized Indians in Southern New England (Sturtevant & Trigger, 1978). Inevitably, this subjected a declining Wampanoag population to stronger control by the colonial government. Many reservations were created in the 1700s, the two most significant being at Mashpee and Gay Head (Conliff, 1998). The land appropriated for reservations was typically the least productive of the region, limiting the success of horticulture, hunting, and gathering.

*Constraints on Wampanoag sovereignty and continual efforts to remove Wampanoag people from their native lands after the 1700s only made it harder for them to survive in their former lifeway.*

Further constraints on Wampanoag sovereignty and continual efforts to remove Wampanoag people from their native lands after the 1700s only made it harder for them to survive in their former lifeway (Conliff, 1998). Some families moved to nearby towns for job opportunities, while others continued to try to make a living on the reservation through market-oriented farming (Conliff, 1998). Thus, the process of assimilation into the New England social economy increased due to the Wampanoag peoples' limited economic options.

Though efforts by Christian missionaries and scholars in the 1600s and early 1700s had succeeded in teaching the Wampanoag to write in their own language, fluency in English became necessary for any Wampanoag person to integrate into the economy. English was taught in schools where the use of the Wampanoag language was discouraged and even forbidden (Bragdon, 2009).

Native identity was incrementally compromised through dramatic decreases in native language use and traditional lifestyle practices. With the exception of a few larger reservations whose leaders fought hard for self-governance, many Wampanoag communities gradually acculturated into white society or consolidated throughout the 1800s (Conliff, 1998). Because of continual acculturation pressures, the native Wampanoag language became much more of a ceremonial language than one used for everyday communication. By the early 1900s, only a handful of Wampanoag words and phrases could be recalled by elders (Sturtevant & Trigger, 1978).

## WAMPANOAG LANGUAGE (WŌPANĀAK) WRITTEN RECORD

In North America, the largest corpus of documents written in a native language is in WŌpanĀak. It is also the first American Indian language to develop and use an alphabetic writing system, and, therefore, it is the first native language to be used in written form by its native speakers (Goddard, 1996; WŌpanĀak Language Reclamation Project [WŌpanĀak], 2014). To this day, the single most studied document written in WŌpanĀak is John Eliot's *Indian Bible*, or *Mamusse Wunneetupanatamwe Up-Biblum God* (Dippold, 2014). Eliot was a Puritan missionary of the Massachusetts Bay Colony who sought to convert the Wampanoag to Christianity through literacy (Goddard, 1996). In order for the Indians to independently read scripture, their own language first had to have a written form. Eliot began studying the language in 1643, working closely with several native speakers. By showing Wampanoag speakers how to phonetically spell the various sounds of their language, Eliot was able to create an alphabet and a unitary system of phoneme spellings (Goddard, 1996).

Other scholarly works of Wampanoag linguistics built on the groundwork of Eliot. In 1707, Josiah Cotton compiled a complete WŌpanĀak vocabulary in an attempt to clarify particular vowel pronunciations that seemed ambiguous in Eliot's system. Experience Mayhew, with assistance from a native bilingual speaker, John Nesnumun, produced the Psalms and the Gospel of John in WŌpanĀak in 1709, using a self-revised version of Eliot's orthography (Goddard, 1996).

Because of the scholarly contributions of Eliot and others, WŌpanĀak literacy rates became substantial by the 18th century (Mifflin, 2008). Wampanoag people were able to write legal documents, petitions, letters, and land deeds in their own language. Many of these still exist in archives (Mifflin, 2008). In 1903, philologist James Trumbull published his contribution to Wampanoag linguistics, *Natick Dictionary* (Trumbull, 1903).



This book is the most complete and coherent contribution since the study of John Eliot's *Indian Bible*, and has helped scholars after him to further understand the structure and underlying implications of the Wôpanâak language (Mifflin, 2008). The latest contribution to Wampanoag language records came in 1988 with *Native Writings in Massachusetts*, by Ives Goddard and Kathleen Bragdon. The book is comprised of a collection of written documents, such as petitions, wills, records of land transactions, and arrest warrants, accompanied by their English translations.

## WÔPANÂAK LANGUAGE RECLAMATION PROJECT

The WLRP, founded by Jessie "Little Doe" Baird in 1993, is a collaborative effort by four recognized Wampanoag communities. The federally recognized Mashpee tribe on Cape Cod, the federally recognized Aquinnah tribe at Gay Head on Martha's Vineyard, the state-recognized Herring Pond Tribe, and the tribally-recognized Assonet band (see Figure 1) hold regular meetings to discuss the project's mission and its progress (Weston & Sorenson, 2011).

*Baird describes her motivation as coming from a series of recurring dreams in which her ancestors spoke to her in Wôpanâak, telling her to "ask Wampanoag people if they would like their language home again"*

Wôpanâak had no living speakers for 150 years by the time Jessie Baird began her groundbreaking project. Baird describes her motivation as coming from a series of recurring dreams in which her ancestors spoke to her in Wôpanâak, telling her to "ask Wampanoag people if they would like their language home again" (Weston & Sorenson, 2011). Within a few years, Baird became aware of a scholarship available to her to study at the Massachusetts Institute of Technology. She chose Algonquian Linguistics as her course of study and subsequently became a graduate student under Dr. Kenneth Hale, who was eager to help her revive the Wampanoag language (Weston & Sorenson, 2011).

Through careful study of the major documents of written Wôpanâak, such as John Eliot's *Indian Bible* and James Trumbull's *Natick Dictionary*, Baird and Hale constructed a complete vocabulary consisting of over 11,000 words, as

well as a list of grammar rules (Mifflin, 2008; Wôpanâak, 2014). Cross-linguistic comparison with other Algonquian languages aided in determining correct pronunciation of unique sounds within words (Mifflin, 2008).

Upon obtaining her M.A. in 2000, Baird and directors of the WLRP began to make further plans for implementation of Wôpanâak language learning. Thus far, three Wampanoag community members have become certified Wôpanâak linguists under Baird in a Master-Apprentice language immersion program, and over 15 have become certified language teachers (Weston & Sorenson, 2011; Wôpanâak, 2014).

Five grammar workbooks, various language immersion camps, and the development of a "no English" curriculum have become important teaching tools. Classes are offered in communities in Aquinnah, Mashpee, Plymouth, New Bedford, and Boston for children and adults using different language teaching models. In addition, the creation of hard-copy dictionaries, coloring-and-story books for kids, and board games for all ages have also been helpful teaching supplements (Weston & Sorenson, 2011).

The WLRP has received funding from multiple benefactors. A \$500,000 grant from the MacArthur Foundation for Baird's accomplishments has focused on language learning implementation. Federal grants from the Administration for Native Americans and continual fundraising by all Wampanoag tribes involved continue to bring in necessary revenue for the WLRP's projects (Weston & Sorenson, 2011; Wôpanâak, 2014).

In close collaboration with Jessie Baird and members of the WLRP, MakePeace Productions made a documentary film, *We Still Live Here—As Nutayuneân*, which relates the story of the foundation and helps raise awareness and funds for ongoing projects of the WLRP (Weston & Sorenson, 2011). In September of 2016, Mukayuhsak Weekuw ("The Children's House") opened for its first year with 10 preschool students enrolled. Mukayuhsak Weekuw was made possible by a collaborative effort between tribal families and Montessori educators who are trained in Tribal language education, as well as a generous grant from the Administration for Native Americans.

WLRP teachers developed a "culture-based language immersion nest curriculum," through which all school subjects are taught (Wôpanâak, 2014). Moving forward, it seems that the number of eager Wampanoag learners is growing, and with it, the capacity of Baird and her project's coordinators to effectively implement methods for language fluency.



## DISCUSSION

The WLRP already appears to be a source of pride for tribal members as there are now many more ways to be distinctly Wampanoag. Ceremonies, songs, youth education, and more are being reclaimed and recreated in Wôpanâak. Tribal members are beginning to regain the ability to express their Wampanoag identity through communicative means, both in speech and in writing. As other modern indigenous language examples suggest, communicating in one's culturally distinct language has major benefits to a community's strength and resilience.

There is no doubt that as Wôpanâak fluency becomes more common, Wampanoag people will have more tools to represent their cultural distinctiveness. However, more directed outcomes are hard to estimate. Perhaps the WLRP and its influence will lead to changes in the public perception of both modern Wampanoag people, and those that lived in the past. There could be a rise in Wampanoag language and history scholarship, whereby inaccuracies in the Wampanoag colonial history could be found. Regardless of particular outcomes, the WLRP will surely affect past, present, and future Wampanoag representations in a positive way.

*With the Wôpanâak language finally back after more than a century of silence, the Wampanoag Nation will be able to rediscover, and contribute further to, their ancestors' place-based knowledge system.*

It is common for indigenous groups to possess comprehensive ecological knowledge that aids them in navigating and subsisting within their environment. This information lives within an indigenous community's native language. Therefore, without the ability to speak their own languages, the world's indigenous are unable to access the information that has ensured their ancestors' survival for millennia. With the Wôpanâak language finally back more than a century of silence, the Wampanoag Nation will be able to rediscover, and contribute further to, their ancestors' place-based knowledge system.

In a modern world, it cannot be assumed that Wampanoag people will be able to access and apply Wampanoag place-

based knowledge in the same way their pre-colonial ancestors did. The lands and resources of southeastern New England are owned and managed in a much different way today than they were half a millennium ago. In the last few decades, however, indigenous land and resource management practices have been getting more attention. Integrating uniquely indigenous environmental practices with modern scientific methodologies has become a rapidly growing research topic, and, in many countries, scholars have supported integrating "traditional ecological knowledge" (TEK) with modern scientific methodology for more effective resource management (Adams et al., 2014; Castledon, Garvin, & Huu-Ay-Aht First Nation, 2009; Xu et al., 2006).

In the future, Wôpanâak could also exist as a regionally specific "database," where new ideas for land and resource management may be found, extracted, and adapted to the modern institutions already in place. With continued study of the language and more attention from the scientific community, the Wampanoag and their unique database of southeastern New England may contribute to further progress in TEK integration, both academically and in practice.

## SUMMARY

Indigenous language revitalization holds important implications for the future of indigenous speakers, in terms of cultural identity and environmental problem solving. Baird's WLRP is one of the most comprehensive cases in the United States to date in that the native language had lost all its native speakers for over a century. Indicative of every indigenous group is a mutually intelligible language that reflects particular geographic understandings, allows for the creation and communication of traditional ecological knowledge, and through speech, defines the unique characters of an indigenous person's identity.

Using their recovered language as a tool, the Wampanoag people now have a greater capacity to strengthen and define their identity and forms of representation. Moreover, if language proficiency couples with historical and archaeological research, we may be able to gain further insight into the traditional Wampanoag lifeways of the past. More information regarding Wampanoag environmental interaction therefore may become more accessible and applicable to current issues of land and resource management.

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