Haida language research digitization project

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This proposal seeks to compile and digitize the earliest known Haida language research. As is the case with most studies on Indigenous languages, the content of the earliest investigations rarely returned to the community. Instead, the academic community has served as an exclusive audience for almost all language related studies. Such is the case with the earliest research on the Haida language. This proposal seeks to implement the latest technology to digitize the texts in an effort to bring the earliest published data back to the Haida community as one of the Haida language revitalization endeavors.

1   Haida language research digitization project

The Haida language research digitization project serves to digitize an endangered language, Haida and provide documentation that the community can access and which will offer sustained interaction. While much of the research on Haida has been detailed and insightful linguistic analyses, the audience for the labor has not been the Haida community. This project and its results will be practical, community oriented, and accessible by any member of the Haida community. The goal of the project is to bring the earliest Haida language research back into the Haida community.

The purpose of Haida language research digitization project is simply to digitize, preserve, and provide wider access to documentary materials, specifically the earliest published articles and ethnographic bulletins. With the Haida language at a critical stage of existence, the proposal seeks to develop standards and databases to make this documentation widely available in consistent, archivable, interoperable, and web-based formats. While much of the work has been largely detailed grammatical analyses usually inaccessible by the Haida community, this project will provide access to the research that the Haida may utilize for their own purposes.

This research project will digitize the earliest research on the Haida language, which encompasses selecting, transcribing, and translating untranslated Haida narrative texts. The Haida language research digitization project will help in creating other infrastructure, working in consultation with the Council of the Haida Nation, Massett and Skidegate Band Councils, and Haida elders, and will include workshops to address the problem of Haida as an endangered language. The Haida language research digitization project will also

provide opportunity for a greater Haida language presence in the community through computers and the Internet. Inherent in the project is the revitalization Haida language learning within the community.

This Haida language research digitization project seeks to create a greater interest at the community level to learn Haida. Having the historical research, previously difficult to get to for the majority of the Haida community, in narrative form will be invaluable in Haida language learning. Such opportunity for interaction is vital for instantiating Haida language learner participation style in which they can listen, read, and learn the language at their own pace. For both fluent Haida speakers and their language apprentices, these resources will be precious for historical and present comparisons of language use among the remaining fluent Haida speakers. It has been difficult for the majority of the Haida community to have access to historical research, therefore digitizing this research in narrative form will be invaluable to Haida language learning.

Biannual visits both for community workshops and with fluent Haida elders in Haida Gwaii, British Columbia for consultative purposes (narrative clarification, completion, and translation) will be essential in producing accurate and approved translations of earliest recorded narratives.

2   Main texts for digitization

There are three phases, and this project focuses on the earliest phase: the latter phases will be addressed in different proposal. It was not until the 1880's that the Haida language began receiving scholarly attention that culminated in 1911. Scholarly investigations of Haida, from geological surveyors to missionaries to linguists, have produced a vast body of literature analyzing everything from Haida's phonemic inventory to its grammatical structure. The following texts will comprise the first phase of the digitization project.

George Dawson and Fraser Tolmie, geological surveyors, compiled one of the earliest lists of Haida vocabulary published in 1884 entitled *Comparative vocabularies of the Indian tribes of British Columbia, with a map illustrating distribution*. The digitization would focus specifically on the Haida terms and provide access to the earliest known list of Haida vocabulary collected.

Charles Harrison's missionary efforts included publications concerning Haida grammar (1895). He wrote that the "principal object in writing this grammar is to afford assistance to my successors in mission work amongst the Haidas, and those who may desire to gain a knowledge of the language in order to benefit these Indians both temporally and spiritually" (1895:126).
In keeping with his principal object, Harrison also published Haida translations of parts of the Bible (mostly from the New Testament), such as *The gospel according to St. John* (1899) and *The Acts of the apostles in Haida* (1898).
Along with Harrison's treatment of grammar, his translations of the Bible serve as the earliest translations of sacred world literature into Haida. While Keen's stated motivation included providing spiritual benefit, his effort now can serve

pragmatically, to benefit any Haidas wanting to learn the Haida language as he mentions as one of his principle objects to assist those who desire to gain knowledge of the language.

At the turn of the 20th century, John Swanton, under the tutelage of Franz Boas, began an ethnographic study of the Haida published in 1905(a). He subsequently published some of the narratives that he collected during his stay on Haida Gwaii. The impetus of Swanton's work, as most of Boas' efforts with Native American languages, was salvific. It was simply to have a record of the languages before they all disappeared. Swanton's work included a grammar of Haida (1911) as well as translated stories and songs from both the Massett (1908) and Skidegate (1905b) dialects. Swanton's collections and publications contain by far the most information, history, ethnology, songs, and myths, with much of the oral history and myths still untranslated.

The scope of this early phase of research encompasses over a thousand pages of research. These texts contain a wealth of linguistic and cultural data and given the vastness of research produced from 1880 to 1911. Swanton's voluminous ethnology and grammar collection set the precedent for Haida language research after 1911 and thus it is suitable to end this phase with his publication on grammar.

3   Impact of the digitization project

Haida, like many other Native American languages, is currently at a critical stage of potential language death. There are at present few fluent speakers left in Skidegate and Massett. Only 15-20% of the elders (Report of the Assembly of First Nations language and literacy secretariat, 1992:64,73) are fluent. Of these speakers, nearly 95% are over 55 and are female. There is no living monolingual Haida speaker. John Enrico notes that to hear Haida today, one must ask a Haida elder to speak it. His assessment is "the combination of at least a century of negative attitudes, the severe loss of knowledge, and the paucity of speakers now makes it extremely unlikely that even the most sophisticated and well-funded retention program could not put off the imminent loss of the language" (2003:7-8). He also notes that the traditional focus on grammatical elements dominates his work and provides a chapter to deal with narrative discourse (1300). This focus on grammatical elements represents not only Enrico's research, but also the majority of the work on Haida language research that ultimately has little or no influence on language revitalization even though the original intention may have been with the Haida community in mind. This project will bring the earliest language research back into the Haida community in various venues including free community meetings and workshops. The scope of the meetings is twofold: clarify the content of the earliest research, and then explore the content of the earliest research.

The criticism raised against much of the Haida language research is the lack of relevance or opportunity for the Haidas to benefit from scholarly publications, even now in regards to reviving Haida language use. Research accumulated thus far has seemingly excluded the Haida community from

receiving much advantage other than being the subject of research. The scope of the efforts has been on meticulous linguistic analyses of Haida phonological, grammatical or morphophonemic features mainly for a scholarly or academic audience but with little regard or relevance for the Haida community. While the work is of the highest quality, very little research has been presented to the community by way of explanation or simply given back to the community after publication in form of copies. This proposal seeks to bridge both linguistic scholarship and practical relevance to the Haida community (see Kroskrity 1986, for relevance of the local community for ancestral language learning and teaching).

With importance to both the Haida and scholarly communities, the Haida language research digitization project will bridge a gap that currently exists in Haida language research. Attention to discourse features of the language, with practical relevance to the Haida community, will augment not only the early research of Haida language, but also the preservation of it (see Dauenhauer & Dauenhauer [1998], Kirkness [1998], & Silko [2000:165] concerning narration and language revitalization). The digitization project results will allow access to the material for anyone interested, and will be user friendly to the list skilled, but engaging as well even for advanced Haida learners.

4   Methodology

The bulk of Haida language research digitization project requires scanning, transcribing, and translating the earliest research into a digital database both on CD ROM and web formats. This two-year proposal includes the following schedule of research: The first year consists of obtaining the texts, narratives, and reports. A summer (2007) visit to Haida Gwaii (Massett and Skidegate, British Columbia) is necessary to consult with Elders's about the project, seek their blessing, and gather input about which narratives to prioritize in the process. I will also secure a venue for the Haida language research digitization project website either through the Council of the Haida Nation or the individual village councils (Old Massett Band or Skidegate Band) as part of the education branch, including consultation with Haida language instructors to develop the materials as a resource for teaching Haida. A winter (2008) visit will begin the first in the series of two community meetings, one in Massett and one in Skidegate, to explain the Haida language research digitization project and explore earliest text from Fraser and Tolmie. By the end of the first year, the digitization process--including training one or two undergraduate/graduate assistants--will be well underway and the beginning of the web-based archive with the eventual interactive format will also be available. The end of the first year (May, 2008) would culminate in the digitization of the Tolmie and Fraser vocabulary, Keen's grammar and Bible translation, and Swanton's *Contributions to the ethnology of the Haida.*

The second year, June 2009, will begin with a visit to Haida Gwaii. The nature of this visit is twofold. The first goal is to offer workshops in

Massett and Skidegate to present the latest accomplishments of the Haida Digitization project. The workshops are key to maintaining community interest and input throughout the project. Secondly, I would meet with the elders in their homes to demonstrate the digitization project with all of the Keen material and the first Swanton texts and explain what the final result will be in June of the following year. As the Haida elders hear and see the archiving process, I will be ready to record related narratives that they may remember as a result of listening to and seeing the digital archival process, thus enhancing the database. Particular effort will be spent on construction, organization, and completion of CD ROMs and Web based archives that the Haida community, especially elders, will want to utilize. This visit ensures continued elder participation and input to the digitization, transcription, and translation process.

A visit to the American Philosophical Society Library to acquire the rest of the Swanton published material, which will then be sorted, transcribed, and digitized beginning mid summer after returning from Haida Gwaii English and Haida would allow a greater expansion and a more comprehensive narrative database. The completion of translation and transcription should occur by the end of winter allowing a greater focus of digitization effort. A final winter (2009) visit will allow final consultation with the elders concerning the Swanton material to verify the translation of the remaining Swanton myths and history. The trip will also provide the penultimate series of community workshops about reversing language death using the Haida language digitization project. The workshops will explain and explore the project's current results, and plan ahead for the final meetings in June to present the culmination of the digitization project. As the second year ends, the web/CD archives and operation will be completed, including all the remaining Swanton texts and will be exhibited in the final community meetings at the end of June. With that information and the final texts gathered, the completion of data digitization should occur by the summer. The final three months of the last year will focus on troubleshooting and completion of CD ROM and Web based operations. The project will end with a trip to Haida Gwaii for the final workshops and to present the elders and Haida community with the CD ROM archive and to promote the Web based archive.

As part of a concerted effort to highlight the issue of Haida as an endangered language, specifically Haida documentation efforts, four community meetings will be held each year in Massett or Skidegate, depending on the texts. Since the dialects are significantly different, each village will have its own meetings to explain and explore the texts, though anyone interested can attend any session. The first two meetings will occur in January, and the last two meetings will occur at the end of June. While the meetings will initially be for clarification—which entails explanation of the researchers' orthography and related linguistic terms—the scope of the meetings will be to share the digitization materials with the community. The January and June meetings will promote greater Haida language awareness to the communities and serve to demonstrate the digitization efforts. I am interested in working with as many elders as possible so they can review the material, and special attention will be

given to their comments in order to make the texts readily accessible to the whole Haida community whenever they desire to have them.

Finally, each year of the project, with my graduate and/or undergraduate assistants I endeavor to co-present and inform appropriate audiences about the Haida language research digitization project at scholarly venues, *International conference on Salish and neighboring languages* for the summer of 2009 and *The annual stabilizing indigenous languages conference* in the summer of 2010. Attending and presenting at these venues will afford interaction with other language revitalization efforts in Canada and the United States. The conferences provide an important bridge and outlet for the academic endeavor of language revitalization as well as an opportunity to mentor the undergraduate or graduate assistants. The research and presentation of the materials at such venues affords discovering how to incorporate cutting edge technology into the project by learning from other revitalization efforts, but also relevant and practical input for fostering community efforts at language revitalization.

Timeline

> Summer 2007--Visit Haida Gwaii-consultation with elders, Council of Haida Nation members, and Old Massett Village Council and Skidegate Council education directors; consultation with Haida language teachers and instructors; visit/contact Smithsonian to gather earliest data; hire student research assistants

> Winter 2008--Two community meetings, one in Massett and one in Skidegate, to explain the Haida language research digitization project; consult with elders/Haida language teachers.

> End of first year: Digitization process--including training one or two undergraduate/graduate assistants--will be well underway and the beginning of the web-based archive with the eventual interactive format will also be available; Tolmie and Fraser vocabulary, Keen's grammar and translated texts, and Swanton's *Contributions to the ethnology of the Haida* digitized; construction, and organization of CD ROMs and Web based archives

> Summer 2008--Visit Haida Gwaii-general workshops in Massett and Skidegate and meet with the elders to inform about progress and provide personal demonstration of the project to date; visit/contact American Philosophical Society Library to secure the rest of the Swanton data needed for sorting, transcription, and digitization; record narratives or voice overs of narratives; organization of data onto CD ROMs and Web based archives;

presentation of project at *International conference on Salish and neighboring languages*

Winter 2009--Visit Haida Gwaii for consultation with the elders and two community meetings about reversing language death; update community about project's current results, and plan ahead for the final meetings

Summer 2009—Final Haida Gwaii visit to present the elders and Haida community with the CD ROM archive and Web based archive; two final community meetings, one in Skidegate, one in Massett; meet with Haida teachers and instructors to display CD ROM and web archives as a resource for Haida instruction; presentation and demonstration of project results at *The annual stabilizing indigenous languages conference*

5   Summary

The Haida language research digitization project is ambitious and seeks to document the Haida language with a focus on the earliest grammars, narratives, and discourse. While the project acknowledges the wealth of earlier linguistic research at the phonological, morphological, and syntactical levels, the gap between the research and its benefit to the Haida community remains to be bridged (Brandt 1988). The Haida language research digitization project will be an effective and important bridge that finally grants the benefit of the earliest language research to Haida community.

The completion of Haida language research digitization project effort will effect great results in documenting an endangered language at the community level and at the research level. Both the Haida community and the academic community will benefit from a unique interactive CD ROM and Web archive of the earliest Haida language research. While not an end in itself, the project will create a solid basis for further research, including digitizing the rest of the traditional linguistic research (after 1911), but also research that incorporates narrative theory and research in the field of language revitalization (e.g. Cantoni 1999).

The CD ROM and Web based archives will serve as a digital linguistic bank for the Haida community for future ongoing deposits. To this date, no other project has affected the Haida community to focus on the Haida language beyond the collection, gathering, and analysis stages. This project will finally bring the early Haida language research to the Haida community in a relevant manner that will foster understanding, interaction, and exploration of that Haida language, all in an effort to revitalize the Haida language. The CD ROM and web archive will be readily accessible, easy to use for both beginning Haida learners, but also engaging for advanced Haida speakers. Sustained Haida language revitalization is one of the most important expected outcomes of the Haida language research digitization project, and that this effort to gather, record,

and digitize the Haida language will support a healthy Haida speaking community.

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