



WHOSE LANGUAGE IS IT? THE RHETORIC AND POLITICS OF LANGUAGE DOCUMENTATION

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OVERVIEW

- Rhetoric of language documentation
 - External language advocacy (by and for "outsiders")
 - Internal language advocacy
- Process of documentation
 - Movement toward documentation by speakers
- Language Documentation Training Center, UH



LANGUAGE DOCUMENTATION

- Language documentation: creation of a record of a language
- Emerging "rhetoric" of documentation



RHETORIC OF DOCUMENTATION

- Enumeration – languages as tokens of larger diversity; commodification
- Languages as repositories of knowledge
- Value of languages to linguistics
- Emphasis on value of language to larger world
- Articulated by, and in terms of value to, outsiders



EXAMPLES

- “the coming century will see either the death or doom of 90% of mankind’s languages” (Krauss 1992)
- "Every two weeks the last fluent speaker of a language passes on and with him/her goes literally hundreds of generations of traditional knowledge encoded in these ancestral tongues. Nearly half of the world’s languages are likely to vanish in the next 100 years." (Living Tongues Institute 2007)



INTERNAL LANGUAGE ADVOCACY

- Hinton 2002: languages as healing, as key to identity and spirituality, as carriers of culture
- Languages tied inseparably to those who speak them
- Element of human rights



PROCESS OF DOCUMENTATION

- Movement toward documentation involving speakers
 - Usefulness of product to language community
 - Language centers outside the academic sphere
 - Linguists not necessarily central to documentation
- Language Documentation Training Center as case study



LANGUAGE DOCUMENTATION TRAINING CENTER (LDTC)

- Complex example of collaboration between linguists and speakers
- Started in 2004; run by graduate students
- Mission “to train native speakers of underdocumented languages to work on the documentation of their own languages”
- Series of 8 workshops every semester – product is website with data/information about language



RHETORIC OF DOCUMENTATION AT THE LDTC

- Recruitment period
- First workshop
- Closing ceremony



DOCUMENTATION PROCESS AT THE LDTC

- Initial emphasis on "hard linguistics"
- Shift to emphasis on recording texts
- Speakers left without linguistic resources
- Input from participants?



CONCLUSIONS

- Unintentional – lack of reflection?
- Long history of ties between linguistics, colonialism, power struggles
- LDTC as amazing project
- Incorporation of more voices?



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THANK YOU

