

A Strategy for Language Maintenance Programs

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Outline

Introduction

Part I

Past and Present

The past

Religion.

Language.

The present

Analysis of the Numbers

The two lines are similar

But not the same

Of the two, language changes more slowly

The First Part of the Strategy

Practical Suggestions

Print media

Hardy and Goldtooth.

Hall.

Harvey.

Various authors.

Other.

Film

Television

Part II

A Vision for the Future

Education

Language attitudes

The Second Part of the Strategy

Conclusion

Figures

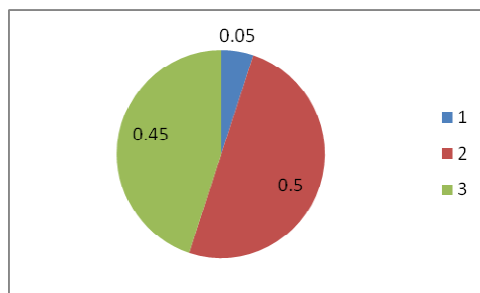


Fig. 1. Pie chart showing the approximate size of three major religious affiliations on the reservation today, where 1 = Old Way, 2 = Peyote (Native American Church, or NAC), and 3 = Christianity.

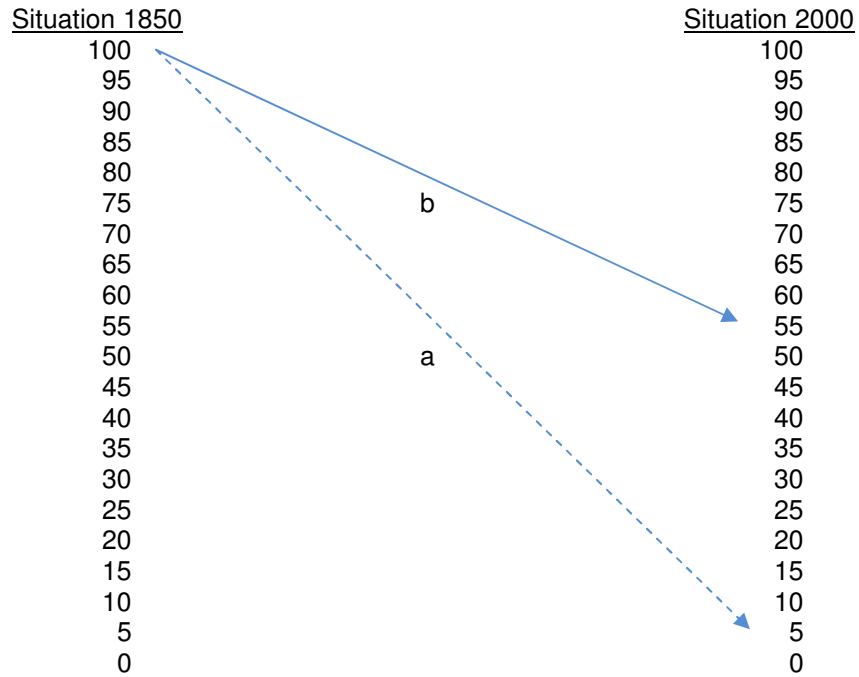


Fig. 2. The decline, between 1850 and 2000, of Old Way religion (a) and of traditionalism in general (combining Old Way and Peyote) (b).

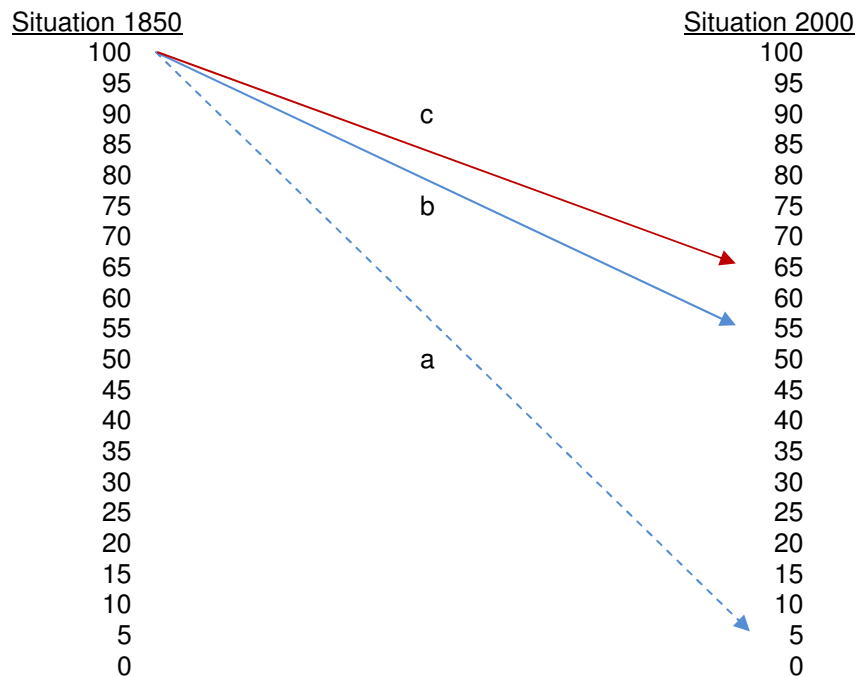


Fig. 3. The decline, between 1850 and 2000, of Old Way ceremonialism (a), of traditionalism in general (combining Old Way and Peyote) (b), and of the Navajo language (c).

Lyon (1989)

[Reichard] began to realize that religion lay at the center of Navajo life, the core from which all else emanated.¹

Navajo Historical Series 2 (1952)

"Now men, is there anyone here who can do it (a chant)? Long ago, people of old had a story of some kind of chant called "Talk One Into the Grave." Who of you knows it?" said Black Horse, asking that it be performed.

These people from the other side of the mountain were saying this. That is what I heard. I wasn't at the meeting myself. And I don't know just how this chant goes.

"I do," said the one I referred to as Little Boy.

"Two of you are needed for it," said Black Horse.

So then my grandfather, the man I spoke of as Big Mexican Clansman, volunteered to join him to carry on the ceremony. South from the trading post there is a ruin which we call in Navajo "Shattered House." Someone burned it long ago. It is said that they were anasazi. It is black there like ashes. It was there that they carried on the ceremony. I don't know how it was done. That is what took place that night [*kódzaago yiská*].²

Lockard (1995)

In 1852, at Fort Defiance, Arizona, Captain J. H. Eaton was ordered to write Navajo translations for 424 English words. Robert Young reflected on his work, "For obvious reasons, there was no Navajo in 1852 who could speak or understand the English language, and there was no speaker of English who knew Navajo."³

Sherzer and Bauman (1972)

According to Wissler (1926:216), to whom the culture area concept owes much of its subsequent popularity among American anthropologists, "it appears the rule that, wherever in aboriginal America, a well marked ecological area can be delineated, there one will find a culture area and that the centers of distribution for the constituent traits will fall in the heart of the ecological area."⁴

"a culture area is often marked by genetic linguistic diversity."⁵

Given this ecological emphasis in the field of culture area studies, it is not surprising that linguistic features have not figured in the formulation of culture areas; for, since Sapir's classic consideration of "Language and Environment" (1912), it has been accepted as a fundamental linguistic truth that, certain lexical elements aside, language and environment are mutually independent (see also Wissler 1922:373).⁶

¹ William H. Lyon, "Gladys Reichard at the Frontiers of Navajo Culture," *American Indian Quarterly*, 13:2 (Spring, 1989), p. 138.

² Left-Handed Mexican Clansman, "The Trouble at Round Rock," *Navajo Historical Series 2: The Trouble At Round Rock* (Lawrence, KS: Bureau of Indian Affairs, Division of Education, 1952), pp. 25-26. For the corresponding Navajo text see, *Atk'idáá' 'Adahoodzaai Baa Hane': Dinék'ehjí Naaltsoos Wólta'í #15* (Albuquerque: Navajo Reading Study, 1973), p. 39. Below I refer to *TRR* and *DNW* respectively.

³ Louise Lockard, "New Paper Words: Historical Images of Navajo Language Literacy," *American Indian Quarterly*, 19:1 (Winter, 1995), p. 18.

⁴ Joel Sherzer and Richard Bauman, "Areal Studies and Culture History: Language as a Key to the Historical Study of Culture Contact," *Southwestern Journal of Anthropology*, 28:2 (Summer, 1972), p. 132.

⁵ *Idem*, p. 133.

⁶ Sherzer and Bauman, *idem*, p. 132.

Other

Hypothesis and corollary

Hypothesis. There is a correlation between religious affiliation and language use on the Navajo Indian reservation.

Corollary: Traditional Navajos use Navajo more than non-traditional Navajos.

First part of the strategy:

Make all the People your partners. Create materials that are neutral with respect to religion, or anything else that could divide into separate groups those you want to reach and unify.

Second part of the strategy:

Be a role model. Make Navajo a language you – as a person people look up to – personally choose to use, and especially with the children in your life.