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Организация
Объединённых Наций по
вопросам образования,
науки и культуры

منظمة الأمم المتحدة
للترقية والعلم والثقافة

联合国教育、
科学及文化组织

UNESCO REGISTER OF GOOD PRACTICES IN LANGUAGE PRESERVATION

The Klallam Language Program

(USA)

Received: fall 2005; last update: summer 2007

Brief description:

This report describes the successive steps of a comprehensive community-based revitalization project of a language that was spoken by only a few elder members of the community. The well-funded, long-term project involves documentation, developing teaching materials with strong support of the remaining speakers, introducing the Native language into public school curricula and training teachers.

The language in question is Klallam, a language of the Salishan family, Straits group, spoken in the north-western United States (North Olympic Peninsula, Clallam County, Washington). It currently has fewer than five first language speakers, but by now over two hundred people have studied it as a second language. The main location of the project is the Elwha Klallam Reservation near Port Angeles.

The program, which started in the early 1990s, grew out of documenting and recording activities of the Klallam language. The foundation was laid with summer language courses and a master-apprentice pilot program. Today, through strong individual, community and public support, Klallam language and culture are part of the school curriculum in the community from pre-school to high school level. Teaching materials (curricula, a grammar, computer games) have been developed by teachers and the tribal linguist in consultation with elders. Further, a teacher qualification and certification system is in place, implemented by the Klallam Language Board. This system has contributed to state-wide standard-setting. Additional effects of the project range from enhanced language competence and school success of Native American students to empowering communities, establishing local networks and creating employment.

Reader's guide:

This project report describes step by step how the Klallam Language Program came about and what it has become over time. It illustrates how a community has come together for language revitalization and has empowered itself by protecting its cultural and linguistic heritage. The project exemplifies successful collaboration among a local community, an academic linguist, and local authorities, particularly in the implementation of a language program in public schools.

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1. INTRODUCTION

Background: current situation in the language community:

Klallam was originally spoken by a substantial population in a number of communities along the north shore of the Olympic Peninsula, along the Strait of Juan de Fuca, in western Washington State, USA and in adjacent Canada. In the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries, after treaties were established, the number of Klallam speaking communities declined due to displacement by European settlers and to disease. Government policies of assimilation and active discouragement of Native languages in schools accelerated the decline of the language. By the mid-twentieth century there were perhaps two hundred speakers of Klallam as a first language. By the end of the twentieth century there were fewer than ten native speakers in a community of about one thousand; there are now four - all women in their eighties.

Although the Klallam community extends to towns across the north shore of the Olympic Peninsula and to southern Vancouver Island, most of the tribal activities centre on the four Klallam reservations: Elwha, Jamestown, and Port Gamble in the U.S., and Becher Bay in Canada. Today, there are speakers of Klallam as a first language, all living at Elwha.

Impetus for the project:

Faced with the imminent demise of the language, the Klallam language program took as its goal to preserve and document what remained of the language. Later, it began to seem a worthy and accessible goal to revitalize Klallam as a second language for tribal members.

Initial priorities:

Before the 1990s, the Klallam language was only minimally documented. There were some old recordings and field notes, a partial dictionary, a brief grammatical sketch and a rudimentary set of language lessons. The language needed thorough documentation and analysis. But the greatest priority when the project began was to record and collect language data, texts, songs, etc. from the four remaining speakers who were willing and able to assist.

2. PROJECT DESCRIPTION

The project's main goals and scope:

The Klallam Language Program has the long-term goal of revitalizing the Klallam language. In the short term the main goal is to expose as many tribal members as possible to the Klallam language and to get them to understand it and use it in songs, speeches, prayers, basic conversation and ceremonial functions.

Development of the project:

The project began in 1991 with basic documentation, recording and archiving of spoken and written language materials. Olympic National Park anthropologist Jacilee Wray began recording oral histories from tribal elders and concluded that someone with linguistic expertise was needed to record the language. The tribal culture program contacted linguist Timothy Montler. In 1992 Montler worked with young adult tribal members and with elder native speakers using standard linguistic field method techniques (e.g. structured interviews) to elicit vocabulary, grammatical information and various genres of narrative.

In the early days of the project (early 1990s) adult Klallam language awareness classes were conducted in intensive summer sessions. These classes were conducted daily for two to three summer months, mostly on the Elwha Reservation in the tribal centre or in the tribal health facility. A few classes were conducted at the two other U.S. reservations each summer. The classes at first introduced the sounds and a writing system for Klallam. They proceeded to vocabulary and basic grammar and conversation.

When interest in and excitement about learning the language seemed to take hold quickly, revitalization – rather than mere preservation – began to seem feasible, and a master-apprentice program (following a concept developed by linguist Leann Hinton of the University of California at Berkeley) was initiated. This program teamed four native-speaking elders who were willing to participate with four younger people, to facilitate transfer of language and cultural knowledge. The apprentices were selected by a tribal culture committee and approved by the participating elders based on interest, ability and sincerity.

Later, when the public high school, in negotiations with the Elwha Klallam Tribe, agreed to offer Klallam language for credit, a focus on grammar and explicit classroom-oriented second language teaching and learning techniques was found to be more productive than the master-apprentice model.

Project strategies, activities and scope:

Today, the Klallam Language program in the schools has three participating teachers, covering pre-school (the Head Start program), elementary, middle and high school.

In pre-school, students learn songs and vocabulary on a daily basis. There are currently an estimated twenty children enrolled in the Head Start preschool program on the Elwha reservation. Elementary and middle school students (currently about a hundred) are exposed to Native language and culture in special weekly classes and via special study units. In high school, three levels are offered where students meet for one hour daily in a standard language learning classroom environment to study Klallam grammar, vocabulary, and pronunciation. The school year of 2006-2007 was the first where a full curriculum of 50 grammar lessons was available, based on the work of linguist Timothy Montler. It is estimated that over the past eight years more than 250 high school students have systematically studied the Klallam language. The language has further been taught to dozens of adults and teenagers at the Elwha Klallam Tribal Centre and through Northwest Indian College in cooperation with Peninsula College.

Teaching materials

The materials for the various levels were developed by the teachers in consultation with elders and the tribal linguist Timothy Montler. The materials closely follow Washington State guidelines and models. The core of the curriculum at the high school level is a 500-page pedagogically-oriented grammar written by Montler based on linguistic data he has collected and analyzed in consultation with elders and teachers. This grammar has been continuously expanded and revised over the past eight years in response to teacher, student, and elder concerns. In high school teaching, the grammar is supplemented with other linguistic and cultural activities.

Tribal linguist Timothy Montler has so far produced the Klallam language grammar, a word list, computer games and a set of transcribed and translated stories that are used in classes at various levels and some of which are on video with Klallam and English subtitles. The computer games, which focus on helping students learn vocabulary and hear and write the unusual sounds of Klallam, are especially popular among high school students.

Teacher qualification

The schoolteachers are all Klallam tribal members. All are speakers of Klallam as a second language and are themselves products of the language program. Each teacher has been a language apprentice and has completed at least three years of classroom study in the language.

The teachers have all received tribal certification by passing a rigorous written and oral exam administered by the Klallam Language Board, which consists of two native-speaking elders, the tribal linguist and those that have passed the advanced exam.

The following competencies are required for teacher certification. Candidates for Klallam language teacher certification must:

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1. Have knowledge of the history and the traditional and modern culture of the Klallam people.
2. Be able to hear, produce, and describe the sounds of the Klallam language.
3. Have acquired a substantial vocabulary in the Klallam language.
4. Be able to produce and use sentences appropriately in the Klallam language.
5. Be able to understand and explain sentence structures in the Klallam language.
6. Be able to tell a story, make a speech and have basic conversations in the Klallam language.
7. Have the ability to read and write the Klallam language using the standard writing system.
8. Have attended training in classroom management.

To demonstrate competency as a Klallam language teacher the candidate must:

1. Tell a story or give a speech in Klallam before the Klallam Language Certification Board.
2. Participate in a brief, sustained conversation in Klallam with the Klallam Language Board.
3. Present to the Klallam Language Certification Board an instructional unit of the candidate's own choosing.
4. Observe classes in the Klallam language at the appropriate level.

Project organizers, other persons involved:

The Klallam Language Program owes its success to a team of individuals having a fortuitous combination of personalities and abilities.

In 1991, anthropologist Jacilee Wray from Olympic National Park (which borders the Klallam territory) assisted the Elwha Klallam Tribe's culture program and helped them get a National Park Historic Preservation grant to bring in a linguist to assist in preserving the language.

Jamie Valadez, the director of the tribe's culture program, immediately saw the value of promoting the Klallam language as a tool for elevating the self-respect of tribe members. She has been the leader of the program since, and through intense work with elders and the tribal linguist has become fluent enough in the language to teach it at the high school level.

Linguist Timothy Montler from the University of North Texas was brought in to collect and analyze language data and to give workshops on recording and writing the language. He had previously written a grammar of the neighbouring and very closely related Saanich language. Montler is now the tribal linguist and has for the past fifteen years spent one to three months every year at Elwha working with native speakers and learners.

A small corps of enthusiastic Klallam language devotees arose among younger tribal members. Native-speaking elders Bea Charles and Adeline Smith recruited Mrs Smith's older brother, Ed Sampson Sr., to tell stories and help teach the language to the linguist and younger tribal members. Mr Sampson's wife Hazel also participated in the early years. Tom Charles Sr., a native speaker of Klallam from the Becher Bay Reserve across the Strait of Juan de Fuca on Vancouver

Island in Canada, moved to Elwha to participate in the language revitalization program. Mr Sampson died in 1996 at the age of 95 and Mr Charles died in 1999 at the age of around 80. They were the last two completely fluent speakers of Klallam. Since 1999, Bea Charles and Adeline Smith have tirelessly and heroically carried on the work. They can both freely and easily translate from Klallam to English, translate lexical items into Klallam and carry on conversations in Klallam. Mrs Charles and Mrs Smith are both in their late 80s and continue to work with younger people to share their knowledge. They also continue to assist the linguist in transcribing recordings of the Klallam language from the University of Washington archives that were made in the 1950s and 1960s. There are a few other elders close to them in age who probably know the language as well, but they are unwell or uninterested – the humiliation inflicted upon that generation for using the Native language, or indeed simply for being Native American, has not been forgotten.

Mobilization of resources (financial, technical and human):

The Klallam Language Program has been funded since 1992 by two Historic Preservation grants from the National Park Service and four \$300,000 language preservation grants from the U.S. Administration for Native Americans. All of these grants have been administered through the Lower Elwha tribal council. Additional funds for research on the language were provided to Timothy Montler through a major grant (\$100,000) from the U.S. National Science Foundation and smaller grants from the Melville and Elizabeth Jacobs Funds through the Whatcom Museum, and from the University of North Texas. These grants were administered through the University of North Texas. The grant monies primarily paid for salaries for the project administrator, teachers, elders, and apprentices. They also allowed for the purchase of supplies, computer equipment and equipment for recording the language. In addition to salaries and equipment, the grants also supported travel of tribal members to language and archival training in the community, at the University of Washington in Seattle, and at the Smithsonian Institution in Washington, D.C., and travel expenses for the tribal linguist.

Official support:

From its beginning, the Klallam Language Program has enjoyed the enthusiastic support of the Lower Elwha Tribal Council, the elected governing body of the tribe. The council has provided classroom and office space for the program and has encouraged tribal members to participate in the project.

In addition to tribal support, there has been a significant amount of support from the community of Port Angeles, Washington. Since 1999, the Klallam language has been taught in the Port Angeles public high school (see above). This came about through the efforts of Jamie Valadez, an Elwha tribal member and certified teacher, Elaine Grinnell, a Jamestown Klallam tribal member and at the time high school counselor for at-risk students, and a sympathetic school board eager to find ways to accommodate the Native American students, whose drop-out rate was exceedingly high.

The school system has provided classroom space, supplies, schedules, and administrative infrastructure. The tribe pays teachers through its language revitalization grants. The high school's Foreign Languages department has changed its name to the World Languages department in recognition that the

Klallam language is in no way 'foreign'. Students may now study Klallam to fulfill the school's language requirement, putting it on a par with German, French, Spanish and Japanese.

In January 2003, the Board of Education for the State of Washington established a pilot program of tribal certification for teachers of Native language and culture (<http://www.pesb.wa.gov/FirstPeople/about.htm>). In May 2003, Jamie Valadez was one of the first persons in the state to earn certification to teach a Native language. Since then, several other Klallam tribal members have been certified as teachers of Klallam language and culture.

3. OUTCOMES

Achievements and positive results:

In 1991, most Klallam people had never heard the language. Today, everyone knows at least a few words; many have achieved some fluency; some children use it among themselves as their secret language and are able to write stories in Klallam. A much greater cultural awareness has arisen in the past years. In 1991, only a few elders knew any Klallam songs or traditional stories; today, every tribal member under the age of 25 knows more than one Klallam song, and the Elwha song and performance group has more than twenty members and a substantial repertoire of songs in the Klallam language. Songs from old Smithsonian Institution recordings have been revived, and a number of new songs have been created on those models. There has been a revived interest in material arts such as basketry, also in association with the language revival program. New street signs and official tribal insignia use the Klallam language for the first time. One even occasionally hears a European American in nearby towns use a Klallam word.

In detail, the Klallam Language Program has seen success in the following areas:

- The language program has strengthened the network of personal and governmental relationships among Klallam groups and among tribal members and the broader community and has created greater awareness of their common goals.
- At the annual north-west coast tribal canoe gatherings, thousands of Native Americans from tribes throughout the area have felt the pride of Klallam young people singing and giving speeches in their language.
- European American as well as Native American youngsters are studying the Klallam language in public schools.
- Through grant funds and community interest, elders and younger adult tribal members have found employment that would not otherwise have existed.
- The success of the language and culture program has attracted other funding such as a Gates Foundation grant for computers. Any tribal family today may get a computer, internet connection, and Klallam fonts and keyboard software. Every tribal member also has access to the internet through computers in the language and culture centre.
- The leaders of the Klallam language program were instrumental in promoting and designing the Native teacher certification program that was approved by the State of Washington.

- One of the language teachers has become a mother and is introducing Klallam to her baby, enabling her to acquire the language from the earliest age.

Another indicator of success are the improved scores of Native American students on the WASL, the standard achievement test required in State of Washington public schools. In the five years since the establishment of Klallam language classes at the high school, the scores for Native American students have risen at a faster rate than in any other segment of the school population. Community members attribute this rise to the fact that the children in high school these past eight years are the first Klallam generation to have been explicitly taught their native culture and language. They are the first generation to be shown that they are heirs to a deeply elegant, complex, and beautiful heritage. The Klallam Language Program counteracts several generations of shame and humiliation and contributes to the Klallam people feeling that they deserve to conduct their lives with pride and dignity. The fact that the language is also taught to European Americans in high school has furthermore contributed to increasing mutual respect and breaking down barriers of racism.

Problems encountered, lessons learned:

The master-apprentice approach contributed less than expected to language revitalization. The idea was to team an elder with a young language learner who were to talk to each other as much as possible in the Klallam language. The young person would learn the language while helping the elder in daily life. There appeared, however, to be far too much important cultural information to be handed down by the elders than could be conveyed to young people through the Klallam language, so the elder and young learner almost always used English. However, while the apprenticeship program did not succeed as a method for language transmission, it has to be emphasized that it succeeded greatly in the transmission of cultural information, especially in the areas of history, genealogy, ritual giving, naming, and general proper conduct.

Future prospects:

In the near future, the Klallam Language Program is looking to publish a first descriptive/pedagogical grammar based on the language of the remaining native speakers. A complete dictionary of the language is in progress. Preliminary dictionaries and word lists are now in use among tribal members.

If a language is to be viable, a literature may be an important resource. As a basis for a Klallam literature, a collection of approximately 200 Klallam texts will eventually be published. In 1992, about 36 hours of stories, songs, and conversations among the last native speakers were videotaped. Project agents are now working on subtitled these and adding grammatical notations that can be used on a computer or DVD player for advanced language learning.

For the longer range future, the most significant problem for the Klallam Language Program is funding. The public schools are willing to support the teaching of Klallam language as long as external funding is available. The Klallam teachers in public schools are primarily supported by language revitalization and preservation grants to the Elwha Klallam tribe. In the past fifteen years, the tribe has been remarkably successful in attracting grant money

for the program, but this cannot reasonably be expected to continue indefinitely. Unlike many tribes in the North-west, the Elwha tribe has no casino as a source of funds. The tribe's economic development projects must necessarily focus on supporting the fundamentals of housing, health care, elder care, and basic education. The challenge will be to find a way to support the continuing success of the language program in perpetuity.

4. FURTHER RESOURCES

Project website: <http://www.ling.unt.edu/~montler/Klallam>

This project was selected in the framework of UNESCO's work for the safeguarding of endangered languages and intangible cultural heritage.

Web: www.unesco.org/culture/en/endangeredlanguages

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