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Studying Indigenous Heritage Languages at Universities: A Collaborative  
Autoethnography

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# Studying Indigenous Heritage Languages at Universities *A Collaborative Autoethnography*

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# Indigenous Graduate Students

- Indigenous students account for 0.5% of doctorate degrees earned (Brayboy, Fann, Castagno, & Solyom, 2012)

**Doctoral Degree Recipients (U.S. Citizens) by Race/Ethnicity, Selected Years 1989–2009**

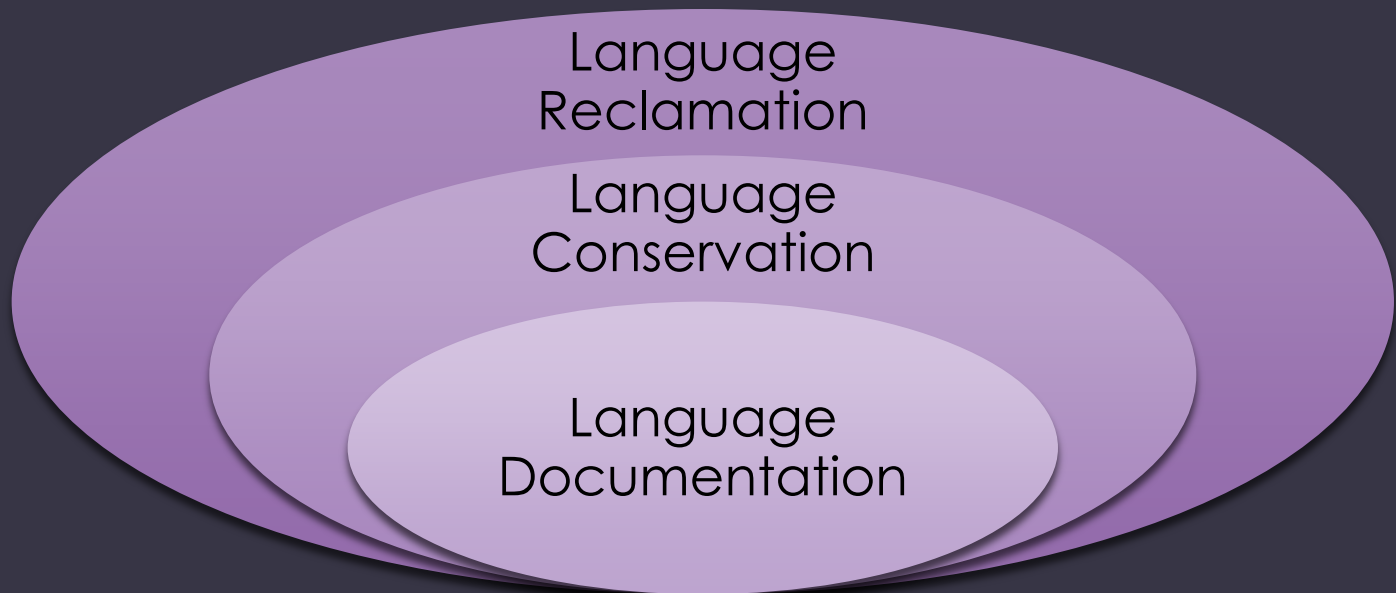
<i>All Fields</i>	1989	1994	1999	2004	2009
Total	25,062	30,904	30,317	28,038	32,231
American Indian/Alaska Native	94	143	213	131	146
Asian	1,262	3,533	2,498	2,061	2,687
Black	954	1,277	1,766	1,989	2,221
Hispanic	695	1,029	1,327	1,302	1,866
White	21,578	24,578	23,901	21,451	24,053

*Source:* National Science Foundation, 2010.

- Feelings of isolation, discrimination, and academic and cultural alienation often become magnified for Indigenous graduate students (Brayboy et al., 2012)
- Students who complete their degrees “tend to be driven by a strong desire to serve their communities” (Brayboy et al., 2012, p. 89)

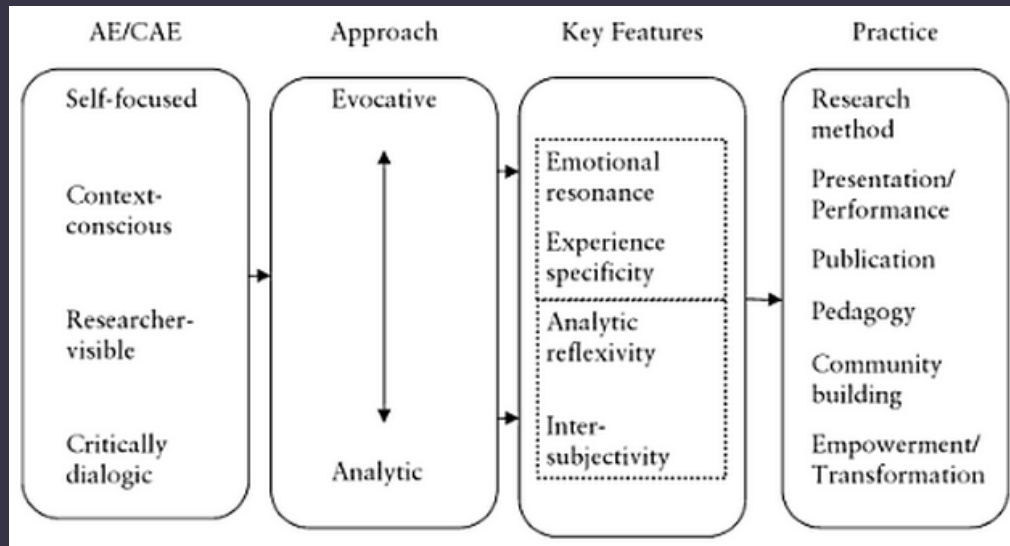
# Language Reclamation

- By learning and speaking our languages, we are participating in a “much larger social process of claiming—or reclaiming—the appropriate cultural context and sense of value that the language would likely have always had if not for colonization.” (Leonard, 2011, p. 141)



# Autoethnography as Method

- Autoethnography is simultaneously ethnographic and autobiographic. It is used to explore the intersection of the self with a larger sociocultural phenomenon. (Chang et al., 2013)



- “[A]utoethnography allows the particularities of research production to be embedded in our inner ways of knowing and being and our subjectivities to saturate the research. In this view, autoethnography not only has the potential to accommodate inner group diversity amongst Indigenous researchers, but also to establish an Indigenous standpoint in the research project.” (Bainbridge, 2007, p. 5-6)

# A Collaborative Endeavor

- Chickasaw
- Language Revitalization & Education
- University of Arizona

- Mashpee Wampanoag
- Immersion Education
- Boston College

- Yerington Paiute & Washoe
- Ethnic Studies
- UC Berkeley

1. What experiences shaped our decisions to pursue graduate schools?
2. What are the benefits and challenges of studying heritage languages in a university setting?
3. What are our goals for after completing our programs?



# Emergent Themes



Access



Space



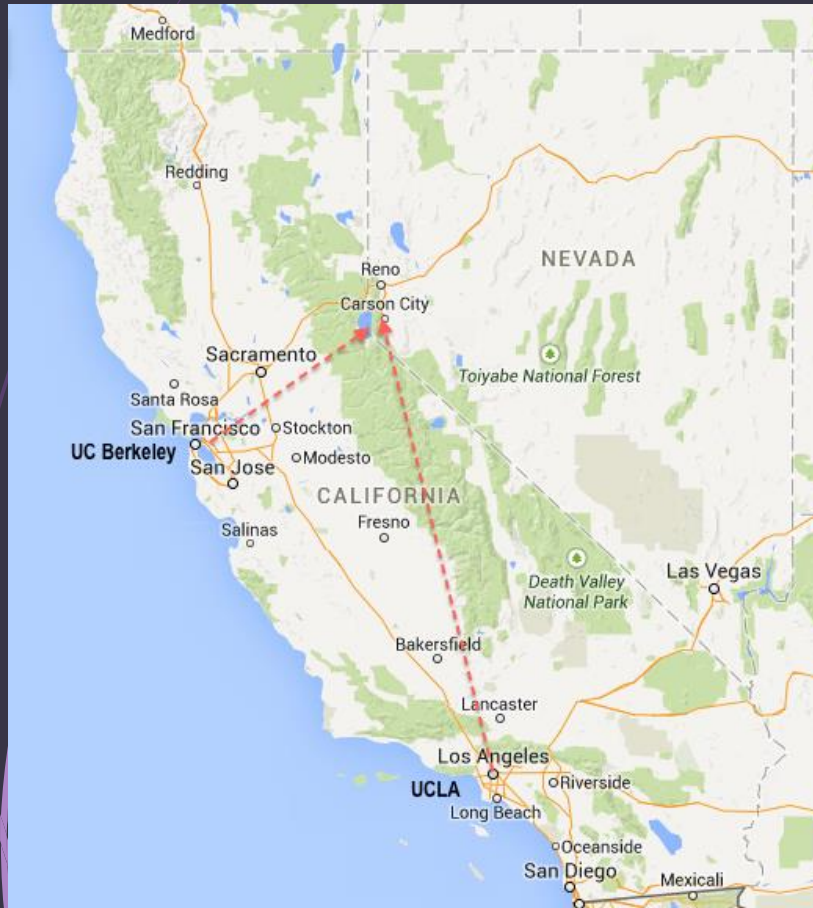
A Tool with Limitations

# Reflections on Access



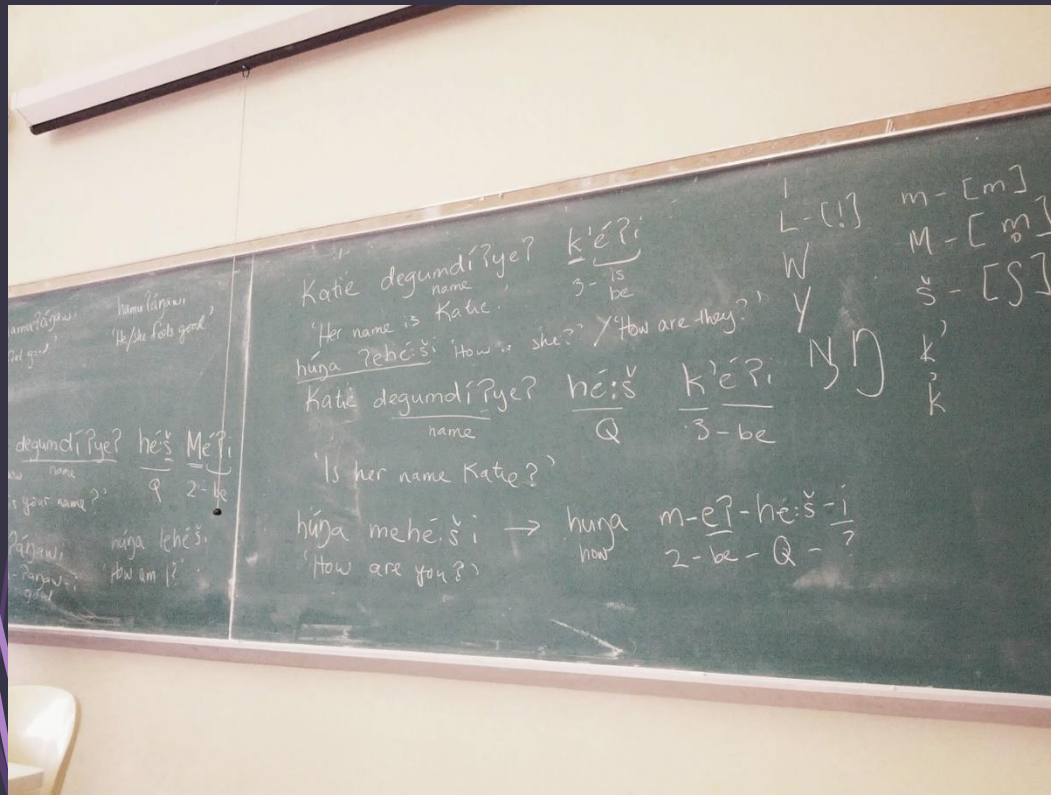
- ▶ Katie Keliida  
M.A.
- ▶ Doctoral  
Student at  
UC Berkeley

# Reflections on Access



- Engagement in community language classes required travel whether from Los Angeles or Berkeley, CA.

# Reflections on Access



šku:li

First Day of Washoe Language at Cal



*dewʔá:gaʔa*

Meeks Bay at Lake Tahoe in the fall



*p'awalu*

Carson Valley in the springtime



*dewʔá:gaʔa*

Meeks Bay at Lake Tahoe in the springtime

# Space

- How do we create space for Indigenous students to engage in language reclamation at universities?
- American Indian Language Development Institute

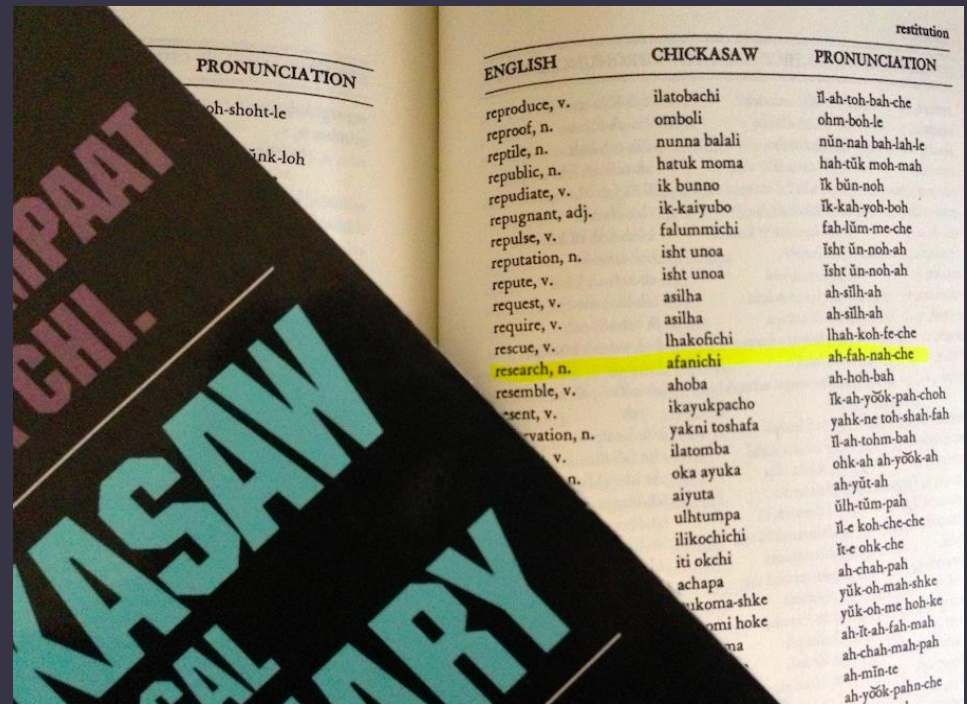


Photo by Traci Morris

# Tool with Limitations

- “The relationship between language work in my community and academia is inevitable right now.” -Nitana
- While each of us have studied our languages within academia, none of us have acquired fluency there.

**“In linguistics courses, *Chikashshanompa*’ was stripped of cultural significance and instead portrayed as data which illuminated linguistic phenomena.” -Kari**

**“While the university has given me the skills to develop a curriculum for our school, what it has not done is given me language skills, or connected me to community members in a way that is real or directly helpful to them.” -Nitana**



# Concluding Remarks

“Show me the calluses on your hands.” –Graham Smith

