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**LANGUAGE REVITALIZATION: STRATEGIES TO  
REVERSE LANGUAGE SHIFT**

by

Jessica Jamiel Martin

**Capstone submitted in partial fulfillment  
of the requirements for graduation with**

**University Honors**

with a major in

Communicative Disorders and Deaf Education

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**Abstract**

Language shift, the process by which a language loses speakers until it becomes extinct, is occurring in speech communities all over the world. This process is influenced by internal and external political, social, and economic factors unique to each community. As its causes and effects are not uniform, a universal model for reversing language shift does not exist. However, several broad principles can be applied across multiple contexts and situations for successful language revitalization. It is essential for the speech community to be the primary decision maker in any program. A thorough assessment of the community's current status, challenges, and resources will help in designing an effective strategy. It is also important for the community to set realistic goals and create or improve a language education program. Navajo is a local example of a community engaging in language revitalization. Using the Graded International Disruption Scale developed by Joshua Fishman, the current position of the Navajo language, as well as target areas for future goals, can be assessed. While speech communities face significant challenges to keep their languages alive, efforts to revitalize minority languages are worthwhile and success is possible with time, dedication, and access to needed resources.

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What is the correct term for an individual who speaks three languages? The answer is obviously trilingual. What about someone who speaks two languages? Bilingual. And someone who speaks only one? That's easy - an American! (S. Manuel-Dupont, personal communication, March 18, 2022).

This flippant joke illuminates a deeper truth about modern U.S. culture: American society is becoming increasingly monolingual. Even as the population grows more diverse, government policies and education systems are failing to promote any language other than English. The U.S. has long been referred to as a “melting pot” where diverse immigrant cultures and traditions blend to create something uniquely American. This may give the impression that the U.S. welcomes diversity, but in reality, this “melting pot” dynamic encourages assimilation into mainstream culture rather than a celebration of differences (Jeffery & Van Beuningen, 2020, pp. 176-177). Despite its rich history of immigration and unique blend of many cultures, the United States is a relatively homogenous country where languages are concerned. Rumrout and Massey (2013) even referred to the U.S. as a “zone of language extinction” where immigrant languages quickly die off after a few generations as they are superseded by English (p. 141).

Many Americans may be surprised to learn that a monolingual society is by far the exception rather than the rule. Linguistic diversity has long been a staple of world cultures; in the Roman empire, for example, people may have consistently used as many as three languages to communicate: Latin (the language of the state), Greek (the language of trade), and the regional or local language (Rodríguez, Carrasquillo, & Lee, 2014, p. 5). In the modern world fueled by globalization, humanity is losing its linguistic diversity. As the shift away from multilingualism continues, opportunities to learn and grow through diversity are diminishing. This fact is revealed by the phrase “monolingualism is the illiteracy of the twenty-first century,” coined by a



group of Utah language educators concerned with the lack of language education they saw in public schools (Roberts, Leite, & Wade, 2017, p. 116).

Unlike many countries, the United States has never had an official language, but there have been numerous “English-only” movements throughout its history (Workman, 2015, pp. 134-135). Over half of U.S. state governments have passed legislation declaring English the official language of the state. In 2017, the English Language Unity Act was presented to the federal government, pushing for English to be acknowledged as the official language across the nation (Jeffery & Van Beuningen, 2020, p. 178). Though it did not pass, the attempt shows the predominance of English in American culture. English is the most universal and most protected language in the nation, with few protections extended to minority languages and their speech communities. Reflecting this English-only trend, most adults in the United States are English speakers, and only 15-20% speak a second language (Franklin, 2013). Another study reported that as of 2018, only 16.9% of adult Americans were multilingual, with fluency in both English and at least one other language (Humanities Indicators, n.d.). When compared with data from other nations, the U.S. numbers are not flattering: 67% of people in Europe, 55% in Canada, and even 25% in India speak at least two languages (Byers-Heinlein et al, 2019, p. 37).

Further, language education remains a low priority in the United States. Only 20% of K-12 students in the U.S. are enrolled in a foreign language class; for comparison, 92% of students in the European Union learn a second language during their time at school (Devlin, 2018). Many areas in Europe require foreign language education, but only 20% of states, and the District of Columbia, have similar requirements (Devlin, 2018). This is perhaps explained by the prevailing attitude that in the United States, learning a foreign language is not relevant in the workforce. In a survey, only 36% of the U.S. population felt that foreign language knowledge

was important for success (Devlin, 2018). The results are surprising when considered from a business perspective, as many employers actively seek out multilingual individuals to join an increasingly global workforce. The demand for multilingual employees is a trend that has been steadily growing in the past several years, and has greatly increased recently with the need to work remotely due to the Covid-19 pandemic (González, 2021).

Despite this reality, the prevalence of English in U.S. government, business, and education, combined with a lack of interest in and support for other languages, creates a funnel effect. With few opportunities for learning and using another language, there are few reasons or motivations for Americans to do so, resulting in even fewer opportunities, and so the cycle continues. Today, it is more important than ever to foster linguistic diversity, especially to bridge language barriers in communications, human resources, and health care settings (González, 2021). Despite other societies recognizing these benefits of multilingualism, the United States remains fixed in an English-only mindset that limits opportunities for its citizens.

As a culture that values English monolingualism, the United States' indifferent attitude toward minority languages is hardly surprising. In a study of language density, Grenoble and Whaley (2006) found that areas of the world with greater linguistic diversity were more likely to have a positive attitude towards multilingualism, while areas with less linguistic diversity were more likely to be hostile to the idea of multiple languages (pp. 36-37). In monolingual cultures, the introduction (or recognition) of diverse languages and dialects can easily evolve into a highly polarized “us or them” mentality that is difficult to overcome (Cantoni, 1996, p. 27).

Unfortunately, the United States is one of the many countries that has fallen into this unhealthy view of linguistic diversity, viewing minority languages as a threat to the American way of life. Hostility toward other languages is evident in the frequently expressed sentiment, “This is

America; speak English” (Workman, 2015, p. 137). Yet this attitude is extremely shortsighted, discounting the many indigenous languages that were spoken on the North American continent before colonization, as well as the nation’s long history of multilingualism and immigrant communities.

American distrust of other languages perhaps stems from the fear that English will become outnumbered and overpowered. However, as Workman (2015) expressed about English, “there was never a...language so little in need of official support” (p. 137). English remains a *lingua franca* across the globe, and is one of the languages furthest from danger. Clearly, the threat of English being overtaken by a minority language at this stage is almost nonexistent, begging the question of why such an irrational fear exists. Although such fears are often unfounded, considering that one language in a speech community typically overshadows all others sheds light on why monolingual cultures are so wary of other languages. Linguist Joshua Fishman (1976, p. 110), recognized as one of the pioneers in the field of language revitalization, has explained that “no society needs or has two languages for the same functions. As a result, no society, not even those whose bilingualism has been most widespread and most stable, raises its children with two mother tongues” (Cantoni, 1996, p. 23). While a speech community typically has only one native language or “mother tongue,” other languages can also serve valuable functions in the speech community.

There are many areas in the world where several languages coexist and thrive side by side. The use of two separate languages within a single speech community is known as *diglossia*. Diglossia supports the development of additive bilingualism — where two languages are learned and developed together, without conflicting with one another (Fishman, 1991, p. 85). Additive bilingualism is healthy for both languages involved, as one does not threaten or undermine the

other. Further, Fishman (1991) argues that diglossia can be a catalyst for establishing stabilized bilingualism, which he defines as the use of two languages in a community with clearly divided uses (p. 85). This separation avoids the danger of either language overreaching their authority and encroaching into the other's space. Stabilized bilingualism recognizes and respects the importance of both languages, but in such communities, the two languages often fulfill different, strictly regulated roles (Fishman, 1991, pp. 85-86). Unfortunately, such a concept is not common, and it is certainly not widespread in the United States.

The other side of the coin is known as subtractive bilingualism, which occurs when one language is nurtured at the expense of the other. The best example is present in U.S. education systems, where minority and foreign languages are taught only to help students achieve English proficiency, and then dropped as quickly as possible. Subtractive bilingualism underscores the fact that in a direct confrontation between minority and dominant languages, the minority language will always be the first to disappear. A dominant language can thrive independently, but minority languages remain defined in terms of their neighboring languages, and their domains become increasingly smaller. The language with less prestige is thus forced into some kind of precarious coexistence with the dominant language, and in this conflict the dominant language holds every advantage. Subtractive bilingualism, such as that present in the United States today, is plainly dangerous for minority languages. By advancing the shift away from diversity and towards monolingualism, subtractive bilingualism's ultimate goal is to champion a single language at the expense, and even death, of all others.

### **Language Shift**

The study of world languages is extremely complex because there are so few universal conclusions. To begin, linguists cannot agree on how many languages are spoken in the world.

The estimates vary as widely as 3,000 to 10,000 separate languages (Crystal, 2000, p. 3), although Ethnologue, an organization which likely has the most precise data, currently lists 7,151 languages (Ethnologue, 2022). One reason for the lack of consensus is the absence of uniform techniques for surveying languages. In addition, the studies that have been done are not complete, and many areas of the world are difficult to access. The line between a language and a dialect is also unclear, further complicating the statistics (Crystal, 2000, pp. 3-7). The Summer Institute for Linguistics (sil.org) is one organization that has been studying world languages for decades, seeking to clarify these issues.

If languages across the globe number into the thousands, it may seem ludicrous or overdramatic to worry for the future of linguistic diversity. Unfortunately, the idea of the world becoming monolingual is all too swiftly becoming a reality, due to a process called language shift. Language shift is the manner in which a language loses speakers. This term also describes how a speech community transitions from using one language to another, often against their will. Language shift occurs for a variety of reasons, influenced and hastened by external political, social, and economic forces, as well as internal forces in the language's own speech community. Unfortunately, given enough time, it almost always results in language death.

The causes of language shift are rooted in the specific historical, cultural, and social context in which the language exists. Although each language's situation is unique, Grenoble and Whaley (2006) have outlined a general model, with four situations that often lead to language death (pp. 16-19). It is common for languages to experience a combination of these four rather than solely one form of attrition.

The first form, sudden attrition, occurs rapidly when external events lead to the disappearance of native speakers. Causes of sudden attrition include war, disease, natural

disasters, and famine. This is an extremely abrupt form of language loss that can catastrophically affect the language in a single generation (Grenoble & Whaley, 2006, p. 17).

Radical attrition is similarly swift, but refers to language loss that is caused by political suppression or genocide. Under significant pressure, speakers are forced to learn the dominant language to assimilate, and they often avoid using their own language to evade further persecution (Grenoble & Whaley, 2006, p. 17). Preserving languages that have experienced sudden or radical attrition is challenging because the process is initiated and expedited by external forces, and may occur at an accelerated rate.

Gradual attrition, as its name implies, is a much slower process. Speakers may transition from using their native language to another language of greater influence (Grenoble & Whaley, 2006, p. 17). This is a common form of language shift because minority languages are often spoken by smaller populations who are concentrated in rural areas. Generally, people move away from these rural areas for greater economic and career opportunities, leaving fewer and fewer speakers to hold the speech community together. Languages thrive only through a speech community, and when that community breaks apart, it is increasingly difficult for those remaining to preserve the language, and by extension, the group's linguistic identity.

The final form of attrition in the model is bottom-to-top attrition. In these cases, the language remains strong in certain contexts, such as religious practices, yet is no longer used in most other domains. Most frequently, the language has ceased to be spoken in the home. One challenge relative to bottom-to-top attrition is the difficulty of assessing the language's true status. Since the language may be used exclusively in some domains, it may appear to be thriving, but an assessment of all domains is necessary for an accurate diagnosis. Gradual

attrition and bottom-to-top attrition are influenced by external forces, but also involve internal factors within the speech community, presenting unique challenges for preserving languages.

Most languages in the world today are experiencing some form of language shift, and the vast majority are in danger of extinction. Although it would be nearly impossible to pinpoint the exact rate at which languages in the world are dying, the estimates that have been put forth are concerning, to say the least. It has been predicted that at least half of all world languages will disappear by the next century (Grenoble & Whaley, 2006, p. 1). It is a shocking statistic, made even more so by the observation that “to meet that time frame, at least one language must die, on average, every two weeks or so” (Crystal, 2000, p. 19). With such a high mortality rate, language shift could be classified as one of the most serious pandemics in the world today.

Despite its seemingly innocuous name, language shift poses a catastrophic threat to linguistic diversity around the globe, and not many individuals are fighting against it. Although thousands of languages still exist, according to Crystal (2000), 4% of the global population speaks 96% of all languages in the world (p. 14). This means that an extremely small number of people in localized communities around the world are the sole trustees of the majority of global languages. Without their efforts, these languages will disappear. This is a massive responsibility for speech communities to shoulder, and they often receive little support. These individuals usually do not have necessary expertise or experience in reversing language shift; they may have a desire to save their language, but they do not know how to go about it. There are far more ways to fail than to succeed when saving a dying language, and languages in danger of extinction cannot afford mistakes that waste time and resources. As such, successful strategies for reversing language shift are vital tools for speech communities to employ.

## Language Revitalization

Efforts to reverse language shift are often referred to as language revitalization. Although a relatively new concept in the field of linguistics, people have been making efforts to preserve languages for centuries with varying degrees of success. As with all things in the universe, language is a victim of entropy, breaking down over time as grammar, vocabulary, and speakers change. Languages are in a constant fluid state, shifting with each new speaker and their unique perception of the world. Entire populations, too, experience pressure from internal and external forces that have profound impacts on their communication systems. Language shift is a natural result of time. It has occurred throughout history and will continue to occur as speakers and languages evolve and interact with each other. However, though language shift is a natural process, this is not an adequate justification for it to be accepted.

If nothing is done, language shift is inevitable, but it does not have to be. If a community is motivated to reverse this process and has adequate resources and support, it is possible to bring a language back from the brink of extinction. Saving languages is a monumental undertaking, but efforts have been successful in the past, most notably with the Hebrew and Hawaiian languages. By following some fundamental guidelines based on successful models, communities can design effective strategies of revitalization to preserve their language.

However, many individuals argue against language revitalization. They may argue that it is a waste of time and resources, that success is unlikely or impossible, and that language shift is natural and should not be reversed. This ties into one of the first steps of language revitalization, which is the desire to reverse language shift in the first place. Joshua Fishman, one of the greatest advocates of language revitalization, often compared language shift to a terminal disease (Adegbiya et al., 2001, p. 1; Fishman, 1991, p. 39). He maintained that it is essential to “*believe*



*that finding a cure is worthwhile*” (Fishman, 1991, p. 39) before anything substantial can be done. As opponents of language revitalization are so vocal and passionate in their arguments against it, it is useful to outline some of the most important reasons why every language deserves to be revitalized.

First, languages have cultural value and form the basis of a community’s identity. Fishman explained that language is the vehicle through which culture is expressed (Cantoni, 1996, p. 81). Culture and language are two concepts that are difficult to define separately because they are so closely intertwined. Each influences the other, and without its language, a culture and the way it is viewed will be permanently altered. Even more significantly, many cultures hold their language as sacred and holy, and language is frequently and closely tied to creation myths (Cantoni, 1996, p. 82). One minority language speaker powerfully expressed this concept, explaining:

When the words of all people become one, then the world will come to an end. Our language is holy, and when it is gone, the good in life will be gone with it. When the old ones said that the world would end with the disappearance of our language, they meant that the young people could not hear, understand, and heed the teachings, words of encouragement, expressions of love, scoldings, and corrections that were offered by the parents and elder relatives; nor would they be able to pray. Without prayers, our lives cannot be good, for without words there can be no prayers. (F. Alts’iisi, as quoted in Parsons-Yazzie, 1996, p. 52, as cited in Adegbija et al., 2001, p. 23)

For many individuals, the personal and cultural value of their language is a central motivator for undertaking revitalization efforts.

On a broader level, each language holds an abundance of knowledge about the world and the human experience. If the language is lost, this knowledge disappears forever, unless efforts are undertaken to preserve it. Language death has even been likened to the loss of the library of Alexandria in ancient times:

One horrible day 1,600 years ago, the wisdom of many centuries went up in flames. The great library in Alexandria burned down, a catastrophe at the time and a symbol for all ages of the vulnerability of human knowledge...Today, with little notice, vast archives of knowledge and expertise are spilling into oblivion, leaving humanity in danger of losing its past and perhaps jeopardizing its future as well...[When] a language disappears, traditional knowledge tends to vanish with it....” (E. Linden, Lost Tribes, Lost Knowledge, *Time*, September 23, 1991, as cited in Cantoni, 1991, p. xvi)

The traditional and cultural knowledge that minority languages hold have irreplaceable value, and should not be discounted lightly.

Closely related to a language’s cultural knowledge is its linguistic knowledge. Studying languages aids in the development and construction of theories about the fundamentals of language. (Willemsen & Bøgh, 2019). The study of language is also fundamental for understanding how language is structured in the brain, and this knowledge is especially relevant to the field of speech-language pathology. Losing a language immediately removes the opportunity for linguists to study it, and because of language shift, there is an ever-increasing lack of data in this area of study (Willemsen & Bøgh, 2019).

One argument against language revitalization, and a common misconception about bilingualism, is that learning multiple languages hinders children’s language development. This claim could not be farther from the truth. Multiple studies have found that speaking more than

one language positively affects child language development. Evidence also suggests that bilingualism can prevent cognitive decline and improve overall health (Rodríguez, Carrasquillo, & Lee, 2014, p. 7). A hypothesis even exists which asserts the existence of a “bilingual advantage,” stating that executive control in individuals that speak more than one language is exercised more often and leads to improved brain function. Although it has not been proven, this hypothesis has gained support and demonstrates that bilingualism may be an advantage instead of a disadvantage (Neural Bases of Language with Liina Pyllkanen, 2020, 16:06). Overall, the argument that multilingualism is harmful for children’s development holds no scientific weight.

Finally, opponents of language revitalization often contend that it is not practical or possible to save every language, and so the attempt should not be made. However, as linguist Michael Krauss pointed out, there is an ethical consideration: no one has the authority to discount another’s language or to decide which languages deserve to live and which deserve to die (Cantoni, 1996, p. 20). Such an approach would be highly unfair and extremely hypocritical, especially as opponents of language revitalization are most often speakers of a dominant language that is not in need of such efforts. The responsibility for deciding if language revitalization is a worthy cause should lie firmly with the language’s speech community, and not with outsiders judging a language and culture that they are not a part of and do not understand.

### **Strategies for Language Revitalization**

As there is no consensus on the question of how many languages exist in the world, nor what constitutes a language versus a dialect, there is no one model or comprehensive framework for language revitalization. Several models have been proposed, but none are fit for all language situations, nor is it advisable to seek a “one size fits all” solution. Due to the complex nature of language shift, no two languages will experience it in exactly the same way. Each speech

community has unique challenges that require specific solutions and accommodations. Language revitalization must be undertaken within the specific context of the speech community that is undertaking it (Grenoble & Whaley, 2006). There are, however, some fundamental practices and guidelines that can help build successful revitalization programs and language communities.

### *Awareness*

First and foremost, language shift must be acknowledged. Too often, there is a lack of awareness, even among native speakers themselves, that a language is dying. According to Fishman, denial is one of the greatest obstacles facing language revitalization (Cantoni, 1996, p. 21). If the issue is not even identified, it cannot be addressed. Language shift is most often a slow, gradual process. Its effects are difficult to document, and consequently, even more difficult to prevent (Fishman, 1991, p. 40). In many cases, by the time language shift is acknowledged, it is already well underway, making efforts for revitalizing the language more challenging. The great danger of language death has been overlooked until the brink of tragedy, and then communities must scramble to salvage some part of the language while it is still possible.

Even in cases where language shift is recognized, it is not always prioritized. Languages encountering language shift face many obstacles, but perhaps the first and most important one to overcome is the right to fight for its existence in the first place. A common epithet surrounding minority languages is *endangered*. While many, perhaps even most, languages are in danger of extinction, this term can do more harm than good. It is common for people to assume that if a language is endangered, nothing can truly be done to save it at that point. This is often used as an argument against language revitalization. Some languages are “wished to be dead” (Cantoni, 1996), with opponents and even native speakers of the language claiming that the language is too far gone to be worth bringing back. This is perhaps one of the most frustrating arguments for

language advocates, and the argument raised most frequently against language revitalization. Often, the language's position is not as precarious as it is made out to be, and certainly, there is still some benefit that can be derived from doing something rather than nothing.

### ***Documentation***

An endangered language, like an endangered species, is in grave danger of extinction. However, languages are different from species in one significant aspect — it is possible to revive them after they have gone extinct (Cantoni, 1996, p. 21). With audio recordings and written transcriptions, a language may be reconstructed to some extent. The most notable example is that of Hebrew, which had long ceased to be a vernacular language when revitalization efforts were begun, and today is spoken as a native language by the majority of Jews in the state of Israel (Fishman, 1991, pp. 289-314). Similarly, the Cornish language experienced another such miracle. In 1891, the last native speaker of the Cornish language passed away, but enough documentation existed for the language to be resurrected in the twentieth century. After recent revival efforts, Cornish was revitalized as a vernacular language, and it is recognized today as a minority language by the United Kingdom (Grenoble & Whaley, 2006, pp. 45-48).

Although few languages achieve this level of success, it is still valuable for speakers to document their language, with both written transcriptions and audio recordings where possible. Fortunately, “*there is no language for which nothing at all can be done*” (Fishman, 1991, p. 12). Some knowledge of a language is better than none at all, and with documentation the language may be preserved, at least in a static, fossilized form, for future generations (Cantoni, 1996, pp. 189-190).

### *Assessment*

One of the most fundamental steps before beginning any language revitalization strategy is to assess the language's current state of vitality. Fishman likened language shift to “an entire cluster of diseases,” and he stressed that a specific diagnosis is needed to find the best cure (Cantoni, 1996, p. 187). Language revitalization must target places where it will have the greatest effect. Patching up symptoms of language shift does not truly reach the heart of the problem and enact lasting change. A deeper understanding of the language and the stage it is in will assist in developing a language program that will have the most meaningful impact. Grenoble and Whaley (2006) have outlined nine relevant factors that contribute to the overall condition of a language (pp. 3-4). These factors can serve as a foundation for assessing the overall state of a language. Table 1 summarizes these nine factors.

**Table 1**

#### *Factors of Language Vitality*

Factor 1	Intergenerational language transmission
Factor 2	Absolute number of speakers
Factor 3	Proportion of speakers within the total population
Factor 4	Trends in existing language domains
Factor 5	Response to new media and domains
Factor 6	Materials for language education and literacy
Factor 7	Governmental and institutional language policies, including official status and

	use
Factor 8	Community members' attitudes toward their own language
Factor 9	Amount and quality of documentation

In their analysis, Grenoble and Whaley (2006) made clear that no one factor should be considered independently when assessing language vitality. Rather, it is crucial to evaluate all factors to gain a thorough understanding of how each affects the status of the language, and how each may be used in language revitalization.

**Factor 1: Intergenerational language transmission.** This is one of the most telling indicators of whether a language is near death. At the point where a language is no longer spoken in the home and intergenerational language transfer ceases, there are fewer speakers that learn the language from birth, and numbers decline sharply with each successive generation. A *moribund* language is one that is no longer learned by children (Grenoble & Whaley, 2006, p. 18). A language at this stage has entered a critical period, because once the older generations die, there are no native speakers left to keep the language alive.

**Factor 2: Absolute number of speakers.** Crystal (2000) explained, “To say that a language is dead is like saying a person is dead. It can be no other way — for languages have no existence without people” (p. 1). Saving a dying language, while possible, is extremely difficult. It requires monumental dedication, resources, funding, and time. Above all, however, it requires willing speakers. At the end of the day, language programs and resources do not save languages; *speakers* do. Grenoble and Whaley (2006) emphasized this when they stated that “speakers are the most valuable resource for a language” (p. 41). The commitment of individual speakers to

learn, preserve, and form a language community is indispensable to language survival. As the most essential component for preserving a language, it is important to understand the absolute number of speakers that currently exist.

Unfortunately, this is not always a straightforward statistic. In speech communities that are extremely isolated or have dispersed across a wider area, finding the total number of speakers is a challenge. Another complication is that there is no simple black-and-white distinction between a speaker and a nonspeaker. Some individuals may have native or native-like fluency, while others can only understand it but cannot speak it themselves. Language fluency exists across a wide spectrum, and it is difficult to determine a proper scale of performance (Fishman, 1991, pp. 49-52). Ultimately, where exact numbers are difficult to measure, a general idea of the number of speakers can be useful as “an immediate index” of a language’s state (Crystal, 2000, p. 14).

**Factor 3: Proportion of speakers within the total population.** Although significant, the absolute number of speakers alone is not a good indicator of the rate of decline or the overall state of a language. This is where Factor 3 is useful. Crystal (2000) maintained that the absolute number of speakers should always be considered in the context of its community (p. 11). A healthy number of speakers for a language depends on the population and dynamic of its speech community. Some languages can thrive with less than a thousand speakers because over 90% of the children born to that community speak the language. This is most common in the case of smaller, isolated communities. For larger speech communities, or those that coexist with speakers of a more dominant language, having a greater number of speakers is more essential. However, it seems that almost no language is completely safe, no matter how many speakers it may have at present. Breton, for example, had nearly one and half million speakers just over a



century ago, but today that number may have dropped to only 250,000 (Crystal, 2000, p. 13).

Thus, the number of speakers within the total population is a useful starting point, but it is not a definitive indicator of language shift.

**Factor 4: Trends in existing language domains.** It is crucial to understand how healthy a language is in domains where it is used. Fishman expressed that “creating cultural space is very important for a language if it is to become competitive within its own culture” (Cantoni, 1996, p. 89). Evaluating the language’s status in current domains shows what functions the language is currently serving for its speech community. Is the language still spoken by families in the home and in social settings? Has the language been replaced by another in all areas but religious rituals and traditions? The answers to these questions will point the way for language domains that can be strengthened, as well as others that may need to be reestablished.

**Factor 5: Response to new domains and media.** Globalization, social media, and the Internet have exponentially increased language shift, with a few dominant global languages rapidly overtaking minority ones in the online domain (Adegbija et al, 2001, p. xiii). The lack of linguistic diversity online illuminates the prevalence of language shift. A UNESCO survey conducted in 2008 found that over half of online content is in English, and twelve languages account for roughly 98% of everything on the Internet (Trevino, 2020). An assessment of a language’s response to new media domains is important for understanding how new technology affects the vitality of the language.

While the uniformity of media poses a threat to minority languages, technology can also be exceedingly useful for reversing language shift. Globalization will only move forward, and speech communities must learn how to exist and thrive in the midst of other languages dominating the technological world. Technology and media can play an important role in

language revitalization, and help communities create greater space for minority language in these domains (Grenoble & Whaley, 2006, pp. 9-10).

**Factor 6: Materials for language education and literacy.** Language is primarily oral in nature, and not every language has an orthography. Like the total number of languages in the world, the data on writing systems remains incomplete, but *Ethnologue* estimates that as many as 43% of languages have no written system (Eberhard, Simons, & Fennig, 2022). Even for languages that have a developed orthography, it may not be utilized by the speech community. While having a print culture is not necessary for language revitalization, it can assist in language education, and in documenting and recording the language. An assessment of a speech community's attitude toward and use of written language is important for preliminary efforts in establishing a language education program.

**Factor 7: Governmental and institutional language policies, including official status and use.** As government policies are strong agents in determining the future of a language, Factor 7 is included as an important part of the language vitality assessment. Article 5 of UNESCO's Universal Declaration on Cultural Diversity states, "All persons should therefore be able to express themselves and to create and disseminate their work in the language of their choice, and particularly in their mother tongue; all persons should be entitled to quality education and training that fully respect their cultural identity" (Grenoble & Whaley, 2006, p. 2; United Nations, 2001). Unfortunately, the right to speak one's own language is as endangered as many other human rights in the world. In many cases, minority languages have been severely repressed by government policies, to the point of extreme language decline or language death. Even in less hostile environments, apathy can be just as dangerous as hostility. Many nations exclusively

promote the use of “official languages” in professional, business, and educational settings, to the detriment of minority languages.

Government recognition is also an important stepping stone for any minority language. One of the most common obstacles facing minority languages is lack of official status. However, government acknowledgement of a language does not guarantee government support. Minority languages need more than lip service and “paper promises” (Grenoble & Whaley, 2006, p. 28). Nondiscrimination is never enough. Active funding and government support is necessary to truly eradicate political and legal barriers facing minority languages. Grenoble and Whaley (2006) emphasize that “any policy...is only as good as its enforcement, an adequate level of funding for it, and the administrative commitment it receives” (p. 28). Too often, policies are not enforced, and communities do not receive the support they need to benefit from “official” policies or status.

Additionally, language use and instruction in public schools is also a meaningful indicator of the political status of a language. While teaching a language in public schools can never completely turn the tide of language shift, it is encouraging that there is a system in place, however inadequate, to provide language education.

**Factor 8: Community members’ attitudes toward their own language.** As willing speakers are absolutely vital to any revitalization program, community members’ attitudes toward the language should also be assessed. It may be surprising that speakers do not always jump at the chance to revitalize their native language. However, revitalization efforts are often shadowed by oppressive measures from outsiders to eradicate the language. The psychological effects of language suppression can linger for generations. Many individuals have no desire to learn or preserve their native language because of the social stigma or trauma surrounding it.

This reluctance of individuals to claim their native language may be termed language shame, and it is a familiar hindrance for advocates of language revitalization. The existence of language shame is evidenced by James Crawford's visit to a Navajo elementary school in the 1990s. During his visit, he asked a class of students if they spoke any Navajo. Initially, none of the students raised their hands, and it took repeated prompting and encouragement before they admitted to any proficiency in the language. While they may not have experienced language discrimination themselves, the memory of it was still fresh in the Navajo community, and they inherited language shame from their parents (Cantoni, 1996, p. 60). Language shame is extremely internalized and difficult to overcome, and can be an obstacle to revitalization if not addressed.

**Factor 9: Amount and quality of documentation.** Grenoble and Whaley (2006) affirmed that "a seriously endangered language should be documented as quickly and as thoroughly as possible" (p. 5). An examination of the amount and quality of the language's documentation is important for identifying any missing areas that need to be documented moving forward.

### ***Realistic Goals***

Fishman explained that because a minority language will always be at a disadvantage to more powerful languages, there is "no margin for error" (Cantoni, 1996, p. 85). It is critical to avoid wasting time or energy on things that will not aid language revitalization. For this reason, successful strategies must be rooted in the language's current stage and needs. Fishman further emphasized that "untimely solutions" are counterproductive and can hinder rather than help a language's status (Cantoni, 1996, p. 66). He advised communities to select "a few well-chosen

smaller victories earlier on” instead of setting unrealistic goals that will not lead to success in the long run (Fishman, 1991, p. 13).

### ***Education Programs***

Grenoble and Whaley (2006) describe education as “a critical domain” for a minority language, and language education is frequently a staple and focus of language revitalization efforts (p. 10). One of the best ways to combat language shift is to create an experience of total immersion in the target language, where children are taught the language by older generations. Using this model, known as a “language nest,” Hawaiian language activists were able to revitalize their language over several decades — from 2,000 fluent speakers in the 1970s, to over 18,000 by 2019 (Daigneault, 2019). This level of success demonstrates the effectiveness of reestablishing the language in the home.

However, creating a successful education program led and sustained by local communities presents its own set of challenges. For one, many communities are small and have few resources. In this situation, locals are forced to seek outside help and expertise. Another common problem is a lack of criteria for determining who is qualified to teach the language. With so few speakers available, some schools fall into the mistake of allowing individuals to teach the language without training and without prior assessment of their language proficiency. It is apparent how this kind of language education can do more harm than good, and this has prompted communities to establish more detailed requirements for teacher training in minority language education (Cantoni, 1996, pp. 115-117). These challenges can present serious obstacles to language immersion. Where an immersion model is not feasible, communities should seek to establish an education program with as much language exposure as possible.

One common pitfall of language revitalization programs is the emphasis placed on schooling at the expense of the speech community. Language education is vital, but it can be a hindrance if the community relies too much on schools to carry the weight of language preservation. Fishman (1991) explained that many programs have adopted a “the school can solve it” attitude (p. 369). Such an approach shifts responsibility away from speech communities and places unjustified faith in educational institutions that do not have the resources necessary to successfully revive and maintain an entire language on their own (Fishman, 1991, pp. 368-370). If children arriving at the school do not already speak the minority language, this places an even heavier burden to the school (Adegbija et al., 2001, pp. 14-15). While language education programs are essential, they can be detrimental if the school becomes the only setting in which the language is valued and practiced. This is the reason why, according to Fishman, “schools represent a dual-edged sword” (McCarty, 2002, pp. 17-18).

Due to government requirements, or a lack of funding and resources, many minority language communities rely on public education systems. A major obstacle for language revitalization in public schools is that minority language instruction is often used as a springboard for proficiency in the dominant language. This is typical in the United States education system. With the goal of assimilating immigrants into American culture, U.S. bilingual programs are typically designed to be a stepping stone to English proficiency; once that is achieved, native language instruction is dropped (Cantoni, 1996, p. 64). This pattern formed the basis of U.S. bilingual education programs throughout the twentieth century, and was reinforced by the United States Congress in 1978, when federal funding was only authorized for transitional programs with the primary goal of English language competency (Rodríguez, Carrasquillo, & Lee, 2014, p. 26). The state of California executed this policy to the extreme in 1998 by passing

legislation that removed all bilingual programs in the education system and excluded all languages, other than English, from its schools (Collazo, 2021, p. 1). Thus, most bilingual schools in the U.S. today support an environment of subtractive bilingualism. Dual language and late-exit programs may alleviate this issue by placing greater emphasis on native language education, but funding for these types of programs is difficult to secure, and often the primary motivation remains to promote English proficiency among minority populations (Rodríguez, Carrasquillo, & Lee, 2014, p. 28).

Native language instruction and education are important, but they are not all-encompassing or sufficient for a language's needs. Ultimately, languages must be supported in individual families and in social communities. As Fishman expressed, "the language does not belong to [institutions]. The language makes use of them" (Cantoni, 1996, p. 194). Schools exist to support language communities, not the other way around. While promoting language education programs, Fishman repeatedly emphasized that "the academic approach has its own value, but it does not by itself, produce a vital living language" (Cantoni, 1996, p. 21). Educational programs are valuable, but they can never replace the heart and soul of community-centered language use. A language must have community involvement and investment to be truly revitalized.

### ***Evaluation***

As with any initiative, frequent evaluation and timely adjustments are crucial to success. Provisions for evaluating success and changing course when necessary should be included in any language revitalization strategy. Languages change rapidly, after all, and what worked a decade ago may not work today. If a revitalization strategy is to be successful, it must make adjustments as the language's situation changes over time.

## The Case of Navajo

In a recent study, language educators Roberts, Leite, and Wade found that like the rest of the United States, Utah is lagging behind in the linguistic diversity department. English is the dominant language spoken in the state, enough so that some Utahns may be surprised to learn that there *are* other languages spoken in Utah. In 2015, one local newspaper reported that as many as 120 other languages have a sizable presence in Utah. Data from a recent U.S. census reveal that although most Utah residents speak English, 14% of the population also speak another language in the home.

Navajo is one of those languages, spoken by about 8,000 members of the indigenous Navajo Nation in southern Utah (Associated Press, 2015). The Navajo language, or the Diné Bizaad, as it is referred to by native speakers (Native Child Dinétah, 2015), is the most widely spoken indigenous minority language in the state of Utah today (Associated Press, 2015). However, it was a long and uphill road over the last few centuries to keep the language alive, and the fight against language shift is far from over.

Like other indigenous groups in the United States, the Navajo people were victims of the harsh effects of colonization prior to the nineteenth century. After the Navajo Nation was imprisoned from 1864 to 1868, the U.S. government signed a treaty releasing the Navajos under certain conditions, one of which was that they would be required to send their children to government schools. From then on, the government changed their focus from “colonization” to “civilization,” and it worked to eliminate Navajo culture through English-only education programs (Thompson, 1975, pp. 25-27).

Beginning in 1868 and stretching into the late twentieth century, many Navajo youths were forced to attend boarding schools aimed at erasing their cultural identity and assimilating



them into U.S. culture. These schools discouraged use of the Navajo language and students were often punished for speaking it (Thompson, 1975, pp. 25-28, 43). Understandably, many Navajo parents and children were not in favor of government education, and Thompson (1975) reported that only about 25% of Navajo children were attending public school in 1945 (p. 88).

Over the next fifty years, the subsequent encroachment of English into nearly every language domain and English-only language education had a detrimental effect on the Navajo language. By 1990, the U.S. census revealed that nearly 18% of the Navajo population reported using only English in the home, and this number presumably continues to grow with each passing year (Adegbija et al., 2001, p. 28). Although the era of government boarding schools is in the past, the Navajo language remains a low priority for the U.S. government, and the Navajo community faces a lack of adequate resources and funding to reverse language shift independently. With fewer children learning it as a native language, Navajo is quickly approaching a more critical stage of language shift, and language revitalization will be necessary to curb its harmful effects.

### ***Graded Intergenerational Disruption Scale***

In his seminal work *Reversing Language Shift*, Fishman (1991) introduced the Graded Intergenerational Disruption Scale (GIDS), a framework that details eight stages of language shift and can assist in identifying where language revitalization efforts should be focused for the most effective strategy. Fishman considered the Navajo language as a case study in his original analysis. Several decades later, Lee and McLaughlin (Adegbija et al, 2001, pp. 23-43) used this scale to again examine the Navajo language closely, judging its progress since Fishman first outlined its status, and projecting future needs of the language.

An evaluation of GIDS can be used to identify key concerns and possible target areas for language revitalization. Languages may need work in multiple stages. Indeed, there are several areas in which the status of Navajo may need to improve. The GIDS begins at the most severe stage and progresses to the least severe stage. However, the stages are not mutually exclusive, and there is overlap among them. Moving from the unhealthiest to the healthiest scenario may seem counterintuitive, but as it is necessary to begin language revitalization efforts at the most severe stage, and then address smaller concerns, the scale is structured to follow the logical path of language revitalization. Table 2 displays the stages of Fishman's GIDS.

**Table 2**

*Graded Intergenerational Disruption Scale*

Stage 8	Reassembling the languages and/or acquiring them on an individual basis during adulthood
Stage 7	The maintenance of a vibrant and natural adult Xish-speaking society
Stage 6	Creating the intergenerationally continuous Xish-speaking community via providing and stressing the link to family life, residential concentration and neighborhood institutions
Stage 5	Literacy via community schools that do not aim at meeting the compulsory education requirements
Stage 4a	Schools that are under Xish control and that can be attended in lieu of compulsory education
Stage 4b	Schools for Xish pupils but under Yish control

Stage 3	Use of Xish in the lower worksphere
Stage 2	Xish in lower governmental services and mass media
Stage 1	Some use of Xish in higher level educational, occupational, governmental, and media efforts

*Note: X refers to the minority language in question. Y refers to the dominant language of the society in which the minority language exists.*

**Stage 8: Reassembling the languages and/or acquiring them on an individual basis during adulthood.** This is the most critical position for a language to be in, requiring a reconstruction of the language and rebuilding a basis of fluent speakers. Fortunately, Lee and McLaughlin found that Navajo has not yet reached this stage. The language has a sizable population of fluent native speakers, and a standard orthography developed in the 1930s is still in use today. In addition, materials for learning the language are prevalent, and the Diné College offers the opportunity to learn Navajo in upper-level courses. The Navajo language is well-documented and far from Stage 8 at present (Adegbija et al, 2001, p. 29).

**Stage 7: The maintenance of a vibrant and natural adult Xish-speaking society.** Lee and McLaughlin reported that Navajo remained the main language for social interactions among adult speakers. However, English was gradually overtaking it in other domains, and the majority of Navajo speakers were adults over the age of 30. With fewer children learning the language, Navajo is closely approaching this stage in the next few generations (Adegbija et al, 2001, p. 30).

**Stage 6: Creating the intergenerationally continuous Xish-speaking community via providing and stressing the link to family life, residential concentration and neighborhood institutions.** This area was identified as the greatest challenge to Navajo and the stage at which

language revitalization needs to be targeted. Younger generations are shifting from Navajo to English at a rapid pace; in 1969, 95% of six-year-old Navajo children spoke the language, but a study in 1993 revealed that less than a third of Navajo kindergartners had reached fluency in the language. Even more concerning, 13% of students in the sample had no knowledge of Navajo at all (Adegbija et al, 2001, pp. 30-31).

Evangeline Parsons-Yazzie (1995 and 1996) suggested reasons why fewer Navajo children are learning the language at home. For one, English has eclipsed Navajo as a language with greater social and economic usefulness and status. Many parents want their children to learn English to have greater opportunities in their schooling and careers. For another, some Navajo children have inherited internalized shame of Navajo language and culture from their parents, perhaps a remnant of the harsh, restrictive language policies of past decades of Navajo schooling (Adegbija et al, 2001, pp. 31-32). Stage 6 is a crucial turning point for the Navajo language as transmission of the language to new generations has stagnated considerably.

**Stage 5: Literacy via community schools that do not aim at meeting the compulsory education requirements.** Lee and McLaughlin reported that all schools involved with Navajo literacy instruction are focused on compulsory education requirements (Adegbija et al, 2001, p. 33). Stage 5 schools are often more affordable than other types of schooling, foster literacy in cultural-specific domains, and are better suited for helping adults become literate in the language. The Navajo language could benefit from Stage 5 schools, particularly as compulsory education is often dependent on government funding and Navajo literacy takes a back seat to English education (Fishman, 1991, pp. 203-204).

Relevant to language education, the attitude of Navajos toward literacy is important to address. Literacy and written language are foreign concepts to traditional Navajo culture and

remain largely associated with English. An orthography for Navajo does exist, but in the minds of its speakers, Navajo is a primarily oral language (McLaughlin, 1992, p. 8-9).

**Stage 4a: Schools that are under Xish control and that can be attended in lieu of compulsory education.** Less than 10% of schools available to Navajo children are under local control, and even fewer have emphasized Navajo as an integral aspect of education. At Stage 4a schools, Navajo literacy is taught before English literacy, and many classes are taught exclusively in Navajo. Although these schools have been effective in educating students in Navajo, the greatest obstacle for their establishment is their dependence on limited government funding. This puts the schools under pressure to meet government requirements, which usually place a greater emphasis on English than other languages (Adegbija et al, 2001, pp. 33-34).

**Stage 4b: Schools for Xish pupils but under Yish control.** The majority of Navajo schools are not under Navajo control, and adopt the policy that Navajo is supplemental to English education. In some cases, Navajo is even treated as a “foreign language.” Some Navajo instruction is better than none at all, but these schools could do much to improve their Navajo language programs (Adegbija et al, 2001, pp. 34-35).

In 1966, the Rough Rock School for Navajo children in Arizona became one of the earliest schools for indigenous children that was governed by indigenous people. Prior education programs mandated by the U.S. government had been extremely restrictive of the Navajo language, and Navajos were not eager to send their children to a school that focused on reinforcing Anglo-American culture and teaching the English language at the expense of the Navajo way of life. However, the Navajo community at Rough Rock finally gained permission from the government to establish their own school and teach in Navajo. After the initiative to

create a community-led school, parents developed a greater desire for their children to attend school, learn Navajo, and embrace their culture (McCarty, 2002).

From the example of Rough Rock, it is obvious that community interest and support is essential for successful language and education programs. The Navajo people saw early education programs, imposed by outsiders, as a threat to their culture, but once they were in control of their own education, Rough Rock became one of the most successful Native American schools in the country (McCarty, 2002, p. 47). For effective language revitalization strategies, native speakers must be the “central decision maker[s]” for every part of the process (Cantoni, 1996, p. 33).

**Stage 3, 2, and 1: Work sphere, mass media, higher education and government.**

Lee and McLaughlin combined the final three stages, as they are interconnected. They found that Navajo is spoken in local and tribal council meetings, but it is translated into English for written records. Business and trade on the reservation prefer Navajo, but it is not a requirement. The court system operates primarily in English. Most media uses the English language, and few programs and newspapers exist that are entirely Navajo. From this, it is apparent that at these stages Navajo is weakening and English has largely overtaken it as the dominant language in higher institutions and public use (Adegbija et al, 2001, p. 36).

Using an analysis of GIDS, it becomes clear that the situation of the Navajo language is fast approaching a more precarious status. The stage of intergenerational transmission is under attack, with “critical linkages...breaking down” (Adegbija et al, 2001, p. 37). The GIDS provides a guideline for important domains where the Navajo language could be shored up, and following a more thorough assessment of language vitality, this information can be incorporated into a

language revitalization program. Additionally, new data on the current number of speakers, and especially the percentage of Navajo children learning the language, is needed.

Moving forward, native communities in the United States have largely won the battle for the legal right to preserve their languages, with legislation in place to protect them. But being allowed to do so and being able to do so are two entirely separate things. Jon Reyhner claimed that native communities do not have what he called the effective right to enact language revitalization. Effective right, in essence, means “access to the knowledge, strategies, and resources” needed for effective language revitalization (Cantoni, 1996, p. 3). Funding opportunities for current revitalization efforts are so limited and unable to provide for everyone, or even sustain these programs in the long-term (Klug, 2012).

The Navajo language still has a long way to go before it can be considered stable. However, new initiatives and programs designed to combat language shift continue to be implemented in, for, and by the Navajo community. One such project is headed by Pete Sands, a member of the Navajo Nation who has recently developed a puppet show for children called “Navajo Highways.” The show was designed to bridge the gap between older and younger generations and to teach Navajo in a fun and easy way. With funding, Sands hopes to make the puppet show available to a wider audience (Porter, 2022).

This initiative is a wonderful language revitalization strategy for Navajo because it is targeted toward the younger generation. If the rising generation can become fluent in the language and then transfer it to their children, the damaging effects of Navajo’s generational gap can be repaired. In addition, this program can be a valuable learning resource. The show may also generate more public interest in the Navajo language, spreading awareness about language revitalization to a wider audience.

## Conclusion

Language shift is a real process that is affecting languages all over the world, and most are in danger of extinction within a short time frame unless something is done to revitalize them. Despite the numerous obstacles that minority languages face, reversing language shift is possible and worthwhile. Language revitalization can turn the tide of language death and preserve minority languages for future generations. As each speech community is unique, there is no comprehensive model or program that will be successful for all languages. Every minority language will face its own obstacles and will require an individualized strategy. However, central to any successful language revitalization strategy is the speech community as the primary decision maker and enforcer. Native speakers must have a desire to enact language revitalization and a dedication to see it through. Reversing language shift is not easy. It requires time, funding, and resources, and even then gains may be minimal. Speech communities must fully invest in their language for any chance of success.

Once language shift is acknowledged, the community should seek to document the language through print and audio materials. It is also vital to begin with an assessment of the current status of the language. The GIDS developed by Fishman (1991) can be a useful scale for judging the severity of language shift (pp. 196-215). After a thorough assessment, objectives can be selected based on highest priority and realistic goals can be made. Two especially critical areas of language vitality are intergenerational transmission of the language and language education programs. The speech community should also periodically evaluate the effectiveness of their efforts, and make adjustments when necessary.

The Navajo Nation is a local example of a community that has been practicing language revitalization in the hopes of preserving their language. Although great strides have been made,



funding is limited and general awareness of language shift is low. With the increasing prevalence of English in Navajo life, language advocates will need to generate greater support for Navajo within their community than ever before in order to save it.

Language revitalization is most often hindered by a lack of community engagement and support. In a powerful call to action at an indigenous language conference in the United States, Rosemary Ackley Christensen said, “We are the committed talking to the committed...It is time to quit spending limited funds and energy on getting together to talk in English about saving native languages” (Cantoni, 1996, p. 102). Instead, she encouraged communities to use their language, tell stories, participate in cultural activities, and do everything they can to advocate for language revitalization (Cantoni, 1996, p. 102). Her plea reflects the greater need for “authentic social change” in speech communities, in addition to language revitalization programs and strategies (Adegbija et al., 2001, p. 41). Schools and programs cannot save a language, but individuals speaking together have the chance to do so.

There is hope on the horizon for minority languages as revitalization becomes a greater global priority. The United Nations has declared 2022-2032 the “International Decade of Indigenous Languages,” with the goal to raise awareness and support for these endangered language communities (United Nations, n.d.). With so many languages slipping away each year at an increasingly accelerated pace, this is a critical time to examine attitudes toward linguistic diversity, and to decide to do something about it. The responsibility can no longer be passed to future generations. For many languages, this is the pivotal point where either action or inaction will have lasting consequences. One native speaker of a minority language recognized this when she said, “I am 100% sure that this is the time that people will look back on and say, this was the generation credited with either saving or failing to save [the language]” (McGinty, 2019). This

desperate but empowering statement shows that speakers truly do make the difference between extinction and preservation of a language. If speakers do something, the language might be saved; if they do nothing, it will certainly die.

Fundamental to language revitalization is the need to shift away from the idea that language diversity is a problem. Instead, it can be viewed as a valuable resource for individual and community development (Collazo, 2021, p. 5). As both language shift and global awareness of minority languages may increase in the next decade, it is hoped that individuals in the United States will have the desire to learn more about minority languages in their areas, cultivate a healthier attitude towards linguistic diversity, and take action to support language revitalization. If this occurs, perhaps the answer to the joke “What do you call someone who speaks only one language?” will no longer be “an American.”

Word count: 10,363

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This capstone project has been a formative experience of my undergraduate education. Throughout this process, I have gained new skills, created meaningful relationships with my faculty mentors, and have had the opportunity to learn and grow in ways that have prepared me for graduate school and a future career. My Honors capstone has been a valuable opportunity for me to challenge myself and become more confident in my knowledge and abilities. It has also allowed me to apply my knowledge outside of the classroom. This was the capstone of my undergraduate education because it required me to build on all of my previous knowledge and professional skills to research a field related to my area of study, create a finished product, and present my findings in a public environment.

This experience has significantly added to my future education and career. I will be attending graduate school in the fall, and I hope to become a certified speech-language pathologist. Although it was difficult at times to balance classes, work, and my capstone project, I feel much more prepared for the demands of graduate school, where I will be expected to perform well in classes and work in the clinic. As I will be completing a thesis during the graduate program, I am glad that I have already completed an Honors thesis project because I have learned so much from going through the process this year. In addition, I strengthened my professional research and public speaking abilities throughout this process, skills that will be invaluable to me as I pursue academic and career opportunities in the future.

I also appreciated that the capstone gave me the opportunity to develop meaningful relationships with faculty members. Most of my experience with professors and classmates during my time at Utah State University was online because of the Covid-19 pandemic. While working on my capstone, I was excited to interact with Dr. Manuel-Dupont and Dr. de Jonge-Kannan in person and get personalized feedback during the research and writing process.

My faculty mentors also provided me with wonderful letters of recommendation and supported me as I applied for graduate school. The application process would have been much harder without their insights and encouragement!

My capstone has deepened my research experience within the field of linguistics. I chose to research language revitalization because I had an interest in the topic but not much knowledge of revitalization strategies. While researching, I read many books and articles that gave me a deeper understanding of the history of language revitalization and a basic foundation in the field. The capstone also required critical thinking about the most effective strategies and initiatives that could be successful for multiple speech communities. One of the most interesting challenges I encountered while diving deeper into the topic and preparing to write my paper was balancing foundational sources in the field with new data and studies. It was important for me to seek information from pioneers in language revitalization, such as Joshua Fishman, but I also needed timely and accurate information from those who built on his work.

I was able to broaden my experience across multiple disciplines with this project, as my main area of study is speech-language pathology. Although linguistics and language preservation are not directly related to communication disorders, they are connected in many areas. Both support the core value of cultural competence, which is crucial for working in a diverse environment as a speech-language pathologist. The fields of linguistics and speech-language pathology center around language and communication, and understanding how language is structured in the brain. Connecting my passion for languages with important aspects of my major was a fulfilling experience.

This capstone project was valuable because it engaged me in my local community. When designing a project, it was important to me for my capstone to have a direct connection to my



community. There were countless minority languages that I could have chosen to focus on in my paper, but I selected Navajo because it is one of the most prominent examples of language revitalization in Utah. I think that this shows that knowledge and research can be applied almost anywhere because there are many local opportunities available, even if they are not obvious at first. Having a local connection was also valuable when presenting my research at the Student Research Symposium because it was easier to engage the public.

One of my greatest challenges was getting started. It was difficult to choose a topic and focus my passion into a cohesive project because I had so many ideas. This cost time and the delay meant that I had less time to complete my project. Fortunately, my faculty mentors and Dr. Miller were willing to help me shape my ideas into a project. After I created a work plan, the next challenge was sifting through all of the information from my research and choosing what to include in my final product. One of the most difficult aspects of writing my paper was condensing so much interesting information into such few pages. I learned how to be more concise in my writing and how to choose the most relevant pieces of information.

The most significant triumphs of my capstone project include developing my skills as a writer and developing greater cultural competence. My faculty mentors were wonderful at pointing me in the right direction in my search for relevant source material. I learned to love the research process and enjoyed diving deeper into the field of language revitalization. In addition, I gained a greater respect and appreciation for the many speech communities that experience language shift, and their dedication to language revitalization. As a result of my capstone project, I have a greater desire to become involved in language revitalization efforts and advocating for minority language groups in my local community.

My advice to future Honors students would be to look forward to their capstone experience. It does not have to be intimidating. While it is easy to become overwhelmed, there are so many wonderful resources that students can access to help them with the process. Reach out to Honors advisors, faculty members, and other individuals at the university for support. Another piece of advice I have is to avoid procrastination. Once the process is started, work on it consistently and stay on track with your work plan. I have learned that this is the best path for success on any major project. My capstone has been one of the most fulfilling experiences from my time at Utah State University!

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**Biography**

Jessica Martin will graduate with Honors from Utah State University in May 2022 with a Bachelor's degree in Communicative Disorders and Deaf Education and a minor in Linguistics. In 2019, she assisted in hosting and chairing Utah State University's Model United Nations conference for high school students. She was also awarded the Honors Research and Study Abroad Fund to attend the North American Model United Nations conference, where she collaborated with other undergraduate students to create resolutions for important global issues. She has maintained a high degree of academic performance throughout her undergraduate experience and looks forward to continuing her education. She will pursue a master's degree in Communication Disorders at Brigham Young University in fall of 2022 and plans to work as a speech-language pathologist with children from diverse backgrounds upon its completion.