

## Constructing Language Assessments in Indigenous Languages to Inform Instruction

Lizette Peter, Gloria Sly, Tracy Hirata-Edds

### “Immersion Education: Pathways to Bilingualism and Beyond”

October 16, 2008, 9:00AM – 12:00 PM  
Saint Paul, Minnesota



### By the end of the workshop, participants will be able to:

1. Identify the why, what, and how of language assessment in the context of endangered language revitalization;
2. relate features of Cherokee Nation immersion language assessment to their own immersion contexts;
3. consider valid, reliable, and culturally responsive approaches for gauging the language learning of immersion students within individual contexts.

## Cherokee Language and Language Shift

- Cherokee belongs to the Iroquoian language family, is polysynthetic, and has syllabary writing system developed by Sequoyah
- Cherokee language shift has occurred over several centuries
- 2003 language survey results: only about 6 - 10% are fluent; 24% are semi-speakers; 70% are non-speakers
- Spoken only by middle-age/ grandparental generation
- *Without intervention*, language may be lost in about 30 years



## Cherokee Language Planning: 5 Phases

- “Purism phase” in 1900s
- “Reform phase” in 1960s
- “Standardization phase” in 1980s
- “Modernization phase” in 2000
- “Revitalization phase” in 2002 and beyond.
  - immersion for children
  - university-based teacher education program
  - immersion for adults
  - widespread literacy and language learning opportunities

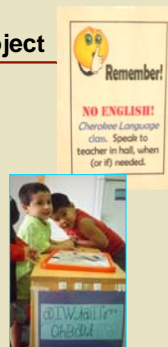
## Three Major Goals:

- Create Language Revitalization Programs.
- Secure a qualified and knowledgeable workforce.
- Document the language and develop curriculum.

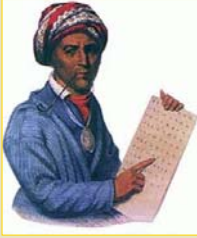


## Tsa-la-gi A-ge-yu-i: The Cherokee Immersion Project

- Pilot year: August 2001 ~ July 2002
- Currently 6 levels of immersion, Preschool ~ 3<sup>rd</sup> Grade
- Eleven fluent Cherokee teachers
- All activities are carried out in Cherokee
- Focus is on language, culture, academic content



## Future Projects



- Study, Review and update of the Plan.
- Develop curriculum and materials for use in **all** classrooms.
- Research and document old and current forms of the Cherokee language..
- Establish archival system.
- Promote employment of Oklahoma certified Cherokee teachers in public school classrooms.

## Language Immersion Mission

“The ultimate goal is for children to acquire the Cherokee language in such a way that it will become an integral part of their lives and their knowledge about the world around them.”



## Four Targeted Immersion Areas

**Cherokee Way:** Language in a broader sense, including Culture, Community, Spirituality

**Curriculum:** Guiding framework; instructional goal-setting; incorporation of standards for language, culture, and academic content

**Instruction:** Teaching and learning infant through adult; professional development for those directly and indirectly involved with instruction

**Assessment and “Envaluation”:** Documenting growth and development of learners’ language/academic skills; overall program evaluation: “Let’s take a look at what we are doing”

## What is the purpose of language assessment in a language revitalization program?

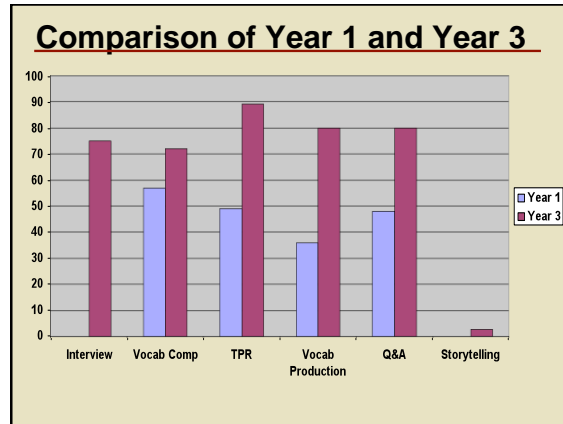
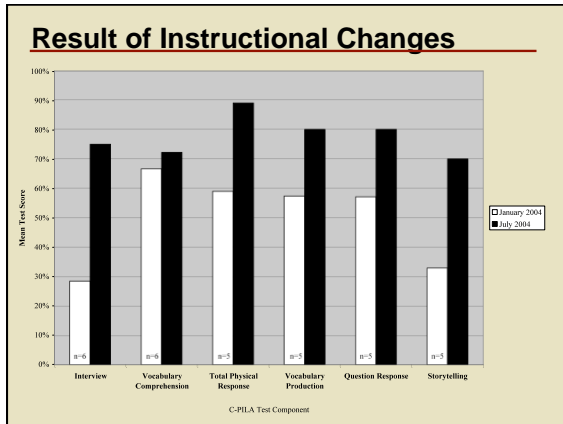
- giving feedback to teachers about learners’ abilities
- giving feedback to learners and their parents
- planning for the future
- improving curriculum and instruction
- establishing credibility and accountability
- furthering our understanding of second language acquisition of less commonly taught languages
- evaluating the effectiveness of the program in reversing language shift

## A Model for Cherokee Immersion



## C-PILA: Cherokee Preschool Immersion Language Assessment

- Designed specifically for children between the ages of two and five who have been, or will be, enrolled in a Cherokee language immersion classroom.
- Purpose: to measure extent to which children learning Cherokee through immersion have developed skills to communicate competently.
- Feedback to teachers: Allowed teachers to recognize that children needed more opportunities to use the language in meaningful ways



### C-KILA: Cherokee Kindergarten Immersion Language Assessment

- Designed specifically for children in Cherokee Kindergarten language immersion classroom with great input from classroom teachers.
- Guided by the question, "What should children be able to do in the language by the end of Kindergarten and after two or three years in immersion?"
- Eventually used for first and second grade, with revisions. Continues to be refined with each administration

### C-KILA Close-Up: Cherokee Verbs

Purpose: to assess children's ability to use third-person singular and plural present verbs:

- Pictures of animals and people performing different actions and are asked *do advne?* 'What is he/she/it doing?' or *do anadvne?* 'What are they doing?'
- Pictures depict basic verb vocabulary that teachers and curriculum planners expect children to know by the end of Kindergarten, such as sleeping, eating, singing, crawling, reading, and painting
- Test type mirrors the kind of activity teachers use in the classroom.

*do advne?*

17

asuwisga  
a-suwisga  
3A.SG-paint:PRG

*do anadvne?*

18

danisuhwisga  
dee-ani-suhwisga  
DST-3A.PL-paint:PRG

Name	1 CHD	2 CHD	3 PK	4 JG	5 LG	6 AH	7 LH
dahitadega (she is jumping)	dahitadeg		dahitadeg			tahuldeg	
usilla (he is sitting)	idsdeliduga	hastadlud	adsdeehlug		(go sit down)	ivsdelvg	jesdelug
adlohya (she is crying)	adlohha	adlohha	adlohi	ahyo	adlohhi	adlohi	
adawoa (she is swimming)	adawos		adawon			adawon	adawo
adansindo (she is crawling)	adansindo		adansindo	ust			
agolyya (she is reading)	digolye	hastadlug	agolye		doweluga		digolye
adishwuluga (she is talking a seat)	disusad	digoweldodi	dowelag		disuwesdi()	doweluga	ishwela ghena
adishwuluga (she is writing)	disusad	digoweldodi	dowelag		disuwesdi()	doweluga	ishwela ghena
aditaga (she is drinking)	aditaga	hadilas	adila			aditag	adila
aditaga (they are drinking)	aditaga		aditag			aditag	aditag

### C-KILA Findings:

- Children have difficulty conjugating Cherokee verbs to agree in person and number.
- Children's output at end of 2<sup>nd</sup> grade in Cherokee immersion reflects limitations in their ability to correctly use certain Cherokee linguistic forms even after as many as four years in an immersion classroom.

### What do the results mean for instruction?

- Teachers and curriculum planners need to prepare materials and lessons that expose children to unique features of the language and have clear targets for each grade level.
- Teachers need to learn to build into daily lesson plans targeted opportunities for children to practice a range of verb forms in meaningful contexts.
- Teachers need guidance in discovering linguistic rules for Cherokee verbs and in preparing materials that they could employ to encourage children to mark and use verbs in meaningful and appropriate ways.

**AT ALL LEVELS: AGE APPROPRIATE, CONSTANT AND PLANNED EXPOSURE TO ALL CONSTANT AND VERB FORMS!!!**

**PRE-SCHOOL:** Evidence of 1<sup>st</sup> Person: "Me" in accurate, complete phrases

**PRE-K:** Evidence of accuracy in 1<sup>st</sup> Person Singular "g/G", with common verbs; growing consistency

**KINDERGARTEN:** Evidence of use of some accurate and appropriate 2<sup>nd</sup> and 3<sup>rd</sup> singular verbs

**FIRST GRADE:** Mastery of 1<sup>st</sup>, 2<sup>nd</sup>, and 3<sup>rd</sup> person singular forms of common verbs; some evidence of accurate use of plural verbs

**SECOND GRADE:** Mastery of many plural forms, maybe not to the degree of distinguishing between dual/plural

**THIRD GRADE:** Evidence of all person markings for present continuous tense, singular, dual, and plural; evidence of some distinction between inclusive/exclusive

### Assessing Cherokee literacy: The C-LILA

- Developed by curriculum & instructional staff
- Guided by question: "What Cherokee reading/writing skills should children be able to demonstrate by the end of each level of immersion?"
- merges unique features of Cherokee language and culture with the Priority Academic Student Skills (PASS) mandated by the Oklahoma State Department of Education
- Piloted in spring, 2008

### Immersion Reading Results, Upclose

Standard: Literary Elements

Summarize the main points/events

d[YHsf =Psd: "cC]sr hqly. tc-Wsc Wc)< h\Tsz KZLsz cC]sri. azl tl /gc / /rg."

Teacher says: "Look at the picture. Put an X next to the sentence that best tells about the picture."



\_\_\_ □ □ . □ □ □ (It is square.)

\_\_\_ □ □ □ □ (It is round.)

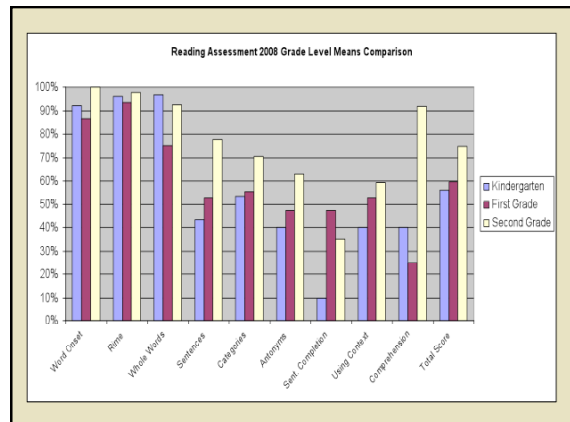
\_\_\_ □ □ . □ □ □ (It is a triangle.)



\_\_\_ □ □ □ □ □ □ □ (The bird is singing.)

\_\_\_ □ □ □ □ □ □ □ (The bird is flying.)

\_\_\_ □ □ □ □ □ □ □ □ □ □ (The bird is eating.)



### What did C-LILA Results Tell Us?

- Little grade-level difference in which areas of the assessment appeared easiest and which gave students the most trouble.
- All groups showed best results in the two phonological awareness sections (word initial and word final syllables) and word recognition.
- Weaker results were in classifying words into categories, selecting word opposites, getting the main idea, predicting, and using context clues to complete sentences.
- In general, kindergartners had difficulty with all sections of the assessment except for phonological awareness and word recognition.

### Using Multiple Assessment Sources

- bringing elders to the classroom to interview students
- recording or noting conversations between children during informal interactions using observation checklists to note specific strengths and limitations of students' language skills throughout different classroom activities
- having students keep a language journal
- teacher self-assessment

### Final Points about Assessment:

- information from assessment should be used for program improvement, not for punitive purposes
- culturally responsive and responsible assessment ensures full participation of stakeholders and is respectful of their values and opinions
- informal assessment is equally important as formal assessment, if not more so
- developing appropriate assessment is an ongoing process, and the assessment process should be revisited and revised regularly
- Remember: the most important purpose of assessment is not to prove, but to IMPROVE the quality and effectiveness of curriculum and instruction

# 3

## Wa-do



### Contact Us!

*Dr. Lizette Peter:*

[lpeter@ku.edu](mailto:lpeter@ku.edu)

*Dr. Gloria Sly:*

[Gloria-Sly@cherokee.org](mailto:Gloria-Sly@cherokee.org)

*Dr. Tracy Hirata-Edds:*

[tracy@ku.edu](mailto:tracy@ku.edu)