

Indigenous Languages:  
Resilience, Relevance, and Revival and the Role of  
Interpreters/Translators

By Armida Hernandez



# POP QUIZ!

- ▶ How many federally recognized tribes are there in the U.S.?

How many federally recognized tribes are there in Texas?

Which U.S. State has the most Reservations?



# Yes, Virginia! There are Indians in Texas!



## Ysleta del Sur Pueblo

- ▶ Approximately 3,000 enrolled members
- ▶ Languages: English/Spanish/Southern Tiwa
- ▶ Currently 2,698 acres, plus 70,461 acres of Chilicote Ranch.
- ▶ Tigua Inc. and subsidiaries – diverse business enterprises



## Horton Hears a Who!

▶ 7,000

43%

80%



“The preservation of the primitive cultures of America – is a utopia incompatible with the other and more urgent goal – the establishment of societies in which social and economic inequalities among citizens be reduced to human, reasonable limits...modernization is possible only with the sacrifice of Indian cultures.”

▶ What do you think?



“A language is not just words. It’s a culture, a tradition, a unification of a community, a whole history that creates what a community is. It’s all embodied in a language.”





- ▶ “In our languages lies the accumulated knowledge of humanity.”



- ▶ “The greatest biolinguistic diversity is found in areas inhabited by indigenous peoples, who represent around 4% of the world’s population, but speak at least 60% of the world’s languages”. (Nettle and Romaine)

# Language Extinction in General

## Why Should We Care?

- ▶ *A link exists between the worldwide collapse of ecosystems*
- ▶ *and the demise of languages.* (Daniel Nettle and Suzanne Romaine, *Vanishing Voices* (1999), Oxford)



# Why Save Indigenous Languages?



- ▶ It's an essential element of our identity as a people.
- ▶ Its unique ability to convey/express thoughts, ideas, concepts not possible in any other language
- ▶ It embodies a unique world-view, spirituality and lifeways.

*It's a sacred, living being:  
a patrimony from our ancestors, a legacy to give our children.*

# Resilience: Flipping the Script

- ▶ Universal Declaration on Indigenous Rights
- ▶ Mexico's judicial/legal reforms – INALI
- ▶ Esther Martinez Native Am. Languages Preservation Act (2006)
- ▶ Language revitalization efforts by individuals, Tribes and organizations, e.g. ILI, ELF, SLI



# How do interpreters and translators help?



- ▶ Cultivate/maintain “prestige” status of indigenous languages.
- ▶ Counteract the forces of language murder/suicide
- ▶ Give indigenous language speakers access to goods/services/information and socio-economic/political participation.
- ▶ Revive/revitalize languages in decline, and in rare cases even resurrect so-called dead languages.

# How can YOU help as an interpreter/translator?

- ▶ Develop a positive attitude towards indigenous languages
- ▶ Familiarize yourself with those you are most likely to come into contact with in your work and resources available to assist speakers of those languages.
- ▶ Positive treatment of indigenous language speakers.
- ▶ Educate/encourage understanding of the importance of indigenous language preservation





Questions?



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