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Language Restoration Before Funding: Or, What to do Before the Grants Come Through

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#### **Author**

Ahlers, Jocelyn C

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## **Language Restoration Before Funding: Or, What to Do Before the Grants Come Through**

JOCELYN C. AHLERS  
*California State University, San Marcos*

When members of Tribes whose languages of heritage are endangered first find themselves able to turn their attention to issues of language documentation and revitalization, the examples of successful efforts which are most frequently cited are typically well-known cases such as Hawaiian and Maori (not to mention Hebrew). While these are all excellent examples of language revival in practice, they share one feature in common that can be rather intimidating for Tribes beginning the road to revitalization: large amounts of organized funding. Immersion schools of any kind can require a great deal of money to get up and running. This includes funding to train teachers, to develop curricula, to pay for space for teaching; the list goes on. It would be unfortunate for any person interested in working on the revitalization of his or her language of heritage to feel unable to begin such work until a large grant has been acquired, or to assume that an immersion school must be the first goal. The purpose of this paper is to suggest that it is possible to strike while the iron is hot, to begin to achieve meaningful and important steps in the revitalization process before any funds have been found to support large-scale efforts. In order to show this, I report on the steps achieved by the Elem Pomo Language Group in the first three years of revitalization efforts, which were completed largely without any large-scale funding. Each of the actions taken by the Language Group during these three years comprises a step which was necessary for the process of language revitalization to continue, but was also small enough, and in this case done in such a way, that large amounts of funding were not necessary. In this way, we ensured that we would be ready to take advantage of funding opportunities as they arose.

It is useful to begin with a brief description of the status of Elem Pomo. Elem (Southeastern Pomo) is a Pomoan language spoken near Clear Lake, California, in Lake County, on the Elem Pomo Indian Colony. As late as the 1970s, as many as one-third of Tribal members still had some knowledge of their language (McLendon 1975), although it was rarely used in conversation. The Tribe gained federal recognition in the 1970s, and now has somewhat fewer than 200 enrolled members. Elem underwent a process that could be referred to as “gradual death” (Campbell and Muntzel 1989), with at least two stages of bilingualism, first with

Spanish, and then with English, although it should be noted that, traditionally, Tribal members probably spoke two or more of the local Pomoan languages. Historically, there was a great deal of intermarriage among Tribes around the Lake, and many members of Elem have more than one Pomoan language as a language of heritage. At the time we began our revitalization project, there were two remaining speakers of the language, one of whom was in her fifties, and the other of whom was in her seventies. The speaker with whom I have been able to work is Mrs. Loretta Kelsey; she used her language in regular communication with her mother until she was in her thirties, but, until our work together began, had not used it regularly since that time. There is some prior documentation of Elem Pomo, which I list and discuss below.

The Elem Pomo Language Group first met at the Breath of Life, Silent No More, Language Restoration Workshop in June of 2002. The purpose of this workshop is to introduce the holdings of the UC Berkeley archives to Native Californians whose languages have one or no speakers. Linguistic mentors aid workshop participants in deciphering the linguistic materials that have been found for their languages, and in beginning to think of ways to use those materials in the language revitalization process (see the Introduction to this volume for a more complete description). At that workshop, I was assigned to be the linguistic mentor for Robert Geary, Gary Thomas, and their aunt, Mrs. Loretta Kelsey, all members of the Elem Pomo Tribe. Robert was especially interested in learning more about his language, and in finding ways to begin to use his language again. We spent the week together, gathering as much of the documentation of Elem as we could find. The final list of documentation included a copy of approximately 500 file slips (Grekoff, date unknown), a copy of a grammar written in the 1970s (Moshinsky 1974), copies of fieldnotes and texts gathered in the 1940s (Halpern 1940), several audio recordings burned onto CDs, and several word lists collected at various times during the 1900s by unknown fieldworkers working with unknown speakers. This material has formed the basis for the historical documentation with which we have been working. We have added to it over time, gathering copies of books written about Pomo culture in general, but these works are specific to the language, and have been an important resource in our work together.

After the workshop ended, Robert and Mrs. Kelsey and I decided that we should work together to begin to document Mrs. Kelsey's use of Elem Pomo. Since then, we have met on a regular basis, and Robert and I are regularly in touch by phone. Each step that we have taken since that time has been decided upon collaboratively. In general, Robert formulates a statement of the next goal that he would like to achieve in our work together. I then suggest some of the ways in which we might go about reaching that goal. Robert and Mrs. Kelsey then decide which of those options would be most appropriate for them and for their community at that time, and we go forward. Frequently during the process, we revisit our sense of where we are going and how we are getting there, readjusting as necessary to meet everyone's needs while still moving forward with our work.

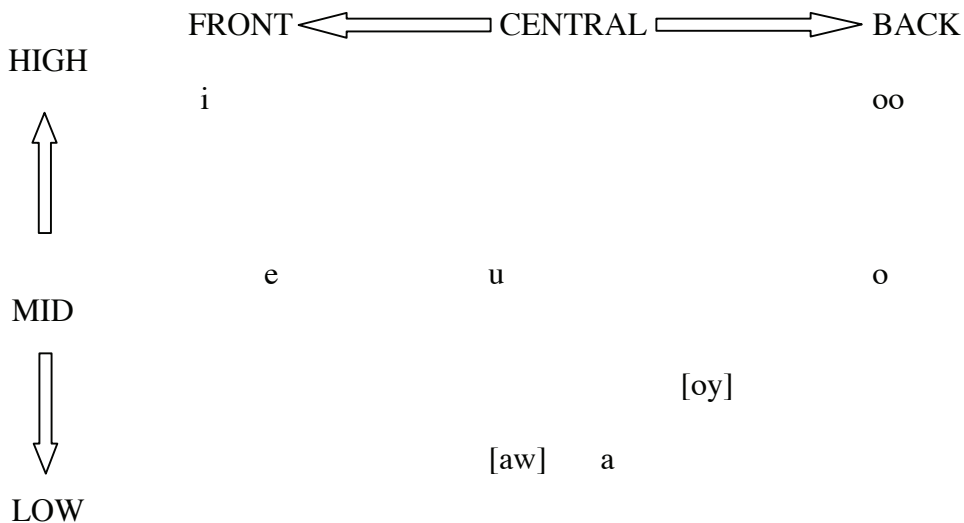
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In this way, the language revitalization process has been driven by the needs of the community from the beginning.

Our first step was to create a practical orthography with which to write the language. While Robert had been introduced to the International Phonetic Alphabet during the Breath of Life workshop, as well as to the various writing systems used by linguists who in the past had worked with speakers of Elem Pomo, we felt that the IPA was too unwieldy for use as a day-to-day writing system. A number of linguists have discussed the information that must be taken into consideration when creating a practical orthography (see, e.g., Hinton and Hale 2001), so I will not provide a detailed discussion of the theoretical implications of creating writing systems here. In general, however, a writing system must strike a balance between accurately representing all of the sounds of a language, and having so many symbols recording so many nuances that it is not useful for everyday life. In this case, the Tribe wished to have a writing system which mirrored that of English, so that children who are literate in English and are learning Elem would be comfortable working with it. The members of the Language Team also wished to have a system which could be used easily on a standard computer keyboard, to facilitate email communication, and the typing of educational materials. Finally, as a linguist, I felt that it was necessary, if at all possible, to adequately represent the phonemic structure of the language. In other words, I wished to avoid potential spelling pitfalls like that of English *-ough*, which is pronounced differently in words such as *though*, *through*, *cough*, and *tough*. Taking all of these considerations into account, I created a writing system (see Figure 1 below), which we have used since that time.

While this work was time-consuming and required an understanding of the phonological system of the language, it was not a project that needed funding to complete. Furthermore, once the orthography was in place, it opened up the use of

Figure 1. Elem Pomo Practical Orthography



	Bilabial	Dental	Alveolar/ retroflex	Palato- alveolar	Velar	Post- velar	Glottal
<b>Stop</b>	p/b	th	t/d		k	q	'
<b>Glottalized stop</b>	p'	th'	t'/d'		k'	q'	
<b>Affricate</b>			ts	ch			
<b>Glottalized affricate</b>			ts'	ch'			
<b>Fricative</b>	f		s	sh	x	X	h
<b>Nasal</b>	m		n				
<b>Liquid</b>			l				
<b>Glide</b>	w			y			

email for communication about the language, since we had deliberately developed the orthography to be compatible with a western keyboard, something that we were lucky that the phonology of the language permitted.

The creation of this practical orthography was a vital first step in our documentation and revitalization process, and had a number of repercussions. First, it meant that Robert could begin to create materials which were easily understood by other members of the Tribe. Moreover, the creation of those materials indexed an active interest in language documentation and revitalization, in a way that utilizing a writing system developed by a linguist for linguists would not have done. Over time, we have made minor adjustments to the writing system to reflect information which Robert and Mrs. Kelsey feel is important to represent in the written form of a word. For example, while stress in Elem Pomo generally falls on the penultimate syllable of the word, there are some cases where it falls on either the antepenultimate, or the ultimate syllable instead. At this point, we have not discovered whether these differences are predictable from the phonological structure of the word, and, in any case, these stress patterns are not predictable for language learners who are reading a word for the first time. We have therefore recently decided to begin marking stress on words when it does not fall on the penultimate syllable, and thus will be adding an accent to the vowel in a stressed syllable in such cases. This ability to adjust our practice when we have added new knowledge has been an important part of our work together for two reasons. First, it emphasizes the collaborative nature of the work. It is vital that the considerations of all those who will be using the documentation be taken into account in developing materials. Second, our ability to adjust our working practice when new information comes to light means that we have not waited to produce learning and teaching materials until we have all possible information regarding the Elem language and its structures. To wait that long would mean that we might lose the opportunity to make use of one of our greatest resources in the language documentation and revitalization process: the speaker of the language. Moreover, it would restrict Robert's ability to devote time and energy to the language whenever that is possible for him. When working on a small scale in this

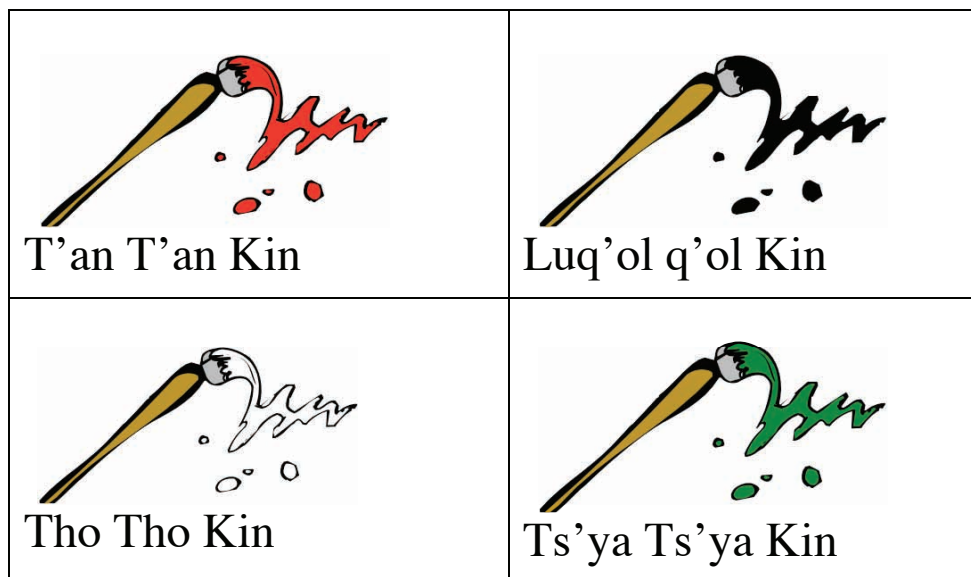
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way, it is necessary to take each day's work and immediately put it to use in the community, and a working practice that allows for some flexibility in material development is an asset in such a situation.

Robert immediately took this writing system and began to develop a series of flashcards to use with his children in their home. Before the development of the practical orthography, he had learned a fairly large lexicon of basic nouns from Mrs. Kelsey, but had had no easy way of writing those words down or of conveying that information to others when he was not present. By creating flashcards, he was able to go home and play games like Concentration with his children. Our next step was to learn how to say each of those nouns in the context of a complete sentence, so that, instead of simply saying "eagle", Robert could ask his children, "Is this an eagle?", and they could respond, "That is an eagle." In this way, each lexical item that was on a flashcard could be used in a communicative act, rather than in a list of words. The creation of these flashcards, like the development of the practical orthography, was something that could be done with a minimal budget. Each card had a picture on both sides, with the Elem word on one side, and the English word on the other. Robert had them all laminated for durability. While they were printed in color, even that isn't entirely necessary when a color printer is not available. Moreover, once the template was in place for creating the flashcards, Robert could make more each time we developed and verified a new list of vocabulary items. (See Figure 2 below for an example of some of these early flashcards.)

The creation of the flashcards was another small but important step on the road to language revitalization. By introducing words and phrases to children, the documentation project that we were engaged in became the source of information for immediate work in revitalization. It was no longer an academic, static affair.

Figure 2: Pomo Language Flashcards



Instead, it was a process which had immediate results in language use among this small group of Tribal members. As a next step, Robert and I worked with Mrs. Kelsey to develop Elem equivalents for a number of phrases used regularly in ceremonies in the Tribe's Roundhouse, and Robert began to use them in that context right away. Again, this small project had immediate repercussions, in that Tribal members began to see, in a fairly public venue, language use that was practical and accessible to everyone.

Throughout these stages, none of these projects required any significant resources other than the willing participation of a speaker, a learner, and a linguist. All of us were working without any reimbursement, and were meeting in the Tribal office or in Robert's home. We met once a month, when I traveled to Clear Lake from San Diego. At first, our meetings were hard to schedule, as we all lived in different parts of the State, but when Mrs. Kelsey moved back to Clear Lake, we found it easier to create times to meet. These once-a-month meetings took place from about 9 until 5. Even lunch became time to hear about the history of the language and its speakers; although we were not gathering linguistic data per se during that time, our lunchtime talks provided the cultural background so necessary for placing language use in context, and led us to ask further questions that expanded our knowledge about both the language and the culture, both vital components of a language revitalization project.

Once we had a writing system and flashcards, and the language had been reintroduced to some ritual situations, we were ready for a larger project. We decided to begin the work necessary to create a phrasebook. While we knew that we could decide on the content of the phrasebook, and gather the linguistic material needed for the phrasebook, on our own as we had been working, we also realized that it would cost money to produce the phrasebook and began to look for funding to pay for publication and materials costs. In the meantime, we gathered together a number of examples of phrasebooks that had been published by other California Tribes, and began to decide what we wanted to include, and what we wanted the final phrasebook to look like.

We decided that the goal of the phrasebook would be to provide useful, everyday language to members of the Tribe, and that it would also serve as a vehicle for introducing the practical orthography and the pronunciation of each of the symbols. These considerations determined the content that we began to gather. The phrasebook begins with a section that introduces each symbol in the orthography, with an English word or description to show the pronunciation, and an example of the sound in an Elem word (with its meaning). The next section is entitled "chit chat", and includes a great deal of the material that enables speakers to use the later lists of words in complete and communicative sentences. This page has phrases like, "This is a \_\_\_", and "That is a \_\_\_", as well as questions like, "What is that?" and "What is this?" Such phrases enable language learners and users to place individual words into the context of the sentence, changing those words from lists to actual communicative acts. We have also included basic conversational phrases like, "How are you?", "Thank you", "What is your

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name?”, and so on. The next section we have entitled “Commands”, and it includes a list of basic, everyday commands that might be used in a home or classroom, such as “Sit down”, “Be quiet”, “Hand me the \_\_\_\_\_”, etc. Again, each of these phrases constitutes a communicative act in that it allows a speaker to create circumstances in which a hearer would respond to a verbal cue, whether it is a question or an order. In this way, Elem becomes not just a list of words on a page, but a language that can be used in real-life, if limited, situations. Further sections of the phrasebook contain lists of terms for household items, food, animals, days of the week, numbers, seasons, plants, and so on. There are also sections including adjectives (colors, feelings, temperatures, etc.) and verbs (basic actions). The end of the phrasebook has an alphabetized list of all the Elem words and English words contained in the book, with their page numbers. The purpose is to create a reference that will allow members of the Tribe to find places in their daily lives to use their language of heritage.

The phrasebook is nearing completion, and we are considering publication options. Our hope is that this book will become an heirloom that each Tribal family can use for years to come, and we would like its format to reflect the unique nature of the book; in particular, we plan for the book to be pocket-sized, so that it can easily be carried. A phrasebook serves a number of purposes in a language documentation/revitalization program. It is a useful tool in language teaching and learning, and can be used to begin a language teaching program. It can also be an important step in the language documentation process, in that it begins the work of creating a dictionary, and the knowledge necessary to document and form the basic sentence forms that are provided at the beginning of the book can serve as material to begin a practical grammar of the language. Thus, while a project like this can be done expensively, if funding is available, it is also worth doing inexpensively, as a useful interim step in working with a language.

In Summer 2004, Robert and Mrs. Kelsey were accepted into the Master-Apprentice Language Learning Program, funded by the Advocates for Indigenous California Language Survival (described in detail in Hinton and Hale 2001). This program provides support for Robert and Mrs. Kelsey to meet regularly for their language work. It also provides training in creating and sustaining a one-on-one immersion language learning experience. Finally, it has provided equipment and training for recording language, and using that language to create teaching materials. This program has allowed Robert and Mrs. Kelsey to progress more quickly with Robert’s learning of the language.

Our next step in working together was to hold a series of language immersion camps on the Elem Pomo Indian Colony reservation. The information that was gathered during each of the steps listed above was used to inform these language camps. The curriculum was decided upon based on a series of conversations among the Language Group regarding what kinds of linguistic information would best serve the Tribe in several realms, including usefulness in day-to-day living, and cultural appropriateness. Each language camp was designed to include a series of ritual language activities that occur in every lesson, and that students can

use in day-to-day living. The first is introductions, in which students are taught to say, “My name is \_\_\_\_”, and “What is your name?”, using immersion techniques. They also learn to answer the questions, “What is his name?” and “What is her name?”. In this way, they not only learn the word *name*, as well as a polite way to introduce themselves, but they learn, inductively, the different articles *my*, *your* (singular and plural), *his*, and *hers*. Furthermore, they learn how to turn statements into questions. With the question, “Is his name \_\_\_?” they learn to create yes/no questions, and that different kinds of questions require different markers. Thus, these rituals of language use serve several language-learning goals. The introduction is followed by the offering of drinks. The instructors go from student to student asking if they would like water or soda. Again, this serves several purposes: it reinforces question formation, it teaches the words “water” and “soda”, and it teaches a politeness behavior that is important and culturally grounded, especially as younger people are expected to think of the needs of their elders in any gathering.

The four language lessons that we initially developed for our camps cover a wide variety of themes. (See Appendix A for a detailed lesson plan from one of the camps). The first taught the names of clothes and body parts, as well as a series of sentences in which those names could be used, including the basic sentences “Is this a \_\_\_?”, “What is this?”, and “Hand me the \_\_\_”. Each of these sentences can be used in a communicative situation, particularly the last. The second camp introduced kinship terminology, and students created their own family trees with the appropriate terms of address and reference for each of their relatives. This camp focused less on immersion than the first camp, in part because it was difficult to act out each of the family members on the tree – Elem kinship terminology is complex. However, we all felt that teaching this terminology was important from a cultural perspective, so that Tribal members could have a sense of the ways in which their language encodes the complex relationships among family members, and could use their language to refer to, and address, relatives and elders in a culturally appropriate manner. The third language camp introduced terminology for cooking and food, as well as sentence structures that can be used in the kitchen, including sentences about setting the table, cutting food, and cooking food. And the last camp reinforced these terms in a lesson on cooking acorn soup. Each camp ended with a game of Bingo, using cards with the terminology learned during the lesson.

Each of these camps took place outside the Elem Pomo Roundhouse, the Tribe’s sacred space. This location served a number of purposes. First, it is at the center of the reservation, easily accessible, and open to everyone. Second, because of its proximity to the Roundhouse, it serves to highlight the importance of language learning to the Tribe. The costs associated with these camps were minimal; at each, I brought the materials necessary for teaching (e.g., bags of children’s clothing and a huge poster of a family tree with all of the kinship terminology written on it). At the first, we served a potluck dinner for all of the participants; at subsequent camps, we ordered pizza for everyone. Other costs

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included nametags, soda and water, and Bingo prizes. In essence, however, these camps were a fairly low-cost way of introducing the Tribe both to their language, and to the Language Group's efforts at documentation and revitalization.

As I stated at the beginning of this paper, its purpose has been to show readers that, while obtaining funding for language revitalization is an important long-term goal of individuals, groups, or Tribes working on language documentation and renewal, it is not a prerequisite for beginning language work. Each step that the Elem Pomo Language Group took during the period reported on in this paper – the creation of an orthography, making and using flashcards in language teaching, gathering data for a phrasebook, and holding immersion language camps – has been an important move forward in the renewal of Elem. Furthermore, each of these achievements places the Language Group in a stronger position to take advantage of funding opportunities as they arise. We have since received grant monies to support the publication of the phrasebook, and the Tribe is working with the Administration for Native Americans (ANA) on a three-year grant which will provide support for some of the Language Group's ongoing activities. The lesson, if we can say that there is one, is that language renewal can progress at many levels, all of which are powerful venues for language work.

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## Appendix A

### Workshop #1: Body parts/clothing

#### Introductions:

(During this section, instructors will first introduce themselves to the students and to each other, to model an introduction. Then they will turn to students and ask what their names are, one by one. When students respond with only their names, instructors will model for them, “Weyuk xin (student’s name)” and encourage the students to repeat. Then they will hand students a name tag and tell them to write their name. Finally, can test comprehension by asking, “Is your name \_\_\_?” Or, “Is his name \_\_\_?” To this, students can simply respond “yes” or “no”.)

- “My name is \_\_\_\_.” Weyuk xin \_\_\_\_.
- “What is your name?” Theyuk xin awiye?
- “Write the name \_\_\_\_.” Ma xin \_\_\_\_ asoon.
- “Is your name \_\_\_?” Theyuk xin \_\_\_ ha?
- “Yes.” I.
- “No.” Hele.
- “Is his/her name \_\_\_?” Ooith/ometh xin \_\_\_ ha?
- “Do you understand?” Ma fdikith ha?

**Materials needed:** Name tags.

#### Drinks:

(During this section, instructors will ask each student individually whether they’d like coffee, juice, etc., and ask them to respond with “yes” or “no”, as learned in the last section. This section can be followed by a short break for students to drink their beverage of choice.)

- “Do you want coffee?” Ma kofi xatsith?
- “Do you want milk?” Ma letse xatsith?
- “Do you want sugar?” Ma muqabats xatsith?
- “Do you want juice?” Ma mukayin Xa xatsith?

**Materials needed:**

- coffee
- cups
- milk
- sugar
- juice

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### Introduce clothing terms and body parts:

(Instructors begin this by pointing to the various pieces of clothing and body parts (on themselves and each other) and naming them. Students are asked to repeat the names of the items. Probably best to just do clothes to start, and then to do body parts, if time and attention allows. Labeling should be done in complete sentences, “This is a \_\_\_\_\_”, although the word for the particular items can be repeated again before asking students to say it. Have them point to the body part or nearest example of the item of clothing. All three instructors should also be pointing and indicating and saying the terms to help students along.)

- “clothes” aba
  - “hat” sumlelo
  - “glasses” ooikunchim
  - “shirt” kamisa
  - “jacket” kapothe
  - “skirt” nawash
  - “pants” k’abok
  - “dress” thoonekoo
  - “socks” kalsetha
  - “shoes” sapatho
  - “boots” wothas
  - “coat” kapothe
  - “belt” moshnets
- “body” Xaba’
  - “head” xiya
  - “hair” ey
  - “ear” Xamuntsa’
  - “eye” ooi
  - “nose” la’
  - “mouth” Xasto
  - “neck” qoy
  - “shoulder” tsa’waya
  - “arm” Xal
  - “fingers” boo
  - “leg” kel
  - “knee” qada’
  - “foot” xaman
  - “toes” qaboo
- “This is a \_\_\_\_\_.” Mi \_\_\_\_\_.
  - “That is a \_\_\_\_\_.” Ooi \_\_\_\_\_.

**Materials needed:** One of each kind of clothes.

### Opportunity for student practice/comprehension:

(Instructors start with yes/no questions to the group, and work up to individual student questions.)

- “Is this \_\_\_\_\_?” Mi \_\_\_\_\_ ha?
- “Is that \_\_\_\_\_?” Ooi \_\_\_\_\_ ha?
- “Touch your \_\_\_\_\_.” Theyak \_\_\_\_\_ atha.
- “Where are your \_\_\_\_\_?” Theyak \_\_\_\_\_ hey’e?
- “Who is wearing \_\_\_\_\_?” Ts’a \_\_\_\_\_ ashamath?

**Materials needed:** None

Guided practice/labeling charts to take home/preparing for Bingo:

(Hand out sheets of paper with picture of the body, and pictures of clothes on them. Tell students to find a particular piece of clothing or body part (not in order); as one last test of comprehension, then tell them to write the label next to the item. Labels will be placed on the large posters so that students can see and copy them.)

- “Find the \_\_\_\_.”
- “Where is the \_\_\_\_\_?” \_\_\_\_\_ hey’e?
- “Write the word \_\_\_\_\_.” Ma \_\_\_\_\_ asoon.
- “Here is the word \_\_\_\_\_.”

**Materials needed:**

- Sheets of paper with body and clothes on them to label.
- Large charts with pictures of body and clothes.
- Labels for the large charts, printed large enough for students to read.

Bingo:

(Gives students one more chance to practice comprehension of all the words. Instructors will require students to say, “I have a \_\_\_”, before marking a square.)

- “Who has a \_\_\_\_\_?”
- “I have a \_\_\_\_\_.”
- “Bingo!”

**Materials needed:**

- Bingo cards
- Markers for the cards
- Prizes

Dinner:

- “Do you want some?”
- “Thank you.”

**Materials needed:**

- Spaghetti
- Drinks
- Forks, knives, plates, napkins
- Cookies

**REPORT 14**

**SURVEY OF CALIFORNIA AND  
OTHER INDIAN LANGUAGES**

***Language is Life***

***PROCEEDINGS OF THE 11<sup>TH</sup> ANNUAL  
STABILIZING INDIGENOUS LANGUAGES CONFERENCE***

**June 10-13, 2004**

**University of California at Berkeley**

**Wesley Y. Leonard and Stelómethet Ethel B. Gardner, Editors**

**Andrew Garrett and Leanne Hinton, Series Editors**

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