

Uto-Aztec Languages and the Importance of Archival Materials in Language Revitalization



Kristen Simmons, University of Arizona



Gabriela Pérez Báez and William Merrill, Department of Anthropology, National Museum of Natural History

Objectives

- Coming from a Southern Paiute community facing language endangerment I was interested in how archival materials can be utilized for language revitalization efforts in communities, particularly my own
- I wanted to locate relevant linguistic materials available at the National Anthropological Archives for Uto-Aztec languages
- By assessing the language materials held by National Anthropological Archives I am presented with a historical scope of language documentation that can serve revitalization efforts

Endangered Languages

- Some 6,000 languages are spoken today (Krauss 1992)
- 90% of the world's languages are endangered or threatened and might no longer be spoken by the end of the century
- Language endangerment is a product of cultural colonialism and an imposition of monolingualism, yet, multilingualism is the natural norm globally
- Language loss is part of a much larger process of loss of cultural and intellectual diversity and of local knowledge

Research

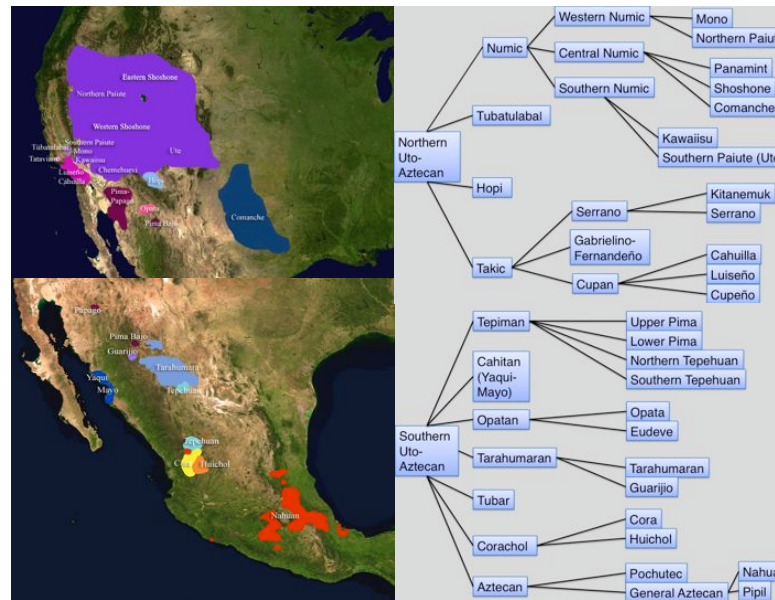
- To assess the Uto-Aztec language materials available at the National Anthropological Archives, I consulted the [Catalog of Manuscripts at the National Anthropological Archives](#) and SIRIS
- The Catalog consists of documents collected by the Bureau of American Ethnology between 1879 and 1965
- John Wesley Powell, the first chief of the BAE, prioritized the study of languages and as a result the collection is rich in vocabularies, grammar notes, and linguistic texts.
- Languages were searched for in the Catalogue and SIRIS by individual language name, paying attention to the shift in names through time as to not overlook any materials
- Found materials were entered into an Excel spreadsheet and arranged by language subgroup

Findings

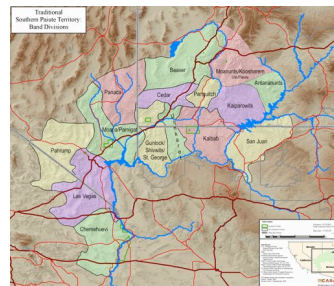
- Total linguistic materials found at NAA regarding Uto-Aztec languages: 516
- Numic language materials found at NAA: 66
- Southern Paiute/Chemehuevi/Ute language materials found at NAA: 84
- The amount of linguistic material found regarding the Southern Paiute/Chemehuevi/Ute languages is promising and highly important when considering the language populations and number of speakers left

Archival Material and Language Revitalization

- NAA holds significant extensive documentation on many endangered languages and cultures
- A digital inventory of materials pertaining to all language families represented in Mexico was created to include all Uto-Aztec languages
- Migrating to digital formats allows for greater access to these collections by community members in support of culture and language revitalization efforts
- This is in keeping with the mission of Recovering Voices: to promote the documentation and revitalization of the world's endangered languages and the knowledge preserved in them.



Above: maps of Northern and Southern Uto-Aztec languages and where they're spoken, along with corresponding language trees based on Miller's (1980) classification.



Above: map of Southern Paiute traditional territory



Above: Southern Paiute Chief Tau-Gu in Partial Native Dress and with Major John Wesley Powell (Non-native) 1873, courtesy of NAA.

ID #	Collection	Ms.	Block	Language	Dialect	Description	Context	Collector	Date	Remarks
BAE MS	B13-d		Paiute (Southern)	NA	NA	Southern Nevada Paiute grammar, personal names, and fragments notes. N.E. [1874, 1875?] 5 pp.	Carson, Oscar	NA	NA	
BAE MS	B16		Paiute	NA	NA	Vocabulary of Pai-Ute (see notes) with list of names and terms. (New And Old) 1, 1877 and before. 1 p. 11 pp.	Watson, Serrano	NA	NA	Contains 64 terms in Spanish (collected in Nevada), Latin or Germanic written in Cambridge, Mass., and dated Mar. 18, 1877.
BAE MS	B17		Paiute	NA	NA	"Ute Language" (Walker River Reservation, Nev.) [ca. 1888]. MS. D. 19 pp.	Washington, S.A.	Walker River Reservation	1888	Reproduced in CV: Copied from Washington's book. Dr. William H. Goble. Revision vocabulary. Computer scan. Reproduction of Walker River Reservation.

Above: small sample of the database focusing on the Paiute language

Uto-Aztec

- One of the largest families of languages in the New World
- Spoken in three geographic areas: western United States, Mexico, and Central America
- Broken into: Northern and Southern branches
- Detailed studies of Southern Uto-Aztec languages completed between the 16th and late 19th centuries
- Number of estimated speakers of Uto-Aztec languages: 1,984,795 (Ethnologue 2009)

Numic Languages

- Is the most northerly branch of Uto-Aztec
- Consists of three closely related areas: Western, Central, and Southern
- Occupies the greatest geographic area of any branch of Uto-Aztec

Southern Paiute

- Belongs to the Southern Numic branch
- Closely related to Chemehuevi and Ute languages
- First detailed study of a Northern Uto-Aztec language by Sapir between 1915-1931
- Represented in 10 communities across Nevada, Utah, and Arizona
- Population: 1,980 (US Census 2000) including Ute, Southern Paiute, and Chemehuevi
- Spoken mainly by older generation, 50+ and not used for communication

Acknowledgements

- I'd like to thank Gabriela and Bill for their insight and guidance on my project, Maggie and Carmen at the Anthropology Library for their helpfulness, the staff at NAA for their patience, my fellow NHRE cohorts, and Cristián Samper.

References

- Grenoble, L. & Whaley, L. (2006). *Saving Languages: An introduction to language revitalization*. New York, NY: Cambridge University Press.
- Hinton, L. & Hale, K. (2001). *The Green Book of Language Revitalization in Practice*. San Diego, CA: Academic Press.
- INALI. (2008). *Año Internacional de Los Idiomas*. Muestras de la Diversidad Lingüística de México (Disco 1 de 2). Secretaría de Educación Pública.
- Miller, W. (1983). Uto-Aztec Languages. In A. Ortiz (Ed.), *Handbook of North American Indians* (pp. 113-124). Washington, DC: Smithsonian Institution.
- Miller, W. (1986). Numic Languages. In W. D'Azevedo (Ed.), *Handbook of North American Indians* (pp. 98-106). Washington, DC: Smithsonian Institution.
- National Anthropological Archives. (1975). *Catalog to Manuscripts at the National Anthropological Archives, Dept. of Anthropology, National Museum of Natural History, Smithsonian Institution, Washington, D.C.* (Vol. 1-3). Boston, MA: G.K. Hall.