

## Documenting Native Languages: What Should We Put in the Dictionary?<sup>1</sup>

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**Overview.** Many people in this audience are involved in a dictionary project or hope to begin one. Below are some of the topics I'll touch on in my very brief talk today, with illustrations from a number of American Indian and other indigenous languages of the Americas.

- very preliminary questions for a dictionary project
- decisions about words to include
- decisions about verb entries
- "we don't have a word for that"

At the end of my talk I'll revisit a short but very important paper by Mary R. Haas (the original guru of academic study of Oklahoma languages) on "What Belongs in a Bilingual Dictionary?" Although it's over 50 years old, it contains valuable lessons for language documentation today.

My remarks are oriented primarily toward the development of traditional printed dictionaries, since for reasons of access and portability these are still the most important for users, but most of these points can be generalized to projects developing online dictionary resources. As you'll see, I include many questions that it may be helpful for your language committee to discuss.

### I. Very preliminary questions

Before you begin, there are a number of things to consider about your dictionary and what goes in it....

- (1) Who is the dictionary intended for? (Everybody? scholars? children? specialized areas?...)
- (2) What ORTHOGRAPHY (spelling system) should be used for the target language,<sup>2</sup> the language the dictionary is designed to reference or teach? (As many of you know, this is very far from an easy question. Few of the languages we care about here have completely standardized orthographies, and debates about spelling often escalate into what Leanne Hinton (2003) has rightly called "orthography wars". But decisions do need to be made!)

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<sup>1</sup> I am very grateful to the following speakers who have generously shared their wonderful languages with me: the late Nellie Brown and others (Mohave), Virginia Carey (Cherokee), Emilia Chuquin (Imbabura Quichua), the late Joanna Freeman (Creek-Seminole), Virginia Kee (Navajo), Felipe H. Lopez and others (Tlacolula Valley Zapotec / TVZ), Maurice Lopez and others (Garifuna), and Catherine Willmond and others (Chickasaw). Thanks to John Dyson and Marcus Smith for the examples in (8) and (23); to the members of the Gabrielino-Tongva Language Committee (especially Jacob Gutierrez and Virginia Carmelo, but also Julia Bogany, Brent Scarcliff, and others) for conversation about Tongva issues; and to my friends in the UCLA American Indian Seminar for very helpful comments. Munro (2002a) and (2002b) provide more discussion of a number of the problems discussed here.

<sup>2</sup> In the paper just mentioned, Haas (1962) calls the language the dictionary is in (usually the native language of the user) the target language and the language the dictionary is of (the one the user is trying to understand, which the dictionary is trying to describe) the source language. Since the language you're trying to learn about or understand is the target of your study, I prefer the terminology used in the text.



one seems to know these old words. Some have clear ETYMOLOGIES (for example, *okhina'* is from *oka'* 'water' plus *hina'* 'road' and *taskannak* is very similar to the *Choctaw* word *tasannok* (Byington 1915: 343, **tasvnnuk**), while others do not. But they all look like possible Chickasaw words. Clearly, then, they belong in a full dictionary (they aren't included in Munro and Willmond 1994, where we included only words known by some contemporary speaker). How should they be entered? Should there be some special mark to show that modern speakers don't recognize them?

(9) You may want to decide that certain words, or perhaps certain classes of words, don't belong in a general dictionary that may be available to everybody. Some people don't want "bad words" in the dictionary, for example. (Lots of people tell me that there are no swear words in their language, but every language has ways to curse in one way or another, and every language has words for parts of the body and actions we may not talk about with everyone.) You might decide that some expressions should be excluded because they are potentially offensive to members of some group or other.

In general, I'm a fan of including all the words you discover, just for the sake of completeness, but there may be some words that should be excluded from a general dictionary for cultural reasons — for example, perhaps there is special ceremonial language that not everyone is allowed to hear. (Could you consider making a specialized dictionary of just those terms?)

### III. Some decisions about verbs

In most indigenous languages of the Americas, verbs are very complicated, and deciding what to include in verb entries can be tricky. As you work on your project, you'll see what close connections there are between grammar and the dictionary. I'll talk here about three components of decisions about verbs:

- What form of the verb should be the main entry in the dictionary?
- How should this form be defined?
- What other verb forms and information should be included?

(10) The first decision to make concerns what form of the verb should be the basic or most complete entry. In English it's easy: verbs have a simple unmodified form, and other forms are derived from it. Thus, in English we have three types of verbs — REGULAR verbs like *love* have four separate forms, slightly IRREGULAR verbs like *sing* have five, and a totally whacko verb like *be* may have eight:

<i>love</i>	—	<i>loves</i>	—	<i>loved</i>	—	<i>loving</i>
<i>sing</i>	—	<i>sings</i>	—	<i>sang</i>	—	<i>singing</i> — <i>sung</i>
<i>be</i>	—	<i>am, is, are</i>	—	<i>was, were</i>	—	<i>being</i> — <i>been</i>

Since in the first two cases the additional forms are made by adding ENDINGS to or otherwise modifying the form in the first column, it's a no brainer to decide that the first column's verb is the one to enter in the dictionary. In the case of *be*, we do this by analogy: *be* is the form that corresponds to the basic forms *love* and *sing* (and in the case of *being*, it works just like them).

(11) In a European language like Spanish or German, the dictionary entry is traditionally the INFINITIVE (translated into English with 'to'), as with Spanish *cantar* 'to sing' or German *singen* 'to sing'. (Verbs in these languages typically have many more forms than English ones.)

(12) What about less well described languages? Some languages, like *Creek* (Oklahoma) and *Imbabura Quichua*, have forms comparable to European infinitives, and speakers often feel these are the best form to list in the dictionary, defined in English with 'to...':

*Creek*                                **yv·hi·ke·tv** to sing (Martin and Mauldin 2000: 153)

*Imbabura Quichua*        **kantana** to sing (Chuquin et al in preparation)

In both languages verbs always need something added to them, but speakers generally agree that this infinitive form is much like a European infinitive (or an English *to* phrase). Speakers feel that an infinitive is the best translation of these forms, in part because they can be used in the same grammatical contexts that an English "infinitive" with *to* (or the Spanish and German infinitives) can, such as the following (Martin and Mauldin 2000: 343):<sup>3</sup>

*Creek*    Nak    hvmke-n    ce-m        poh-etv    kom-i-s.  
           thing    one-acc    2sIII-dat    ask-inf    want-1sI-ind  
           'I want to ask you one thing'

(I give many examples here in linguistic style with one line for the language data, with many words broken up into smaller meaningful elements, and another line for the GLOSS, which has one translation or explanation per meaningful element. I won't say much here about glosses, and you can ignore them if you like. A translation of the example is given either under the first two lines or (if there's room) off to the right. I have underlined the parts of the language line and the translation that it's important to compare, as with *pohetv* and 'to ask' here.)

(13) If there's no actual infinitive, how do you know if a given form is "comparable to European infinitives"? One way would be to look at 'want' sentences. Thus, for example, most *Chickasaw* verbs probably have upwards of a thousand forms, but there is a "bare" form to which PREFIXES and endings are added that is often used comparably to English *to* forms, as in

*Chickasaw*    Taloowa    sa-banna.  
                   sing            1sII-want            'I want to sing'

*Sabanna* means 'I want', so *taloowa* corresponds exactly to 'to sing' — so that is how this verb is defined in Munro and Willmond (1994: 332). (The gloss under the word in the example, however, is 'sing', since this is not the same as the word's dictionary definition: a gloss, as we'll

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<sup>3</sup> Abbreviations used in the glosses include acc : accusative, B : basic; dat : dative, dem : demonstrative, hab : habitual, ind : indicative, inf : infinitive, irr : irrealis, nom : nominative, perf : perfective, pl : plural, prog : progressive, tns : tense. Pronominal prefixes and endings are glossed with 1, 2, 3, s, p. Chickasaw and Creek pronominal prefixes and endings are identified with I, II, III. Garifuna prefixes and endings are identified with P and T. Some segmentation of data cited from the literature is mine; the original authors might not agree!

see again later, can be more abstract.) The word *taloowa* can also be used all by itself as a sentence or a command —

Chickasaw Taloowa. 'He sings', 'She sings', 'It sings', 'They sing'  
Taloowa! 'Sing!'

— but these don't seem as suitable as dictionary definitions (though sometimes something like 'sings' may be used this way, as discussed in (16) below).

(14) For many languages things are not so simple. Speakers may not feel there is a consistent "name" for a verb (comparable to English *sing*, Chickasaw *taloowa*, or most infinitives), even though a "bare" form does exist. Consider the Garifuna language of Central America. When asked for a verb out of context, a speaker may offer a number of different forms, and in simple sentences verbs always have an ending:

Garifuna Erémuha-tu.  
sing:B-T3f 'She sang'

However, there are contexts where verbs are used without any prefix or ending, such as in commands:

Erémuha b-án!  
sing P2s-aux 'Sing!'

For this reason, speakers are quite willing to accept *erémuha* as a verb entry (e.g. in the glossary of Munro and Lopez et al. 2012-13). The best definition, however, seems to be the simple stem 'sing', since such words can't usually be used in infinitive contexts.

(15) In some languages there are no "bare" verb forms at all. Let's look at some sentences from Tlacolula Valley Zapotec (TVZ); a language of central Oaxaca, Mexico):

TVZ R-ù'a'll b̀unny.  
hab-sing person 'The man sings'  
Gw-ù'a'll b̀unny.  
irr-sing person 'The man will sing'  
Cay-ù'a'll b̀unny.  
prog-sing person 'The man is singing'

In these sentences, prefixes *r-*, *gw-*, and *cay-* are added to a STEM *ù'a'll*. When I started working with TVZ, I initially proposed to my collaborator, Dr. Felipe H. Lopez, that we should list stem forms like *ù'a'll* in the dictionary. He was horrified. *Ù'a'll* is not a word, and can't be used (or even pronounced) on its own. This experience, and others like it, helped me realize that for speakers of most languages what belongs in the dictionary is words, not stems.

(16) There's no "infinitive" form in TVZ. Dr. Lopez and I decided that the HABITUAL form of TVZ verbs (like **rù'a'll**, the verb in the first example in (15), with an *r*- prefix) was the best one for the main entry. Initially I thought **rù'a'll** should be defined as 'sing'. But compare the following sentences and their translations:

<u>TVZ</u>	<u>R-ù'a'll</u>	bùunny.	
	hab-sing	person	'The man <u>sings</u> '
	<u>R-ù'a'll</u>	ra	bùunny.
	hab-sing	pl	person
			'The men <u>sing</u> '
	<u>R-ù'a'll=a'</u>		
	hab-sing=1s		'I <u>sing</u> '

Although the gloss of the verb *rù'a'll* is the same each time, the meaning expressed by the verb varies. *Rù'a'll* does express 'sing' in the second sentence, the one where the SUBJECT is PLURAL, and in most sentences with PRONOUN subjects, like the last one. But in the seemingly more basic first sentence, the one with a SINGULAR subject, the English translation is 'sings'. We made the decision, then, that the definition of a habitual verb like **rù'a'll** would include the English singular -s ending, since that seems like a more basic meaning than the one that implies the verb has a plural subject. (The English definition 'sings' also reinforces the idea that the most common use of habitual verbs like *rù'a'll* is to refer to the present.)

Choosing the habitual form as the main entry form means, of course, that the TVZ-English part of our dictionary has a huge **r** section; the same thing can happen any time dictionary entries include a prefix. This didn't bother us....but it's the kind of thing some people worry about.

(17) Choosing to enter only words in the dictionary can be a difficult matter, however, especially in a language with a very complex prefix system. For example, many (probably most) dictionaries of Athabascan languages list ROOTS or stems rather than full words. The reason for this is clear: in a language like *Navajo* (spoken, as you know, in the Four Corners area), in which ten or more separate prefixes may be added to a root to produce a pronounceable verb, there are so many possible words that the decision of how to list them in the dictionary raises innumerable problems. The eminent lexicographic team of Robert Young and William Morgan (1987, 1992) chose to produce two very large and entirely different dictionaries of Navajo, one with full word entries, one with root entries. Native speakers often find the first much more user-friendly, but with experience may come to appreciate the second (which is usually preferred by linguists).

(18) While most languages don't have quite as much verb complexity as Navajo, many have some irregularity. The majority of TVZ verbs use regular prefixes that substitute for the habitual prefix *r*- on those verbs' stems, but this is not always true. For example, consider the perfective (past) form of the TVZ verb 'sing' that we saw in (15) and (16):

<u>TVZ</u>	<u>B-ì'i'lly</u>	bùunny.	
	perf-sing.perf	person	'The man <u>sang</u> '

The perfective prefix is *b*-, but we don't add this directly to the stem *ù'a'll*. Instead, the perfective

stem of 'sing' is *ì'lly*. Obviously, *bì'lly* needs to be in the dictionary too. Our TVZ dictionary (Munro and Lopez et al. 1999) includes all irregular forms as part of a main entry like that for **rùà'll**, and these each have their own CROSS-REFERENCE entries.

(19) In some languages, of course, there are more complexities. Often it's useful to include key forms in the main verb entry from which all other forms of the verb can be derived (much like the PRINCIPAL PARTS listed in traditional dictionaries of Latin). This is the system used by Feeling and Pulte in Feeling's dictionary of the Oklahoma language *Cherokee* (1975). Here, for example, is part of the entry for 'sing' from this dictionary (the raised numbers mark TONE):<sup>4</sup>

*Cherokee* de<sup>2</sup>kā<sup>3</sup>no<sup>2</sup>gi<sup>3</sup>?a he's singing  
de<sup>2</sup>ji<sup>32</sup>no<sup>2</sup>gi<sup>3</sup>?a  
du<sup>1</sup>hno<sup>2</sup>gi<sup>3</sup>sv<sup>23</sup>?i  
de<sup>2</sup>kā<sup>3</sup>no<sup>2</sup>gi<sup>3</sup>sgo<sup>3</sup>?i  
t<sup>1</sup>hno<sup>3</sup>gi  
ju<sup>2</sup>hno<sup>2</sup>gi<sup>1</sup>sdi

This entry illustrates very clearly an important point about dictionaries: you may not be able to understand (or appreciate) them unless you read the introductions! The introduction to Feeling (1975: xiv-xvii) explains clearly what each of the untranslated principal parts or "sub-entries" above means, since these "are needed in order to be able to correctly predict the set of pronoun prefixes which a given verb takes as well as certain changes which occur in verb stems when various suffixes are added." The first sub-entry is the first-person singular form ('I'm singing'); the second is the third-person singular non-progressive remote past ('he sang'); the third is the third-person singular present habitual ('he (habitually) sings'); the fourth the imperative ('sing!'); and the fifth the third-person singular infinitive ('to sing', used in a third-person singular context). Although Feeling (1975) is a relatively short dictionary, it packs a huge amount of information for the user who takes the time to understand how it works.

(20) Example (19) shows how important it is to document the decisions you make in deciding how to structure your entries — and to be consistent. (Feeling and Pulte emphasize, for example, that their five *Cherokee* sub-entries are always given in the same order!) One area where this is important is with languages where verbs can take different types of subject and object marking. Feeling and Pulte handle this by giving the 'I' subject form of each verb. Another way to do the same thing is with abbreviations of some sort that are clearly explained, again in the introduction.

For instance, consider the (shortened) dictionary entries for the *Creek* and *Chickasaw* words for 'to sing' discussed earlier ((12), (13)), each of which contains "(I)".

*Creek* yv·hi·ke·tv to sing (I) (Martin and Mauldin 2000: 153)

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<sup>4</sup> I have omitted parts of this entry (from Feeling 1975: 79) and have replaced the underdotted *a* and *i* with a and i. My translations of the sub-entries below are based on the examples in the introduction (xiv-xvii).

Chickasaw    **taloowa** to sing (I) (Munro and Willmond 1994: 332)

A user needs to read the introduction (or to have some background in Muskogean verb structure) to know that the "(I)" is an indicator that the verb takes type I subject marking, which in Creek is *-i-* 'I', *-etsk-* 'you (singular)', *-ē-* 'we', *-atsk-* 'you (plural)' (Martin and Mauldin 2000: xxvi), and in Chickasaw is *-li*, *ish-*, *ii-* (or *il-*, *kii-*, or *kil-*), *hash-* (Munro and Willmond 1994: xxvi).<sup>5</sup>

(21) Another important thing to think about concerning verb entries is how to treat idioms, expressions whose parts don't always make sense. Their literal meaning, as with English *kick the bucket* or *bite off more than one can chew*, may have nothing to do with the way speakers use them. Here's a Chickasaw example (Munro and Willmond 1994: 111):

Chickasaw    **holisso kashoffi**    to get divorced (I)

*Holisso* means 'paper', and *kashoffi* is 'to clean'; thus, this literally means 'to clean the paper'.

Alternatively an idiom may have very unusual SYNTAX, meaning that sentences using the idiom may be put together in an unexpected way. For example, the most basic way to say *I'm happy* in the Mohave language of California and Arizona is

Mohave    M-iiwa-ny-ch    'ahot-k.  
2-heart-dem-nom    be.good-tns    'You are happy'

Literally, then, 'my heart is good' means 'I'm happy'. In the Munro, Brown, and Crawford dictionary (1992: 107) the entry for this verbal expression is

**iiwanych 'ahot=k** be happy (idiomatic possessor expression)

The identification of this expression as an "idiomatic possessor expression" means (as you'll see in the introduction!) that the subject is expressed (with the second-person prefix *m-*) as the possessor of the first word, 'heart'; there is no subject prefix on the actual verb *'ahotk*.

Deciding what to do about idioms is an important part of dictionary making.

Here's another question, though. Is it responsible to include literal translations? Should the Chickasaw entry for 'to get divorced' and the Mohave entry for 'be happy' tell us their literal meanings? (I don't think so myself, but you may disagree!) Or should interested parties look up the component words and figure it out for themselves?

#### IV. "We don't have a word for that..."

(22) Finally, what about words for which there is no record at all? For many languages there are words and grammatical elements that are not documented at all, for which there are either nonexistent or incomplete records. My best illustrations of this problem come from

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<sup>5</sup> It's clear that page xxvi is where you reveal such things!

*Gabrielino/Tongva/Fernandeño* (below: *Tongva*), a language formerly spoken in the Los Angeles Basin, which I work on (using manuscript notes from John P. Harrington and others) along with heritage learners from the Gabrielino-Tongva Language Committee.

Words and other language elements for which there is no documentation are troubling, but when we do not have complete records, we are RECONSTITUTING word and grammar patterns, and you may have to do this too. For example, we had to do this with the Tongva number system. We've reconstituted a complete system for counting to 999 (or higher!) in Tongva, even though the available written recordings are incomplete and chaotic. Here are a few of the previously undocumented numbers our group is now using (there are lots more):<sup>6</sup>

<i>Tongva</i>	weheesh mahaar koy wachaa' kavyaa'	'seventeen'
	weheesh mahaar koy wehee'	'twenty-two'
	weheesh wachaa'esh weheesh mahaar	'eighty'

(How many numbers belong in the dictionary? It takes up a lot of space to list them all. Most people are content with putting in enough to clearly show the patterns (but unfortunately, not enough of this information had been recorded for Tongva). What do you think?)

(23) Below is another example, from *Serrano*, a language of California with only a few remaining speakers. Serrano words for the days of the week change when they're used in a sentence telling when something happened. Earlier records did not include the basic non-sentence form of two of these words, and speakers could not remember them, so the language program had to reconstitute the missing words (given in italics below; thanks to Marcus Smith, Linguistic Anthropologist with the San Manuel Band of Mission Indians language program):

<i>Serrano</i>	Luunis 'Monday'	Luunisp 'on Monday'
	Awoh 'Tuesday'	Awočav 'on Tuesday'
	Apaahi 'Wednesday'	Apaahičav 'on Wednesday'
	<i>Awačah</i> 'Thursday'	Awačaav 'on Thursday'
	<i>Amaahc</i> 'Friday'	Amaahcav 'on Friday'
	Saavað 'Saturday'	Saavaðp 'on Saturday'
	Đumiin 'Sunday'	Đumiinp 'on Sunday'

(24) Basic sentence structure is a serious issue — perhaps more grammar- than dictionary-related, but most dictionaries include examples, and you can't put them together without grammar. *Tongva* expresses subjects and objects in PARTICLES attached to the first word or phrase in each sentence. Look at the Tongva particle chart that appears at the end of this handout. Each particle that is given in the chart in italics is not documented in the literature, and has been reconstituted based on other existing patterns. As you can see from the examples in the chart, it would be impossible to talk about lots of important human events without these elements.

(What status do such reconstituted items have? How should they be put in the dictionary? What do you think?)

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<sup>6</sup> Note to linguists: You may think the full details of counting systems and days of the week (see (23)) are boring or trivial. But trust me, language learners of the future will be pleased if you include this information in your documentation.

## V. What belongs in a bilingual dictionary?

(25) Mary R. Haas's "What Belongs in a Bilingual Dictionary?" (1962) is a very brief paper, but it includes guidelines that can be helpful for any dictionary maker. Haas answers her question (1962: 104-105) with the following list:

1. "for each word or expression...just the right translation";
2. "all the words, locutions, circumlocutions, and idioms that any user might ever need";
3. "all the inflectional, derivational, syntactic and semantic information that any user might ever need";
4. "information on all levels of usage, including special warnings about words not to be used in the presence of ladies, in the presence of children, or to or in the presence of one's superiors";
5. "all personal names, names of personages past and present, place names, names of famous books and play, names of characters therein, and any other names that any user might want to look up";
6. "all the specialized vocabulary items of all the sciences, professions, manufacturing industries, and trades, each carefully and appropriately labeled as to its field";
7. "all necessary information about correct spellings, as well as information on alternate or commonly-encountered incorrect spellings";
8. "all the information needed to instruct the user in the proper way to pronounce each word".

And in addition, Haas continues, the dictionary should have four additional features:

9. "It ought to be equally oriented to speakers of both languages."
10. "It ought to be as well-adapted to purposes of machine translation as it is to human translation."
11. "Above all, it should be compact."
12. "A final desideratum...would be the inclusion of illustrations to picture items unfamiliar" to users.

And truly finally (1962: 107), Haas provides what may be her most important piece of advice:

13. "A good dictionary is one in which you can find the information you are looking for — preferably in the very first place you look....It is 'no fair' to list some words in alphabetical order while others are to be found only in groups or sets."

Some of the points Haas makes may seem more relevant for dictionaries of "major world languages" (she based this article not on her work in Oklahoma, but on work she did during World War II with Thai). However, most of Haas's ideas have a lot to say for those compiling dictionaries of Oklahoma languages — something Haas never did herself, though her work informed Martin and Mauldin's 2000 dictionary of Creek — and other indigenous languages of the Americas.

Each of them is worth discussing. Undoubtedly you'll decide that some of them aren't too important, since they are more geared toward a different kind of language. But even those may influence some of your decisions.

Good luck with your dictionary project, whatever stage you currently are at!

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