**Background**

While the benefits of bilingualism have been widely acknowledged, parents face many hurdles raising children bilingual. Factors such as consistency in language use, family, school, and social support networks, issues of ethnic and social identity, and the prestige value of language have contributed to successful bilingualism. (DeCapua, 2009)

Not speaking a language associated with one’s own heritage can cause feelings of estrangement from the family, culture and language, and this may result in guilt at later not speaking the language. (King & Fogle, 2006)

Native Americans differ from other cases researched about language loss due to the fact they were, in the majority of cases, forced to speak a language other than their own,(Begaye, 2007)

The loss of language is potentially permanent and detrimental to the future and diversity of Native people. (Boggs, 2007)

**Research Questions**

- How has Language Loss across 4 generations of Miwoks affected their identities?
- How might language relate to self-identification as a Native American, Miwok?
- What experiences help shape family identities as Native American?

**Methods**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Name</th>
<th>Generation</th>
<th>Age</th>
<th>Sex</th>
<th>Language</th>
</tr>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Alice</td>
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<td>30</td>
<td>F</td>
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<tr>
<td>Jon</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>65</td>
<td>F</td>
<td>English</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Nicole</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>31</td>
<td>F</td>
<td>English</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Marie</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>20</td>
<td>F</td>
<td>English</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>James</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>15</td>
<td>M</td>
<td>English/German</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Participants:

Five participants - Four generations who are members of a federally recognized tribe, Ione Band of Miwok Indians, based on the 1915 Dawes Rolls.

Procedure:

These five participants were interviewed about their language experiences and their identity.

Analysis:

Qualitative thematic analysis (Auerbach & Silverstein, 2003)

**Results**

Six major themes surrounding the effects of language loss on the participants identities.

1) Nostalgia
2) Disconnect or Regret
3) Lack of access or ease of access to language
4) Self-identification
5) Desire to connect or re-connect to culture
6) Outside assumptions/expectations/stereotypes

"Mom used to make acorn soup. It was good. Taste like chalk I think, if I remember correctly, acorn soup and acorn bread." – Alice, Gen. 1

"I was raised in an English-only speaking family. My mother did not speak Miwok. My father died when I was very young, and I only met my mother a few times when I was little before she too died. My father’s dad also died before I was born…So there was no exposure to the Miwok language from that part of my family." – Lois, Gen. 2

"My family grew up in the East Bay Area, far enough where we did not regularly attend tribal meetings or stay connected with the tribe, except for annual gatherings. I believe this is a significant reason why I now feel disconnected and a lack of cultural identity." – Nicole, Gen. 3

"I would have jumped at the opportunity to learn our language if it were accessible." – Marie, Gen. 3

When talking about regrets for not learning the language, there was a strong sense of desire to make a connection to re-connect.

When there was a disconnection from the language or traditions, this related to the lack of accessibility for learning the language.

In regard to the 3rd generation, Spanish was a factor that showed up as a part of their identity since these participants had a Spanish last name.

**Results Continued**

**Generational Differences**

The older two generations noted no significant influences, neither negative nor positive on shaping their Miwok identity.

"I wasn’t taught to speak our language or cared really to learn. We would’ve been taught if we asked mom...we would ask what certain words were or what this was in Indian and she would tell us, in one ear and out the other you know." – Alice, Gen. 1

"If they talked about me I wouldn’t know it…I wouldn’t care anyway." – Alice, Gen. 1

"I believe it’s true that how people perceive the way I look, does influence how I identify my culture." – Lois, Gen. 2

However, the 3rd generation noted experiences with outside perspectives of others about their physical appearance as well as language that influenced their identity as being Native American.

The younger generations recalled their experiences with a Spanish last name and the language loss attributed to that culture. This affected their identity in a more complex manner. With a Spanish last name, their identity conflicted with not only not speaking the Spanish language, but with the Native American as well.

The 4th generation had no significant influences or experiences related to his identity.

"There was one occasion when I was mistaken for being part Asian…people are unable to distinguish my NA characteristics, thus negatively impacting how I identify as a Miwok Indian." – Nicole, Gen. 3

"People assumed I was Mexican. Even Mexicans expected I could speak Spanish when I mentioned my name. Learning Spanish was an obvious choice." – Marie, Gen. 3

"I feel embarrassed when I speak Spanish, especially when I’m with fluent speakers; it’s in my cultural background, but I end up speaking ‘Spanglish’." – Nicole, Gen. 3

**Discussion**

Through this research I expected to find a relation between language loss and its influence on the identities of these participants. There were variations of disconnect from generation to generation.

What I found is while I was looking for responses to the Native American, Miwok language, there were outside influences that were stereotypical and related more to the Spanish heritage of the family.

Feelings of disconnect and regret coincide with a desire to establish a connection to the Miwok heritage, either through language, or traditions like basket weaving.

By keeping linguistic practices and cultural traditions accessible to tribal members, Miwok identity can improve and flourish across future generations.

Three generations of Miwok Indians learning to basket weave at Chaw’se Indian Grinding Rock Historical State Park in Volcano, CA.

**References**

Begaye, T. (2007). Native Teacher Understanding of Culture as a Lack of access or ease of access to language. Desire to connect or re-connect to culture. Nostalgia


**Acknowledgements**

A multi-week summer research project was completed with students in Dr. Priya M. Shringi’s Course, “Second Language Acquisition” and under the direction of Dr. Rhonda Zlotnick, School of Education, Mills College.