



Sociologic Notes on Obsolescent Languages

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SOCIOLOGIC NOTES ON OBSOLESSENT LANGUAGES

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0. The disappearance of languages, when viewed in the broad sweep of history, is no uncommon phenomenon. Sumerian, Egyptian and Etruscan are familiar examples of important tongues in the ancient world that later passed out of currency. The expanding Roman Empire swept out of existence scores of languages in Italy, Gaul and Iberia. Pictish was lost without a trace after Germanic tribes overran England. In recent centuries, the conquest and colonization of new lands by European powers eventually resulted in the loss of hundreds of languages. The process is still continuing, particularly in the Americas. As a result, it is possible to observe communities whose original speech is even now in the process of disappearance, and to gain thereby an insight into the similar events that have occurred in the past. Since no serious study has yet been made of this phenomenon, the present paper attempts, by means of brief statements on a series of known cases, to indicate some of its features. There are seven examples from North America, one from England and one from the South Seas. They include cases which the author has had occasion to observe personally, with the addition of a few others from available literature. Since

none of the observations were originally made with the specific object of discovering the factors at work in dying languages, the present summaries cannot give rounded systematic answers to even the main questions. Nevertheless, they seem to contain enough pertinent material to justify their presentation.¹

It will be noted that many of the circumstances described are similar to those found in the languages of some immigrant groups, particularly when the community is entirely cut off from the mother country and culture. Furthermore, whatever one may say regarding language will find its analogs in other aspects of culture. If these parallels are not discussed here, it is not for failure to recognize them, but only because of the modest aims of the present offering.

1. Tasmanian. Tasmania was discovered in 1642 by Abel Jans Tasman and in the next 160 years was visited by several other explorers, including Captain Cook and Captain Bligh. Almost without exception, the contacts of these expeditions with the natives were friendly. In 1803 British settlement began. With the landowners came convicts, indentured to serve them, and soldiers. Very soon the settlers and the natives were in conflict. This began when some soldiers fired on a group of natives engaged in a kangaroo drive; it is said the soldiers thought they were being attacked. Reprisals and counter-reprisals followed, and it is reported that some also hunted the

¹ This material was first included in a public lecture, on *Dying Tongues*, given at the University of Wisconsin in 1938. However, the work of adapting it for publication was interrupted and I have not had the opportunity to complete it until recently.

natives down for sport. But the situation became uncomfortable for the settlers and repeated efforts were made, without success, to bring an end to the conflict. In 1828, Governor Arthur, in desperation, decided to round up the natives and put them off by themselves in some safe place. A reward of 5£ for every adult and 2£ for every child captured without injury was offered. These bounties resulted in few captures but many deaths, since the natives, with no inkling of the humanitarian purpose of their aggressors, fought back. Then the governor tried a large-scale expedition, which was known as the Black Line. A force of 3000 settlers, convict servants, police and soldiers were deployed in a long line from the east coast to Great Lake in the center of the island; this line was to proceed southward driving all natives before it until they were safely confined on Tasman's Peninsula. The expedition was elaborately planned and great feats of difficult organizing and locomotion were performed in rough, mountainous, and thickly wooded country. It took several weeks time and an outlay of 30,000£. But throughout the maneuver only five natives were encountered, two being captured and three killed; all the others had eluded the dragnet.

About this time, George Augustus Robinson conceived the idea of learning the language of the natives and going among them as a friend. In five years he succeeded in gathering all the natives together and taking them to live on Flinders Island. In 1800 there were supposed to have been five thousand or more Tasmanians. When Robinson finally finished his task in 1835 there were only 203 left. The rest had been killed by the settlers or had died of new diseases or of grief. Protected and confined on Flinders Island, the survivors pined away and in 12 years their number was reduced to 44. These were moved again to Oyster Bay where they continued to die off from disease and drink until the last of them, a woman named Truganini,

died in 1876, just 73 years after the first European settlement.²

We are told little about the linguistic phenomena connected with the story of the Tasmanians. Specimens of their language, mainly vocabularies, were recorded by several Europeans. There were four dialects, which varied considerably. When natives from different parts of Tasmania were brought together on Flinders Island, it was probably not easy for them to converse with one another. Calder speaks of their language as being 'all but lost.'³ Some English or Pidgin words came into use in the native speech, as *tea*, *picanini*, *buckalow* or *bacala* ('bullocks') and *tabletee* or *tablee* ('travel'). The Australian word *lubra* was introduced by the whites. It is reported that some sort of Pidgin was in use.⁴

As might be expected from the nature of the contact and the brevity of its duration, English has taken nothing, not even place names, from the Tasmanian language.

2. Yahi. The story of the Yahi is briefer than that of the Tasmanians, but there are elements in common. It begins with 'Indian troubles' in northern California in 1857, and ends with the death of an old man in the University Hospital in San Francisco, only 59 years afterward. In the early days the Yahis, known to the settlers as the Mill Creek Indians, distinguished themselves by their ability to raid suddenly and to disappear in the hills. Expeditions organized against them usually failed to find them or were ambushed and driven off. The men would then find and kill some

² This account based on Fenton, *A History of Tasmania*, London 1884. Fenton (p. 375) quotes Robinson with regard to socio-psychological factors in depopulation: 'They suffered much from mental irritation, when taken with disease they refused sustenance and died in delirium. The wife or husband, when bereaved, would immediately sicken, and rapidly pine away.'

³ Fenton, *op. cit.* 91, footnote.

⁴ Fenton, *op. cit.* 96, 103-4, 437.

other Indians and return home satisfied. We are not told how the raiding career of the Yahi started, but it is evident that the raids were partly in retaliation for injuries, partly a means of obtaining food when game became scarce. The Yahi did not always get away. On several occasions bands of them were cornered and shot down to the last man, woman and child. After 1871, little was seen or heard of them, but reports came in from time to time of people who had seen Indians or evidence of their presence. There was a tendency to discredit such reports until a surveying party in 1908 ran onto a cleverly hidden camping place in Deer Creek Canyon and saw three old Indians, who got away. In 1911, the barking of dogs in the early morning at a slaughterhouse near Oroville led to the discovery of a naked starved Indian, the last Yahi, who had been driven by hunger to seek food in this place. The discovery of the 'wild man' created considerable excitement, especially frightening the old man himself. Efforts to communicate with him in English, Spanish, and several Indian languages were of no avail until T. T. Waterman of the University of California came armed with a vocabulary in the related Nozi language and, after a number of attempts, finally said an intelligible word, *siwin?i yellow pine*, the material of which the cot in the jail-cell was made. From this beginning, Waterman initiated the study of the Yahi language, later taken over by Edward Sapir. The old Indian was called Ishi, the word for *man* in his language. He was taken to the University and soon adapted himself to a new role as contributor to the study of the language and culture of his tribe. Probably in his fifties when he was taken in, he learned to make himself understood in English, speaking with a marked accent and with modified grammatical forms. Specimens of his English are given by Saxton T. Pope. His command of his own language was faultless.

Some interesting details on the language

situation with Ishi are contained in the following note by Sapir:⁵

Ishi, the informant, spoke very little English, but I consider the full data on kinship terms that I obtained from him, aside from a few doubtful points, as thoroughly reliable. This is due to the fact that the terms were collected very slowly and with the utmost care and circumspection, with repeated checking whenever opportunity was offered; further to the fact that data already obtained from the Northern Yana helped me to follow the informant. The many agreements in the nomenclature between the Yahi and Northern Yana systems are in no case due to suggestion on my part. The work was rendered possible by the use of counters, differing in appearance for males and females, arranged in the form of a genealogical tree; this device put the whole investigation on a directly visible footing. My familiarity with Northern and Central Yana (by that time also of Yahi) naturally also helped, tho the language of the discussion itself was a crude jargon composed of English, quasi-English and Yahi.

The Yahi seem to have been isolated from other Indians as well as from the White settlers, but somehow a few words of Spanish jargon became known to some of them. Thus, it is related that when Mr. Norvall in 1885 came upon four Indians taking old clothes from his cabin, a young woman among them pointed toward Mill Creek and said, 'Dos chiquitos papooses' (two small children) by way of asking mercy. An old woman, found by the surveying party already referred to, we are told, 'asked in a few words of broken Spanish for water.'⁶

Incidentally, the related Central and Northern Yana (Nozi, mentioned above) are also now extinct, and were already reduced to a last few speakers each by the

⁵ Edward Sapir, *Yana Terms of Relationship*, UCPAAE 13.153-73 (1918).

⁶ Material for this account found in T. T. Waterman, *The Yana Indians*, UCPAAE 13.35ff. (1918); Saxton T. Pope, *Yahi Archery*, UCPAAE 13.103ff; Pope, *The Medical History of Ishi*, UCPAAE 13.174ff; Edward Sapir, *Text Analyses of Three Yana Dialects*, UCPAAE 20.263ff (1923). The bulk of Sapir's linguistic material on Yahi has not yet been published.

time of Ishi's death. That the circumstances of the extinction of these dialects were different from the case of Yahi is indicated by the fact that the last speakers lived in contact with younger Yanas who did not speak their native language.

3. Cornish. Cornish went out of use something over a century ago, but John Norden in the early half of the seventeenth century already noted that it was beginning to go:

But of late the Cornish men have much conformed themselves to the use of the English tongue, and their English is equal to the best, especially in the Eastern partes; even from Truro eastward is in a manner wholly Englishe. In the west parte of the county, as in the Hundreds of Penwith is to be marvelled that though husband and wife, parents and children, master and servauntes, doe mutually communicate in their native language, yet there is none of them but in manner is able to converse with a stranger in the English tongue, unless it be some obscure persons that seldom converse with the better sort.

Richard Symonds in 1644 says, 'about Pendennis and the Land's End they speak no English,' indicating that there were still monolingual areas. In 1707 Edward Lhuyd remarks that many of the people, especially the gentry, do not understand Cornish and that every Cornishman speaks English.

According to popular legend the last speaker of Cornish was Mrs. Dolly Pentreath, who died in 1778 at the age of 102, but there is some evidence that some others may have survived her. Whoever was the last to speak the language, echoes continued for at least seventy-five years, for in 1875 W. S. Lach-Szyrma and H. Jenner reported having interviewed six people of 60 years of age and upward who knew some words of Cornish. Three of them could count from one to twenty. They knew about twenty isolated words, and three sentences whose meanings are: (1) 'Mac-keral, mate, third, fourth, fifth, sixth' and the rest in English 'all aserowd all along the line oh' (that is, they are too

thick to count), (2) 'splashing backward and forward in the water,' (3) 'Lend me your stick to walk.' These translations are supplied by Jenner, the informants themselves had only rough ideas as to what the sentences meant.⁷

4. Mohican. Despite the title of James Fenimore Cooper's famous novel, *The Last of the Mohicans*, there still exists a community of 125 or more Mohicans in Shawano County, Wisconsin. The language continued in active use until a generation or two ago, and several of the people still know bits of it. The present-day language of the community is English.

In 1734, John Sergeant went as missionary among the Mohicans. He learned their language and worked energetically among them. Soon he formulated a large-scale plan of accomplishing their christianization and 'civilization.' He conceived of a boarding school where the children of the tribe, both girls and boys, would come to learn their letters and arts and crafts, like farming, blacksmithing, carpentry, sewing, cooking. Sergeant did not live to see his plan carried out, but the school was established in 1749 and proved successful. In 1791, the editor of *The Massachusetts Historical Collections* wrote: 'The Indians are civilized. All speak and write English. The men are good farmers. The women good housekeepers.'⁸

In 1785 the Mohicans moved from their original home around Stockbridge, Massachusetts, to Western New York and in 1822 they moved again to the State of Wisconsin. Both of these migrations and another removal within Wisconsin came about only because of outside pressure, for the Indians

⁷ This account based on H. Jenner, *The Cornish Language*, Phil. Soc. of London 1873-4.165ff; *Traditional Relics of the Cornish Language*, Phil. Soc. 1875-6.533ff. The quotations from Norden and others are to be found in these articles.

⁸ Quoted in Joseph Schafer, *The Winnebago-Horicon Basin*, Madison State Historical Society of Wisconsin 1937, p. 38.

each time preferred their former home. The government policy, when Indian tribal lands became desirable to speculators or settlers, was to offer the Indians some new land beyond the frontier and some cash inducement in exchange for their old land. Later the advancing frontier would catch up with the Indians and the land question would come up again. Desiring to settle the matter once and for all, the government urged the Indians to become citizens of the United States, with individual land-holdings and no tribal guarantees. The issue of citizenship split the tribe into two parties. Congress declared them citizens in 1843 and was forced by tribal pressure to repeal the act in 1846. In 1906 they were again made citizens with privately held land, but in the thirties, by cooperation of the Indian Bureau and the Resettlement Administration, a reservation was provided for those who wished to live on it.⁹

We have no contemporary data on how the experiences and problems of the Mohicans reacted upon the language. Our information is recent. Until about sixty years ago there were Indians who habitually spoke Mohican. In 1938 there were four or so who knew some words of it. These people as children spoke the language with their grandparents, but this was so long ago that not one was still capable of speaking more than isolated words and a limited number of set phrases. Those who knew something of the language were proud of this knowledge and were known for this special ability among all the members of the tribal remnant. They themselves said they often exchanged sentences in Mohican to impress other people. Mrs. Robinson told me she used Stockbridge for 'blackguarding' at people, particularly those others who knew what the words meant. It may be of interest to remark that the four people reputed to know most about the languages

were not among those who had chosen to take advantage of the new reservation.

The Mohican vocabulary collected in 1938 contained several Dutch words, in assimilated form, evidently reflecting contact with the Dutch in New York State.

5. Chitimacha. Not long after their first contact with the French, the Chitimacha of Louisiana became involved in a long war, suffered repeated raids instigated by the French, and finally had to sue for peace. Starting with a population estimated at 2600,¹⁰ they must have lost heavily from the raids in killed and captives sold into slavery. Subsequently, in two and a half centuries, their population continued to dwindle—probably through disease as well as dispersal—until they number about 65, now living around Indian Bend on Bayou Teche. Their language declined in usage against the competition of French and more recently of English.

In 1934 there were still two individuals who spoke Chitimacha well. Benjamin Paul, who died in that year at the age of 66, told me he had often talked the language to himself in order to keep up the memory of it. Delphine Ducloux, then 62, who died in 1940, had talked the native tongue with her aged aunt until the death of the latter several years before. Mr. Paul was a purist in Chitimacha: once he refused to dictate a myth because he could not remember the native word for 'skunk.' He preferred to talk French or English rather than mix foreign words into his Chitimacha. Such qualms were not shared

¹⁰ John R. Swanton, *Indian Tribes of the Lower Mississippi Valley*, BAE-B 43.45 (1911), gives the following approximate figures on population: 2625 in 1698, 700 in 1758, 350 in 1784, 50 in 1908. (Compare the last figure with the present one, 65, and there appears to have been a slight increase in the latest period.) Swanton's book has been our immediate source for statements about the history of the Chitimacha. The description of present-day conditions is based on personal observations.

⁹ This account, except for the last datum, taken from Schafer, *ibid.*, chapters III and IV.

by Mrs. Ducloux. In addition to these two speakers, there was Mr. Paul's younger sister, Pauline, who could understand almost anything in the language and who could make herself understood in it. One of Mrs. Ducloux's sons knew a number of Chitimacha words and would sometimes ask his mother for additional expressions. Several women in the tribe know the Indian names of the different types of baskets and basketry designs, and a few words are probably known to other members of the tribe.

About twenty miles away from the Indian community, across the bayou in a Negro settlement, lived two former speakers of Chitimacha, cut off from all ordinary contact with the others by the patterns of race segregation. They were both senile to the point where it was impossible to get satisfactory linguistic material from them, but it was clearly evident that they had once had native control of Chitimacha. One woman had some sort of disorder of hearing, so that, as she repeatedly stated when I visited her, she could hear me talking but could not hear what I was saying. 'Was it something about the Indian language? Well, nup is an Indian word and means *potato*.' All the while she was very interested in a neighbor's baby and, in her gurgling and talking about babies, it was impossible to learn any more about her knowledge of Chitimacha. Nearby lived Sadie Darda (died 1935), of Negro and Indian descent, who was only slightly senile. She was surrounded by a number of children and grandchildren, who, along with all the neighbors, looked up to her for her knowledge of the Indian language and probably also of mystic lore. When asked for Indian vocabulary, Mrs. Darda dictated a most remarkable mixture of Indian words and invented vocables, for the most part based on French or English with some twist or change. We may illustrate with the numerals from one to twelve: anku (Chit. ?unku), antu (Eng. *two*), čašinam (Choctaw *tučina*), fatiam (Eng. *four of forty*), hustina

(Chit. *husa*), sakine (Eng. *six*), setu (Fr. *sept*), etu (Eng. *eight*), nantiya (Eng. *nine* or *ninety*), disiti (Fr. *dix*), onziya (Fr. *onze*), duziya (Fr. *douze*). When asked for a word, Mrs. Darda never hesitated a moment in giving one of her vocables, only occasionally saying she did not remember; she must have been at least partly conscious of inventing forms in order to maintain her role as one who knew much ancient lore. She climaxed her performance by singing an 'Indian' version of Casey Jones, whose words were Chitimacha-sounding nonsense vocables.

On the subject of social distances that have affected the preservation of Chitimacha, we may note that the Indian community is relatively isolated, both from the local Whites who look down on the Indians, and from the Negroes whom the Indians avoid to maintain their standing. Indians who marry Negroes are ostracized. Inter-marriage of Indians with Whites for the most part takes place in distant places (as New Orleans), because of the local prejudice. The Indians tell that the local French a number of years back completely accepted them, but the younger generation has set up a social barrier. The oldest people as children were educated along with White children in a French convent school. After its close there was no school for the Indians, who refused to go to the Negro school and were not accepted in the White school, until a special school was provided by the national Indian administration in 1934. One of the prides of the Chitimacha is the art of making fine basketry; this was a disappearing art fifty years ago, but was revived thru the moral and economic encouragement of a White benefactress. Tourists frequently come to the homes of the Indians to look at the Indian baskets and talk to the people, and language seems always to have been an interesting topic for them. I know of at least three amateurs who have made serious attempts to collect vocabularies of one kind or another, and a good many visitors ask

casually about the words for baskets and other things.

6. Natchez. In the early days of Louisiana the Natchez were strong enough and bold enough to join with the Choctaw in an all but successful effort to drive the French out. When the plan failed because of a last minute withdrawal on the part of the Choctaw, the French set out to destroy the Natchez. A large part of the tribe was killed in battle or sold into slavery in the West Indies. A few hundred escaped to the Chickasaw. When the French attacked the latter for harboring them, the Natchez moved on, some going to the Creek Nation and some to the Cherokee. There is every reason to believe that the Natchez were made completely welcome in both of these groups, that there was no policy of discrimination or segregation. Considerable intermarriage took place, and accounts indicate that the Natchez early became bilingual or polylingual. Both the Creek and Cherokee were large tribes, much larger than the remnants of Natchez that settled with them. Though it was the language of a small minority, Natchez continued to be spoken until today, two hundred years after the exile. In view of this remarkable fact, it is interesting to note the following remark by Mooney:¹¹ 'They seem to have been regarded by the Cherokee as a race of wizards and conjurers, probably due in part to their peculiar religious rites and in part to the interest which belonged to them as the remnant of a broken tribe.'

In 1907 there were still five persons living in the Cherokee Nation near Braggs, Oklahoma, who could speak Natchez. Of these, two were still alive in 1939, Watt Sam and Nancy Raven. Both spoke good Creek and Cherokee in addition to Natchez. They understood English fairly well, and Watt Sam could speak it, but preferred not to. If some other Indian were present who knew English he would address his remarks to the latter

and let him translate. His wife was Cherokee and their children spoke Cherokee. His only opportunity of speaking Natchez was when he happened to meet Mrs. Raven. Nevertheless, his knowledge of the language was faultless. His Creek and Cherokee were about equally good; he could read and write Cherokee in the Sequoya syllabary. Mrs. Raven was perhaps more conversant with Cherokee than with Natchez, and she spoke Natchez with something of a Cherokee accent.

Mr. Sam had an extensive repertory of myths and stories, which seem from their content and references to be partly original Natchez, partly new material which must have been added since the old days of the Natchez Nation. All of it was distinct from Creek and Cherokee lore. Likewise his Natchez contained few, if any, Creek or Cherokee elements. But, aside from language and narratives, all folk recollection of the ancient Natchez was gone. When the names of the old castes, Suns, Nobles and Stinkards, were repeated to him, Mr. Sam recognized them as words but had no knowledge of the social order in which they were used.

In addition to the two speakers mentioned, quite a number of Indians among the Creek and Cherokee claim descent from the Natchez and there is a settlement in Oklahoma known as Natchez Town because of the ancestry of the inhabitants. However, only one old woman, Peggy Leaf, knew some Natchez words, which she spoke with a Cherokee accent.¹²

7. Catawba. A few hundred Catawba Indians occupy a reservation in South Carolina, where they live mainly by farming. The women make Indian pottery, the only such still produced east of the Mississippi

¹² Historical material on the Natchez in Swanton, *op. cit.* 45ff. Contemporary information supplied by Mary R. Haas, who has done extensive research on Natchez language and ethnology.

¹¹ See AA 1.517.

River, and it is sold both on the reservation and at various stores and resorts in the neighborhood. In 1937, when I visited the Catawba, Sam Blue, the chief, who was also an elder of the Mormon Church, was in the habit of putting on a feather headdress on Sundays and greeting and conversing with sight-seers and visitors. When a number of people were present and he was asked, he would oblige with an Indian song, a few sentences in Catawba or a bit of dancing. There were generally a few other Indians about the reservation cross roads on Sundays and they too would answer the questions of the curious. Small articles of pottery were displayed on stands and some sales were made. Not all the Indians live on the reservation; some live in the town of Rock Hill and work in the mills there.

Besides Chief Blue, there were two other people who had spoken the language in their childhood. The chief's half-sister, Sally Brown, knew even more of the language than he—her vocabulary was larger, but both were quite fluent and sometimes used Catawba in conversation with each other. Sam Harris, having spent much of his life off the reservation, was no longer conversant with Catawba. All three speakers were well over sixty. There were others who knew a few words of the language, but no one else who had any semblance of the ability to speak it. Within the ten years prior to my visit, four other speakers had died.

8. Penobscot. Penobscot will surely last another few decades but is not likely to continue longer than that.

Among the four hundred odd inhabitants of Indian Island near Old Town, Maine, a score or more of older Indians can talk the old language well, and a few insist on doing so whenever possible. Among middle-aged people there are more who understand it than can speak it. The youngsters hardly learn it, and those who do learn some at home forget it after they start school. English is the usual language on the island. Yet

they still have their own tribal government and are very definitely a community unto themselves. They live by farming and other pursuits common among the non-Indian inhabitants of the region. During the hunting season, some of the men hire out as guides. The women make and sell baskets and other souvenirs to tourists, and some tribal revenue is earned by the two-oar ferry that takes tourists back and forth between the mainland and the island.¹³

9. Mashpi. The original nucleus of the Mashpi was the Wampanoag tribe of Cape Cod, Massachusetts, one of the good neighbors of the Pilgrim fathers in the Plymouth Colony. As the immigrants increased, they absorbed the Indians' territory and made their old existence by hunting and fishing impossible. In return they took some responsibility for their well-being. If the Wampanoags were friendly to the struggling Pilgrims, they also offered friendship and refuge to other unfortunates. Indians of other tribes and escaped Negro slaves came into the community. Their town was a terminal of the underground railway. There were no taxes, and the state gave some attention to economic distress. In 1870 the people became United States citizens. A special economic situation developed out of the fact that the country became a vacation resort where most of the land belongs to non-resident owners of summer homes while the use of public funds is determined by the votes of the resident Mashpis. These earn a large part of their living by seasonal work for the summer residents or by municipal jobs; some subsist on state or municipal relief. The maintenance of the Indian tradition and the continuation of certain tribal ceremonies are strongly encouraged by the peculiarities of their present situation. The people go so far as to supplement their

¹³ Information from personal observation supplemented by Frank Siebert, who made several visits to the Penobscot in the course of linguistic research.

knowledge of aboriginal ways by consulting Speck's scientific monograph, *The Mashpi Indians*.¹⁴

But, while the community has continued in spite of the wholesale assimilation of outside elements, the language has long ago gone out of use. It has not been spoken for about three generations and the last person who knew any words of it died in the late twenties.¹⁵

10. Conclusion. Of all the cultural facts that identify and characterize a community, language is one of the more deep-seated and persistent. But it is not immutable, and in a period of a few generations or thousands of years a community may drop one language in favor of another. Frequently the community itself is transformed along with the linguistic switch. That is, only as the community is surrounded and absorbed into a larger community, does it tend to drop its old language and to take on that of the larger group. The process does not move uniformly but usually first affects certain sections of the people—defined in terms of geographical location, age-group, sex, economic and cultural status—and certain types of personality. Once the new language is widely adopted, there are certain groups and personalities that persist especially in retaining the old language. These differences of receptivity, both in the initial and in the final stages, point up the structure of the community and the kinds of personality that develop in it. From these considerations comes the significance of studying the sociology of obsolescent languages.

Ethnologists and linguists who go to the field among any people who are on the road to losing an earlier language should make the most of their opportunity to gather careful systematic data on what is taking place.

¹⁴ *Indian Notes and Monographs*, vol. 44.

¹⁵ Information on the Mashpi supplied by John H. Useem. See also Zimmerman-Useem-Ziegler, *Littleville, a Parasitic Community during the Depression*, *Rural Sociology* 1.54ff.

It is desirable that they not only note how many in each sex and age group are bilingual or monolingual in each of the languages, but also report fully on the social pressures and trends, the attitudes taken by different individuals and sectors of the community, current philosophies about the choice of language, correlation with social and economic position, the use of the languages in different social settings, special symbolisms attached to the use of language, and all the other pertinent facts. Obviously we have here a rich area in which to observe the interplay of culture and personality. Field workers are therefore urged to collect autobiographies and individual case studies from people whose lives are particularly revealing as to the sociology of language conflict.

The present paper has not attempted to discuss the effect of social obsolescence on the language system itself. Even though the effect is surprisingly little in quantity, it is very important to observe which features of vocabulary, morphologic structure and phonetics give way first and which persist to the last. In part these items are determined by the similarities and differences in the two languages, in part they reflect what may be described as weak points in the language pattern. They have to be interpreted with care, taking into account that language patterns suffer modifications even when no situation of rivalry exists. It is usually safer not to declare that such and such is caused by the obsolescent state of the language, but one should be careful to note every instance where there is inconsistent use, particularly where there are differences between the generations or between the conservative and unconservative speakers. One should also record the judgements, of praise or criticism, that one hears expressed for one or another style of speaking.

It is perhaps necessary to point out that the factors determining the obsolescence of languages are non-linguistic. There are no such things as inherently weak languages

that are by nature incapable of surviving changed social conditions. Some might imagine that the languages of hunting or pastoral groups cannot adapt to the needs of an agricultural or industrial society. But history proves the contrary. Every language that today is used by peoples carrying on advanced modern industry and science was once used by people in simpler economic and cultural stages. By the application of old terms and descriptive phrases to new situations or by the adoption of foreign words, the new vocabulary needs are met.

As for different kinds of linguistic structure, none has ever prevented the adaption of a language to a new cultural context.

There is little point in trying to draw from the preliminary material presented in this paper any serious generalizations about the sociology of obsolescent languages. Some of the problems stand out with some clarity, most are barely suggested. The main purpose of the present paper is therefore to enter a plea to field workers to seek and report data that may some day make possible a serious general study.