Where Are Your Keys (WAYK):
A framework for endangered language learning

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Overview

- What is Where Are Your Keys (WAYK)? How does it help people learn endangered languages?

- Case study: Aleut

- Successes and failures

Challenges in learning an endangered language

SPEAKERS few speakers, no speakers, aging speakers, no speakers who can teach, diasporic speaker populations, no space for immersion

RESOURCES no documentation, no teaching materials, no media in the language, no resources to produce new materials, no location for language learning

COMMUNITY stigma, devaluation of culture, fractured community relations, social problems, generational trauma, diaspora, low sense of efficacy, poverty

Challenges for Aleut

SPEAKERS
- Fewer than 100 speakers (of two different dialects)
- None trained as teachers
- Insecure about language abilities; have no place to use Aleut conversationally

RESOURCES
- Limited money
- Limited teaching materials (textbooks, classroom space, etc.; documentation available is oriented toward linguists)
- Limited time—all speakers over 65
- Two dialects, so all resources (including learner populations) split

COMMUNITY
- Historical attack on Aleut families and culture
- Low sense of efficacy among youths (potential learners)
  - Monolingual English speakers; Aleut appears difficult
  - Intimidated by elders
  - Low confidence

What is "Where Are Your Keys" (WAYK)?

Developed by **Evan Gardner**, who describes WAYK as a "language game":

> "You can play the game anywhere, anytime, with anyone, as long as you have a single fluent speaker of the target language, *preferably with no conventional teaching experience*."

(Gardner 2009, "Where Are Your Keys?")

Ideal for endangered language communities

A "language hunt" (monolingual elicitation)

LEARNER'S GOAL

- To acquire a new piece of language using language that is already known

- To construct a mini-discourse in which to practice this new piece of language

RULES

- Only the target language can be used

- The learner can use anything in their immediate surroundings to assist in the elicitation

- The speaker does not formally teach or instruct the learner

The "set-up"

"...a tongue-in-cheek reference to the idea that you can be in the middle of a completely designed situation and not even know it, even after the trap is sprung."

(Gardner 2011 – "The Top 20 WAYK Techniques")

- Created context designed to elicit the target linguistic item

- Should be clear to the speaker what the targeted language is without English

- Can incorporate previously learned language

- Props, gesturing, acting, or conversation may be necessary to provide sufficient context for the target item

set-up for plurals
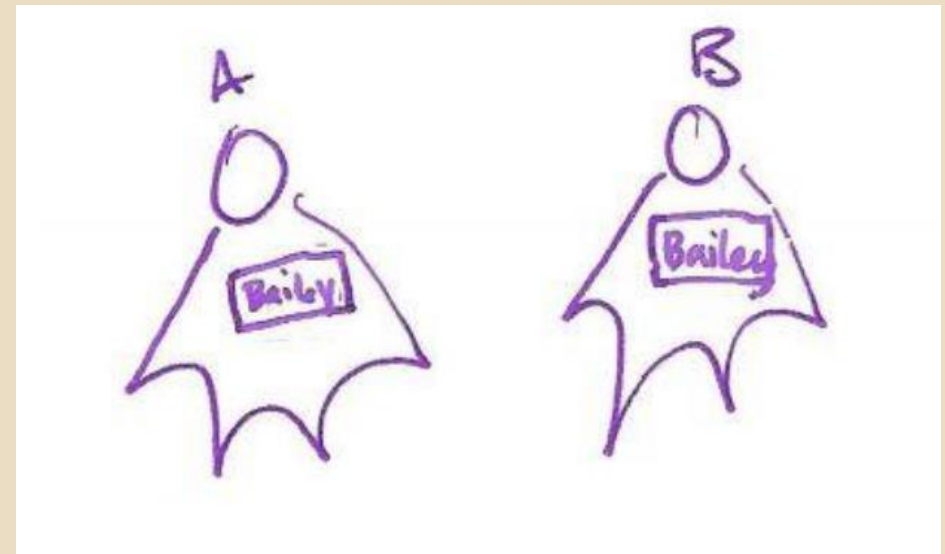
set-up for adverbial suffix *-ma* 'too'

The "hunt"

- Requires only one speaker and one learner

- Learner works to:
  - Create a miniature two-person dialogue that uses the target language
  - Construct a list of new terms in the form of a paradigm

- Once the dialogue is established, all participants get a chance to play both "asker" and "answerer"

START OF HUNT

Known language: *qanan* 'which', *hilaqulix̂* 'book', *ala-* 'want'

Target language: colors

Initial question: *Qanan hilaqulix̂ alat?* 'Which book do you want?'

END OF HUNT DIALOGUE

Asker: 'Which book do you want?'

Answerer: 'I want the blue book.'

Asker: 'Do you want the red book?'

Answerer: 'No, I don't want the red book. I want the blue book.'

END OF HUNT PARADIGM

hilaqulim chidĝii 'blue book'
hilaqulim uludaa 'red book'
hilaqulim chidĝaayuu 'green book'

The lesson write-up

- The language "hunter" records the set-up, elicited dialogue, and any relevant paradigms

- The resulting write-up is now a teachable lesson for future learners

- Teaching the new lesson does not require the presence of a native speaker

Part of the lesson for -*gî*, the passive suffix

Person A:
What **was** this letter **written** with?
Person B:
This letter **was written** with a pen.

Person A:
Was this letter **written** with a pen?
Person B:
Yes, this letter **was written** with a pen.

Person A:
Was this letter **written** with a pencil?
Person B:
No, this letter **was not written** with a pencil. This letter **was written** with a pen.

Set-up

Paradigm 2:
to be written
is written
is not written

Beyond the "hunt": The fluency freeway

- Lessons are ordered by learners from beginner to advanced → learner-designed, speaker-generated Aleut curriculum

- The curriculum is currently physically pasted to the walls of the Aleutian Pribilof Island Association office building (and online in Google Drive)

- Learners can keep track of which lessons they have progressed through, and which they have taught

Beyond the "hunt": Techniques (TQs)

- Signs (often based off ASL) that allow learners to communicate with one another and with speakers during a hunt without English
  - E.g., 'again' = request for speaker to repeat something

- Also used to convey concepts of the WAYK learning philosophy
  - E.g., 'Mr. Miyagi's chopsticks' = focus on a small target item at a time

Cedar Edwards demonstrates 'faster' = request for speaker or teacher to cover material more quickly

Beyond the "hunt": Star command

- A place to organize the events of a day, e.g., during summer language intensives
  - Hunts and hunt participants
  - Which lessons will be taught
  - When group planning will occur
  - ...etc.

- Gives language communities a tangible tool for self-sustainment
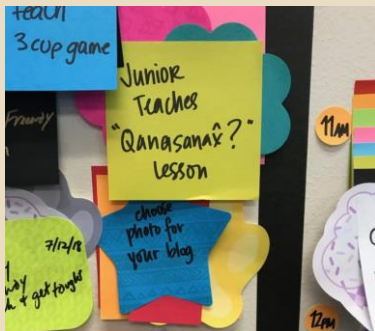
Sample item on the "star command" calendar wall

The Anchorage summer 2018 intensive team planning activities for the rest of the week

...a "language game"?
...a program?
...a pedagogical tool?
...a learning philosophy?
...a method for community building?

Benefits

SPEAKERS *few speakers who can teach, speakers insecure about language abilities, no place for speakers to speak their language*

- No prescriptive tools used, no comparison to English made
- No teaching experience required; anyone who speaks can be involved
- Speakers have a miniature setting for immersion

RESOURCES *few teaching materials and space, aging speakers*

- Language "hunts" can take place anywhere; require no special materials
- Only one speaker and one learner is required
- Learners simultaneously learn, teach, and create curriculum for future learners

COMMUNITY *broken community, low sense of efficacy among youth*

- Elders (speakers) and youth (learners) brought together to collaborate
- Language-learning presented as a highly accessible game
- Youth take on leadership positions and build confidence
  - Language acquisition initiated by learners rather than teachers
  - Youth decide what language they want to acquire
  - Youth are trained to conduct monolingual elicitation, to teach, and to plan programming
- Sustainable by community on its own

Shortcomings

UNADDRESSED (...UNADDRESSABLE?) PROBLEMS
- The dialect split
- Diasporic speaker and learner populations

PROBLEMS WITH WAYK
- Is like learning a language on its own → inaccessible to outsiders
  - WAYK-specific terminology
  - Proliferation of TQs
  - The "foreignness" of the learning system
- Too much input → needless bureaucracy

Txichix qaĝaasakuq!