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-Aztecan 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-Aztecan language materials available at the National Anthropological Archives, I consulted the Catalog to Manuscripts at the National Anthropological Archives and SIIRIS.
-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 tests.
-Languages were searched for in the Catalogue and SIIRIS 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-Aztecan 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-Aztecan 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.

Uto-Aztecan

-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-Aztecan languages completed between the 16th and late 19th centuries.
-Number of estimated speakers of Uto-Aztecan languages: 1,984,795 (Ethnologue 2009).

Numic Languages

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

Southern Paiute

-Belongs to the Southern Numic branch.
-Closely related to Chemehuevi and Ute languages.
-First detailed study of a Northern Uto-Aztecan language by Sapir between 1915-1931.
-Represented in 10 communities across Nevada, Utah, and Arizona.
-Spoken mainly by older generation, 50+ and not used for communication.

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References