

Miami Language Reclamation: From Ground Zero

Daryl Baldwin

Director, Myaamia Project

*A lecture presented by the Center for Writing
and the Interdisciplinary Minor in Literacy and Rhetorical Studies*

Speaker Series

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Preface

In October 2002, the Center for Interdisciplinary Studies of Writing (now named the Center for Writing) and the Interdisciplinary Graduate Minor in Literacy and Rhetorical Studies welcomed Daryl Baldwin as its twenty-fourth speaker to present on *Miami Language Reclamation: From Ground Zero*. The revival of indigenous languages is a growing movement among Native Americans from Hawaii to Cape Cod, and it is fast becoming a subspecialty in the field of linguistics. There are 211 indigenous languages still extant throughout the United States and Canada, but only 20 of them are spoken by the youngest generation of their communities. As director of the Myaamia Project at Miami University in Oxford, Ohio, Daryl Baldwin is a key figure in the reclamation movement. His mission there, he states, is to revive the language of his ancestors, the Miami People, whose last speakers died in the 1960s. The process began in the library, with strenuous research, and gradually moved towards active community engagement. Slowly, the Miami People have begun again to breathe life into their language. Though still long from complete, the reclamation project's ultimate aim is to "raise [Miami] children with the beliefs and values that draw from our traditional foundation and to utilize our language as a means of preserving and expressing these elements." Language, Baldwin asserts, is not only a form of communication, but is even more so an essential element of community building, and of knowing a people's history and values.

We at the Center for Writing believe this Speaker Series will provide new insights for teachers and researchers in the fields of literacy, cultural studies, linguistics, and beyond. We invite you to contact the Center about this publication or any others in the series.

Kirsten Jansen, Series Editor
Elizabeth Oliver, Editor

Introduction of Daryl Baldwin by Lillian Bridwell Bowles

Welcome to this lecture, sponsored by the Center for the Interdisciplinary Studies of Writing and the Minor the Literacy and Rhetorical Studies. The Linguistics Program and the Graduate School join us in co-sponsoring the visit of Daryl Baldwin to our campus. I first heard Mr. Baldwin at the Conference on College Composition and Communication, where he stunned the audience with the importance of his work to resuscitate the dormant Miami language. Not spoken by a native speaker since the 1960s, the language, like all languages, embodied the history, culture, and language of its people. Without it, the Miami people could not reclaim and educate their children about their heritage.

Daryl Baldwin is an enrolled member of the Miami Tribe of Oklahoma. He was born and raised around the Great Lakes area, residing most of his life in Northwest Ohio. He currently lives in Liberty, Indiana, with his wife and four children. In the presentation I heard earlier, he said he hopes that his children might someday dream in Miami, as his ancestors did. Baldwin is descended from the Turtle/Wells family of the Miami Nation. His father and grandfather were active on the Pow-wow circuit from the 1950s until the present, traveling through 21 states and Canada. His forefathers were leaders in the affairs of the Miami Nation, and Baldwin continues to lead through his work in language and cultural reclamation.

Baldwin earned a Master of Arts degree in 1999 from the University of Montana, with an emphasis in Native American linguistics. Over the last 10 years he has worked with the Miami people developing culture and language-based educational materials from the reconstruction efforts initiated by the work of Dr. David Costa who is a linguist from El Cerrito, California. He is currently the director of the Myaamia Project at Miami University. Among his many activities, he holds language camps where Miami children can learn and play in their reconstructed language. Please help me in welcoming Daryl Baldwin to our campus.

Miami Language Reclamation: From Ground Zero

Aya tipeewe iishiteehiaani oowaaha weeyaahkiaani noonki kaahkiihkwe (Greetings, I am glad to be here today).

It is always interesting to hear people introduce me. It always sounds like someone else they are introducing. I suppose that's because I never think about what I do. It's just work that needs to be done, and for those of us down in the trenches there is certainly no glory in that. It can be pretty messy work with a tremendous amount of obstacles. Sometimes those obstacles can even come from within the tribal community. At least for myself, I think there is a real benefit to educating people about the role of language. For most Americans, language is nothing more than a mode of communication, but for many native people, that's not necessarily the case, and I hope you get that from the presentation I am about to give.

I was invited to speak about our efforts to restore our native language in our tribal community. When I say "tribal community" I primarily mean in northeast Oklahoma because that is where the Miami Nation seat of government resides today. However, there are many tribal members that live all over the country and I don't want to exclude them either. In the course of designing our materials, we try to be inclusive of everyone. In other words, you don't have to live in Oklahoma to gain access to language and cultural materials.

I prepared a slide presentation that will take approximately 45 minutes. The first few slides give a very brief background of the Miami People's history. It's really important that we look at the history of the Miami People because, as a modern tribe, we have been shaped by our past. The events over the last two hundred years have certainly impacted our ability to retain our traditional language, and there are many issues related to that history that we must recognize in order to create an environment in which our language can thrive again. Through the middle part of the slide presentation, I will cover the actual language reclamation effort. At the end of the

slide show, I am going to talk a little bit about collaborations. One of the things we have learned is the value of collaborating and building long-term meaningful relationships with people and institutions outside our community.

Before I begin I want to clarify a couple of things. First of all, I speak from my own perspective, which has been shaped by my own personal experience as a Miami Indian coming from a non-reservation community. What is applicable to our community may not work for another community. All of these communities are very different and they have different histories. There are lots of similarities, but I find when it comes to language reclamation there is a lot of difference in how a community may approach language stability. All tribes in America have experienced various levels of language and cultural loss. There isn't a single tribe that hasn't been negatively influenced by Europeans. And, yes, there are tribes that still have a stable language and cultural base, and then there are tribes that have lost a great deal. And, I think all of the tribes fall within that gradient somewhere. There are many things that influence the stability of any language and culture.

In my mind, there are at least three main ingredients important to long-term language and cultural survival. You have to have a large enough population where people can interact daily and reinforce each other. You must have a sizable land base to support a culturally distinct population. And, equally important, is a positive attitude about the language. A positive attitude is reflective of an understanding about the role of language in maintaining traditional beliefs and values. I have participated in many discussions with tribal leaders and elders from a variety of communities. These individuals can be vastly different in how they value language, as well as how they understand its role in the community and in the contemporary society as a whole. There are even disparate views on what should happen with the language. Should it be kept alive

or should it fall dormant? There are elder community leaders who believe that if a language cannot be maintained as an oral language, then it should be left to go dormant and not be revived. Then there are elders that feel very strongly that even a small part of their language can benefit their people. Every community has to grapple with the multitude of issues around language preservation.

I had also mentioned land base as a key ingredient to language preservation. I want to touch on this quickly because I think it is a common belief among both native and non-native people that there exists an intuitive link between an Indian and his/her reservation. In Oklahoma, there are 39 tribes and no real reservations. What is considered a reservation in the West and what we consider Indian lands in Oklahoma can be two different things. Our land bases in Oklahoma can be small and fragmented; while, in states like Montana, reservations can be very large and include white-owned properties within the jurisdictional boundary of the reservation. The clear jurisdictional boundaries that came with our original reservations in Oklahoma went unrecognized after the allotment period. That's not to say these boundaries won't be recognized again someday, but that is a matter to be worked out through our legal process.

It's also important to realize there are about 56 million acres of Indian lands in the United States today. We have just a little over 560 federally recognized tribes. Six of those 560 tribes control nearly half of those 56 million acres. There is a huge disparity between tribes who have land and those who don't. The only point in bringing this up is that we have to realize that a few tribes have the necessary resources to stabilize their language, but most do not. It will be very disheartening if we as smaller tribes hold ourselves up against a larger measuring stick as a means of determining progress. As I go through this slide presentation, I want you to keep that fact in the back of your mind. What we consider to be great leaps forward are considered baby

steps from the perspective of others. The Miami have to rebuild themselves. That is just a reality. As painful and embarrassing as it is, that is the reality. But we cannot shy away from it, because it's the truth of our history.

The first slide had the term *myaamiaki*, which is a plural noun translated as “the Miami People.” The singular form *myaamia* is the source of the regional term Miami.

In terms of our history, the first real contact occurred around the 1630s with French traders and missionaries. French traders brought foreign material goods that would eventually change many aspects of our culture. These material goods created dependencies, and those dependencies would eventually be linked to treaty negotiations.

Our ancestors signed their first treaty in 1701. This treaty was an attempt to bring an end to the hostilities between the Iroquois and the Great Lakes tribes. Our leaders traveled to Montreal, Canada, but one important leader did not make it home and died on the return trip. It is important to note that this was a peace treaty, not a land treaty. What I call the encroachment period began shortly after this 1701 treaty. What I mean by “encroachment” is that more and more Europeans moved into the area wanting to set up trading houses and to build relationships with the tribe for economic and religious reasons. That period actually continued all the way up to the mid-1700s. By that time, you start to get settlers moving into Miami lands, so I tend to refer to that whole period as the “encroachment period.”

By 1790-1791, the Miami were involved in two major battles with their allied tribes. These proved to be successful attempts at holding back American encroachment, but in 1795 the Miami met their first real defeat. That defeat led to the Greenville Treaty. This was the first major land treaty that our ancestors were forced to sign, and it basically gave up our Ohio country. The traditional landscape of the Miami includes what are now Indiana, western Ohio,

eastern Illinois and, at times, parts of southern Michigan and Wisconsin. That is what our leaders of the time stated as being the landscape in which they lived. That's not to say that other tribes didn't live within that same area. Tribal boundaries were fluid, and so it was quite common for multiple groups to claim a single area as part of their landscape. The Potawatomi lived to the north of us. The Sauk, Meskwaki and other tribes moved through the region, and at one point the Delaware resided along the White River in central Indiana after being pushed from their eastern lands.

The treaty period began in 1795, and shortly afterwards, in 1800 General William Henry Harrison became the first governor of the Indiana territory. In a nine-year period, Harrison was able to secure over 50 million acres of Indian lands. As more and more settlers moved into Indiana, pressure to remove the Miami became greater. The Miami were able to stall removal agreements until the 1840 treaty, when one of the stipulations in that treaty was that they would accept a reservation in Kansas. Our ancestors were able to delay the actual removal for several years. But finally, in October of 1846, removal was carried out by military force. An army was sent out to what is now Peru, Indiana, and our ancestors were given 48 hours to collect what they could carry. With much needed crops still in the field, they were loaded onto canal boats to make the long journey west.

Their journey took them down the Miami-Erie Canal system to the Ohio River. Once they made it to the Ohio River, they were boarded onto steamboats, and the following slide is a photo of one of the steamboats used in their removal. Once they reached Kansas, they walked the last 50 miles. There were some deaths along the way, primarily children and elders, and there were even a few births. The treaty promised a half-million acre reservation in Kansas, but when they got there they found 350 thousand acres, which was considerably less. They barely

got settled in their Kansas home when the Kansas-Nebraska Act of 1854 opened up Kansas to white settlement. The same scenario that occurred in Indiana occurred again in Kansas: settlers moved in and began to encroach on Miami reservation lands. The federal government was unable to stop the encroachment, and the newly formed state was simply unwilling to respect the sovereign rights of the Miami Nation. Soon after statehood, the reservation was allotted into 200-acre parcels, which ultimately reduced the reservation from 325,000 acres to 71,000 acres. By 1867, the Miami were forced to accept another removal, this time to Indian Territory, which we know today as Oklahoma. Many tribes from the Great Lakes region were forced to Indian Territory, so you may recognize several of the tribe names on the early Oklahoma tribal map shown here.

The Kaskaskia, Peoria, Wea, and Piankashaw, as seen here on the map, are often considered part of the Miami-Illinois grouping. We tend to group Miami-Illinois together, because they spoke different dialects of the same language. However, we also have to recognize the political autonomy of these groups, so from that perspective I won't say all these groups are of one nation, as that was not the case historically. Nevertheless, the Illinois language was completely intelligible to the Miami, and there were historical kinship ties between the bands. Even today when we pick up Illinois language materials, we can read them clearly, and so our language research makes use of any and all known Miami and Illinois resources.

Today there is much intermarriage and mixing among these tribes who now reside in northeast Oklahoma. Several of our tribal members are eligible for enrollment in other tribes, and, even though they maintain a political affiliation with only one tribe, they still maintain kinship associations with families who are enrolled in other tribes. Intermarriage has never been

an issue for us, as alliances were often formed historically through marriage into other bands or tribes.

In terms of our historical population, when the French arrived among the Miami they estimated our population to be well into the thousands. By the time our ancestors stepped onto Indian Territory after two removals, there were less than 80 individuals. That doesn't mean there were only 80 Miami left at the time of the last removal. During both of our removals from Indiana and Kansas, some Miami People remained behind. During the removal from Indiana, certain individuals and families were granted exemptions so they didn't have to go on the removal, and so they remained behind. For those of you who are familiar with modern issues in Indian country, you may recognize the name Miami Nation of Indiana. They are the descendents of those who remained behind in the first removal of 1846. Several Miami families were also left behind in Kansas, because the treaty of 1856 gave tribal members the option to accept American citizenship, on the condition they terminated their tribal citizenship. And so by the time they finally arrived in Oklahoma, there were only about 80 left.

The Miami Reservation in Oklahoma was eventually allotted in 1889. By the early 1900s there was literally no land base under the control of the Miami Nation. There were individual families who held allotment lands, and a very small percentage of those families still hold those lands today in northeast Oklahoma. Only recently, starting in 1976, has the Miami Tribe had the resources to begin buying back original reservation lands. Today the tribe has about 1,000 acres, but we have literally had to buy it all back through our own economic ventures.

Some Miami did attend boarding schools during the early 1900s, but boarding schools didn't have a major impact on our language. As a matter of fact, by the time most of our tribal members entered boarding school, they already spoke English. It is very likely that their ability

to speak English kept them from much of the inhumane treatment that other tribal children were forced to endure. We have elders today who attended Seneca Indian School, and those elders are in their eighties now. In listening to them recount their boarding school days, they speak of hardships and not being allowed to “speak Indian,” but some also feel they benefited from the trades they learned while there. That said, there is no doubt in my mind that boarding schools further instilled in our elders a shame of being Miami, which did have a negative impact on language retention.

The history I have just shared with you is very important in understanding how our community has reached the point of no speakers. The fragmentation of the land, the loss of population, boarding schools, social pressures – all of these things reduced the language to the point where the last of the conversationally fluent speakers passed on in the early 1960s. What remained was a handful of songs, some prayers, and giving Miami names to children. The Miami did not typically translate their traditional names and didn’t address each other by name. This is how the traditional practice of naming was able to survive in the shadows of forced assimilation: when children were born they would be given both English and Miami names. The English names served the needs of the non-Indians, while their traditional tribal names, still in the language, were known among the community only. That aspect of our language continues today.

What motivated our initial language efforts was the research of Dr. David Costa from the University of California. David reconstructed the phonology and morphology of Miami-Illinois, giving us an important piece from which to work and launch our reclamation efforts. I met David back in the 1980s and we began to communicate about the language. During that time, there was a general feeling among the Miami community that the spoken language was gone and that there

was little documentation of it. David changed that perception, as he found a great deal of documentation on Miami-Illinois. He traveled throughout the Midwest and the East, including the Smithsonian Institute, Indiana, and Oklahoma. What he found was that the Miami-Illinois language was very heavily documented in written form for 300 years. Even as recently as 1999, Michael McCafferty from Indiana University located a 17th-century Illinois manuscript, which had been sitting in a tin box in a Canadian Jesuit archive for nearly three hundred years. Almost none of these materials have ever been published or transcribed, so we have our work cut out for us.

I personally did not grow up with the language. The only language used around me came in the form of ancestral names. Sometime in my late 20s I began to inquire about the language and developed a real desire to learn more. Having spent most of life on the pow-wow trail, I was developing an interest in learning what it meant to be Miami, and I saw the language as a means of learning that. My father suggested that I make trips both to Indiana and Oklahoma to see what was left of the language. So I visited both places and met elders who remember hearing the language as children, but I found no one who could speak or who knew much about the language beyond traditional names.

At the time all this was occurring, I was attending the University of Montana, majoring in wildlife biology. After some advice from community elders, I switched my major to linguistics and have been working with our language effort ever since. It has been my experience that much of what is produced from academic circles does not really benefit tribal communities, though I do believe that is changing. My reason for getting a degree in linguistics was not to become a linguist, but to acquire enough linguistic skill to do my own research as well as to make use of others' research for the benefit of my community.

With the appropriate training, I began to dive into the historical records. I want to give you an example of the condition of writings that we work with. This slide represents the worst of the worst. This is a page from a French to Miami-Illinois missionary dictionary circa 1688. I personally find that the missionary work is especially valuable due to the fact that these records represent the initial contact period. In order for the missionaries to translate and preach Christianity, they needed to have a good grasp of the language and to understand the people's culture. The missionaries became fluent speakers of these languages and spent a considerable amount of time with the people. That doesn't mean they weren't critical of our traditional culture and that they didn't misinterpret what they saw. But they did know how things were said and done and those observations, along with the language, are very valuable to us today.

I think our ancestors really struggled with some of the Christian concepts and, equally, the Jesuits struggled with our native ways of knowing. You can see that struggle in these records. So we find the old stuff not only reflects the struggles that can occur at the cultural crossroads, but we also find that much of the traditional ways of thinking and the use of "old language" are still present. Another item worth noting is that these older documents were shown to our last speakers in the early 1900s and one in particular commented, "This is real Indian, like I used to hear my mother and aunt talk when I was a child, in Indiana." So language changes, and our speakers recognized that language changed. As we work with a multitude of records spanning 300 years, we are constantly faced with having to make decisions regarding translation, usage, etc. Taking these issues under consideration with our knowledge of how the language has changed is a major task in the reclamation process. For example, we know the basic structure of the Algonquian verb system, and we know from the older records that Miami-Illinois speakers constructed and used verbs based on that old system. However, the later speakers abandoned

part of the verb paradigm, which really simplified the language, probably making it more like English. Gee, did I just imply that English is a simpler language than Miami-Illinois? [grin]

This slide represents a document that is considerably easier to read. Charles Trowbridge was commissioned by then-Governor Cass to study the language and culture of the Miami during the winter of 1824. We know today that the motivation to do this work was certainly not out of admiration for the language and culture, but instead to benefit the Americans in future treaty negotiations, and so we have to be careful how literally we take the information from these documents. I believe those Miami who Trowbridge paid for historical and cultural information were also suspicious of his motives, and either did not share certain kinds of information or altered that information for the purposes at hand. Regardless of this, there is much linguistic information that is valuable to us.

Albert Gatschet was the first trained linguist who worked with the Miami down in Oklahoma around 1895. Gatschet's work was continued by Jacob Dunn in Indiana and Oklahoma in the early 1900s. Jacob Dunn spent about 20 years working with the last speakers and seems to have built a respectful relationship with several elders. In a couple of instances Dunn noted that elders were uncomfortable sharing certain kinds of information and Dunn seems to have respected this and moved on to other topics. We want to find and work with materials derived from well-established relationships.

We reached a point around 1995 where we felt we could begin putting together some basic lessons. At the time, I was aware of the need for tribes to have proprietary privileges over language and cultural materials, and I still feel strongly that tribes should maintain legal rights over their traditional knowledge, including that knowledge which is reflected in language. In an attempt to create an avenue of mutual participation, we drafted a compact agreement between the

Indiana Miami and the Oklahoma Miami to work together on language reclamation efforts. We knew this would be a challenge in light of the historical scars that had been created around the 1846 removal, and the fact that the group in Oklahoma was federally recognized while the group in Indiana had their recognition revoked in the late 1800s. But we felt this “good faith” document was necessary in order to work together for the benefit of all Miami People. In 1997, leaders from both communities sat down and signed the compact agreement to work together. As of this presentation, that document still lives, though admittedly it has been stressed at times. The agreement called for the establishment of language committees in both Oklahoma and Indiana. We meet annually to discuss a multitude of issues, including the distribution of materials and the appropriateness of printing certain kinds of information. For instance, it was an agreement between the two committees that traditional names would not be included in the dictionary currently being created.

Once we were engaged in program development something else began to occur. Tribal members became more interested in looking at the original materials and digging into archives in an attempt to see what other researchers were looking at. I think this is important, because tribal people need to have the opportunity to decipher historical records on their own and not blindly accept what others tell them. I fully believe that we need to challenge each other over the validity and interpretation of historical, linguistic, and cultural information. We stand a better chance of preserving our traditional beliefs and values when we know how these concepts differ from those around us. Too many times our culture is interpreted through the lens of other cultures, and that filtering process can make things appear like something they are not. I think the risk of that can be lessened when we work directly with elders who were physically and mentally closer to the generation that the information comes from. It has been my experience

that elders tend to interpret information based on their personal and intimate knowledge of individuals and events experienced from previous generations. In other words, elders tend to be more specific. Non-Miami researchers have to rely on generalities derived from the fields of linguistics, anthropology, etc. In other words, academics tend to be more generalized in their interpretations of our history, language, and culture.

As a result of our efforts, we began to set up language camps and we continue to have good turnout today. We generally find that adults want to talk *about* language while kids are much more prone to *use* language. Kids like games, and they like to be active. All of these slides represent a multitude of activities designed to bring language into an active setting. Kids don't want to sit in class. They don't want to study linguistics. For me personally, kids are much easier to teach than adults. I only have to talk to children in the language. With adults I have to explain everything, but I am comfortable doing both.

Our camps are constructed in a way that encourages whole families to participate. This is important for a couple of reasons. First, we don't have a tribal school system, so the home has to be the central place for language learning. This means all of the family needs to be engaged on some level in order for language learning to occur. Secondly, parents are an important part of the reclamation effort because our young people need the support and encouragement of parents and the community as a whole if language is ever going to be heard outside the language learning programs and in the daily lives of Miami People.

A full-scale community effort is simply not a possibility for us at the moment. So we need to create these home "nests" where both parents and children can reinforce each other. I bump into a lot of people who are trying to learn their language, and their greatest difficulty is not having anyone to talk to in the language on a daily basis. Schools, camps and programs are

where we introduce new language or learn about the language. It is in our daily lives that we actually *learn* language. In other words, it is through using the language where learning actually takes place.

Some of our traditional games are played today, and the language efforts allow us the opportunity to reconnect the language with the games. We are fortunate enough to have vocabulary for several of these games. Games can often times have metaphoric expressions, and it's these metaphors that give us a unique understanding of culture.

Our ancestors were lacrosse players, and so today lacrosse is an active sport during language camps. Again, weaving the language into the games is important. One of the things we didn't want to do was to bring our people to the language. Instead, we aim to bring the language back into our community members' daily lives. We continue to encourage its use wherever Miami People are together for whatever reason.

This slide shows young adults acting out scripts that were prepared in the language. We have tried to use a whole language learning approach, focusing on everyday vocabulary. If we look into our normal daily lives, we can usually hone in on a set of daily vocabulary. Creating scripts around that set of vocabulary gives students an opportunity to work with a set of expressions they can more easily adapt to their daily activities. We regularly challenge adult learners to pay attention to the common words they use on a daily basis. They then bring that list to camp, and we help them create scripts that reflect their personal daily activities. We have even had requests from home-schooled families for specific vocabulary. Our goal has always been to give direct support to families who have the motivation and interest to incorporate language into their lives.

We have also reached out into our own community in order to identify individuals who may have skills we are in need of. For example, when we wanted to create an interactive computer program, we asked for individuals with computer programming skills. One tribal member stepped up and offered to assist, and the program we use today is a direct result of his efforts. It is this kind of community participation that has allowed us to develop our own programs and materials with little funding. After the computer program was completed, we put it out at one of the language camps and let people beat up on it a little bit: “How do you like it? What do you like? What don’t you like about it? How can we change it?” When the community is directly involved in the development of their own programs, there is a sense of participation, and they are more likely to use it.

As you can see from these slides, we will teach anywhere – sometimes on the spur of the moment. There have been occasions when we were together as a community for whatever reason, and someone would start asking questions about the language: “Am I saying this correctly?” or “How would this be said?” We always have these white boards stashed away in places where we gather so we can always pull one out and start writing. Adults like to be able to see the language written. We find with adults that there is a visual connection with language. So again, we have to try and meet all their needs.

For many years, our people gathered primarily for tribal business reasons or elections. Once we started the language reclamation project, we not only had people coming for a very different reason, but also we began to see a different segment of the community gathering. There is a community building process at work. Our language reclamation work has forced us to look at ourselves and have a better understanding of our history and how we got to this point in time. Many, if not most of our obstacles, are created from within. In order for us to overcome those

obstacles, we have to develop a good understanding of ourselves. Language reclamation is about community building and healing from the past. That's why it is so difficult. We are also fortunate to have the support of our political leaders. We have a mutual respect and understanding that we are all striving for the same thing.

Several of these slides show that community building in progress, bringing the little ones and the elders together. I don't want to underestimate the knowledge that our elders have. Many elders will say they don't know anything. In their minds, they are thinking of the knowledge held by earlier generations, but when we spur conversation it is amazing what they do remember. In some strange way, they don't realize what they do know and how important it is to us. It doesn't matter how small that amount of information is; it is the collective knowledge of the community base that begins to yield things that help us understand.

I remember early on, when I began working with our language, I would go to conferences and other meetings to better understand what others were doing. I heard individuals whom I have a lot of respect for say, "When the language is gone the culture is gone." Of course, in every case, this perspective came from someone who lives among a community which still had speakers. So, for someone like me sitting in the back of the room, I remember the emotional charge that came from thinking, "Well, I guess we don't exist anymore as a culturally distinct people." I now understand better what these individuals are trying to say, but I don't believe they are completely correct. Yes, when the language goes, the thoughts and minds of the people change dramatically, but to say they become culturally extinct is not completely true. I have since come to learn that what is important are the traditional values, beliefs, and knowledge of our people, and that our language is the verbal expression of these important cultural elements. Our behavior is the physical expression of these important cultural elements. And, yes, to best

preserve these things, we need both our language and a behavior that is based on our belief of these things. The last thing we want to do is reclaim our language based solely on linguistics and English translations. Although that is the starting point, at some point we need to be able to step away from the linguistics and English and let our language tell us what it needs to. In order for that to happen, we must know something of our traditional beliefs, values and human knowledge, which our elders do possess in a fragmented way even today.

This slide shows one of our elders in her late eighties showing us how our traditional corn was planted. We had gathered together for a spring planting, as we still grow our white soft corn. Our initial idea was to make a language activity out of this. It just so happened that one of our elders was present, and so I asked her, “Do you remember planting this corn when you were younger?” She said, “It’s been over 50 years since I planted Miami corn, but I remember.” So I asked her to show us, and she said she would be happy to. She proceeded to take a handful of corn from my hand and demonstrate how she was taught to plant. We not only had a language activity that day, but we also had historical and cultural activity all wound together. Our elders do remember things. We, as young people, just have to remember to ask them.

Many of our elders comment on hearing the language during their childhood. Some even asked their elders to teach them when they were young. In every case, the parents or grandparents refused to teach the language to the younger generation. They felt strongly that the young should just learn to speak English. In one case, an elder was told, “Life would be too hard for you if you learned to speak Indian.” Some of my academic colleagues have graciously pointed out to me that every community has a right to determine the fate of their language, and they point to examples like this as a way of saying “it was their choice.” Based on my knowledge of our tribal history, I have repeatedly argued two points against this view. One is

that our people were psychologically coerced into believing that being Indian was something to be ashamed of, that their cultures had no future, and that speaking a native language, considered by many to be a simple barbaric language, had no future. Our ancestors from previous generations repeatedly received these kinds of messages, as we still do to some extent today. The most damaging aspect of this kind of psychological warfare is that children who grow up with these messages eventually believe them to be true. Even today we find these misconceptions lingering among our own tribal members, but I don't criticize them for they are, like all of us, products of our past.

Despite the hardships of the past, both the older and younger generations are very much supportive and interested in the language. Even young parents want their children to have at least some exposure to traditional language and culture. Our biggest challenge is meeting that need without the proper community infrastructure. There has been a lot of activity that has begun to nurture growth in our community, and that growth is more rooted in our traditional language and culture.

I put a couple of slides in here to show you some traditional dress. The French used to trade ribbons with our ancestors, and they would make intricate geometric patterns worn on leggings and skirts. I know many of you are already familiar with ribbon work, but I wanted to show you some Miami examples.

I also mentioned there were a small handful of songs that were retained prior to our language falling dormant. The language work we are involved in has afforded us the opportunity to make new songs in the language, and a couple of the drums among the Indiana Miami have created several songs over the years. Again, the language work really forced us to look at all aspects of our community. Because the language reflects traditional beliefs and values, it begins

to bring many community elements back together. The language is truly the glue that holds us together in our thoughts and in our hearts.

One of the expected problems that we have is that we don't have any language teachers who are native speakers. Our teachers are created as a result of our efforts and their knowledge is a reflection of where we are at in our understanding of our language. From my perspective our language ability is still pretty rudimentary. In order to prepare for the future, we are literally training young children not only to speak, but we are also teaching them how to teach the language. These two children in this slide are my son and daughter, and I have involved them in the teaching process because I want to teach them how to teach. I hope that there is going to be a greater community need for teachers in the future than there is right now, and we will continue to work so that we have tribal members who are prepared for that time. We are not at a point where community immersion programs are possible, but we will be there at some point. For right now, what is really vital is having some ability to speak, to teach, and to recognize our future needs.

These next few slides are an example of that work in progress. Every other year, my children and I participate in a native language workshop out at Berkeley. It is called the Breath of Life Workshop and it is geared to Native communities in California who have lost their speakers. This particular slide is a TPR session. TPR, or "Total Physical Response" is where you don't use any English – only gestures and other body language to get your ideas across. As much as I support adult learning, our children have to be our focus. At a young age, they are wired for this kind of learning. Adults simply are not. It doesn't mean that adults cannot learn a second language, but they won't learn it at the speed and with the ability that young children have. I have never been able to dream in my language, but I know that my children do, because I

have heard them talk in their sleep. The simple fact that they have had exposure to their language since infancy has to make a difference in their ability not only to speak, but also to think in the language. This is a threshold I may never cross, but let's not assume that because I as the teacher cannot think and dream in the language, that my students won't be able to do so themselves. My kids tease me because I drag them everywhere I go, but I tell them that I need someone to talk to.

We have also found a way to get peer pressure to work for us. When you have children teaching children, those children are going to pay attention. The kids in the group shown here are more apt to ask another child how to say something than an adult. And so we have learned to shape certain aspects of our language program around that approach.

We realized early on that there were physical and human resources we just didn't have. Several years ago, we turned to our friends at Miami University for help. The Miami Tribe and Miami University have been building a relationship since the early 1970s. That relationship is built on trust and respect, and many wonderful opportunities beyond language have grown from the relationship. We asked the university if we could move the research aspect of our language and cultural efforts into an academic setting, and, in response to this need, we would involve students in an array of programs and projects that serve the cultural needs of the community. So in 2001, we launched the Myaamia Project at Miami University. Its mission is to preserve, promote, and research Miami Nation history, culture and language. And it has quickly proven to be a very good thing for both of us.

The next few slides show the many opportunities for interaction between the tribe and university. The tribal leadership makes visits to the university on a regular basis, and university staff, faculty, and students make regular trips to Oklahoma. Most of the young adults who enter

college have little knowledge of contemporary Indian life and, due to the relationship and interaction between us, many stereotypes have been dissolved.

We have even gone as far as visiting anthropology classes, which we are happy to do. We recognize the importance of the NAGPRA law (Native American Graves Protection and Repatriation Act), but change cannot really occur until we begin to reshape the thought processes of those who aren't even aware the law exists. The Miami Tribe copyrights all of the materials created through the Myaamia Project. Again, proprietary ownership over cultural information and materials is important to the tribal community. This slide lists several of the projects we are currently engaged in, such as ethnobotany, dictionary development, archival development, transcription of early records, audio CDs, and several other projects. The heavy research component is important to our reclamation effort. Our community is not against research, but they want research that benefits the community. I think that is really important here.

The ultimate goal of this work is to eventually be able to raise our children with the beliefs and values that draw from our traditional foundation and to utilize our language as a means of preserving and expressing these elements. I would like to end this presentation with a short video clip of Miami children utilizing the language in conversation.

Neewe (thank you)