

D R A F T (August 13, 2002)

“The Cherokee language is the basis of Cherokee spirituality and wisdom...many tribal elders, medicine people and storytellers are now gone. Cherokee people may be only one or two generations from losing the language.”

Chad Smith, Principal Chief
State of the Nation Address, 2000

Chapter 4 –Current Status of the Cherokee Language

The Cherokee Nation conducted 300 in-person interviews between March and May 2002, a sample population of 115,026 Cherokee citizens who live in the 14 counties of the Cherokee Nation. The interviews were conducted for the purpose of determining the level of language loss and to plan language revitalization strategies for the future. This chapter contains a report of the findings to be used as the foundation for the development of the 10-year language preservation plan. The chapter is divided into three sections: report of findings, analysis of the findings, and status of language loss.

Section 1 – Report of Findings

Sociodemographic Information

Gender and Age of Respondents – 57 percent (N=171) of the respondents are female and 43 percent (N=129) are male. The age cohort of respondents is:

10 – 20 years: 43 or 14.3% 51 – 60 years: 52 or 17.3%
 21 - 30 years: 28 or 9.3% 61 – 70 years: 52 or 17.3%
 31 – 40 years: 34 or 11.3% 71 + years: 51 or 17%
 41 – 50 years: 40 or 13.3%

Figure 1: Number of Respondents by Age

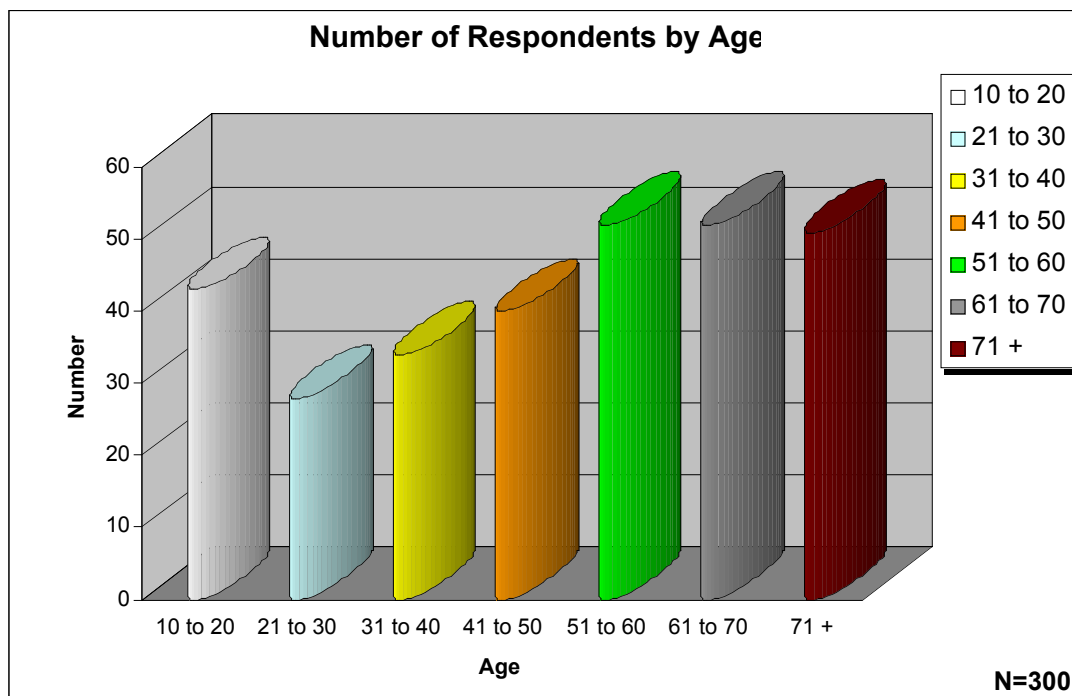
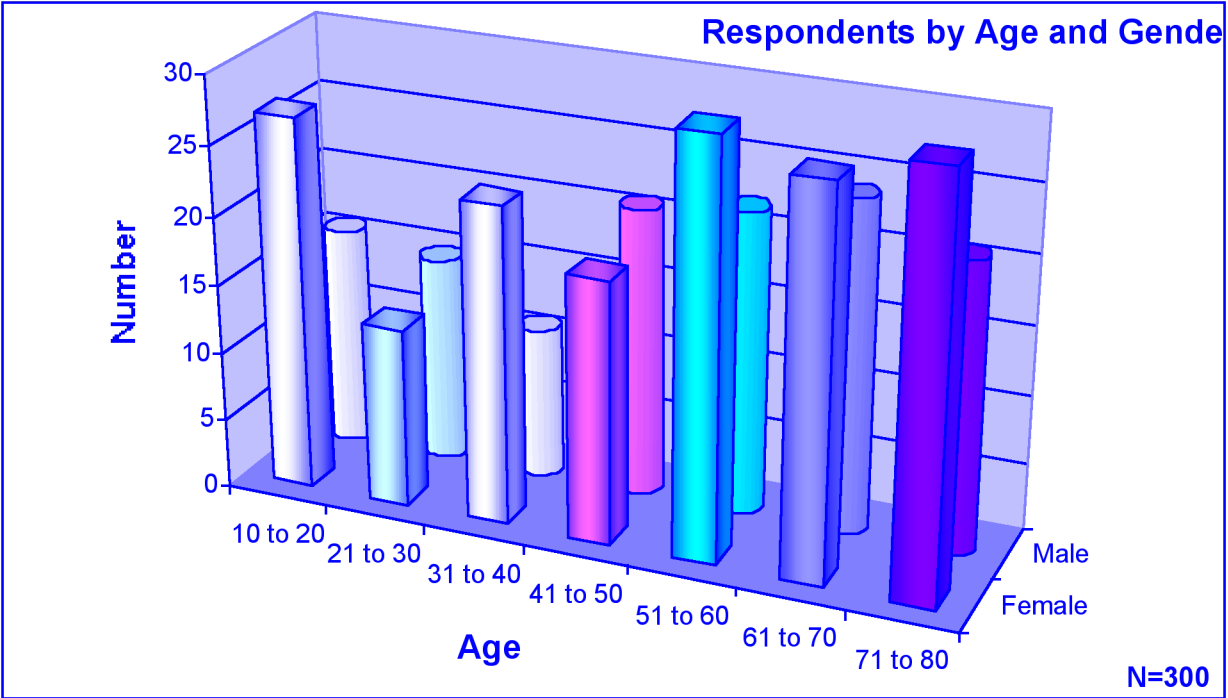
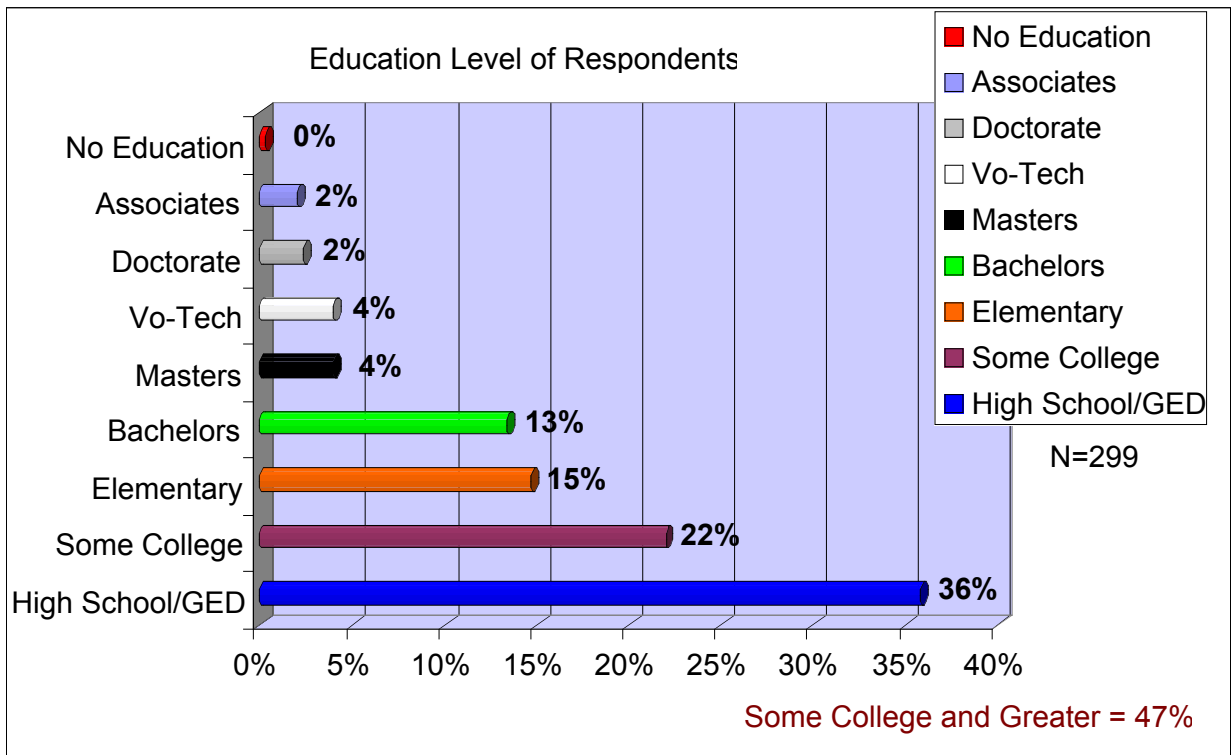


Figure 2: Respondents by Age and Gender



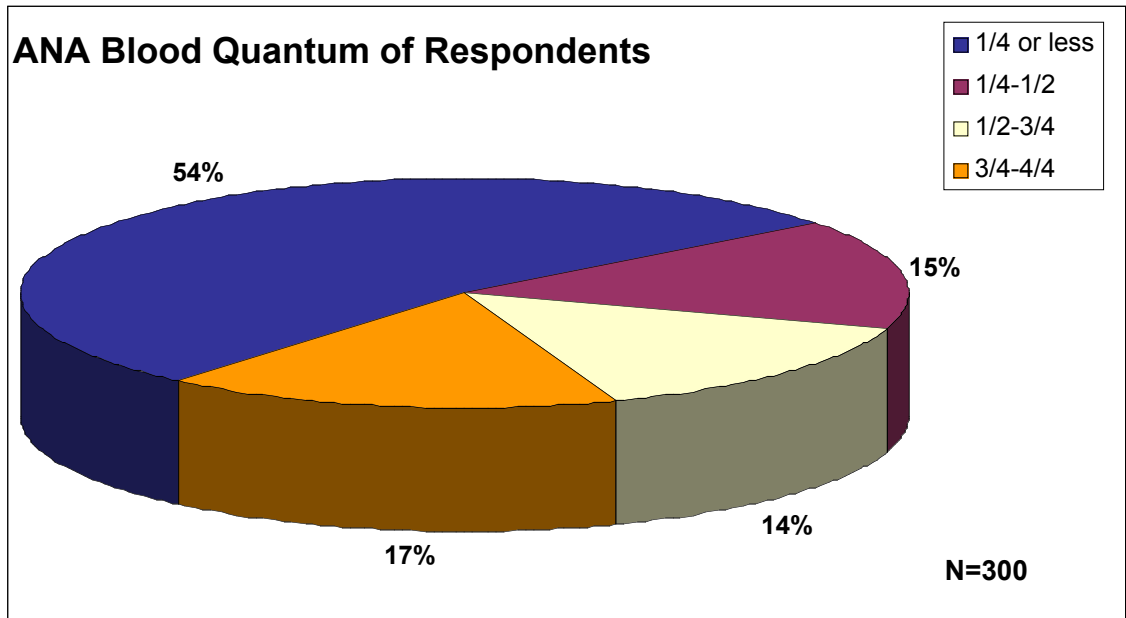
Educational Attainment – Although the majority of respondents had a high school or less education, 47 percent of the respondents have some post-secondary educational experience including vocational-education.

Figure 3: Education Level of Respondents



Cherokee Blood Quantum – Almost half (47.9%) of the survey responds report $\frac{1}{4}$ Cherokee blood quantum or less which is substantially different than for the general population (76%) of Cherokees who live in the 14 counties.

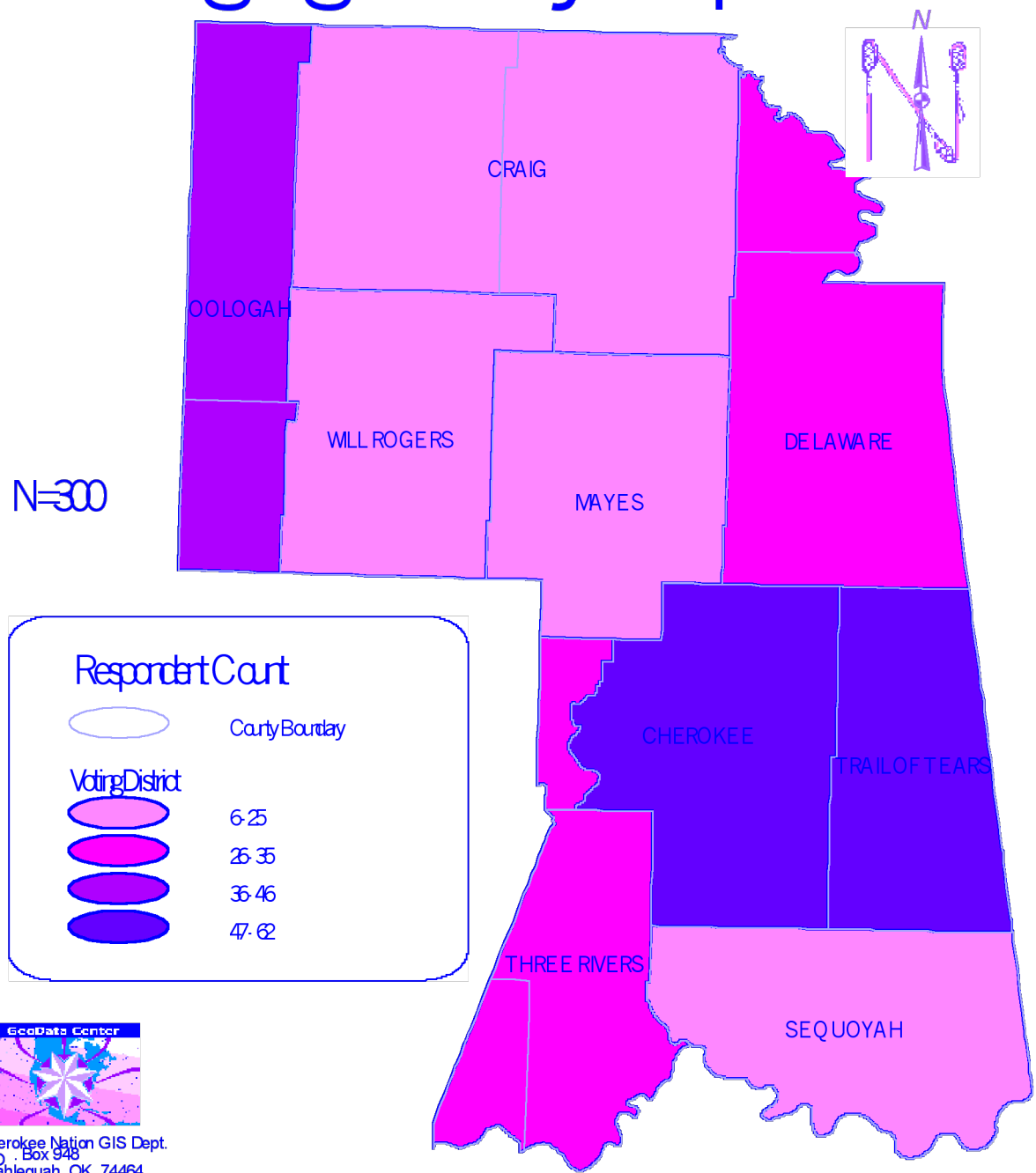
Figure 4: Blood Quantum of ANA Respondents



Residence – The majority (92%) of the respondents lived in rural areas of the 14 counties in the nine CN districts. However, 8 percent live in the Tulsa urban community.

Figure 5: Map of Survey Respondents within the Cherokee Nation Legislative Districts, Northeastern Oklahoma

Cherokee Nation Voting District Language Survey Respondents

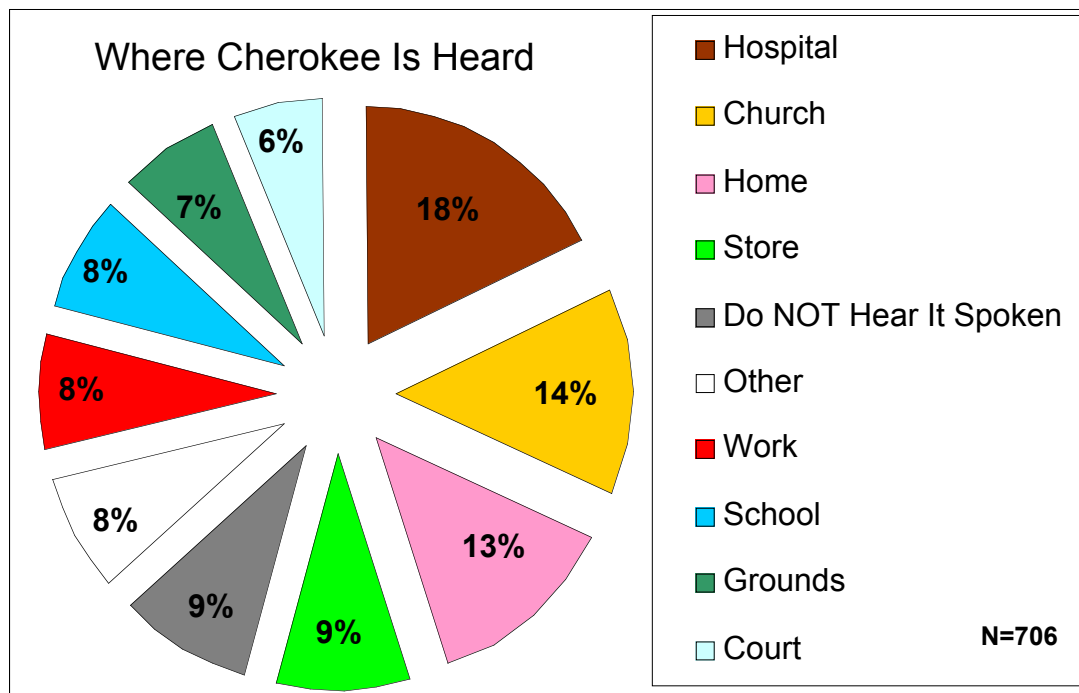


Use of the Cherokee Language

Where Do You Hear the Language Spoken – All respondents were asked to identify the places where they most frequently hear Cherokee being spoken. Nine percent reported that they never hear the language spoken. For those who heard the language being spoken, the following places accounted for the majority (91%) of the responses.

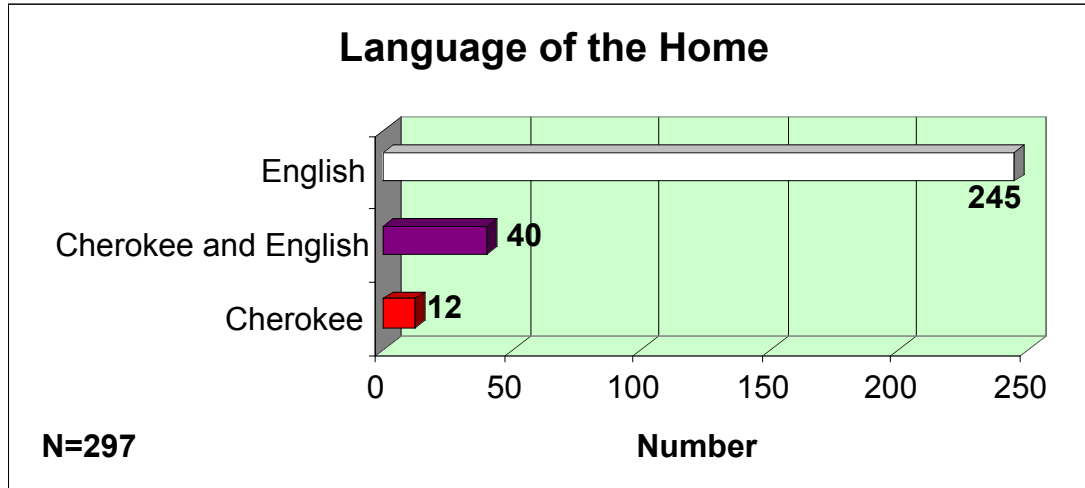
1. Hospital – 18%
2. Church – 14%
3. Home – 12%
4. Store – 9%
5. Do NOT hear it spoken – 9%
6. Work – 8%
7. School – 7%
8. Grounds – 7%
9. Court – 6%
10. All Other – 8%

Figure 6: Where Respondents Heard Cherokee Spoken



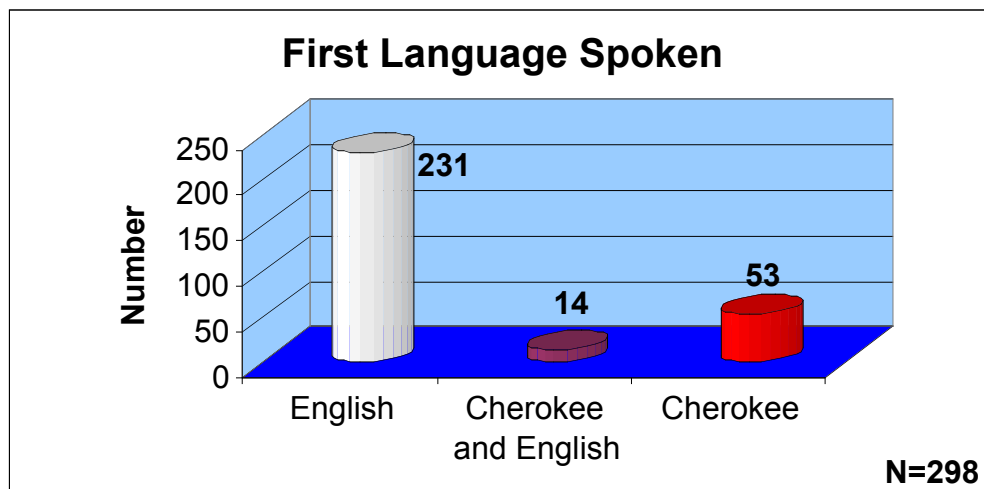
Language Used in Home - For 17% (n=52) of the survey respondents who speak Cherokee, the language is spoken in the home setting. The vast majority of the respondents (82% or 245) speak English only in the home setting.

Figure 7: Language of the Home



First Language – Cherokee was the first language for 18% (53 responses) of the respondents with almost 5% who reported learning both Cherokee and English. English was the first language used for the majority (77% or 231) of the respondents.

Figure 8: First Language Spoken, by number of responses



Cherokee as a Second Language -

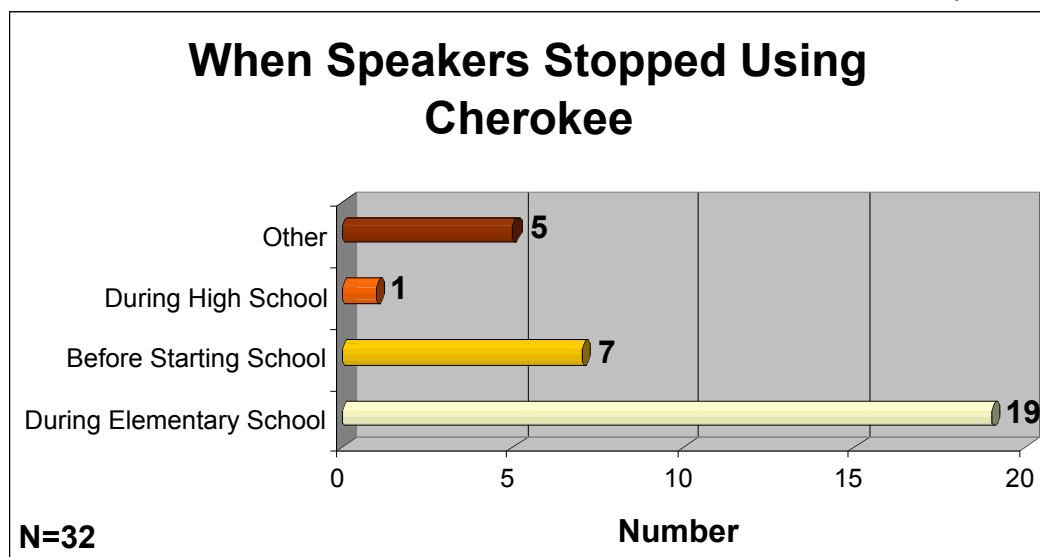
Fifty-three respondents declared English as a first language. Those respondents also reported that they either currently speak or at one time spoke Cherokee. Thirty-five (n=53) still speak Cherokee as a second language.

Figure 9: Respondents who learned Cherokee as a second language

Stopped Speaking the Language - 26% (n=32) of those who speak the language reported that they used to speak Cherokee but no longer speak. When they stopped using the language was reported at the four time frames.

1. During elementary school (between grades 1-6) – 59%
2. Before starting elementary school – 22%
3. During high school years – 3%
4. Other – 16%

Figure 10: When Those Cherokee Speakers Who Stopped Using Cherokee Quit Speaking



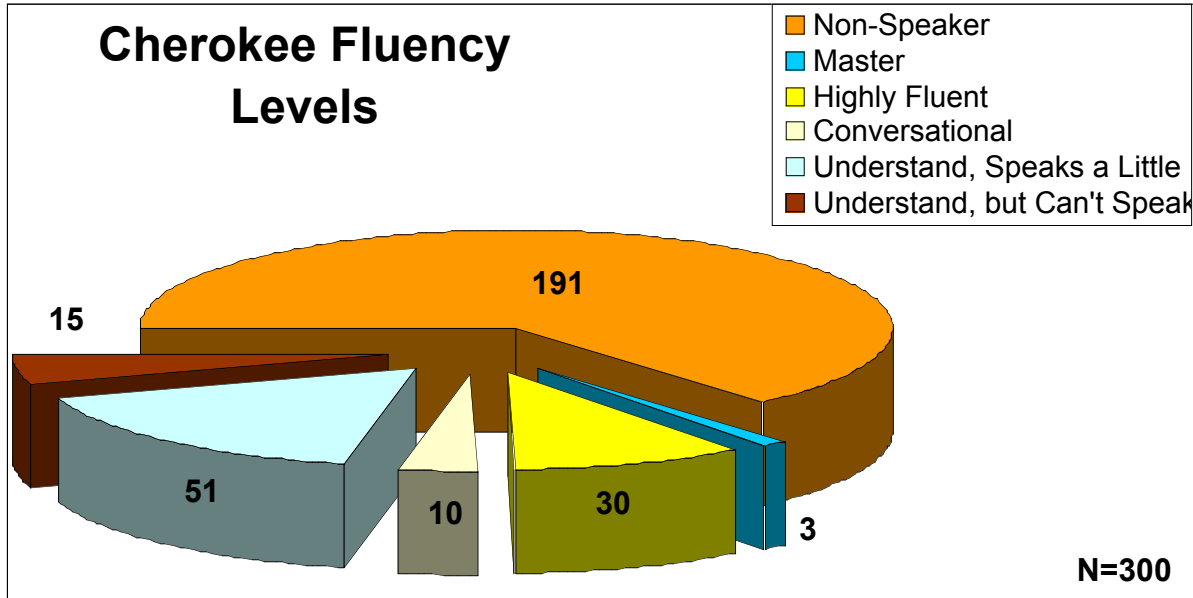
Various reasons were given such as: 1) when I got married, 2) when I moved away from Cherokee speaking people, 3) when the Cherokee speaker died, 4) because I couldn't speak Cherokee a school. Several single answers were given such as: "My grandparents said they wouldn't speak to us anymore 'cause we would get confused", "Mother thought it was hard to learn English and live in a White man's world", "lack of interest and no need", "easier to speak English", "lack of confidence because I was not fluent", etc.

Fluency of the Language – The majority (64% or 191) of the survey respondents do not speak the Cherokee language. Shown below is the fluency level for all respondents.

- 64% - non-speakers
- 5% - Understand, but can't speak
- 17% - Understand and speak a Little

3% - Conversational
 10% - highly fluent
 1% - Master level

Figure 11: Fluency Levels Found in the Survey, Reported By Number



The survey also revealed that all conversational, highly fluent, and master level speakers are over the age of forty.