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Seminole Nation ANA Language Assessment Project
Final Report
Seminole Nation Language Development Advisory Volunteer Group

Jennifer Johnson
Barbara Coon
Natalie Deere
Jane Northcott
Ella Colman
Willis Deatherage
Inna Micco Hickey
Audrey Tilley
Harris Cully
Leon Bell
Pat Bell
Ahse Deere
Jackson King
Exie Fish
Kevin Mack
Ella Mack
Ida Gonzales
George Gonzales
Ricky Chupco
Vicki Davis
Martha Davis
Madonna Williams
Emma Wesley
Kerri Larney
Jerry Haney
Mabelline Davis
Peggy Davis
Yvonne Holata
Terry Spencer
Jennie Ross
Executive Summary

In the 19th century, missionaries began the task of standardizing the Seminole-Mvskoke language. Since that time, the role of written and oral uses of the language has flourished, however, over 150 years later Native language use has steadily begun to decline. Informal and formal observations of the use of the language illustrate that the Seminole-Mvskoke language use is heading for extinction within the next forty-fifty years.

Within the past year, the Seminole Nation has sought to reverse the shift toward the English language. In the fall of 2009, the Seminole Nation was awarded an ANA Language Preservation grant from the US Department of Health and Human Services, Administration for Children and Families, Administration for Native Americans to conduct the Language Assessment Project.

The following report includes critical baseline data from the Language Assessment Project. The principal method that survey information was collected was through a convenience sample (n=1,000) survey that generated both quantitative and qualitative data. Key findings derived from the sample population are noted below.

- Only 17 people under the age of 50 self identified as fluent speakers (n=1,000)
- Only 109 respondents identified themselves as fluent speakers (n=1,000)
- 25% of the sample population reported some Native language use in the home (n=968)
- 80% of survey respondents believe that it is important for tribal members to know the Native language
- 96% of survey respondents said that steps need to be taken to renew the Seminole-Mvskoke language.

Programmatic activities from the Language Assessment Project were used to inform the development of four community goals:

- Immersion Education
- Fundraising
- Community Outreach
Curriculum Development

Prior to the Seminole Nation Language Assessment Project, the Seminole Nation did not know or understand the current status of the language loss. No formal survey had been conducted to ascertain the level of loss or to understand what tribal members needs were in regard to language planning.
Chapter 1

Overview of the Seminole Nation and the People’s Language
Overview of the Seminole Nation

*Excerpt courtesy of Rebecca Stone, Program Development*

The formal history of the Seminole Nation of Oklahoma began when Spain first occupied the peninsula known as Florida. When Pedro Menendez de Aviles founded St. Augustine in 1565, the first permanent settlement in Florida after at least sixty years of sporadic Spanish visitation, he discovered complex cultures sustained by hunting, fishing, farming and raising stock. Tribes from three different basic language groups, the Timuquan, Calusan, and Muscogean, occupied Florida and lived in small, well-organized villages.

Although today we are called Seminoles, this name was first due to a European misnomer, which categorized a diverse group of autonomous tribes together under the name Seminole. The Spanish first recognized the indomitable self-preservation of the speakers of the “core language” Maskoki, and called them cimarrones, or “free people.” Translated through several languages to English, this term came to apply to all of Florida’s initial inhabitants, and their neighbors who later fled to join them when deprived of their own homelands. The Seminoles absorbed remnants of other Florida tribes into their own. The Oconees were the first “Seminoles,” followed by the Yuchis, Alabamas, Choctaws and Shawnees, each of which, once they moved into Florida, became known as Seminoles. Other tribes included the Hecete, Eufaula, Mikasuki, Horrewahle, Tallahassee, Ceyahv and Apalachicola.

The Seminole Nation of Oklahoma is a federally recognized Tribe of Indians, is comprised of a group of many Tribes and remnants of Tribes. Our current form of government is anchored by a Band system which includes the twelve traditional bands and two Freedman bands. The chart below illustrates the twelve traditional bands, their associated tribe and language group.

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<tr>
<th>Seminole Bands</th>
<th>Associated Tribe</th>
<th>Language Group</th>
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<tr>
<td>Ceyvha</td>
<td>Chiaha</td>
<td>Muscogean (Hichiti Dialect)</td>
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<tr>
<td>Eufala</td>
<td>Eufala</td>
<td>Muscogean</td>
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<td>Fushutche</td>
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<td>Muscogean</td>
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<td>Hecete</td>
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<td>Muscogean (Hichiti Dialect)</td>
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<td>Hvteyielke</td>
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<td>Muscogean</td>
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<td>Mekusukey</td>
<td>Mikasuki</td>
<td>Muscogean (Hichiti Dialect)</td>
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<td>Nurcup Harjo</td>
<td>Apalachicola</td>
<td>Muscogean (Hichiti Dialect)</td>
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<td>Ocese</td>
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<td>Horrewahle</td>
<td>Muscogean</td>
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<td>Muscogean</td>
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<td>Tom Palmer</td>
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<td>Muscogean</td>
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<tr>
<td>Tusekia Harjo</td>
<td>Oconee</td>
<td>Muscogean</td>
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</tbody>
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*Source of chart: Compiled with information gathered from http://www.seminolenation-indianterritory.org/*
Today the tribal population is approximately 17,650. The Tribal Complex is situated in the town of Wewoka, Oklahoma. The tribe currently owns 372 acres of federal trust land and approximately 53 acres of fee simple land, while 35,443 of allotted acres are supplemental to the tribal land base which makes up Seminole County. An estimated 31% of tribal members still live within the tribal jurisdictional area.

The State of the Seminole Nation’s Language

The Seminole Nation of Oklahoma’s linguistic background is comprised of both written and oral literacies. The language is spoken by three tribal groups—the Muscogee Creek Nation, the Seminole Nation of Oklahoma and the Seminole Tribe of Florida. Corpus language planning was first carried out by missionaries in the nineteenth century. By 1853, an alphabet had been introduced and was in use by tribal members (Martin, Maudlin & McCarty, 2003). Although formal documents and journals provide evidence of the use of the written form of the language, it is unclear the roles written literacy played in the daily lives of tribal members. Archival documents indicate a significant number of tribal members were literate in the tribal language. Ads in the local newspapers were written using Seminole/Mvskoke language advertising sundry items that could be bought at the local store. Today, remnants of the influence of the language can be viewed on a few historical buildings in the Nation’s capital of Wewoka. These buildings demonstrate the thriving trade process between tribal members and the settlers in the Seminole County area.

In 1972, under the auspices of the Bilingual Education Act, the Seminole Bilingual Education committee was formed to begin efforts to formally organize a bilingual education program. It is important to note that the focus was for children to “develop greater competency in English, become more proficient in their dominant tongue, and to profit from increased educational opportunity” (SBEP, 1972). Collaboration between East Central University and local school districts such as Strother, Bowlegs, Sasakwa, Justice and Wolf made the program possible. These classes were implemented in local community schools and were open to all students. Program newsletters provide much detail of efforts to develop curriculum and implement it in the local schools. Much of the curricular focus was on teaching numbers, colors, animals and short phrases. One of the benefits of this program is that it put tribal members with rich linguistic experience in the classroom, and established a link between the tribal community and the local schools.

In 1993, during the Oklahoma Native American Language Development Institute, a language curriculum was created as a result of a partnership between Seminole and Muscogee Creek tribal members. The focus of acquisition planning was to introduce students to the Seminole/Mvskoke language. The product of the institute was a yearlong curriculum that divided units into week long lesson plans that were intended for brief twenty minute classroom activities. However, it is not known whether or not the curriculum was implemented in any language classes.

During the late 1990’s the Seminole Language Curriculum Committee designed a language awareness curriculum for tribal children ages preschool and up. The objectives of the committee were to circulate the curriculum in schools, complete archival work as well as a video, teach phonetics, and to provide outreach language classes in community churches and homes. The curriculum, which included two sets of instructional books, along with audio tapes, was made possible through a partnership with the Seminole Nation Language Curriculum Committee and the Oklahoma State Department of Education.
Currently, Seminole/Mvskoke language classes are offered at two Oklahoma universities, vocational training schools, and in local community classes. For the Seminole youth that attend the three tribal Headstart programs, language in the classroom consists of identifying numbers and colors, etc. Many of the teachers are community members who have had no formal training in Second Language Acquisition or bilingual teaching methods. Virtually all of the curriculum and language planning efforts to date have not had a focus on fluency, rather the efforts have been focused more on providing Seminole tribal children with language awareness activities and lessons.

In 2008, the Seminole Nation Office of Historic Preservation began efforts to develop community language activities. The Community classes are currently offered in six communities with high Seminole populations. The Language programmatic activities are highlighted below.

- Community Language Classes-The goal of the community class program is to offer beginner level classes that focus on the basic fundamentals of reading and writing and basic vocabulary. The second level of classes is Basic Conversational classes that teach simple conversational sentences. Approximately 300 tribal and non tribal people have participated in the community language classes within the past year.

- Curriculum and Material Development-The team of language teachers and volunteers has created a curriculum to utilize in the community classes. Additionally, materials such as flashcards have been developed in partnership with the Chickasaw Nation.

- Translation Services-A upon request, the Office of Historic Preservation provides translation services from English to Seminole-Mvskoke, or Seminole-Mvskoke to English. These translations are from archival documents, speeches, presentations, etc.

- Tribal Youth Language Classes-The community language teachers focus on school age children during the summer months. As a collaborating partner with the Seminole Nation Tribal Youth program, the language teachers developed a six week long curriculum to provide language awareness activities to youth ages five through sixteen.

- Radio Program-The Seminole Nation hosts a thirty minute weekly radio program in which a portion of announcements and tribal news are broadcast in the tribal language.

- Development of Language Immersion Activities-Several inter-departmental partnerships have been developed as a result of the Language Assessment Project. As part of the ANA community goal of Language Immersion Education, several volunteers have collaborated with the Seminole Nation Childcare Program to develop the first 6 weeks-1 year old language immersion class. The program is currently in the planning phase, and through the support of the Office of Historic Preservation, has recently completed the purchase of modular building to house the classroom. Initial plans are to open the classroom in the Winter of 2010.

Legislatively, the Seminole Nation, through action by the Inter-Tribal Council of the Five Civilized Tribes, supported a resolution in 2009 that strongly opposed “any attempt to declare English as the official language of Oklahoma because doing so is an affront the great heritage and spirit of the people of the Five Civilized Tribes.” Additionally, the resolution stated that each Tribe is “working to preserve, protect and teach their own languages as part of the history of each tribe and of Oklahoma.”
Most language planning efforts have been spearheaded by different individuals and until very recently there have not been any collective community wide efforts for language planning that includes or encompasses the entire tribal community. Like many other tribes, economic planning is at the forefront of the Seminole legislative agenda, and language planning efforts, although very critical, often falls behind tribal economical matters. It is important to note that tribal funding for corpus, status and acquisition language planning has been very minimal because of these concerns.
Chapter 2

Status of the Language
The Seminole Nation conducted 1,000 language surveys to tribal members. The resident population of the Seminole Nation is 17,650 who live throughout the continental United States. The surveys were conducted to ascertain the status of the language and to gauge respondent’s needs in response to language planning efforts. This following chapter illustrates the report of the findings from the Language Assessment Project.

Section 1-Methodology

In 2008, the Seminole Nation was awarded the Native Language Preservation grant from the Administration for Native Americans. The goal of the grant was to promote the survival and continuing vitality of the Native dialect through language education planning and programming. Objectives of the grant were to develop an assessment instrument, conduct 1,000 surveys and compile and evaluate the resulting data.

While archival research was important to the development of the context of the Project it was extremely important to include local community members in the process. The Language Assessment Project relied heavily upon a key group of volunteers to steer the Project. Advertisements in the local media were utilized to recruit volunteers from within the local tribal community. The Seminole Nation Language Development Advisory Volunteer Group played an integral role in administering the survey, offering guidance on the development of community goals, as well as serving in advisory capacity on the progression of the grant.

Additionally, another key group to provide assistance was through the resources from partnerships formed through the Project. Local service sites were utilized to disseminate information about the Project. Participating partners also administered and served as collection sites for the language surveys.

Sampling Techniques

A random sample method was originally planned to collect survey data. The sample size of the targeted population was 1,000, which was calculated for a confidence level of 95% and a sampling error of 3%. However, due to the time limits of the survey and the magnitude of the data to be collected, it was decided that a convenience sample method would be the most successful technique of obtaining the necessary data.

Surveys were distributed at partner locations and advertisements of the Project were heavy throughout the course of the Project. Volunteers were solicited to help administer the survey. All surveys were numbered and the corresponding numbers were cross referenced with a master list to avoid duplication of tribal members in the final count. Over 1,000 surveys were completed; however, some of the surveys had to be destroyed due to duplication, different tribal affiliation, etc. The final number of tribal members who completed the surveys was 1,000.

Instrument Development

A structured survey instrument was developed with the guidance of a core group of volunteers. A review of language surveys developed by various tribes and organization were reviewed for applicability to the Language Assessment Project.
Four fluency levels were utilized in the survey for ease in understanding how fluency and receptiveness was assessed. These included:

How well do you understand your Native language?
   a. Understand everything someone says to me.
   b. Understand most of the time.
   c. Understand some words or phrases only
   d. Not at all

3. How well do you speak your Native language?
   a. Fluently
   b. Well enough to make myself understood.
   c. Not very well: know words and phrases, but have a hard time making myself understood.
   d. Not at all.

Assessment questions were formatted to make it “user-friendly” so that the surveys could be completed independently and participants could retain a sense of anonymity and authenticity throughout the process. For example, participants might be more open when allowed to respond freely and without regard to how their answers might be perceived if they were interviewed. However, some of the participants elected to be interviewed through their survey and volunteers and staff willingly complied with their requests.

The Assessment also included baseline data on the following:

- Socio-demographic information
- Oral and written fluency levels
- Domains of language maintenance
- Importance of renewal of the Native Language

Survey Data Analysis

Data was compiled through a computer program that was developed by the Language Survey Specialist. The results of the data collection included 1,000 surveys. Analysis includes coding of the survey responses and identification of themes around the issues of language loss and the participants’ language ideologies. Issues that were illustrated through the interviews reveal a candid look at what participants believe is important in the Nation’s language planning.

Limitations of the Study

The sample size is representative of only .06% of the total tribal population. Due to the size of the sample, there may be limitations to the findings. Additionally, because a non-probabilistic method was utilized, an expansive generalization cannot be made to represent to total population of the Seminole Nation.
Section 2-Report of the Findings

Sociodemographic Information

Gender and Age of Respondents-62 percent (n=620) of the respondents are female and 38 percent (n=380) are male.

The age group of respondents is:

Approximately twelve of the fourteen tribal bands actively participated in the Language Survey. The survey was inclusive of all tribal bands, however, only twelve of the self-identified band membership
took part in the assessment. The respondents’ Tribal Bands and Clans are shown below. The highest participation was the Tallahassee Band, followed by Ocese and Tusekia Harjo respectively.

**Respondents' Tribal Bands**

- Ceywha: 4%
- Eufaula: 3%
- Fushutche: 8%
- Hecete: 8%
- Htaytenilke: 4%
- Mekusukey: 4%
- Nurcup Harjo: 14%
- Ocese: 14%
- Reisale: 8%
- Tallahassee: 18%
- Tom Palmer: 9%
- Tusekia Harjo: 4%
- Unknown: 9%

n=950

Participation from various clans is highlighted below.

**Respondents' Clans**

- Bear: 11%
- Beaver: 4%
- Bird: 14%
- Deer: 14%
- Kaccv: 14%
- Vktetvulke: 1%
- Wind: 18%
- Sweet Potato: 7%
- Raccoon: 1%
- Alligator: 9%
- Other Unknown: 10%

n=861
Family and Community Language Use

Approximately twenty five percent of the respondents (n=968) indicated some use of the Seminole-Mvskoke language in the home. However, sixty-eight percent of the respondents’ homes were English only. Although the Assessment Project participants are representative of 1/17 of the total tribal population, if compared with the entire population, the English Only homes would be dramatically increased.

When asked about language use to children in homes and communities, only twenty-nine percent of survey respondents (n=928) indicated that the Native Language is being spoken to children in home and in the community. Fifty-three percent of survey respondents disagreed with this statement.

Most (n=910) of the respondents indicated that they do not hear the language being spoken on a daily basis. Seventy-one percent indicate that they do not, while 29% indicated that they do.
LANGUAGE FLUENCY

The greater part of the survey respondents (n=949) indicate that they understand some words or phrases only or not at all. Findings also illustrate that only thirty-three percent of the participants show some level of language receptiveness, with twenty percent of respondents indicating they have full comprehension of the language. The levels of language comprehension are shown below.

Levels of speaking ability dramatically decreased. Only eleven percent of survey respondents indicated fluency in speaking the language. The majority of participants indicated they do not speak very well, and know words or phrases only. Twenty seven percent indicated they do not speak the language at all.
The levels of reading ability were dramatically low. Only 7% of survey respondents (n=947) indicated that they were able to read in the language very well. Sixty-nine percent indicated that they had no abilities to read in the language.

Levels of writing ability mirrored Reading ability. Only 5% (n=949) of respondents indicated they were able to write in the language. The number of participants who had no writing ability was slightly higher. Eighty-one percent were not able to write in the language.
Language Domains

Respondents were asked specific questions about where they hear and speak the language. The following charts illustrate the various domains in which the language is spoken, heard and who it is addressed to.

The greatest sites of language maintenance were in the religious domains. Church was the place in which the majority of speakers use the language. This was followed by home, funerals, and the ceremonial grounds. Similarly church, ceremonial grounds and family member’s homes is where the language is most frequently head (n=994).

Family members (n=692) comprised the largest group of whom respondents addressed in the Seminole-Mvskoke language. Only 5% of respondents utilized the language among friends. The language is falling into disuse in social interactions outside of the family unit.
Importance of Language Renewal

The great majority of survey participants want to see the language perpetuated in future generations. The following charts illustrate the needs of tribal members who participated in the survey.

Fully eighty percent of respondents (n=963) indicate that it is important for tribal members to know the Native language. Only 10% of survey respondents disagreed.

Eighty-three percent of survey respondents reported that an important part of being Seminole is to know the language. 74% of participants indicated that they strongly agreed with this statement. Additionally, only five percent of respondents disagreed.
Respondents (n=951) reported that the use of a written language is important in future language planning endeavors, with 75% indicating that having a written language will endure that the Native Language will always be spoken.

Survey respondents strongly believe that the Native language should be spoken to children in home and in communities. Seventy-three percent indicated they agreed with the statement (n=955). Only 5% of the respondents disagreed.
The majority of the respondents (n=934) indicated that students should have the opportunity to learn their Native Language for their World Language Requirement in School. Some cited the fact that students were required to learn either Spanish or French and that tribal students should be afforded the opportunity to study their own language.

There was strong support for the development of an language immersion school for Seminole students. Seventy percent of respondents (n=924) indicated that there should be a Seminole school where all classes are taught in Seminole except for English classes. Only 13% disagreed with 17% undecided.
Again, the majority of respondents (n=902) indicated that they would enroll their child in an immersion school if afforded the opportunity. Sixty-eight percent agreed to the statement.

The majority (47%) of participants (n=902) agreed that today’s children and youth want to speak their Native language.
Most participants (n=883) believe that the Native Language contributes to the academic achievement of children. Sixty-three percent agreed to the statement with only 15% disagreeing.

Perhaps most tellingly, a full 96% of respondents (n=786) agree that steps need to be taken to renew the Native Language in the various Seminole communities.
Non-speakers clearly want their children and grandchildren to be able to learn the Native language (n=662). Ninety-seven percent of the respondents indicated that this is an important issue that they agreed with.

Section 3-Status of the Language

The Language Assessment Report identified only seventeen people under the age of 50 who self-identified as fluent speakers (n=1,000). Of the respondents, only 109 people (n=046) identified
themselves as fluent speakers. Although Seminole-Mvskoke language use is still spoken throughout community churches and ceremonial grounds the linguistic demographic is rapidly changing.

Michael Krauss (1998), notes that languages are considered moribund when there are no child speakers. Likewise, Joshua Fishman also discusses the threat to languages when there are only a few speakers who maintain the language, postulating that future generations will be ill equipped to transmit the language to their offspring (1991, p. 113).

In concluding the Language Assessment Project, it is safe to say that there are no child speakers who can utilize the language fluently and in all domains. The majority of speakers have diminished within the course of four generations. Today, the Seminole Nation’s linguistic demographics have shifted from monolingual Seminole/Mvskoke language speakers to monolingual English speakers. The children from most Seminole/Muscogee speaking families are now monolingual English speakers with little or no background knowledge of the heritage language.

On Fishman’s Graded Intergenerational Disruption Scale (GIDS), the Seminole/Mvskoke language meets the description of Stage 7; most users of the language are a socially integrated and ethnolinguistically active population, but they are beyond child-bearing age (1991, p. 89). Similarly, when comparing the current status of the language to Michael Krauss’ typology, the language would fall under Class C; spoken only by the grandparental generation and up (Krauss, 1998, p. 11). Except for a few exceptions, the last truly fluent speakers are at least fifty years old and older. Realistically, the Seminole-Mvskoke language is threatened with extinction within the next thirty-four years, unless language planning that is focused on developing fluent speakers is swiftly implemented.

Through the progression of the ANA Native Language Preservation grant, the core group of volunteers has committed themselves to the revitalization of the Seminole-Mvskoke language. Utilizing data from the Assessment Project, the group has developed four community goals in future language planning endeavors.

These goals are:

- Immersion Education
- Fundraising
- Community Outreach
- Curriculum Development

The development of the community goals to revitalize the language requires substantial financial support from the tribal government. Federal funding, grants, and private foundational support will assist in endeavors to revitalize and preserve the language, however, the Seminole-Mvskoke language cannot be dependent upon outside financial resources alone. Funding from the tribal government must be permanent to ensure sustainability to the program. Fishman (1991) asserts, “societally based RLS cannot be accomplished at all if it is not accomplished at the intimate family and community levels”. The challenge to move forward in reversing language shift must be propelled by concepts of self-determination in order to develop language policy that will influence future language planning on the community and family level.
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http://www.wm.edu/linguistics/creek/textbook/pumopunykv1.pdf

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Appendices