

# WWULiE World News

Western Washington University Linguistics in Education

Fall 2009

## Do linguistics this week!

Featured lesson from [TeachLing](#).

### Problem-Solving with Michoacán Nahuatl Grades 5-8

This problem-solving exercise allows students to discover meanings of parts of words in Michoacán Nahuatl, a Uto-Aztec language of Mexico. According to [Ethnologue](#), in the 1990 census there were 3,000 speakers of the language. It's alternatively spelled, Nahuatl, because unlike in English, the "l" here is spoken without using the vocal folds [-voice]. The brackets below indicate phonetic pronunciation. In the Yakima Valley of Washington State, there is a large community of immigrant workers, many of whom are from Michoacán State, which is in the southern part of the country. Perhaps some of them speak Michoacán Nahuatl as well as Spanish.

Adapted from Fromkin, V., R. Rodman, N. Hyams (2003) *An Introduction to Language*, 7th ed. Boston: Thomson Heinle. For more on this, see William Sischo (1979), [Michoacán Nahuatl](#), in Ronald W. Langacker, ed., *Studies in Uto-Aztecan grammar 2: Modern Aztec grammatical sketches*, 307-80.

Look at the following words from Michoacán Nahuatl and their English translations.

[nokali] 'my house'	[mopelo] 'your dog'
[nokalimes] 'my houses'	[mopelomes] 'your dogs'
[mokali] 'your house'	[ikwahmili] 'his cornfield'
[ikali] 'his house'	[nokwahmili] 'my cornfield'
[nopelo] 'my dog'	[mokwahmili] 'your cornfield'

- a. What is the piece of the Michoacán word that means each of the following English words?

'house' \_\_\_\_\_ 'my' \_\_\_\_\_

'dog' \_\_\_\_\_ 'your' \_\_\_\_\_

'cornfield' \_\_\_\_\_ 'his' \_\_\_\_\_

(plural marker) \_\_\_\_\_

- b. What is the English translation for the Michoacán word [ipelo]?
- c. How would you write 'his cornfields' in Michoacán?

## Linguini

Here are some announcements and little tidbits (little tongues, to be precise) that we think will interest you.

### Hangul Day

October 9 S. Korea

### Chosŏn'gŭl Day

January 15 N. Korea

These two days celebrate the birth of the Korean writing system. There's a great post about it on the [Language Log](#).

### WWULiE 2010

June 30 & July 1

See below for a report of the 2009 conference.

Click [here](#) for reports from previous meetings.

**WWULiE**  
**World News**  
Vol. I No. I

Editors

Dave Pippin  
Anne Lobeck  
Kristin Denham

## From the classroom

Dave Pippin  
Billings Middle School (Seattle)

Welcome to the first issue of the WWULiE World News, the mouth of the Western Washington Linguistics in Education project. We aim to publish this three times a year—in the fall, winter, and spring. In this space we will be featuring dispatches from the classroom. This month I'll be reflecting on my experience teaching geography and history at Billings Middle School, here in Seattle. It's our hope that you will consider writing a piece about your experiences incorporating linguistics in the classroom in upcoming issues.

*Back to the drawing board...*

This is the second year I've taught World Geography to my sixth graders. When I started teaching this course last year, I did a lot of problem sets in my tour of the world. While we covered a lot of ground, my feeling was that it all seemed rather rushed and disjointed. My original thought was that I would tie the material together with a discussion of the rise and fall of language around the world, ideas found in Nicholas Ostler's *Empires of the Word*. But that proved too daunting, given all of the other aspects of the curriculum I wanted to cover. This year I abandoned the tour in favor of a more thematic approach, and after an opening discussion of earth geometry, I dove into language.

To get the conversation started, I asked my classes to consider a few big questions:

- What is linguistics?
- Why study it in geography class?
- How many languages are there in the world, and what are the most widely spoken?
- How do languages differ?
- What is a dialect?

Conversation around these questions revealed that many students struggled to even come up with ten languages—mentioning instead such things as “African” and “Asian”—and that a lot of them associate language with a bank of words. Still, it wasn't me, the teacher, that began to shed some light on the topics. The students themselves started raising good questions and soon started wrestling with the very nature of language itself:

What about sign language?  
What about Gibberish?  
Are we talking about current languages?

So, of course, we moved right into a problem set on **Pig Latin formation**. This is a good one; it's familiar, fun, and expansive. Working through it provided just enough challenge, and the following day the students walked into a room filled with the sounds of Kauai'i community radio, **KKCR**, streaming over the computer. A parsimonious explanation of Pig Latin involves introducing some expert language about language, the structure of syllable, constraints upon different languages, definition of vowels and consonants, glottal stops, and even a permutation challenge, and Hawaiian language is a great contrast to English.

The next few days saw the conversation move back to the notion of what's a dialect, pigins and creoles, and then an old favorite, **New England /r/**. Last year I didn't teach any American geography or regional patterns. But I think adopting world view of language must begin by looking at the data all around us. Indeed, it's this ability to generalize to everyday life that makes the study of language so fascinating in the first place.

R is one of the most menacing sounds. That's why they call it murder, not mukduk.

Dwight, from  
The Office

## 2009 Summer Workshop Report

The third annual WWULiE World convened on Wednesday, July 1, 2009 and continued through Thursday, July 2. Twenty-five teachers, WWU students, and linguists gathered together to do some linguistics and talk about issues involving the teaching of language study in the schools, with a focus on the topic of Language and Dialect in the Pacific Northwest.

Cindy Boyd, *elementary teacher, Lynden SD*  
Marsha Riddle Buly, *literacy and bilingual education, Western Washington University, Bellingham*  
Theresa Carey, *high school teacher, Lynden SD*  
Jeanne Conroy, *teacher, Daly City, CA*  
Kristin Denham, *linguist, Western Washington University, Bellingham*  
Scott Grinsell, *student, Western Washington University, Bellingham*  
Maya Honda, *linguist, Wheelock College, Boston, MA*  
Sandra Keller, *teacher, Ferndale SD*  
Beth Keyser, *English teacher, Superior Jr. High School, Superior, MT*  
Marcy Kok, *Lynden Valley SD*  
Anne Lobeck, *linguist, Western Washington University, Bellingham*  
Sylvia Mendoza, *ELL teacher, Nooksack Valley SD*  
Amy Miller, *4<sup>th</sup> grade teacher, Lynden SD*  
Sue Mosich, *1<sup>st</sup> grade teacher, Tacoma Public Schools, Tacoma*  
Suzie Nelson, *practicum supervisor, TEOP, Everett*  
Wayne O'Neil, *linguist, Massachusetts Institute of Technology, Cambridge, MA*  
Joy Patman, *Spanish teacher, West Seattle High School, Seattle*  
Dave Pippin, *history and geography teacher, Billings Middle School, Seattle*  
Cindy Purdy, *5<sup>th</sup> and 6<sup>th</sup> grade teacher, Kendall Elementary, Mount Baker SD*  
Alisa Sachs, *English teacher, Fairhaven Middle School, Bellingham*  
Tim Shepherd, *retired teacher, Kendall Elementary, Mount Baker SD*  
Doris Sjoquist, *teacher, Nooksack Valley SD*  
Sarah Van Dyken, *elementary teacher, Lynden SD*  
Jen Wesolowski, *Nooksack Valley SD*  
Aileen Whitney, *teacher, Tacoma*  
Suzanne Yorks, *teacher, Kendall Elementary, Mount Baker SD*

Plans are already underway for another meeting in **2010**, tentatively scheduled for June 30<sup>th</sup> and July 1<sup>st</sup> at WWU with a focus on **World Languages**.

### Summary of the 2009 Workshop

**Wednesday, July 1<sup>st</sup> (morning)—Language in the 19<sup>th</sup> c. PNW**

**Kristin** discussed both work that she has done and is being done at Tulalip Elementary school with regard to Salish language education. She gave some history about speakers of the language in modern times, showed clips from the

Tulalip website, talked about placenames, and discussed Vi Hilbert's Lady Louse stories.

**Dave** gave a lecture about James Swan and 19<sup>th</sup> c. contact between white settlers and Native people. He discussed the origins of Chinook Jargon and played an example of a song in Chinook WaWa.

**Anne** stimulated a classroom weary of historical lectures. By displaying an isogloss of American's preferred work for soft drinks—pop, soda, and Coke—she generated a conversation about dialects that touched on military bases, the Northern Cities Vowel Shift, a study of Pacific Northwest English, and more.

### Wednesday, July 1<sup>st</sup> (afternoon)—Developing and Teaching Linguistics Problem Sets

**Maya** discussed one of the important phenomena that she and Wayne study with their students—plural noun formation. She brought up Jean Berko-Gleason's study of young children in 1956 and the famous wug test while Kristin showed clips of her kids being subjected to similar linguist-parent recitations.

**Dave** introduced to the group a problem of plural-noun formation in Armenian, developed by a student in Maya Honda's and Wayne O'Neil's linguistics class. The group worked though it in small groups and then came back together to discuss the key elements of problem-set based linguistics, which Maya elaborated on after break.

**Maya** talked about constraining the data to give students several possible hypothesis choices, getting students to think about potential counterexamples, a top-down v. bottom-up approach, and the importance of telling a connected story of language.

**Kristin** handed out data on Lushootseed and asked that the class turn the information into problem sets.

### Thursday, July 2<sup>nd</sup> (morning)—Dialect and More

**Kristin** explained why we write and say *wolves* instead of *wolfs*.

**Dave** walked the class through the Pig Latin problem set and showed how it could be connected to a conversation about Hawaiian syllabic structure. Later he went on to discuss the North Carolina Language and Life curriculum, which includes problems like Appalachian *a*-prefix.

**The Group** had a roundtable conversation (so to speak) about lots of stuff.

### Thursday, June 26<sup>th</sup> (afternoon)—Workshop

The group worked on projects of their own choosing. Teachers created accounts on TeachLing so that they could make their lessons available to the wider community.

See you next year!