

## **“The Cherokee Nation and its Language” tsalagi ayeli ale uniwonishisdi**

### **Introduction: a historical sketch of the Cherokee People**

The Cherokee people prior to European contact (1600’s) lived in a vast area of what is now the southeastern United States from the eastern seaboard west to Tennessee. Half of the Cherokee population was lost in the 1730’s from Small Pox because of their commercial trade with England and in the 1770’s the Cherokee faced genocidal wars with Great Britain and the United States. In the 1830s, the Cherokee faced political and legal battles with the US government attempting to save their eastern homelands and existence. That episode resulted in the infamous “Trail of Tears” in which approximately 4,000 Cherokee people died on the 850 mile death march from what is now Tennessee, North Carolina and Georgia to Indian Territory, now eastern Oklahoma (Conley, Robert, 2006).

After the Cherokee settled in what is now the Cherokee Nation “west” a sophisticated government was built because the people strongly wanted to continue to enforce their own tribal laws. The Cherokees built a Supreme Court Building, the first public building in Indian Territory. Shortly thereafter, the tribal government of the Cherokee Nation (CN) also built a National Capitol Building, the National Prison, and nine District Courthouses that comprised a unique tribal legal system, unlike any other tribe of that era. The Saline Courthouse located in Rose, Oklahoma is the only district court house standing today. According to renowned legal historian and scholar, Rennard Strickland,

The Saline Courthouse is more than a tribal site; it is a national treasure that symbolizes a moment in human development when a small group of Native people succeeded in balancing continuity and change. Cherokees preserved their historic values and traditions while adapting to a world of intense pressures, new technology, challenging ideas of modernization and the devastating destruction of colonization, foreign settlement, and geographic relocation. At the heart of what the Cherokees preserved in their courthouse at Saline was the lesson of building and rebuilding a civilization, of adaptation, of changing and yet of remaining true to

certain values regardless of the nature of change. The heart of those values, symbolized by this simple building, is an understanding of the timeless---of family, of tribe, of friends, of place and of season. There is a widely held belief that at places like the Saline Courthouse, the Cherokee Nation dramatically broke with ways of their traditional aboriginal law and passed, almost overnight, to a highly sophisticated system of constitutional law. The remarkable emergence of the Cherokee legal system came from a court like Saline. Here, tribal goals and values were fused with western, Anglo-American legal institutions. The best of the old ways were preserved at the Saline Courthouse by tribal judges, jurors and other Cherokee citizens while they absorbed new ways that strengthened them as a people and helped them prepare for survival into the twenty-first century and beyond (Strickland, Rennard, 2002)

As a people who value education, the Cherokees built the first institution of higher education for women west of the Mississippi River followed later by a higher education school for men. The CN also built 150 day schools and other public institutions throughout the CN.

The ugliest chapter in Cherokee history was yet to be faced when in 1906 the common title of Cherokee land in northeastern Oklahoma was divided into individual allotments; Indian Territory became the State of Oklahoma. In 1906 the initial Dawes Commission provisions were superseded by Section 28 of the final version which continued the Cherokee government providing that; “the Tribal existence and present Tribal governments of the Choctaw, Chickasaw, Cherokee, Creek, and Seminole Nations are hereby continued in full force and effect for all purposed authorized by Law” Thus, the precontact sovereignty of the CN was continued although the state of Oklahoma did not fully recognize the continued presence of this doctrine until the early 1950’s. (Strickland, Rennard, 2008) In 1976, a federal judge found that the US Bureau of Indian Affairs had wrongfully kept the CN from exercising its governmental rights; meanwhile the CN in 1975 had adopted a superseding constitution and began efforts to revive the CN.

Today, the CN is the second largest American Indian tribe in the country with approximately 280,000 members in Oklahoma and throughout the US, with about 140,000 who live within the tribal jurisdictional service area in 14 counties in northeastern Oklahoma. The CN has a tripartite democratic form of government that includes judicial, executive, and legislative branches. The judicial branch includes a District Court that oversees internal legal issues and Judicial Appeals Tribunal that is comparable to the Supreme Court that oversees internal legal matters and the District Court. The executive branch is lead by an elected Principal Chief (Chad Smith) and Deputy Principal Chief (Joe Grayson, Jr.) and is the largest branch of the government that oversees the tribe and administers its many programs and services on a daily basis. The legislative branch of government is composed of 17 tribally elected counselors who make the laws and set overall tribal policy for the tribe.

The CN and its business enterprises employ approximately 6,000 persons making the CN the leading employer in northeastern Oklahoma. Many employees work in Tahlequah at the W.W. Keeler Tribal Complex but services to the people are located in a number of field offices in the 9 major districts or jurisdictional service area.

### **Description of the Cherokee Language**

The Cherokee language is classified as the sole member of the Southern Branch of the Iroquoian language family (the Northern branch includes speakers from the Huron, Tuscarora, Oneida, Mohawk, Seneca, Cayuga, and Onondaga tribes). Linguists have estimated that Cherokees separated from their other Iroquoian brethren roughly 3,500 to 4,000 years ago. (King, Duane, 1977). Due to the length of separation, Cherokee is unintelligible to the speakers of other Iroquoian languages; Cherokee is classified as polysynthetic in that words consist of many parts. This is best demonstrated by verbs, the central ingredient of the Cherokee language. Indicative of this, Cherokee as a language consists of about 75% verbs and 25% non-verbs. English is the opposite as 75% are non-verbs and 25% are verbs as noted Cherokee linguist, Durbin Feeling, once said, “It’s all in the verbs” (Feeling, Durban, 1993).

## The Major Characteristics of the Cherokee Language

The description of Cherokee in this section is from “Characteristics of the Cherokee Language and the Expected Levels of Proficiency” (Wyman Kirk et al, 2006) and *A Reference Grammar of Oklahoma Cherokee* (Montgomery-Anderson, Bradley, 2008).

### (1) Phonology

At first glance, one may get the impression that the Cherokee phonology is rather “simple.” This impression comes from a relatively small catalog of consonantal and vowel segments:

#### Consonant:

p, b (note that /p/ and /b/ are found only in English loan words, and are not part of many speakers “consonantal” inventory), t, d, tl, dl, k, g, kw, gw, glottal stop [ʔ], palatal affricates [c, j], s, h, l, m, n, hn, w, hw, y and hy

#### Vowels:

i, ii, e, ee, a, aa, ã, ãã (nasalized mid-central vowels – often represented by [v]); u, uu, o, and oo (the long vowels are sometimes represented by the symbol: as in a:)

That is, a total of 23 consonants if we count /p/ and /b/, and 12 short and long vowels. What needs to be realized about these sounds is that the distinction between voiceless and voiced stop- and affricate-series is not based on voicing (voiceless/voiced) as it is in English (e.g. p/b, t/d), but rather it is dependent on the degree of aspiration. In general, the distinction between the aspirated dental stop /t/ and the unaspirated counterpart /d/ is not phonologically predictable. For example, the root for “to cause for something flexible to fall” has two forms: -adonht- and -adonhd-, and the choice of which root-form to use based on the tense of the verb must be learned:

unadonhtanvi ‘they caused (long time ago) something flexible to fall’  
anadonhdiha ‘they cause something flexible to fall’

Another complication in Cherokee phonology is the tone system. Some researchers claim that Cherokee has a lexically marked tone system, but there may be syntactically determined tonal rules as well – the latter has yet to be explained. It is generally agreed that Cherokee has six surface tones, four of which may appear only on long vowels:

i)	high (3):	gádó (3-3)	‘what’
ii)	low (2):	àhnàwo (2-2-1)	‘shirt’
iii)	high fall (32):	óòsta (32-1)	‘good’
iv)	low fall (21):	nããya (21-1)	‘rock’
v)	low rise (23):	sàhkòónge (2-2-3-1)	‘blue’
vi)	high rise (34):	nóóya (34-2)	‘sand’

These tonal patterns are lexical as well as syntactic. The lexical tonal patterns must be learned for each lexical item, and there are some general syntactically motivated tonal changes that must yet be discovered.

## (2) Morphological and Syntactic Structure

### Nouns:

Cherokee nouns usually consist of one or more prefixes and a number of suffixes. Nouns may be divided into inanimate and animate classes, but the distinction does not manifest itself until the noun is pluralized. For example:

kanesa’i ‘box’	=>	dikanesa’i ‘boxes’
agehya ‘woman’	=>	anigehya ‘women’
gehyuja ‘girl’	=>	inigehyuja ‘(speaking of you and me) girls’
	or	
	=>	osdigehyuja ‘(speaking of that one and me) girls’
	or	
	=>	sdigehyuja ‘(speaking of both of you) girls’
	or	
	=>	idigehyuja ‘(speaking of we all) girls’

or

=> ojigehyuja ‘(speaking of those people) girls’

Nouns may indicate “location” or “direction” by the use of suffixes. For example:

ama ‘salt’	=>	amohi	‘in the salt’
gasgilo ‘table’	=>	gasgilã’i	‘on the table’
tuluja ‘basket’	=>	talujohi	‘into the basket’.

In expressing possession relationships, some nouns take one set of prefixes indicating the grammatical “person” (1st, 2nd, 3rd; singular, dual, plural) and other nouns take another set of person prefixes. These person prefixes are often referred to as “pronoun” or “pronominal” prefixes. The difficulty for the learners is that the use of different sets of pronoun prefixes is not predictable. Learners must learn which set of person prefixes would apply for each noun.

### **Verbs:**

Cherokee verbs are even more complex than nouns – in fact, verbs exhibit the most complex structure in Cherokee. They encode information about who is doing what to whom, in what shape and condition, how many, which gender, when and how – one of the reasons for the language’s typological classification as “polysynthetic” – and one verb complex may express ideas that in English may require several sentential expressions.

At a minimum, Cherokee verbs must contain a verb stem, one pronoun prefix, and a final suffix. They may also exhibit one or more initial prefixes, a reflexive prefix which directly precedes the stem, and several non-final suffixes as summarized below:

Initial Prefixes + Pronoun prefix + Reflexive prefix + Stem + Non-final suffix + Final Suffix
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Although the minimal Cherokee verb contains a verb stem, one pronoun prefix, and a final suffix, the initial prefixes and reflexive prefixes are necessary to express certain

fundamental concepts and ideas in the language. In fact, many of these initial prefixes and reflexive prefixes must be used on certain forms.

Initial prefixes may be:

y- ‘negative’	w- ‘away from speaker’
n- ‘lateral position’	de- ‘plural object’
da- ‘future’	da- ‘motion toward speaker’
i- ‘again’	ga- ‘since’
e- ‘distant imperative’	j- ‘relative’
j- ‘specific time past’	j- ‘negative imperative’
j- ‘again (imperative)’	

Note that there are four /j-/ morphemes, each of which carries a different meaning. Learners of Cherokee must be able to distinguish which meaning is intended based upon context and the verb form/tense used.

Pronoun prefixes show a great deal of complexity. At least one pronoun prefix must precede a verb stem in Cherokee. These prefixes are divided into three sets: A, B, and Person. Set A prefixes appear with transitive verbs, while Set B prefixes mainly appear with intransitive verbs, and, sometimes, with transitive verbs that have inanimate objects. The Person Set prefixes are used when the direct object of the verb is a person, and these prefixes will replace either the Set A or B prefixes on a verb. Just a few examples:

Set A:

- |  |   |
|--|---|
| a. <b>ji</b> -woniha ‘I am speaking’             | b. <b>hi</b> -woniha ‘You are speaking’           |
| c. <b>ga</b> -woniha ‘S/he is speaking’          | d. <b>ini</b> -woniha ‘You and I are speaking’    |
| e. <b>osdi</b> -woniha ‘S/he and I are speaking’ | f. <b>sdi</b> -woniha ‘You both are speaking’     |
| g. <b>idi</b> -woniha ‘We all are speaking’      | h. <b>oji</b> -woniha ‘We (not you) are speaking’ |
| i. <b>iji</b> -woniha ‘You all are speaking’     | j. <b>ani</b> -woniha ‘They all are speaking’     |

Set B:

- |  |  |
|--|--|
| a. <b>agi</b> -ha ‘I have it’          | b. <b>ja</b> -ha ‘You have it’           |
| c. <b>u</b> -ha ‘S/he has it’          | d. <b>gini</b> -ha ‘You & I have it’     |
| e. <b>ogini</b> -ha ‘S/he & I have it’ | f. <b>sdi</b> -ha ‘You both have it’     |
| g. <b>igi</b> -ha ‘We all have it’     | h. <b>ogi</b> -ha ‘We, not you, have it’ |
| i. <b>iji</b> -ha ‘You all have it’    | j. <b>uni</b> -ha ‘They all have it’     |

Person Set:

- |  |   |
|--|---|
| a. <b>jiya</b> -dvgi’a ‘I hear him/her’        | b. <b>hiya</b> -dvgi’a ‘You hear him/her’         |
| c. <b>a</b> -dvgi’a ‘S/he hears him/her’       | d. <b>ena</b> -dvgi’a ‘You & I hear him/her’      |
| e. <b>osda</b> -dvgi’a ‘S/he & I hear him/her’ | f. <b>esda</b> -dvgi’a ‘You both hear him/her’    |
| g. <b>eda</b> -dvgi’a ‘We all hear him/her’    | h. <b>oja</b> -dvgi’a ‘We, not you, hear him/her’ |
| i. <b>eja</b> -dvgi’a ‘You all hear him/her’   | j. <b>ana</b> -dvgi’a ‘They all hear him/her’     |

Note that the Person Set prefixes are actually more complicated than this since it is possible that in this set we may see a mixture of A, B, and specific Person set prefixes on a host of verbs.

The Pronoun prefix system extends beyond those forms presented above; for example, there are other prefixes used with “people” to indicate the specific object of the sentence. For example:

- a. **gv**-woniha ‘I am speaking to YOU’

Here /gv-/ means ‘I – You’, and so we use /gv-/ if “I” is the subject and “You” are the object.

- b. **sgi**-woniha ‘YOU are speaking to ME’

- c. **agi**-woniha ‘S/HE is speaking to ME’

Note that the prefix /agi-/ looks the same as the ‘I’ prefix on the Set B verbs: agi-ha ‘I have it’.

As the examples above illustrate, Cherokee has three pronoun sets, Set A, Set B, and Person Set. Person Set applies to verbs that can take a human object such as “like,” “love,” “hear,” “listen,” “watch,” etc. These sets are further complicated by the use of

other pronouns that are used in specific situations such as those exemplified in a), b) and c) above.

There are a large number of non-final suffixes (e.g. -e- ‘at intervals’; -is- ‘duplicative’; -ilo- ‘repetitive’; -dohdan- ‘unintentional’; -ohn- ‘completive’; -el- ‘dative/benefactive’; -idol- ‘around’ and many others). Final suffixes include those that indicate tense and aspect. For example:

ga-’i	‘I am walking (right now)’
ga-’iso’i	‘I walk (habitual act)’ or more often ‘I (always) go by (on foot or some other means)’
jiwoni-ha	‘I am speaking (to a person or persons right now)’
agwoni-sā’i	‘I spoke (to a group of people long ago)’ (Remote Past)’.

A transition in tense often triggers the use of specific prefixes used with that tense. For instance, in past tense forms the use of /ji-/ or /j-/ on a verb indicates that the speaker is identifying, has identified, or that someone has identified WHEN the event took place. This prefix is used even if no one has given a time frame for the action, but the action may be understood to have occurred at a general time. For example:

aqwenvsv’i	‘I went’ (time not specified)
svhi j-aqwenvsv’i	‘I went yesterday’

This form /ji-/ (before consonants) or /j-/ (before vowels) appears with great frequency on past tense verbs.

Changing tense may also trigger a change in pronoun sets. For example:

Present Tense	=>	Past Tense
Set A		Set B
jigowhtiha ‘I see it’		agigohv’i ‘I saw it’
ga’i ‘I am walking’		awanigisv ‘I walked’
jiwoniha ‘I am speaking’		agwonisv’i ‘I spoke’

Another characteristic of Cherokee verbs that makes them challenging to learn is their ability to classify. That is, the choice of verb is determined by a quality of the item that is the subject for intransitive verbs or the object for transitive verbs. There are at least 40 Cherokee verbs that have classificatory variants and many of these are considered verbs of handling. The classifications include animate, liquid, flexible, long, and compact and each of these distinctions changes the form of the verb. For example, the verb ‘give’ changes with each of the distinctions:

wesa <u>gakaanee</u>	animate	‘She is giving him a cat.’
ama <u>ganeehnee</u>	liquid	‘She is giving him water.’
ahnawo <u>hanvneee</u>	flexible	‘She is giving him a shirt.’
gansda <u>aadee</u>	long	‘She is giving him a stick.’
kwana <u>ahnnee</u>	compact	‘She is giving him a peach.’

The form used with compact objects can also be used with items that do not fit into one of the classes or in question formation when the identity and therefore class is unknown.

In sum, Cherokee has fifteen tenses that students must either learn or at least understand to be “fluent.” In addition to these tenses, students must learn various pronoun prefixes (the aforementioned Set A, Set B, Person Set, and Specific Object pronouns like the /gv-/ form), numerous pre-pronoun prefixes (such as the /ji-/ past tense specific prefix), a large number of suffixes (past tense markers, interrogatives, etc.), and a pitch/tone system that has yet to be fully documented. Languages are sometimes examined and classified according to the nature of their morphological structure. One such typology is *morphological typology*. This refers primarily to the extent to which words in the language are divisible into clearly individuated morphemes: 1) isolating, 2) agglutinating, and 3) inflectional or fusional. Chinese, a Category IV language, is an isolating language in which every word consists of only one morpheme. At the other extreme in this “isolating-inflectional” continuum are polysynthetic languages of which Cherokee is one. English is at the lower end of the *inflectional* group and Japanese is in the agglutinating group. From the morphological typology perspective, Cherokee is different from English and other Category IV languages.

The complex nature of the morphological marking system in Cherokee adds another variable to the overall structure that is additional challenge for native English speakers. Because so much information is provided morphologically, the syntactic structure of Cherokee allows for relatively free word order with the order in Cherokee determined by pragmatic rather than syntactic factors.

### **(3) Writing/Orthography**

Although the Roman alphabet system is sometimes used as a learning device for adult learners who already know the English alphabet, the primary means of writing and reading in Cherokee is the traditional writing system known as the Syllabary. This situation is somewhat similar to the other languages of Category IV (Arabic, Chinese, Korean, and Japanese) in that each of these languages has their own orthographic traditions that are totally different from an alphabetic system. They may use the alphabetic system for supplementary and instructional purposes, but their traditional writing systems are the primary means of instruction.

All historic materials (Cherokee Phoenix newspaper, Bibles, written documents, laws, constitution, letters, etc.) are written in the Syllabary. For students to access and understand these sources they must master the Cherokee Syllabary – they must be able to “read” these materials and comprehend them. In addition, language learning materials are currently being produced in the Syllabary. This especially applies to all of the Immersion curriculum materials which are written exclusively in the Syllabary, and future materials will be produced in the Syllabary.

Learning the Cherokee Syllabary is difficult because the system does not mark all phonemic differences (such as aspirated and non-aspirated contrasts) adding to the difficulty of learning new symbols. The Syllabary is an effective means to access pronunciation and meaning of expressions to the already fluent speakers, but this is not the case for non-native speakers.

In sum, Cherokee, like non-Western languages such as Arabic, Chinese, Korean, and Japanese, has a long cultural history that is very different from those of the West, and the rich cultural tradition is embedded in the language itself and in the use of the language. This is another layer of attributes that is often foreign to speakers of English.

#### **(4) Variations**

The Cherokee language spoken in Oklahoma and that spoken in North Carolina are mutually intelligible, and yet speakers from both areas have noted stark difference when talking with each others. This difference may be attributed to a dialectal difference which arose primarily because of the 170 year separation of the two Cherokee groups resulting in this dialectal shift. Montgomery-Anderson (2008: 15) describes the dialect differences as follows:

The first European to come into contact with the Cherokees was Hernando De Soto in 1540. By this time they had already developed a complex society centered on their capital city of Echota, near what is now Madisonville, Tennessee. The capital was moved in the 1700s to New Echota in northwestern Georgia. At this time there were three recognized dialects of Cherokee. The Lower Dialect, also known as Underhill, is now extinct; it was originally spoken in northwestern South Carolina as well as adjacent communities in Georgia. The Eastern Dialect was originally spoken in western North Carolina and is now the dialect for the Qualla Boundary community in the same area. The third dialect, known as Overhill, Oтали or simply the Western Dialect, became what is now known as Oklahoma Cherokee (Mithun 1999:419). The Eastern or Lower dialect used a trilled [r] instead of [l]; this dialect's pronunciation of the name *jaragi* served as the basis for the English word 'Cherokee' (Mooney 1995:16).

#### **Placing Cherokee at the proper level of proficiency among other languages of the world**

Although not officially classified in terms of language difficulty level, Cherokee contains those features found in languages that have been classified at the highest, i.e. most difficult, level (Level 4) according to the levels of learning difficulty. These features include the complex pitch vowel inventory mentioned above, complex morphology (this

includes numerous morphophonemic elements and morpho-syntactic elements), a set of classificatory verbs (verbs that require the speaker to distinguish the physical nature of objects to select one of five appropriate verbs), and a reading/writing system that is not phonetic or alphabetic (Kirk, Wyman 2005).

**Levels of Proficiency.** In the 1970s, the Foreign Service Institute, the Defense Language Institute, and other governmental bodies concerned with language learning established a scale of "Expected Levels of Absolute Speaking Proficiency in Languages." They divided all the languages taught at the institutes into four groups based on the achievement level a student may expect after a certain period of study.

**Group I:**

In Group I are languages that are relatively easy for native speakers of English: Afrikaans, Dutch, French, Italian, Portuguese, Spanish, and Swahili, for example. Students of these languages can expect to achieve Advanced proficiency after about 720 hours of study.

**Group II:**

In Group II are slightly more difficult languages: Bulgarian, Farsi, German, Greek, Indonesian, and Hindi among them. It takes about 1320 hours of study to reach the Advanced level in these languages.

**Group III:**

In Group III are languages such as Bengali, Czech, Hebrew, Russian, and Thai. Students may achieve Advanced skills after about 1500 hours of study.

**Group IV:**

Group IV, the most difficult languages for native English speakers, includes Arabic, Chinese, Japanese, and Korean. These languages require as many as 2760 hours of study of Advanced level competency.

Cherokee is appropriately considered to belong to Category IV along with Arabic, Chinese, Japanese, and Korean. This thinking is based on the characterization of the Cherokee language as described above (Kirk, Wyman et al, 2006). The major facts of the language are reviewed below which was initially prepared with the assistance of the Iroquoian language experts Dr. Marianne Mithun (Department of Linguistics, University of California at Santa Barbara) and Dr. Pamela Munro (Department of Linguistics, University of California at Los Angeles). The following book was a useful reference: Buttrick, Daniel S. and David Brown. 1819. *Tsvlvki Sqclvclv, A Cherokee Spelling Book*. Knoxville: F.S. Heiskell and H. Brown.

The strongest reason for designating Cherokee to Group IV comes from three dimensions of the language that pose extreme challenges for English speakers learning Cherokee.

### **1. Correspondence of grammatical categories between English and Cherokee (typological fit)**

Typologically, English is considered a synthetic language in that a word may contain a small number of morphemes; while Cherokee is a polysynthetic language in which there are a large number of morphemes, particularly multiple roots, per word. At first glance, many nouns in Cherokee may match nouns in English, but the similarity ends there. Much of what is expressed in an English noun, for example, is expressed in a Cherokee verb *if it is expressed at all*: it may be a verb itself, or it may be a piece of a verb.

### **2. The amount of learning that is required for Cherokee**

The second dimension has to do with how much have to be learned to speak even minimally in Cherokee. Perhaps Korean and Japanese are ranked high because one has to learn case endings – markers of nouns that indicate whether the noun is the subject, object, benefactive, instrumental, etc. In order to speak a polysynthetic language like Cherokee, one cannot pronounce each element corresponding to an English word as it comes to mind. One has to know huge

numbers of complex words, complete with their pronominal prefixes, other prefixes and suffixes, and the cumbersome morphophonemic rules.

In all languages, words have a systematic internal structure, one of the things that make it possible for speakers to learn so much vocabulary. And good speakers can create new words when necessary, on the basis of the ones they know. But there is a tremendous amount to know in order to create a Cherokee word, not something a learner can master in a short or even medium amount of time.

### **3. The writing system**

A Cherokee spelling system based on the Latin alphabet, with some special values, was used by the Congregationalist missionary Daniel Sabin Buttrick and his Cherokee assistant David Brown in a spelling book (Buttrick and Brown 1819). This was superseded by the Cherokee syllabary developed by Sequoyah (George Guess) in 1821, which became the official writing system of the Cherokee people in 1828. Creation of a unique Cherokee writing system resulted in widespread literacy and many publications including the newspaper *The Cherokee Phoenix* (1828-1834). Sequoyah knew no English and the syllabary he developed is an indigenous system that consists of 84 symbols that represent syllables—not single sounds—comprising typically a vowel or a combination of a vowel and a consonant. With 84 symbols to be memorized along with tonal and morphophonemic rules to be learned, achieving fluency in Cherokee reading and writing skills for English speakers requires much study and practice.

### **(4) Final Consideration**

There are additional complexities that Cherokee poses for the English-speaking learner like tone, classificatory verbs, different kinds of past tenses, verb-centeredness, etc. Combined with the factors above, these characteristics of the language provides justification for ranking the task of learning Cherokee for English speakers as equally if not more difficult than learning even those languages belonging to Category IV, like Korean and Japanese.

## **Cherokee Language Revitalization**

The Cherokee people have experienced several phases of language shift and revival.

1. The first phase has been referred to as the purism phase that occurred when people believed that the language was being contaminated by too many English “loan” words. This occurred in the early 1900s when Oklahoma became a state and the CN no longer had jurisdiction of its people. However the Cherokee language became an important issue of CN Chief Bartley Milan in the 1940s when he located the original matrices of the syllabary and started to print in the syllabary once again. The first Cherokee language classes were taught at the University of Oklahoma and the American Business College in Tulsa (Conley, Robert, 2006).
2. The second or reform phase did not begin until more than fifty years later when classes were offered by the CN in the early 1960s led by a tribal member and language advocate, Agnes Cowen, who through a federal grant implemented the Cherokee Bilingual Education Program and developed the first written Cherokee language lessons. In 1970 Principal Chief W.W. Keeler appointed a Dictionary Committee composed of Charles Sanders, Sam Hair, Annie Meigs, and Anna Grits Kilpatrick who worked with language expert Durbin Feeling to compile the first Cherokee dictionary in 1975. This phase marked a desire to make the language learning less complex and was a time when teaching tools such as lexicons and simple lessons were being developed.
3. The third phase of standardization occurred in the 1980’s that involved a process in which the current dialect used in Oklahoma was legitimated and became accepted as the major form of the language. Cherokee classes were offered in many communities and for CN employees.
4. The fourth phase begun in 2000 and involved making the language more modern in which there was recognition for the need to create new vocabulary

for use by the general public on the CN website. In 2001 an advisory council of master speakers was formed to guide language related activities of the CN Cultural Resources Center and to create new Cherokee words.

5. Finally, today the fifth phase of language renewal presently proposes that Cherokee people must become involved in all aspects of language revival if the language is to survive beyond the present older generation of master-level speakers. (Raymond, Margaret 2003)

In determining how the Cherokee language has endured both orally and in written form, the question we need to ask is: "Where do we use the oral and written Cherokee?" Certainly, in those homes where Cherokee remains the primary language of communication the continued use of the language needs to be encouraged and supported. We believe that one of the principle means by which Cherokees has survived is the strong association between the Cherokee language and its use in Cherokee spiritual life. (Allen, Richard, 2003)

A principle link that united Cherokees was their community's religious centers. In Oklahoma, there exist two distinct (yet fundamentally related) entities that served Cherokee religious life, those two being the Christian church and the ceremonial or "stomp" grounds. For the Christian church, Bibles and hymnbooks written in the syllabary provided the means of reinforcing the importance of Cherokee. For the ceremonial grounds, the requirement that ceremonial leaders use Cherokee in their performance of their duties and all records and information is kept in the syllabary served much the same purpose. Both religious venues called for the leaders to be proficient in spoken as well as written Cherokee. To attain ceremonial office as a council member or clan leader, the person must show that he/she can speak fluently and write proficiently in the syllabary. The same rule holds true for the many Cherokee churches throughout northeastern Oklahoma (Kirk, Wyman, 2005).

According to the CN survey results of 2003, only about 10 percent of Cherokee consider themselves active language speakers, about 4 percent are able to read the Cherokee syllabary and less than 2 percent can write it. However, some have estimated that there are only approximately 10,000 people out of the total population of 280,000, that is, less than 4%, who speak Cherokee at some level of proficiency -- from the novice level in which a few common words or phrases are understood or spoken to the most

advanced master level where the individual is competent in all skills including the ability to translate between Cherokee and English. About 17% are what has become known as apprentice or semi-speakers -- people who understand the language but have limited ability to speak Cherokee. They may be adults who heard and spoke only Cherokee up until the age they entered public schools when English was introduced and became their language of choice. Many of these adults have a tacit knowledge of Cherokee and can understand most of the spoken language but have lost their ability to use the language as they did as children. The vast majority of the population or about 73 percent of the Cherokee people are non-speakers (Peter, Lizette 2006).

At the time of the first European contact with North America there was somewhere around three hundred indigenous languages. Today, that number stands at around 200 with 175 languages spoken only in the United States. About one-third of those 175 indigenous languages have only very elderly speakers (Krauss, M, 1996) This group, of which Cherokee is one, without reversal of this language shift is destined for extinction in a matter of a few decades. Language loss is loss of culture. Language is the basic medium of transmission of arts, literature, history, cultural and religious traditions, social institutions, and values. For example, cultural values such as “respect” and the Cherokee concept of *ga-du-gi* or working together are embedded in the Cherokee language.

### **Legislative Authority**

The authority for actions, policies and programs dealing with Cherokee culture and language is found in the Cherokee Nation Constitution and more recently in laws enacted by the CN Tribal Council. A 1991 legislative act:

“Established Cherokee and English as the official languages of the tribe, provided that any tribal member may speak in Cherokee or English in communicating with tribal government, that English translation services will be provided for persons who speak Cherokee, and established a policy to take leadership to maintain and preserve the Cherokee language as a living language by a) efforts to involve tribal members to the greatest extent possible in instruction in Cherokee language; b) establishing a permanent Cherokee language program; c) encourage the use of Cherokee language in both written and oral form to the fullest extent possible in public and business settings; and d) encourage the creation and expansion of the number, kind and amount of written materials in the Cherokee language and official encouragement for the development of materials.”

Following this legislative authority for action 95 community members were convened by the CN Office of Policy, Planning and Development on October 2-3, 1999 to design future language, history and culture programming activities. Participants included language speakers, culture and history experts, Cherokee artists and crafts persons, and a variety of interested individuals met for two days to plan the future language, culture and history programs in nine distinctive subject areas: literature, history, storytelling, culture and traditional craft skills, drama music and film, historical sites, arts, genealogy, and language. Results and outcomes of this first comprehensive planning initiative have guided the Nation's future language, culture and history activities located both within the CN governmental system and in Cherokee communities. A 50-year vision articulated by this group projected that 80 percent of the CN citizens would be actively re-engaged in the revitalization of the Cherokee language and culture.

In 1995 the legislative act of 1991 was strengthened and amended to read:

“An emergency declared by the Tribal Council to establish a permanent Cherokee language program as a support unit for all programs and services within the Cherokee Nation subject to such funding limitations as may exist from year to year.”

This act is symbolic of the tribe's recognition that survival of the culture is dependent on the ability to perpetuate, preserve and protects the language. Following this act, the CN Culture Resource Center (CRC) was established in 1995 to preserve and promote the Cherokee language, history and culture of Cherokee people and is administered by the CN Education Department. The tribe recognized that survival of the culture is dependent on the ability to preserve, protect, and perpetuate the language. The creation of this new department reflected the central role that the Cherokee Language had within the CN. The CN Tribal Council Education Committee provides oversight and funding of the CRC and the CN's various other language programs on an annual basis.

In the 2002 State of the Nation address, Principal Chief Chad Smith announced an important new nation wide policy to address “the perpetuation of the Cherokee language” as one of the new top three initiatives of his administration. (The others are Jobs and Community.) This important administrative mandate generated many new language programs and activities, and each unit was charged with the responsibility to develop

measurable short- and long-range strategies designed specifically to accomplish the 50-year language vision. For example, the Language Strategic Work Team was charged with the responsibility of developing national strategic goals to be implemented by CN departments and offices. The goals for fiscal year 2009 implementation are:

1. Cherokee Nation leaders are accountable to Cherokee families and communities.
2. The value of the Cherokee language is demonstrated by regular usage.
3. The Cherokee Nation will support and promote Cherokee values, traditional knowledge and experience.
4. All Cherokee Nation groups must demonstrate support for the Cherokee language.
5. Educate Cherokee citizens about laws concerning trust and private property in the Tribal Jurisdictional Service Area.

Most importantly, and a significant indicator of the Executive Branch's commitment to Cherokee language and culture, the Cherokee Nation provides additional special internal funding to assist the various departments and offices to meet each strategic goal and objectives.

#### Long-range Language Revitalization Plan

The award of findings of the 2002 language survey, the CN, for the first time, to quantify the language fluency rate of citizens living within the CN jurisdictional service area and to develop a formal long range language plan to address the language needs. Quantitative data was gathered using a convenience sample (n=300) and a key informant process that collected qualitative information from individuals knowledgeable about the Cherokee language. Based on the findings of the 2002 survey, the Cherokee language is very close to extinction as only adults beyond childbearing age still maintain the fluency of the language. If the classification of language vitality proposed by noted linguist Michael Krauss is applied to the Cherokee language, the life expectancy of the language is only 30-40 years as the language is spoken fluently by only the grandparental generation.

As a result of these findings the CN began a 10-year language revitalization program for the period 2003 – 2012. This program developed a number of language policies with a long-term goal that in fifty years, 80 percent of all tribal members would be actively re-engaged in the language and culture of the tribe.

Major findings derived from the sample population are noted below:

- No one under 40 years of age is conversational in the language.
- Only 52 speakers use the language in their homes.
- Only 9 individuals were found to be highly fluent and only 2 are considered to be at the highest level of bi-literate or at a master's level.
- The remaining 247 (or 85%) of the survey respondents have very limited ability to speak Cherokee or are non-speakers.
- Most former speakers stopped using the language either before they started to school or while in elementary school.
- Most children of fluent or conversational speakers do not speak the language.
- Most respondents report they would like to learn to speak the language or learn to speak better.
- Almost all respondent said that preservation of the Cherokee language is very important for future generations.

Three major long-range goals and 12 strategic objectives provide the overall direction for the tribe's future language revitalization initiative. The goals are:

- Create language revitalization programs that ensure survival of the Cherokee language throughout the tribal communities;
- Educate and certify language teachers to assure a qualified and knowledgeable workforce for program implementation; and
- Document the language and develop language instructional materials and curriculum. (Raymond, Margaret 2003).

The CN has taken significant steps to reversing language shift through a systematic language planning. Of all these efforts the most innovative is the program to grow a new generation of fluent speakers from childhood on up starting in an early childhood immersion program.

The next major language effort was launched in 2003 in three initiatives: 1) the creation of four language advisory groups; 2) opening of the “language nest” for 3 and 4 year olds and 3) opening of the language teacher preparatory degree program at Northeastern State University and 4) special language and ongoing language programs. These initiatives were, and remain today, central to the creation of a new generation of second-language speakers. Following is a brief description of these three language programs that remain the core of the CN’s language revitalization efforts.

### Language Advisory Committees

The CN uses formal ways to gain input on how the language programs and services are implemented and assessed to meet the principal goal of bringing the language back to Cherokee people. This input includes assistance of four professional linguistic consultants from the University of Kansas (Drs. Tracy Hirata-Edds, Lizette A. Peter, Akira Yamamoto, and Kimiko Yamamoto respectively) and three major Cherokee language advisory committees all of whom meet on a regular basis. The language advisory committees are composed of community and CN master-level speakers who convene to develop new vocabulary, review written materials and curriculum, and recommend new language services. These committees are: the Cherokee Language Advisory Council composed of approximately 20 individuals organized in 2001 to provide new vocabulary for the Cultural Resource Center; the Cherokee Speakers Bureau organized in 2006 and composed of approximately 80 speakers who provide direction to the overall CN Education Department; and the Cherokee Speakers Consortium composed of about 25 individuals organized in 2007 between the CN and the Eastern Band of Cherokee Indians (EBCI) for the purpose of sharing language materials and new vocabulary to be used in the classroom. The three Cherokee language committees are composed of CN employees and representative from many Cherokee communities who volunteer their time to assist CN language revitalization efforts.

### Tsa-la-gi A-Ge-yu-li (Children’s Language Immersion Classrooms)

As noted above, the CN has taken significant steps to reversing language shift through systematic language planning. Of all these efforts, the most innovative is the

program to grow a new generation of fluent speakers from childhood on up in an early childhood immersion program. In August 2001, the Cherokee Nation began to offer preschool age children the opportunity to participate in all the typical activities of the preschool while immersed in the Cherokee language. Although these activities are all typical of young children's school days, the language provided by the teachers in the classroom and on the playground is Cherokee -- that is, Cherokee is the language of the preschool.

In 2005 an immersion kindergarten opened to provide further language opportunities for four- and five-year olds. The teachers are bilingual but speak only Cherokee with the children throughout the day. A full immersion First grade began in 2006 and Second grade full immersion began in 2007. At the end of the 2008 school year, there were five classrooms with a total of 60 children enrolled. In fall 2008 for the first time all immersion classrooms will be in the same location, a newly renovated independent building adjacent to the CN Children's Development Center.

Children in the Cherokee Language Immersion School have been demonstrating increasingly greater language proficiency with each year since the program has been implemented. These gains are demonstrated within cohort groups, as children matriculate from one level to the next, but also *between* cohort groups, a reflection of teachers' improved skills and a constant increase in the number and quality of Cherokee language materials available for classroom use. Assessments of children take place both informally through observations of daily participation and deskwork, and formally through the administration of the Cherokee Immersion Language Assessment.

Observations of the immersion classrooms reveal that children use Cherokee almost exclusively, with their teachers and with one another. They use Cherokee during meal times and all learning activities when their teachers are present and, more importantly, they speak Cherokee casually to one another during free play time, even when their teachers are not present. The children have been observed cooperating in Cherokee, talking about events in their lives in Cherokee, assuming the role of teacher to teach their classmates Cherokee, and even arguing with one another in Cherokee.

The formal language assessment results corroborate these observations. Children's scores are highest in receptive skills and lower in productive ones, and yet, at

all levels and with increasing proficiency at each level, children demonstrate that they can respond to questions about themselves and concrete topics, that they possess an ever expanding vocabulary, and that they are developing general language skills.

Furthermore, children who have been in immersion for three years or longer demonstrate higher levels of accuracy in pronunciation and the ability to mark Cherokee verbs appropriately for some tenses. Importantly, children are demonstrating communicative competencies including strategic competence (skills language learners use to compensate for their limitations in the language). This documented progress in children's language abilities indicates that the immersion program is steadily improving in its capacity to achieve the goal of producing fluent Cherokee speakers (Hirata-Edds, Tracey and Peter, Lizette 2006).

#### Northeastern State University Cherokee Language Degree Program

Through a Memoranda of Agreement initiated in 2004 with Northeastern State University College of Liberal Arts 21, new language classes worth 40 credit hours are offered for about 75 students who are majors in the new program or those who are taking the Cherokee language as a foreign language requirement.

The CN provides an annual \$100,000 grant and in-kind funding for two positions, an instructor and administrative assistant, plus approximately \$60,000 annually in special scholarships for students who make a commitment to teach in the CN language immersion school upon graduation.

The goals of the Cherokee Language Degree program are to:

- provide an innovative undergraduate program that prepares students for K-12 teaching positions in Cherokee and
- To produce teachers who are fluent in speaking, reading and writing of Cherokee and are prepared to teach about the Cherokee cultural heritage.

Upon graduation, students are expected to:

- speak the Cherokee language at the intermediate-high level as established by ACTFL,
- write the Cherokee syllabary at the intermediate-high levels,

- demonstrate knowledge of pre-contact culture, cultural change and contemporary culture through course work and construction of curricular units for K-12 grade levels,
- analyze the morphology, phonology and semantics of the Cherokee language, demonstrate understanding of language teaching approaches and methods through courses, curricular planning and field experiences,
- critique literature and historical documents written in the Cherokee language, and
- Demonstrate professional conduct and responsibilities in the classroom.

This degree program is fully accredited or certified with various regulatory agencies such as: the Oklahoma Commission for Teacher Preparation, the Oklahoma State Department of Education, and Oklahoma State Regents for Higher Education, the National Council for Accreditation of Teacher Education, and the American Council of the Teaching of Foreign Language. For the 2007-08 academic year, 218 students were enrolled of which 25 majors were attending these classes (Kirk, Wyman 2008).

#### CN Special and Ongoing Language Programs

In addition to the major language initiative described above, other language programs developed as part of the long-range revitalization plan include:

- Office of Language Curriculum. In 2003 a curriculum team was initiated to develop new print materials and animated videos for the language immersion classrooms. To date five levels of grade- and language-specific curriculum have been developed for preschool through third grade immersion classrooms. They are aligned with the Oklahoma World Language and Priority Academic Student Skills (PASS) standards. On-going review of the written Cherokee material is conducted to assess accuracy of the use of the written and spoken language.
- Office of Translation Services. This office was established in 2007 because of increased requests for translation of historical documents, monthly tribal newspaper, tribal and public signs, literature, interviews; verbal interpretation services for Cherokee elders at CN offices, tribal courts, and area medical facilities; development of the Cherokee lexicon and technical assistance required

to maintain the CN website; and technical language support for translation of a monthly article is provided for *The Cherokee Phoenix*. Language proficiency testing is conducted by this office to certify language fluency and language instructors for CN programs.

Language activities and programs that have been ongoing include:

- The Cultural Resource Center Activities. The CRC develops special language materials for a variety of group activities such as the Summer Language and Culture Camp, after school programs, Head Start classrooms, and other language programs offered in area schools and communities. Other activities of the Cultural Resource Center are:
  - Videotaping of cultural activities (basket making, flute making, etc.) in the Cherokee language to supplement classroom language activities.
  - Development of special supplemental language instructional materials and literature (“Cherokee Wisdom Stories”).
  - Summer Language and Culture Camp, a week-long learning opportunity for approximately 400 students (K-9) in different Cherokee communities.
- Adult Cherokee Language Classes
  - Introductory language classes for adults have been offered since the 1990’s in various Cherokee communities both within and outside the CN jurisdiction for a 10-week period with approximately 400 individuals participating annually.
  - Beginning level Cherokee language classes have been offered since the 1990’s primarily to adults in various Cherokee communities both within and outside the CN jurisdiction for a 10-week period with approximately 400 persons participating annually. A new tribal policy was enacted in 2002 in which employees who demonstrate increased language skills as assessed by a language fluency test administered by CN language expert, Anna Sixkiller Huckaby. Employees show increased fluency receives a modest pay incentive increase.
  - Since 2003, the beginning, intermediate and advanced level on-line internet instruction have been provided twice a week for 10-week periods

and broadcasted nationally in which more than 3,000 persons enroll each year.

- Cherokee Youth Choir. Since 2003 Cherokee music CD's have been recorded by the Cherokee National Youth Choir and used as supplemental teaching materials for classrooms and for enjoyment by the general public.
- Cherokee History and Culture. A number of activities are provided both by the CN and the Cherokee Historical Society. Through a contract agreement with the Cherokee Heritage Center, the CN manages a major part of this program which includes a museum, genealogy services, a reconstructed 1600 ancient village, and a variety of art shows and cultural activities held throughout the year. In addition:
  - A 40-hour Cherokee Legal History course is offered several times a year for CN employees and those in various Cherokee communities in Oklahoma and elsewhere in the US.
  - Cherokee cultural presentations to schools, communities, organizations and national conferences are made in approximately 80 different settings annually.
  - Literature review and research to assess historical accuracy is provided as an ongoing service to the general public, schools and individuals on an as-request basis.
- Language Documentation. The most conspicuous lack in language resources has been a comprehensive Cherokee grammar. However Dr. Bradley Montgomery-Anderson, NSU faculty, recently completed a Cherokee grammar for his Ph.D. dissertation. It is the first comprehensive treatment of Cherokee and is intended for teachers and students of the language as well as linguists. While the work is a description of the contemporary Cherokee, the material contained in the grammar will aid those interested in doing work on the historical development of the language with the hope that the grammar will be part of a new generation of interest and research on the language.

### **Cherokee Language Renaissance**

The 1999 gathering of Cherokee community members represented the first nationwide language planning effort. The most important outcome was the development of a 50-year goal statement as;

*“By 2050 a renaissance will have occurred in which eighty percent of Cherokee citizens will be actively re-engaged in revitalization of the Cherokee language and culture.”*

Almost ten years later in January 2008, guided by the University of Kansas team of linguists, a “re-envisioning” workshop was held to refine the future goals for the CN immersion programs. Attending were many language advocates including classroom teachers, parents, CN language staff, interested community members, and NSU language faculty, staff and students. The ultimate goal on which the re-envisioning focused is for the children in the CN immersion program *to acquire the Cherokee language in such a way that it will become an integral part of their lives and their knowledge about the world around them.*

The group also developed many other goals around larger categories such as the Cherokee Way (language, culture, and community), Instruction, Evaluation, and Curriculum. Although these goals need to be refined into strategic interventions, this work very directly addresses the 50-year goal of bringing language back to the people as a living part of Cherokee life ways.

- Cherokee Way – Elevate the status of the language to support its future sustainability and vitality by expanding the domains for Cherokee language use throughout the community.
- Immersion School – Create a stable Cherokee-only school, both physically and conceptually that provides a safe environment with well-equipped classrooms conducive to learning; recruiting and retaining a staff that is well-prepared professionally to meet the needs of learners with respect to the language immersion classroom.
- Assessment – Provide for regular formative and summative assessments that appropriately measure student achievement of language, culture, and academic content standards and that provide useful information to teachers, parents, and program planners toward greater instructional effectiveness.
- Language Curriculum – Foster greater two-way exchange between curriculum staff and instructional staff to enhance the alignment of curriculum, instruction, and assessment and provide both units greater understanding of the linguistic, cultural, and academic needs of children.

- Parent Classes – Develop and offer regular and frequent workshops, materials, and interactive sessions that also involve the children and family as a whole.
- Community Involvement – As an important part of the Immersion program, community elders need to be encouraged to share their stories for publication and the community members to participate in a Foster Elder Program to work with young people.
- CN Employees – All employees will continue to improve their Cherokee language vocabulary by learning a new word or phrase each week that represents a Cherokee value.
- College of Cherokee Studies – Develop methodology, philosophy, and history curriculum all conducted in Cherokee with NSU faculty, including the Dean, Chairperson, and Instructors.

The examples above illustrate the extent to which the CN language teachers and language advocates value the importance of making continual progress in language activities. Progress, however, cannot be achieved without the tribe's strong commitment to providing the requisite resources necessary to carrying out the goals of these language advocates. In addition to having timely and adequate resources available to robustly support the CN's existing language programs, there are five other new language programs that are essential if the tribe intends to continue to move forward toward the 2050 goal. These five programs are briefly described below.

#### Nation-wide Language Survey

The need to update the 2002 tribal language survey is essential to being able to strategically plan future tribal language programs and additionally to obtain future outside grants from such agencies as the DHHS Administration for Native Americans. The new survey will target 800 Cherokee citizens living within the CN jurisdictional boundaries using a stratified random sampling technique. The instrument has been developed with input from several professional linguists (Pila Wilson – University of Hawaii-Hilo, Akira Yamamoto - emeritus University of Kansas), an anthropologist (Justin Nolan – University of Arkansas, and a statistician (Mike Robbins – University of

Missouri) who are part of the research team. The methodology will involve in-person interviews conducted by 20 Cherokee speakers. The interviewers will be trained in interviewing techniques. The research subjects will receive a stipend for their participation in the survey. The interviewees will also receive a stipend for their participation in the survey. Findings will show the current status of the Cherokee language by comparing cohorts of speakers and non-speakers with cross variable analysis of selected data sets such as those shown below.

- Number, age, gender, of language speakers
- Language fluency and where speakers currently live
- Number of first and second language speakers
- The setting where the language is most frequently used
- The rate of language loss or gain since 2002
- Respondent level of education, blood quantum
- Family language fluency
- What the CN can do to improve its language programs

The result of this nation-wide survey will show what progress, if any, has been made in the language revitalization efforts since 2002. It will provide a statistical description of the current status of the Cherokee language and most importantly it will serve as the data source for development of an updated language revitalization plan and the future CN language initiative.

#### Language Translator Training Program

At the present time, the Cherokee language, as the indigenous language of Cherokee people, is declining as evident when compared to the early 20<sup>th</sup> century when it was estimated that 80 percent of the Cherokee people were literate in the language. Today it is estimated that only about 2 percent of the speakers can write in the Cherokee syllabary and only about 4 percent can read the Cherokee syllabary.

The current CN language programs are important to preserving the language but none are designed specifically to promote literacy of the Sequoyah syllabary. There is urgent need to translate current written materials to use as teaching tools and for historical archiving of Cherokee literature but there are not enough people capable of translating a wide range of expressive forms of the language.

There is need to train a cadre of at least 20 translators who are competent in reading materials in both the contemporary version of the Sequoyah syllabary and the original Sequoyah syllabary (used before 1830). Only then can the CN can begin to secure many historic documents for translation that are currently housed at the Smithsonian Institution, in other public museums, libraries and private collections.

### Master-Apprentice Program

Although the CN has initiated many language programs, few have produced fluent speakers. The major problem that most adult second language learners face is the lack of opportunities to engage in intensive and extensive language learning activities. An effective model in helping increase conversational proficiency is a one-to-one relationship between a highly proficient speaker and a language learner. Known as the Master-Apprentice, the model has been refined by noted linguist Dr. Leanne Hinton through her work with California-based tribes.

The CN needs to initiate at least 15 teams (30 people) who will make a commitment to work together 8 hours every week for three years. It is important that the Apprentice and Master commit to each other because of the intensity required of this kind of long-term commitment. Because this is both a costly and time consuming project stringent criteria needs to be followed. The Masters most likely will be 50 age or older and speak at a highly fluent level (level 4) with priority given to those who live alone and receive assistance from CN Elder Services. The Apprentices must be fluent at least at the conversational level (level 3).The following four priorities for selecting apprentices have been ranked in order of urgency to the CN highest to lowest.

1. Highest priority will be given to current NSU students who plan to become a CN language immersion teacher and who are also parents of a child enrolled in the CN immersion classrooms.
2. NSU students who plan to teach in the CN immersion classrooms.
3. CN employee who currently work, in a language program and need, to increase fluency to better perform their CN job.
4. Any young adult who plans to teach the language in a school located in the CN or in a Cherokee community.

The CN will establish a program that will consist of 5 days initial training and regular follow-up training with the 15 teams. A Project Coordinator will design and refine the language activities, use recording and video to document the process and observe team communication, to train teams to work together to resolve difficulties, and to assess team progress.

### CN Employee Immersion Program

The CN has offered many language classes for CN employees, and has an employment preference for hiring language speakers and additionally offers a pay incentive to employees who increase their language proficiency. However, not unlike the general Cherokee population, there is a continuing aging out and decline among CN employees who can still speak the language. Thus, there is an immediate need for the CN to implement a more efficient method to revitalize the language so it can become as integral a part of the workplace environment as it was in the early 1970's when it was quite common to hear Cherokee being spoken in the hallways and among employees.

The goal of this project is to implement a 40-hour employee language immersion project similar to the 40-hour Cherokee history course that is currently required for all new employees. However, because adult language immersion has never been attempted in the CN workplace, it will require careful planning not only to recruit and train master language speakers, develop learning content areas and corresponding curriculum but also and most importantly, to define the way to best create, as much as possible, a "natural learning environment" where the language can be used in an every day practical setting. The Cherokee Heritage Center's Adam's Corner could serve as a natural learning environment. Student employees would spend the first 3 hours of each day learning basis vocabulary for the day's activity. The remaining 5 hours students would visit Adam's Corner general store, church, home, gardens, and community area speaking the language appropriate to these settings and doing activities such as cooking, crafts, and games, etc. This method would allow the students at the end of the week to have a speaking vocabulary of approximately 2,000 words and phrases and additionally they would be able to converse in simple sentences in life-appropriate settings. A three-day adult immersion training program was inaugurated during July 24-26, 2008. The program is

designed to develop a model for a detailed teaching plan by 6 master-teachers, to test the effectiveness of the plan, techniques, and materials with 16 apprentices most of whom are CN employees.

It is important to seek assistance from outside communities and individuals who have experience in adult language immersion techniques combined with a task force of Cherokee speakers; such as CN employees, participants in the CN Speaker's Bureau or the Cherokee Advisory Council. Important elements of the program would include the following:

- An emphasis on developing language speakers fluent enough to help bring the spoken language back to the CN work and home environments; and
- employees committing not only to participate in the 40-hour immersion program but also agreeing to continue to practice and improve their language skills in future years.
- After the first year of implementation, curriculum will be completed, field tested and revised according to lessons learned. The program would then be implemented one week per month in which 20 learners and 5 speakers will be actively engaged in 40 hours of language immersion, and eventually be expanded in following years at other CN office sites.

#### Cherokee Star Stories with Animation

The CN is faced with a daunting situation; Cherokee students rank significantly below non-Native students in math and reading in most of the 82 public schools with the CN jurisdictional boundaries. Contemporary animated video, produced entirely by Cherokee animators, is one of the ways to motivate youth to become interested in studying traditional language and culture. The CN hopes that by extending these animations to include Cherokee star stories in the planetarium, they can stimulate Cherokee student interest in astronomy and space science as a bridge to promoting basic learning in math and reading (Sakamoto, Phillip 2008)

Through a collaborative agreement with the Indigenous Education Institute, a native non-profit organization, created for the preservation and contemporary application

of ancient Indigenous traditional knowledge, CN animators, Joseph Erb and Roy Boney, will develop a digital curriculum on the subject of Cherokee astronomy and space science. Noted astrophysicists; Drs. Nancy Maryboy (Cherokee-Navajo), David Begay (Navajo), and Phillip Sakimoto (Department of Physics at the University of Notre Dame) will bring together ancient sky traditions with modern astrophysical knowledge. This is intended to stimulate interest among Cherokee youth and communities in learning about their own traditions and modern space science through the teaching of ancient Cherokee star stories using the Cherokee language as a major tool. The project, titled “Coyote Goes Digital” will utilize the expertise of the Cherokee sky traditions with Cherokee cultural knowledge holders and master-level speakers.

The goal is to develop protocols and methodologies for using planetariums to present Cherokee sky stories in ways that honors authentic tribal knowledge that are suitable for outreach presentations to educational audiences, and are coupled with engaging segments on current NASA space science. These methodologies will be fundamental tools that, in future years, will form the basis for engaging Cherokee youth in their own sky traditions, Western science and the Cherokee language.

## **Conclusion**

According to a University of Arkansas Professor Justin Nolan and his students (Shawna Cain, Roger Cain, J. Matthew Reynolds) who have been conducting ethnographic observation of the Cherokee language in rural Trail of Tears, CN District 2, the Cherokee language is known for its perdurability in the Native-speaking world, and despite its endangered status, there is just enough time to salvage it from extinction. The success of language revitalization mission is contingent on heightening tribal interest in the values and rewards of learning to speak, read and write in the Cherokee language. This resonates throughout the voices of the speakers themselves.

Language documentation ultimately seeks to reduce the language footprints of the dominate language. Language revitalization exists to keep Cherokee citizens who are balanced bilinguals and who can function effectively both in Cherokee and English worlds. Keeping the language alive is an ultimate goal for the Cherokee people. It is neither reasonable nor realistic to expect the CN language programs to restore the vitality

of the Cherokee Language within those programs. It is when people use the language at home and at work that the language regains its life. It is encouraging that the CN has transformed the assimilation-based thinking that left Cherokees and other Native Americans to question the value of their own culture, lifeways and language---for this the CN can move toward the 50-year goal of creating a renaissance in which the majority of Cherokee people will once again be actively engaged in the language and lifeways of the Cherokee people.

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Margaret Peake Raymond, August 15, 2008

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