## Philology and endangered languages: the case of Western Abenaki Emmon Bach ebach@linguist.umass.edu

Documentation and philology

Often our knowledge of languages depends completely on documents that were produced for reasons that have nothing to do with linguistics. Without the corpus of Gothic from Bishop Ulfilas (IV. Century), consisting of fragments of a bible translation and religious commentaries, we would know very little about that language. More recently, knowledge of the Eastern Algonquian language Massachusett is based largely on the translation of the bible by John Eliotl, deeds and town records and the like. The Massachusett example is especially apposite here as this material has formed the basis for the current revival of the language, now called Wampanoag.

Often in current fieldwork situations, linguists will come across various kinds of documents and records (sometimes recordings). The main point to be made here is that the study of such records can play a crucial role in efforts to document and strengthen endangered languages. Such study falls under the heading "philology", or 'love of the word'. I wish to illustrate this point by looking at the case of another Eastern Algonquian language, Western Abenaki (WA).

After giving some basic information on Western Abenaki, I will give four "snapshots" of documenters and documentation of the language stretching back several centuries, and then show how several gaps in our knowledge of the language can be filled by looking at this material.

## 2 Western Abenaki

Algonquian is one of the largest linguistic families in North America (present day Canada and United States), both in number of languages and in geographical spread. It is distantly related (under the family name Algic) to Yurok and Wiyot (Northern California). The languages of the Algonquian family spread from the northeast of the continent (historically down the eastern seaboard as far as what is now Virginia) all the way across the northern parts of present day US and throughout Canada. Some of the better-known languages and groups of the family are Cree (various languages), Anishinabe (Ojibwa /Chippewa), Blackfoot, Menominee, Lennape (Delaware).

Linguistically, the Algonquian languages are well known for the grammatical category of obviation, intricate verbal morphology and agreement systems. Some highlights of Western Abenaki follow:

Syntax: word order pretty free. Some second position clitics: ji 'future,' ba 'conditional'. Complex verbs can include a preverb, which carries subject prefixes (in the relevant categories) and a kind of ablaut ("changed conjunct"). The two parts of a complex verbal construction can be separated by other material.

Noun classes / gender: ANimate, INanimate. Reflected in verbal morphology with big four-way distinction between Animate Intransitive (AI), Inanimate Intransitive (II),

Transitive Animate (TA) and Transitive Inanimate (TI) - latter according to gender of

nouns only, and such nouns (and inflections for them) go for singular and plural. proximate (3), all others obviative (3'). In WA, this distinction operates in animate Obviation: when more than one third person appears in a sentence, one must be

transitivies (TA and TI) encode a distinction between definite and indefinite objects. forms for indefinite animate subjects. In addition, Independent Indicative forms of person/number categories include exclusive and inclusive 1st person forms, and special Preterit tenses, and for some points in the paradigms a full set of negative forms. The number of categories: Indicative, Subordinative/Subjunctive, Conditional, Present and Conjunct, Imperative (including 1st and 3rd person forms), and within each of these a Within each, there are three sets of forms, traditionally called Orders: Independent, Verbal categories: As mentioned, there are four major classes of verbs: Al, II, TA, TI

complex nominal and especially verbal bases. In common with all Algonquian languages, WA has an active and complex system for deriving

in urban areas, such as Troy, New York, or towns in their historical territories (Belchertown, problems has been locating the places and groups that went into the current population of Odanak. Rogers, under command from Lord Jeffrey Amherst, in 1759. One of the persistent historical Today, people of Western Abenaki heritage also live in northern Vermont (Swanton) and scattered The question was dealt with in detail by Gordon Day (1981, excerpt reprinted in Day, 1998). Western Abenaki oral traditions recurrently mention "Rogers' Raid", conducted by Major Robert various Indian allies. The groups ending up in Odanak generally were allied with the French. name the WA word for wild onion: winoz + -ki 'territory, land'. Population movements during the especially along the eastern shores of Lake Champlain. The Winooski River incorporates in its Abenakis were apparently located primarily in present day Vermont and New Hampshire, 17th and 18th centuries resulted from invasions, wars between the French and English with their final uk or et etc. are from Algonquian locatives. In earliest contact times the precursors of the (formerly St Francis: hence in some older literature: St Francis Indians). Name: Wôbanaki (Wabenaki). Odanak = 'at (locative case) town, village'. Many place names in New England in History and geography. The current home of the Western Abenaki people is Odanak, Québec

where Day's works and collections are archived. place to educate Indian boys. P. P. Wzôkhilain and Joseph Laurent (see below) were educated there. Gordon Day taught there for a number of years, and it is still important as one of the places The Dartmouth connection. Dartmouth College in New Hampshire was originally founded as a

etc.; Anon. Translation of Mark, Anon. Roman Catholic Catechism. Pial Pol Wzőkihlain: Abenaki educator, fl. c. 1830. Writings: Abenaki Primer, Book of homilies, Snapshots of Western Abenaki times: four people and their work

> RC Catechism. Day (1998) accepted the ascription to Wzôkhilain Here is a typical philological problem: establishing the authorship of the Mark translation and the

glossed words are relevant to the discussion later in this paper) The Mark translation is especially useful as it tracks the English bible quite closely. Here is a sampling from Chapter I (with interpolated text from a King James bible, EB, the underlined and

1.5. Ni mziwi Judea wjiaak wdellosanôssa agma ait ta

wjia?lak Jerusalem, ni wzognebólgonôssa tali Jordini sibok

..halômlohozinôl wzaagawakôzwôganowôl.

were all baptized of him in the river of Jordan, confessing their sins.] >>wzognebôlgonôssa he baptized them Independent Indicative Preterit 3\*-3p And there went out unto him all the land of Judaea, and they of Jerusalem, and

1.10. Ni annegitta waji kposat nepbik wnamiton spem-

kial tôwdatal, ta wnamihô Wijiwliniwaskwiliji paki wôbi

pellaz sôkhi pnosat ni oskitkôgon.

Spirit like a dove descending upon him.] [And straightway coming up out of the water, he saw the heavens opened, and the

>>oskitkôgon 3'-3 descending on him

critical edition. work by a native speaker of a North American language. The book deserves to be published in a Familiar Abenakis and English Dialogues. This work is an outstanding example of a linguistic Joseph Laurent / Sozap Lolô was an Abenaki chief and educator. He published in 1884 New

Civilization in Hull, Quebec. behind quite a lot of material, including recordings, archived at Dartmouth and in the Museum of considerable body of published work on the language and history of the Western Abenaki, and left Algonquian nations, especially the Western Abenaki (cf. Foster and Cowan, 1998). He produced a English invaders' self-serving ideology. Day devoted his life to the study of the eastern correct the traditional myth of the "wild and uninhabited land" that formed a big part of the the original inhabitants of his home country in Vermont. He was one of the first ethno-historians to Originally trained in forestry. Day became interested in the ecological and agricultural practices of Gordon M. Day (1911-1993) was the principal modern researcher on Western Abenaki.

Steven Laurent (Atian Lolô), 1909-2001, was the son of Joseph Laurent. He lived in New Hampshire and devoted many years to work on his language, published edition with English missionary. In 1957 he recorded (with Gordon Day) the entire text of his father's book Laurent translations and index of Abenaki dictionary by Father Joseph Aubery (1673-1755), Jesuit

impossible to elicit (in my experience). Intransitive verbs. In general, examples displaying crucial forms are hard to find, almost I. Day (1964) reports: WA does not show special forms for obviative subject in Animate

bemóozó [sic for bemôwzo in GDD]: s/he lives (3, 3') [Day 1964]

– 3) TA forms. Ives Goddard in the major work on the Algonquian Independent Indicative (Goddard, 1967) cites Laurent's paradigms for WA, includes no Al 3' forms nor any inverse Obviative on Proximate (3')

zanôba obv.: zanôba. 'horse' ases, obviative form asesa; 'woman' phanem, obv.: phanemo (<...mw-a); 'man, male' Phonological attrition has made the obviative inflections either invisible or very unobtrusive;

In general, many final vowels, especially a, were lost, some restored by analogy

inflections -Vk / -VI (AN / IN). morphological environment, the variable vowel is coded usually as -V, occurring also in the plural In verbal paradigms, one mark for obviative arguments is -a / -i. The choice depends on

So there are two questions: (1) has the obviative been lost from modern WA, remaining perhaps only in vestigial form (possessed animates, see below)? (2) if lost, when did the loss take place? These are philological / historical questions.

belied by the texts in the same book. paradigms for nouns in which he calls the obviative forms "accusative". But this identification is In a book published in 1932, Henry Lorne Masta (another Abenaki educator and chief) gives

## ...and regained

possessing forms, the possessed noun is always in the obviative form. Compare from Laurent I. Obviative AI forms. Here is a general Algonquian fact about the obviative: in 3<sup>rd</sup> person

 W'kaozema
 N'kaozem my cow his cow

Note: -em marks possessed items, 'cow' is kaoz.

distinctive inflections? There are in fact some such examples in Laurent 1984: So we should we be able to make up easy examples with possessed nouns as subjects to test for

Wibguigo n'-d-aasom.

'My horse is grey.

Wibguigoa w'-d-asoma. 'His (her) horse is grey.

'His (her) mittens are thin.'

(mittens are Animate, notice lack of sg / pl distinction: 4 also means 'his horses'..) W'meljassa wazabizoa.

Compare also these examples from Laurent, 1884:

N'kaozem -ji ônkohlôn.
 W'kaozema -ji ônkôhlôna.

'My cow will be sold.'

'His cow will be sold.'

Philology and endangered languages: the case of Western Abenaki

N'kaozemak -ji ônkohlônak.
 W'kaozema -ji ônkohlôna.

'His cows will be sold. 'My cows will be sold.

(These examples are actually historically a different category: indefinite subject TA forms, with the -a marking the obviative object, the analysis in WA is somewhat up for grabs.)

subjects. So it looks in fact, contra Day, that WA, at least in 1884, could inflect AI verbs for obviative

The other gap: TA inverse 3' - 3 forms

Joseph Laurent (1884) includes a section in his paradigms called "Relative Conjugation". It includes what are disparate forms (from a contemporary analytic point of view): ThemeSign 2 forms for 3 and 3p subjects and "Me and You" forms (ThemeSigns 3 and 4). Some examples (from Laurent1884):

12. K'kezalmegw.
13. K'kezalmegok. 14. K'kezalmi. 10. K'kezalmel. K'kezalmiba. 11. K'kezalmelbena 'Thou lovest me. 'They love thee.' 'I love thee.' You love me. 'He loves thee.' We love thee.

Of these forms only those with 3 and 3p subjects show ThemeSign 2 -(e)gw (underlying -gok < -

They love me. 'He loves me.

gw -(V)k).

16. N'kezalmegw. 17. N'kezalmegok.

Or are there none? are all those with 3 or 3' subject and 1st or 2nd object, or 3' (obviative) subject and 3 or 3p objects As reflected in Goddard's 1967 summary, there are no examples in his source, Laurent 1884 These forms in the Independent Indicative should be built on the ThemeSign 2 -(e)gw. Inverse TA

However, in other older sources we find lots of examples of 3' - 3 and 3' - 3p forms

Mark (1830) (cf. above for the first two):

20. wdihlgo wzognebôlgonôssa
 oskitkôgon 3'-3

> descending on him 'he baptized them' [IndIndc Preterite 3'-3p]

'he said to him (3' - 3) Mark 1.40

Masta (1932!):

21. wmilgon

weskok8gon8zsa (note:  $8 = \hat{0}$ )

> 'they were intercepted by the Iroquois' 3' - 3p Pret 'gives' 3' - 3 (in return receives...) Masta 32

to be a mixing in of an old definite-indefinite ("finite-absolute") distinction and forms from synchronically and diachronically. Comparing Penobscot paradigms (Voorhis, 1979) there seems These forms in -go(n) 3' - 3 and -gonô 3' - 3p appear regularly in Mark, Masta, and in Day's manuscript materials. Still, there are many mysteries (to EB at least) in how to analyze these forms "indefinite subject" and inanimate subject patterns.

From these dates, spanning the work of J Laurent, I conclude that the absence of these forms in 1884 is fortuitous, but there is still conflicting evidence, some hard to interpret.

FINAL MORAL: Multiply the philological and linguistic work to be done on Western Abenaki thousands-fold. There is a huge need for workers and work! The intellectual rewards are tremendous.

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'(EB Website: http://www-unix.oit.umass.edu/~ebach/papers/lingdex.htm)