"I heart this camp": Participant Perspectives within the Story of Miami Youth Camps

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Myaamionki is the place of the myaamia. The miami people are my family… . I think the most important thing in myaamionki is that we are all family.

The quotation given above is an observation made by a fourteen-year-old Miami girl at the conclusion of an annual Miami language and culture youth summer camp in 2008. Within her statement are three important themes that have emerged from the camp setting. First, there is the question of defining and understanding myaamionki (literally ‘Miami place’), a key issue in that the Miami community has long been scattered and many children grow up without regular contact with other Miamis. Second, there is the related question of what it means to be Miami and what sort of value that identity holds. Finally, emerging not from her statement directly, but rather from our reading of it, is a recognition of how experiences at these annual youth camps are adding to a larger narrative of reawakening the Miami language and culture.

This paper examines these themes through an investigation of Miami language and culture camps and focuses on how the observations and words of their participants both reflect and shape this larger community narrative. Since these camps began in the early 1990s, their role has grown and

1. Miami words in this paper are spelled in the orthography outlined in Baldwin and Costa (2005) with the exception of some personal names, for which we use the spellings used by the individuals.
evolved in the two main Miami communities to the point where “camp” has become not only a major annual program for youth, but also an underlying philosophy that reconnects multiple aspects of community as part of ongoing decolonization efforts. While there are certain tangible effects of these camps such as the learning of phrases and exposure to specific traditional activities, camp organizers and facilitators have increasingly realized that less tangible results are the most important ones since they reflect larger cultural themes of relationship, responsibility, and action. We argue that annual camps in Oklahoma and Indiana have become a means of creating Miami space within a Miami place, empowering participants to enrich their own Miami identities and community roles. This paper relates these ideas in terms of how they create a Miami aacimooni ‘story’—here, a narrative rooted in the past but developed in the present for future generations of Miami people. Our examples come from participant observation, informal interviews, and pre- and post-camp student questionnaires collected in 2007 and 2008 for camp assessment purposes.

We the authors write from multiple perspectives, and are among the “participants” alluded to in the title of this paper. We both were involved as students at Miami language camps in the mid-1990s. In more recent years, we have been involved as camp staff members, teachers, organizers, and as language committee chairs for the Oklahoma (Wesley) and Indiana (Scott) Miami communities. Our own stories thus fall into a larger pattern within the aacimooni of Miami language reclamation efforts in that we began with goals associated with the language itself, but have since adopted a more holistic approach that both responds to the social parameters that led to language shift and that also empowers community members to recognize their agency in the process of bringing the language back. “Reclamation” is the term we use to describe this process because awakening the Miami language goes beyond the steps associated with “language revitalization,” such as increasing the number of speakers and domains of use. Additionally, it includes asserting the prerogative to do these things at all and to define the associated goals using community values and needs. Such social elements of self-determination fall under what we term “reclamation.” Being able to relate this story from insider perspectives is also part of “reclamation,” as too often the story of the Miami language is evaluated outside of the cultural context in which it is occurring.

Our story begins with the history underlying Miami language shift and the development of camps as a response to this history. We then turn
to the social function that these camps have come to serve through an examination and discussion of participant perspectives. Finally, we discuss the larger implications of these findings for language reclamation in our community and elsewhere.

ON THE MIAMI CAMPS

The Historical Context—The People and iilaataweeyankwi ‘Our Language’

Due to circumstances surrounding an 1846 removal of a portion of the Miami community from the historic homelands of Indiana, the Miami people today are politically organized into two entities: the Miami Tribe of Oklahoma in Miami, Oklahoma, and the Miami Nation of Indiana in Peru, Indiana. Though Miamis are scattered all over the United States, significant concentrations live in and around northeast Oklahoma and in and around the ancestral homelands of Indiana, and most language and cultural programs occur in these places. For purposes of this paper, Oklahoma refers to both the geographic location as well as the Miami Tribe of Oklahoma as a people and government, and Indiana refers to the place and its associated people and government. Miami, or the endonym myaamia, refers to the people and language irrespective of political affiliation. Our language, known in Algonquianist circles as “Miami-Illinois” (e.g., Costa 1999, 2003), is shared by all Miamis, with only very minor dialectal differences between Oklahoma and Indiana that are not important for discussions in this paper.

Because of the circumstances of removal and other facets of colonization such as boarding schools, land loss, and economic difficulties (see Baldwin 2003, Rinehart 2006, Leonard 2007), the Miami community underwent a significant and nearly complete language shift to English, a story that seemingly has an endpoint around the early 1960s (ibid.), or according to some sources, 1989 (e.g., Mithun 1999:334), when the last individuals who knew the language passed away. Regardless of the exact year, common to most reports is that the Miami language is said to have become “extinct” with the passing of the last speaker. However, Miami people argue that our language was actually “sleeping” during its period of dormancy, in that it was never irretrievably lost because of the presence of significant documentation from which we could (and eventually did) learn our language (Leonard 2008).
Around the same period of time that the language went out of use, there was a pattern and corresponding discourse of “loss” and “decline” with respect to other parts of the two Miami communities. A total lack of commonly held land in Oklahoma, ongoing fights for U.S. recognition in Indiana, and economic challenges in both places were among the larger issues. Meanwhile, however, there were always efforts by some to valorize and maintain community cohesion, political strength, and traditional wisdom, kinship, and values.

From this emerged what has become a large-scale cultural reclamation movement in both Miami communities. This began in the early to mid 1990s with a series of programs, community gatherings, linguistic research and materials development, and efforts to reestablish the home as a domain for the Miami language. Especially robust among earlier efforts was a focus on what is usually termed “language revitalization”—that is, the calculated effort to bring a language into increased usage. While there were efforts by individual families to incorporate the language into their daily lives, the biggest single community effort around this time was language camps. These commenced in Indiana and began occurring in Oklahoma soon afterward. They took place under a variety of models such as informal gatherings and day workshops that focused on language teaching. The history of these camps is in itself an aacimooni of program development, in this case one that has been guided by an ongoing examination of the needs and perspectives of the Miami community. In the next two sections, we present the main descriptive components of the camp aacimooni. As noted, the first efforts were in Indiana, but the recent youth camps that are the special focus of this paper began in Oklahoma, and this community is thus discussed first for ease of presentation.

**Oklahoma Camps**

“Language camps” in Oklahoma began as two- to three-day workshops that went from midmorning to midafternoon and had the goal of teaching key points of the language to a group of Miamis, primarily adults, so as to facilitate their future teaching of the language to others. Spearheaded by linguistic research done by David Costa and Daryl Baldwin, the Miami Tribe of Oklahoma applied for and in 1996 received an Administration for Native Americans grant to run such summer workshops and to produce a set of pedagogical materials. These initial “camps” met at the Oklahoma...
longhouse, a Miami community gathering center near Commerce, Oklahoma, and over time grew into two to three concurrent workshops demarcated by age and/or previous language training, usually with separate groups for children and adults, in some cases with the adults further divided into beginners and more advanced students. They included activities such as paper puppet shows, skits in the language, games, and a few other tasks that actually used the language. Most common in these workshops, however, was overt discussion and teaching of vocabulary and grammatical concepts such as phonology, morphology, and animacy.

The initial main language teacher was Daryl Baldwin, who was among the first Miamis to significantly learn the language from documentation and to introduce it into home use (see Hinton 2001, Leonard 2007). Other Miamis, including both of us, later took on teacher-facilitator roles. Participants included regular returnees and one-time attendees; some were local but many tribal members traveled long distances to attend. Some participants were tribal elders who remembered the language having been spoken and who could speak about the social contexts of its use, and their role was especially important for motivating the community and situating the historical context by which the language had gone out of use in the first place. The pedagogical target of camp, however, was younger adults and children, the idea being that their new linguistic knowledge was key for language revitalization.

While many people did in fact learn parts of the language and the camps were an enjoyable time, among our early findings in Oklahoma language reclamation efforts was that these programs were overly focused on language as a set of linguistic rules, and not on language as something that people would actively use in daily life as part of a larger cultural identity. As noted earlier, participants came from all over the United States and had not necessarily had much contact with other Miamis; for some, it was their first trip to Oklahoma. Others had grown up among people of many indigenous nations and identified with cultural traditions that were understood to be “Indian” but not necessarily thought of as “Miami.” A snag occurred in the reclamation efforts in that there were people who learned the linguistic facts, but had difficulty feeling the prerogative and responsibility to actually speak myaamia.

In response to this issue, “language camps,” as they continued to be called, retained their structure as two- to three-day workshops but
began to incorporate more cultural activities and community building. For example, part of one camp involved a Miami elder teaching others how to plant *miyamia miincipi* ‘Miami corn,’ a variety of maize unique to the Miami people. Everybody then participated in a planting activity, the language component primarily occurring in the relevant commands and associated nouns. Integrating grammar and vocabulary into cultural practices proved to be an effective way of creating a natural space for the language. Though some camp participants still worried about pronunciation or sometimes reverted to English even for words or phrases that they knew how to say in Miami, the usage of at least some of the language became more commonplace through the early 2000s. Moreover, other tribal gatherings beyond language camps began to include prayers and greetings in the language, and community reports such as the Oklahoma newspaper *aatotankiki myaamiaki* began containing increasingly frequent articles about the language, as well as headlines and a few other keywords in the language. The title of this newspaper is itself significant in that it was originally accompanied by the rough English translation “what the Miamis are talking about” but over time lost this English translation and came to be given only in *myaamia*.

The reclamation story by this point was clearly developing in a positive way; new characters were emerging and there was more use of the language. Speaking *myaamia* started to be normalized and was no longer something of the past, but was instead an element of modern Miami life—despite the language’s alleged “extinction.” Missing at the community level, however, was the opportunity for tribal youth—the next generation of Miami leaders—to interact for longer periods of time and to learn and use the language without the distractions of dominant society. The response of the Oklahoma Language Committee was to propose and eventually start a full-fledged educational immersion program for youth—again, a “camp,” but one that would last a week and that would have a carefully designed curriculum, trained counselors, and would be *myaamia* in every way that it could be. In June 2005, the *eewansaapita* ‘he [the sun] rises’ Miami Youth Educational Initiative (see Figure 1), commonly known as “camp,” was begun. Its name came out of the larger metaphor and associated *aacimooni* of *myaamiaki eemamwiciki* ‘the Miamis awaken,’ which had been adopted by a group of Miamis as a way of conceptualizing our cultural and language reclamation efforts and their developing outcomes.
Designed to be small and intimate, *eewansaapita* camps have been limited to around twenty student participants within an age range of ten to sixteen. The four annual programs reported on in this paper have easily met this target, the second through fourth being made up of approximately half returnees and half new students. Each year, participants are grouped into “clans” of approximately four students plus a counselor—usually a tribal member in college—and in some cases also a junior counselor, usually somebody with previous participation in language and cultural activities who is not yet old enough to be a counselor but who has expressed interest in eventually becoming one. Additional staff members include camp directors, language teachers, artists, cooks (who plan meals using traditional foods and food practices), and several additional staff from Oklahoma tribal offices to help with logistical issues such as buying materials and delivering supplies. Most funding has been allocated by the Oklahoma Business Committee

2. The goal of these camps is for all staff members to speak *myaamia* whenever possible, and the counselors receive special language training prior to camp. However, we have also invited people with higher proficiency in the language to reinforce its use among the entire group by speaking to participants only in *myaamia*, and they are called “teachers.”
(the elected tribal council), with many people also volunteering their time and expertise to make things happen.

The eewansaapita camp takes place at the Oklahoma Cultural Grounds, a tribally owned area located in the country west of Miami, Oklahoma. The location has special relevance because the major hub of camp activity is located within a nineteenth-century Miami land allotment that had fallen out of Miami ownership. As part of a series of land acquisitions in the late 1990s to early 2000s, this site was among many former Miami allotments that were purchased by the tribe as a means of reclaiming Miami land for Miami people. Moreover, the Cultural Grounds are notable for including many ecosystems within a relatively small space. These include a forested area, a creek, a pond, and a prairie, each of which has its own cultural relevance. Over the development of the eewansaapita program, buildings and infrastructure have also been added to the site, which now includes a cook shelter, toilets and showers, and mowed areas for playing sports; originally, the site had no buildings aside from a storage garage. Participants stay in tents organized by clan, and we have come to refer to the cluster of tents within the site as a minooteeni ‘village,’ which along with the adjacent cook shelter has become a central place in its community function, even though it is physically located at the edge of the Cultural Grounds.

And so began the story of eewansaapita, a program that has evolved from year to year, but that has had and will continue to have an element of newness and rebirth each time it occurs. It is appropriately named in that there has not only been a metaphorical sunrise with Miami children coming together to do Miami things that in many cases had not been widely practiced for much of the twentieth century, but also in that the campsite provides a place to literally observe the sunrise and other phases of the day. Common to all camps has been a lack or at least a very limited usage of clocks and fixed schedules. Instead, things largely evolve on their own, though there is a general morning, afternoon, and evening plan of activities (or planned free time), and certain major tasks such as meal setup, cleanup, and fire duty are assigned to each clan by the staff. In this way, the tribal youth who attend are active participants in shaping the program. They have roles that are essential for the day-to-day operation of the camp village and for the community as a whole; the community in turn provides for the needs of the individuals. The daily activities are guided by a similarly
reciprocal approach. While partially planned in advance by camp organizers, the details of their implementation are constantly informed by the desires and needs of the entire group, and most activities require individuals to take on specific tasks.

As with the logistics of the program and especially the Oklahoma Cultural Grounds, which began without the necessary facilities but have become a campsite, the camp curriculum has also evolved over the four years reported on in this paper. The first year had no designated theme other than “camp” and there was a strong sense by the original organizers that we were testing an immersion model. We had specific learning objectives associated with the various activities, but there were also general goals of making it through the week without major mishaps and of creating a positive program, both of which were met. Having established a basic foundation through the experiences of that first camp, subsequent camps have each been given a special theme and have had planned activities that revolve around those themes, with most introducing a relevant element of Miami culture as gleaned from aacimoona ‘stories’—historical and contemporary—of the Miami people and our culture. The idea is that camp participants will be able to live these experiences, not just hear about them, and hence become actors in the larger narrative of being Miami. The themes thus far have been the following:

2006: miiwa, aawiki, myaamionki (literally ‘path,’ ‘time,’ ‘Miami place,’ and presented in camp informational literature as “Finding our paths through a Miami place, at a Miami pace, and in a Miami way.”) The educational experience focused on Miami concepts of “time” and “space” within a cultural landscape—in this case, the Oklahoma Cultural Grounds, which as noted above, are especially well suited to experiencing traditional practices because the site contains multiple ecosystems and is also isolated from the distractions of dominant society.

2007: kiiloona myaamiaki (‘we are Miamis,’ also presented with the English term “kinship.”) The experience focused on Miami concepts of kinship and included several activities in which the student participants focused on their relations to each other and on the responsibilities associated with those relationships.

2008: ašiihkiwi neehi kišikwi (‘earth and sky’). This theme expanded on previous camps and their recognition of two-dimensional land, space, and
connection by examining how the sky fits into the concept of *myaamionki*. Staff included tribal member and geologist Dr. Timothy McCoy, a curator of the national meteorite collection at the Smithsonian Institution. A special part of the curriculum reflected the history of mining in northeastern Oklahoma, an industry to which most Oklahoma Miamis were connected in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries.

*Indiana Camps*

“Language camp,” as it was commonly referred to among the Indiana community, was created in conjunction with an annual Miami homecoming week in Peru, Indiana in the early 1990s. This was an expansion of the idea of the annual Miami reunion, which has continuously been held in Indiana since 1903 to bring together the scattered tribal community. From approximately the 1930s to 1990s, Indiana was essentially landless, with the exception of tribal cemeteries and one small parcel of original reserve land that was still held by a tribal member. In the 1990s, Indiana began to actively reacquire ancestral lands. A tribal center was established in downtown Peru, and the tribe also purchased a significant thirty-six acre parcel of land along the *nimacihsinwi siipiwi* ‘Mississinewa River.’ A Miami place known as *aašipehkwa waawaalici* or in English as the Seven Pillars, this became the location of the initial Indiana camps. The parcel itself is located at the boundary of the *waapipinšia* (Wapapincha) Reserve and *atehkononki* (Tahkanong) Reserve, two former reserve lands that were lost in the early to mid-twentieth century following tribal termination and associated loss of tax-exempt status in 1897. Though the grounds lack the necessary amenities of electricity, running water, and even restrooms (there were portable toilets), this language camp created a nurturing environment for the ancestral language to reawaken, while also reestablishing a community relationship to the ancestral lands. A core group of Miami people would remain onsite the entire week of these camps, and community members from the nearby area would come and go, often arriving to play in lacrosse games or to participate in evening meals, social singing, and dancing. Some Oklahoma Miamis would make the journey from Oklahoma or other parts of the country to attend for a few days as well.

Camp initially focused upon Daryl Baldwin introducing everyone to the main components of the language. Participants ranged from children to elders, many of whom were from the generation who were the last to
hear the language spoken in a community context. As with the similar example in Oklahoma, the elders’ stories and insights were greatly inspiring to the younger participants. As more community members became involved and developed knowledge and speaking skills in the language, the camp incorporated activities that integrated more language such as the traditional Miami games *pakitahaminki* ‘lacrosse,’ *mahkisini eeyoonki mihkintinki* ‘moccasin game,’ and *seenseewinki* ‘plum stone game.’ Those who began as students in these early camps found themselves taking on more leadership roles in subsequent ones. Again, Indiana efforts at this point paralleled those of Oklahoma in that these former students found themselves being teachers whose roles were often targeted toward teaching the language to children. In addition to the traditional games mentioned above, games such as *paapankamwa iilweeta* ‘Fox says’ (a Miami language version of the popular “Simon Says”), *mihsa* (the firewood game), and several others were developed to help children learn Miami words and phrases.

Nevertheless, though the camps were still largely conceptualized around direct language objectives, there was a shift occurring in the perceived function of language learning. Some of the initial learning helped community members to see the cultural value in the language, particularly in terms of how it allowed people to connect with this Miami place in a different way. For example, learning Miami names for plants indigenous to this area provided a new level of cultural and ecological understanding. Moreover, learning and using the language were increasingly becoming a way for members of the community to connect with each other, and “camp” started serving as a space for developing broader community connections.

“Language camp” continued into the 2000s by name, but its content and focus continued to evolve as the Indiana community changed in the ways discussed above. Many of the activities from “camp” became integrated into broader community life, and several activities developed throughout the year so that a single week was no longer the only occasion that Miami people would see one another and use the language. Many adults expressed difficulty in learning the language and adult participation in camp actually declined over this time, but support and interest in the language from this segment of the community continued to grow. In particular, there was overwhelming support for children to learn the language, given the recognition of the larger value associated with the language that the community had increasingly come to have. It was for this reason that Indiana developed the *saakaciweeyankwi* ‘we emerge from the water’ Miami Tribal
Youth Summer Education Program in 2008 (see Figure 2).

The story of the saakaciweeyankwi Program’s development directly begins with the eewansaapita camp, which in turn had been influenced by the original camps in Indiana. The first annual saakaciweeyankwi Miami Tribal Youth Summer Educational Program in August 2008 was funded by an allocation from the Indiana tribal council and a grant from the Association on American Indian Affairs Summer Youth Camp Grant Program, and was aided by the sharing of materials and ideas from the eewansaapita program. While taking place over four days instead of a full week, the overall program narrative echoes that of the camp developed in Oklahoma; it was a way of introducing and strengthening Miami language, cultural beliefs, and traditional values among tribal youth. The eight student participants ranged in age from nine to seventeen, the oldest two taking on junior counselor roles. Staff included tribal members who had previously participated to vary-

Figure 2. saakaciweeyankwi Miami Tribal Youth Summer Education Program Logo.
ing degrees in earlier camps and similar community activities. Other Miami relatives visited and shared knowledge of plant uses, songs, and lacrosse.

Lacking the necessary facilities on currently owned tribal lands to provide for a camp of this degree, the Indiana Language Committee chose to use the camp facilities of the Dunes Environmental Learning Center, located within the Indiana Dunes National Lakeshore near Chesterton, Indiana. While this campground is located in extreme northwestern Indiana and far from much of the contemporary Indiana population concentration, it continues to be a Miami place, known as neekawikamionki ‘the Indiana Dunes.’ It is also near another very important Miami place known as saakiiweeyonki (the confluence of the St. Joseph’s River and Lake Michigan). According to a Miami aacimooni, this is eehonci kiintoohki pyaawaaci myaamiaki ‘where the Miamis first came from’ (see Costa 2010:55). In this aacimooni, the Miami first emerged from the waters of the saakiiweesiipi ‘St. Joseph’s River.’ The newly developed youth program’s name thus not only references this important event that created the Miami people, but also is intended to acknowledge that we are once again emerging from the water, in this case the deluge of colonialism.

The objectives of this camp were for participants to experience place through a Miami perspective and to strengthen tribal youth’s connections to the Miami homeland and their Miami relatives. The diverse ecosystems at the Indiana Dunes National Lakeshore provided opportunities for tribal youth to experience a diversity of Miami perspectives on place through exploring and interacting with the unique plants and animals in this landscape. The program provided a learning experience for everyone involved. Not only did participants learn from staff, but staff also learned from participants, thus creating a reciprocal learning environment similar to that of the eewansaapita program. The camp was so successful that the Indiana community requested the continuation and expansion of this program. “Camp” has not only become a space created among the Indiana community, but has also become a part of the larger aacimooni of Miami reawakening.

**Participant Perspectives within the Narrative**

My mother [Anna Mongosa Marks] didn’t understand Miami because her mother told them when they went to school and learned the white man’s language they would no longer speak the Miami language in their home because they had to live in the white man’s world. She was afraid they would
get mixed up or wouldn’t speak English properly if they talked the Miami language in the home. So, as her children went to school, they were told not to speak Miami at home. . . . So we did lose our language that way.


My mother [Lily Chapendoceah] spoke Miami. My grandfather [Elijah Chapendoceah] wouldn’t teach me. He said, “Everybody will be talking the white language.” I heard Miami spoken, but he would never teach me. He never taught any of us. I disagreed with him. But he wouldn’t teach us.


Throughout our efforts to awaken the Miami language, we have constantly been guided by the perspectives of our elders who grew up with the Miami language as part of their everyday lives—though as noted in the quotations above, not as something that they were allowed to have as part of their personal linguistic repertoires. Although their parents’ and grandparents’ experiences prevented them from acquiring the language, they still longed to have learned it. It was the elders’ experiences with the language that established a necessary foundation for recent reclamation efforts—particularly the active support they provided because they had personally experienced the individual and community disconnectedness that came from earlier language shift and marginalization. We began to see the wisdom behind the elders’ articulations of their experiences in the actions and thoughts of all camp participants. In this way, the elders’ wisdom continues to play an active role in developing the aacimooni.

As mentioned earlier, we the authors have been involved in Miami language reclamation since its initial phase, and as with the elders who provide foundational wisdom and participate in the aacimooni, we also are among the “participants” referenced in the title of this paper. In our recent roles as camp facilitators, a special role we have assumed has been in assessing the outcomes of camps so as to better guide our respective language committees and communities in future endeavors. Within this capacity, we have instigated an ongoing dialogue with other community members on language reclamation and related issues.

As part of a desire to more formally document our reclamation efforts, in 2007 we also began inquiring directly about eewansaapita camp participants’ perspectives via pre- and post-camp questionnaires that were
designed for general evaluation and assessment purposes. Based on this idea, the 2008 saakaciweyankwi camp also included pre- and post-camp surveys modeled after those used in the eewansaapita program. These questionnaires have been four pages long and have asked some basic information (e.g., name and age) and several opinion questions on issues such as cultural interests, learning interests, whether the participant liked or wanted to try traditional foods, and specific questions to gauge the mastery of camp themes and associated language. Questionnaires have ended with reflective, open-ended short essays about major components of Miami culture and identity.

Given the shift in focus within formal language programs from language-specific to more holistic efforts to create a cultural and identity context for the language, our formal camp assessments have largely focused on beliefs and desires rather than specific facts or measures of linguistic proficiency. While partially designed to gauge the more tangible results of camp with respect to participant understanding of camp themes, what has also emerged from these questionnaires is a less tangible but highly important pattern of what might be called recognizing and practicing Miaminess. The camp student participants have started putting themselves into the larger Miami aacimooni by articulating their personal connections with larger cultural patterns. Three that have emerged in particular are relationship, responsibility, and action guided by these interrelated concepts, all of which are discussed in detail below. The quotations we have chosen to illustrate these themes come from the written questionnaires.

**Relationship**

Myaamionki is about the myaamia tribe and our history, like where we come from and what traditional foods we eat and our language. Its also about are [sic] relationships that we have with each other.

—14-year-old Miami girl

The most important things that happened were meeting more people.

—10-year-old Miami boy

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3. Most questions are written and answered in English, but especially for the post-camp questionnaires, core vocabulary such as kiwiinsooni ‘your name’ is provided only in myaamia.
The concept of kinship has been integral to the overall camp environment all along. While some camp participants come from the main tribal population areas in Oklahoma and Indiana, others come from elsewhere in the United States. Making participants aware of their relatedness in a *myaamia* way greatly affected how they interacted with one another. By carefully crafting activities through a *myaamia* perspective that broadened the dominant societal definition of “family” to include everyone at the camp, participants began to treat one another as relatives, even though they had often been “unrelated” at the beginning of the week. With these newly realized roles of kinship also came responsibilities to *myaamionki*, as relationship to the land is an integral part of Miami culture. All of our recent youth camps have in some way explicitly included activities related to kinship, one significant example of which is discussed next.

We observed early on that some camp participants had comprehensive knowledge about their family histories, while several had limited knowledge, and others had none. In 2007, the *eewansaapita* program introduced the following activity to further develop camp participants’ perspectives as to how they were all related and why this was important. The activity began by talking about Miami concepts of kinship and how those differ from the dominant society, including the kinship system itself (see Costa 1999) and also with respect to the social functions and expectations associated with kinship in Miami society. Prior to camp, participants and their parents or guardians were asked to provide their tribal genealogies as well as photos of their relatives and ancestors, and we got additional information of this kind from the Oklahoma tribal archives. With every participant’s tribal genealogy in hand, we asked them to write the names of those people who were either *ceeliweemakiki* ‘my close relatives,’ *eeweemakiki* ‘my relatives,’ or *iilaapiikasiaani* ‘my ancestors.’ Participants then created a poster in which they placed themselves at the center of a web surrounded by photos of all of their relatives and ancestors, rather than at the end of a branch as one would have with a family tree model. This fit nicely with the idea that we who were attending the camp were surrounded by family.

Having created visual representations of their own individual relations, participants then went around to others’ posters to look for shared pictures or names, and recorded which other participants had the same relatives. This task was intended to show the connections among all camp participants,
and in several cases, participants discovered that they had close kinship connections to one another. Next, in order to reinforce the idea of a web of interconnectivity, we placed each student’s name around the outside of a circle on a community poster, and everybody was asked to name the other camp participants to whom they were related. As the final step in the activity, we drew lines connecting the participants with the relatives they had identified, the final result being a web (see Figure 3) that connected all of the camp participants. Beyond visually showing patterns of direct relations, this unified image reinforced that as a Nation, we are all related—and by extension, we have responsibilities toward one another.4

4. In 2008, the saakaciweyankwi camp extended this idea into a similar activity in which each participant created an individual book of knowledge that showed his or her relationships to other Miami people, to land, and to history, the intent being for participants to go out into the community after camp and constantly add to their books.
Responsibility

To be myaamia means that we are bonded together as family... If we believe that we can keep the myaamia traditions and lifestyle alive, then it is possible because we are a family.

—17-year-old Miami girl

To be myaamia you have to know your language and also to be involved in your community. The community is what we take care of day in and day out.

—15-year-old Miami girl

These words from seventeen- and fifteen-year-old Miami girls illustrate the responsibilities of the individual toward the community. The seventeen-year-old further remarked that she had learned the necessity of maintaining these relationships for the future health of the Miami people:

I learned that camp was a perfect place to create relationships with the Miami family. I also learned from camp that the Miami future depends on us, the younger generation.

Ultimately, this wisdom leads up to the most important part of the larger aacimooni of Miami reclamation and the various substories within it. In any language reclamation narrative, a crucial responsibility is that of actively applying one’s knowledge, as doing so lays a foundation for the aacimooni to continue. Oklahoma Chief Leonard, in his final State of the Nation address in June 2007, noted that elders have a responsibility to teach youth, and that this younger generation in turn carries a responsibility to perpetuate and add to knowledge:

Because we [tribal elders] are the remaining knowledge bearers, we have a great responsibility to teach those who are rising up to become the elders of tomorrow. We have many middle age and young people who are working hard to gain knowledge of our culture, language and traditions... We must continue to teach by supporting the efforts of our younger members, encouraging them to learn and to become teachers of that knowledge. . . . Join me in encouraging them, learning with them, and teaching them to become respectful members of this community.

Being a respectful member of any community entails having a sense of responsibility toward the community and acting according to community expectations, which in turn requires the knowledge to guide these actions. Camps are designed to respond to both needs. As noted earlier, for example, camp participants are divided into clans, in which individuals have responsibilities to their fellow clan members, and each clan in turn has responsibilities to the entire village. Foundational to the day-to-day operation of camps, this wisdom is articulated regularly in camp discourses and we turn to this part of the aacimooni next.

**Action**

You may need to act and do myaamia things.

—12-year-old Miami boy

The myaamia people have lots of traditional foods. They used their resources. They played games like lacrosse, the moccasin game, and the bowl game. They respected nature and animals. It’s important that myaamia people do this, not just know it.

—11-year-old Miami girl

As illustrated in the statements given above from a twelve-year-old Miami boy and eleven-year-old Miami girl, although camp participants learned many new words and concepts, it was necessary to translate this wisdom into action, not “just know it.” When asked what he had learned at camp, another twelve-year-old Miami boy stated,

I learned new words, I learned about the Earth and Sky, and I learned how to respect myaamionki . . . I would say that myaamionki helps us, feeds us . . . I think that it is important to respect myaamionki and treat it right.

Respect lies in what we do, and in the awareness that guides these actions. This boy recognizes that the act of respect in this case is guided by the cultural notion of reciprocity, in noting that since myaamionki provides for the people, the people thus need to provide for myaamionki.
Integration of Themes

Beyond the general overlap of these three themes, one specific example from camp that integrates them is the playing of *pakitahaminki* ‘lacrosse,’ which is perhaps everyone’s favorite evening activity. In this particular game, participants learn and use commands such as *miililo* ‘give it to me,’ *naaši* ‘get him/her,’ and *ahtoolo* ‘put it in [the goal or score]’; they keep score by asking *taaninhswi ahtooyiikwi* ‘how many do you have?’ to the other team, who then might reply *[number] eehtwaanki* ‘we have [number].’ More crucial for this paper, however, there are many less tangible but equally important effects of participation. Older youth with more experience and skills take on the responsibility of teaching younger participants vocabulary, how to throw and catch, how to “cradle” the ball, and several other aspects of *pakitahaminki*. Recognizing the kinship ties and the associated responsibilities for treating each other as family, true roughhousing or other inappropriate actions are rare and quickly stopped by the student participants when they do occur. Furthermore, a pattern has developed in which more experienced players actively find ways to fully integrate the youngest players into the game, despite skill differences due to age or experience. Such socialization of young children by older children and the mixing of ages are both expected in Miami culture.

Finally, the act of playing a *myaamia* game in a *myaamia* way on *myaamia* land in itself becomes part of our *aacimooni*. In *The Practice of Everyday Life*, Michel de Certeau states: “Every story is a travel story—a spatial practice” (1984:115). From our reading of de Certeau, places are tangible; they can be visited, and they can even be demarcated geographically—in this case, the Oklahoma Cultural Grounds and Indiana Dunes camp locations. But space is that which is “done” in a place and it is this act of doing that is a story in itself, the spatial practice. In playing *pakitahaminki*, camp participants establish a Miami space in which their actions are guided not only by knowledge of language and of the game itself, but also by Miami cultural norms. This spatial practice implicitly challenges the historical colonial discourse of Miami land, culture, and language “loss,” a narrative in which the depopulation of traditional lands, assimilation to dominant society, and “extinction” of the language are all understood to be complete and permanent. In opposition to this dominant narrative, Miami “camp” functions as a space within a Miami place—be it
on currently owned or ceded tribal land—where what is practiced within this space is a story of Miami reemergence and reawakening through our active presence and use of our language.

Where we have traveled and where we are going to an extent depends on the feelings held by the characters in the aacimooni, not only with respect to specific camp themes and activities, but also in a more general way. To better understand these perspectives, our camp questionnaires and other assessment materials have ended with an open-ended question to the effect of “What does it mean to be myaamia?” Representative answers include the following:

The most important thing we need to know is the myaamia language.

—13-year-old Miami boy

speaking myaamia

—11-year-old Miami girl

My favorite word to say is peeciaani!! (‘I smell bad’)

—11-year-old Miami girl

being made fun of

—10-year-old Miami girl

While most statements from Miami youth express the value—and in some cases humor—camp participants see in being myaamia and speaking myaamia, the final quotation is also reflective of how Miami youth also endure the ongoing marginalization associated with being “Indian” and other ongoing effects of colonization. Especially given that this response occurred after the participant’s initial camp experience, it is reflective of how the Miami reawakening aacimooni still contains a significant amount of decolonization work.

CONCLUSIONS AND IMPLICATIONS

We turn now to the larger language endangerment and reclamation discourses that have become prominent as many indigenous communities
find themselves in situations of language and cultural shift. Our observation
of the popular and academic discourses on reversing language shift has been
that there is usually a primary focus on the language itself with respect to
teaching, learning, and especially intergenerational transmission in the home
(e.g., Fishman 1991, Littlebear 1996). So too was the early discourse within
the Miami communities, in which the initial “camps” and related efforts
identified linguistic proficiency as a goal and the acquisition of language
knowledge as a measure of success. From early trial and error, and from
a deeper examination of community needs, however, arose a broadened
narrative of language reclamation as a segment of a larger and more
holistic decolonization effort. Just as historical language shift in the Miami
communities was guided by a series of interrelated social factors, so too is
the reclamation story of creating new spaces for the language and culture.

The presented participant perspectives reflect that the reclamation
of indigenous languages requires a holistic approach to implementation
and assessment, an idea that is becoming increasingly recognized among
practitioners of language reclamation. For example, in describing her
experiences with the Rama Language and Culture Project in Nicaragua,
Craig argues that “revitalization is not about recreating a community of
native speakers; it is rather about issues of self-respect and empowerment,
and about reclaiming one’s ethnic identity—issues of human value which
cannot necessarily be measured in number of words or phrases learned”
of a holistic approach to reclamation, noting that the key variable of securing
intergenerational transmission revolves around interconnections with social
issues such as culture, politics, economics, and education.

We agree with these scholars and others who call for a holistic
approach, and add that the narrative developing in the Miami communities is
especially broad because it not only interrelates cultural themes with practice,
but also recognizes that “intergenerational transmission” is not necessarily
unidirectional in the sense that elders must disseminate knowledge to youth.
While we acknowledge that there may be some directionality from “one
who speaks myaamia” to “non-speaker” in terms of passing on specific
traditional knowledge, we also assert that reclamation is a reciprocal process
that requires speakers, in both the literal and metaphorical sense, to listen
to the non-speakers—in this case, youth who are newly involved with
reclamation efforts—just as much as in the other direction. All Miamis of
all ages shape our *aacimooni*; at camps and elsewhere, those with direct linguistic knowledge have a responsibility to put it into practice for the rest of the community, and the needs and perspectives of the learners must continually inform the practices of those who have specialized knowledge.

In conclusion, we argue that the space-making discussed in this paper cannot be unidirectional, but rather requires that everybody assume a role as an active character in the *aacimooni*. This is necessary for a truly holistic language and cultural reclamation effort, particularly for communities such as ours in which the language has had a period of dormancy, the people are geographically scattered, and the youth have very diverse experiences. While it is clearly important in any program with a language component that participants gain linguistic knowledge, the diverse experiences that they bring to the process are as much a part of the story as is the language itself. The *myaamiaki eemamwiciki* ‘the Miamis awaken’ metaphor discussed earlier aims to create a lasting foundation that will guide the acquisition of linguistic and other kinds of knowledge in a way that continually recognizes the agency of all Miami people in this process. This is our story of reclamation. As we travel further, our wisdom will continue to grow and will become part of this *aacimooni*. We close with the words of an *eewansaapita* student participant whose feelings mirror our own.

I ♥ this camp.

—11-year-old Miami girl

REFERENCES


