



Language Revitalization: Issues with Reference to Navajo



Language Learning Success™

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Rosetta Stone Endangered Language Program



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My grandma taught me how to talk Navajo but I'm still learning. She showed me how to cook cake, pizza, eggs w/ baked, and blue mush. She works at Chinle Elementary school. She works for the principle. My grandma lives at Many farms. Her name is Carolyn Irvin. My grandma taught me how to weave.

**“My grandma taught me how to talk Navajo,
but I’m still learning. She showed me how to
cook cake, pizza, eggs with bakend and blue
mush. ... My grandma taught me how to
weave.”**



Impressions? What worked and why? Difficulties? Hurdles to teaching?

Diyogí yishtł'ó.



Diyogí deitł'ó.



'Asdzání diyogí yitł'ó.



RosettaStone®

The Rosetta Stone Endangered Language Program



The Endangered Language Program Mission

The Endangered Language Program works with Native language communities to create custom Rosetta Stone software for use in their language revitalization programs. Through a variety of development models designed to make Rosetta Stone software available to a wide range of indigenous groups, we promote global linguistic diversity and embody Rosetta Stone's belief that language learning makes the world a better place.



Endangered Language Program

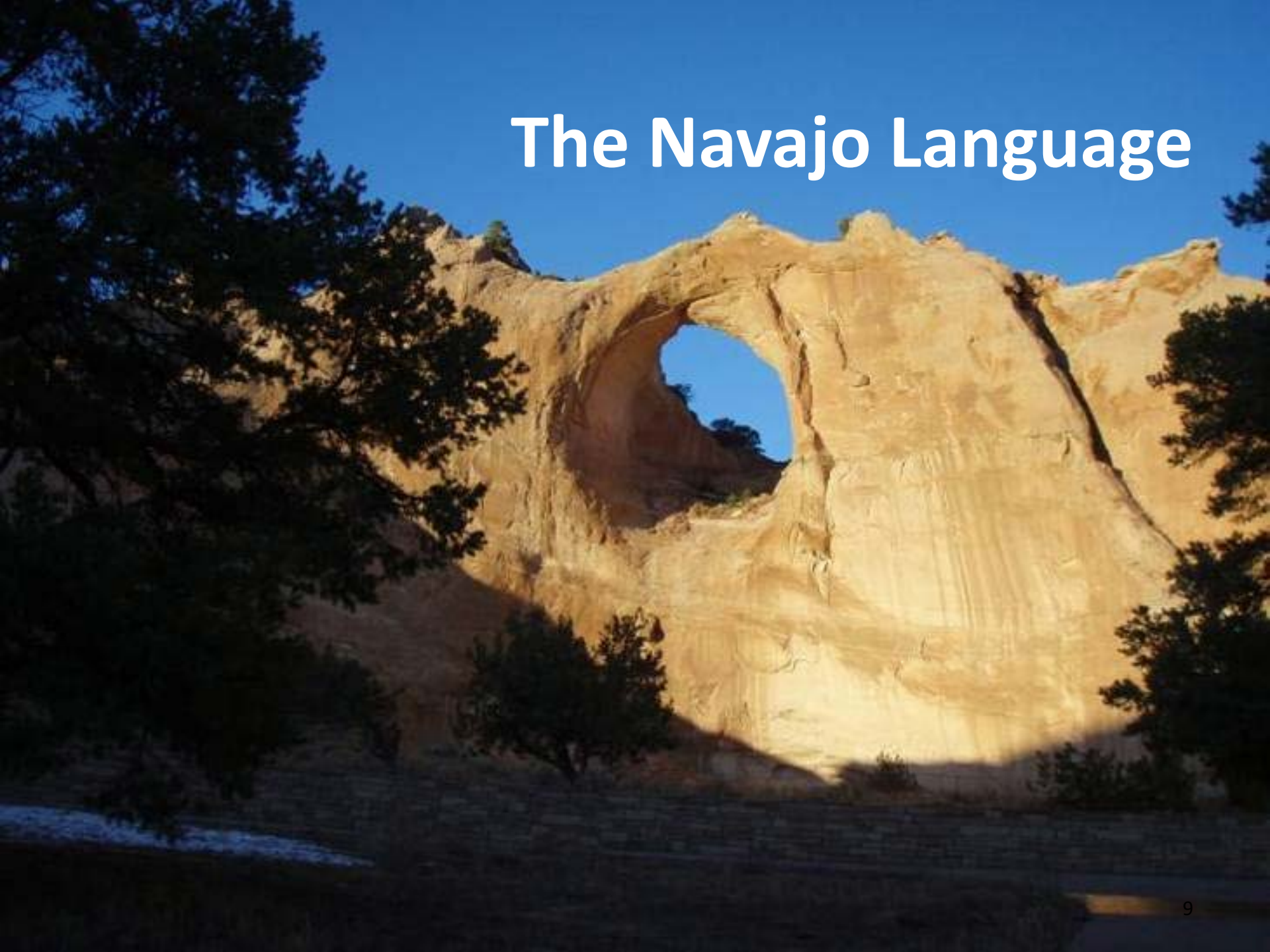
- 1999: First project launched
- 2004: Endangered Language Program founded
- 2006: Mohawk Level 1 released
- 2007: Iñupiaq (Coastal) Level 1 and Inuttitut Level 1 released
- 2007: First company grant projects launched
- 2009: Mohawk Level 2 released
- 2010: Chitimacha released
Navajo released
Iñupiaq (Kobuk / Selawik) released
- 2011: Iñupiaq (North Slope) completed

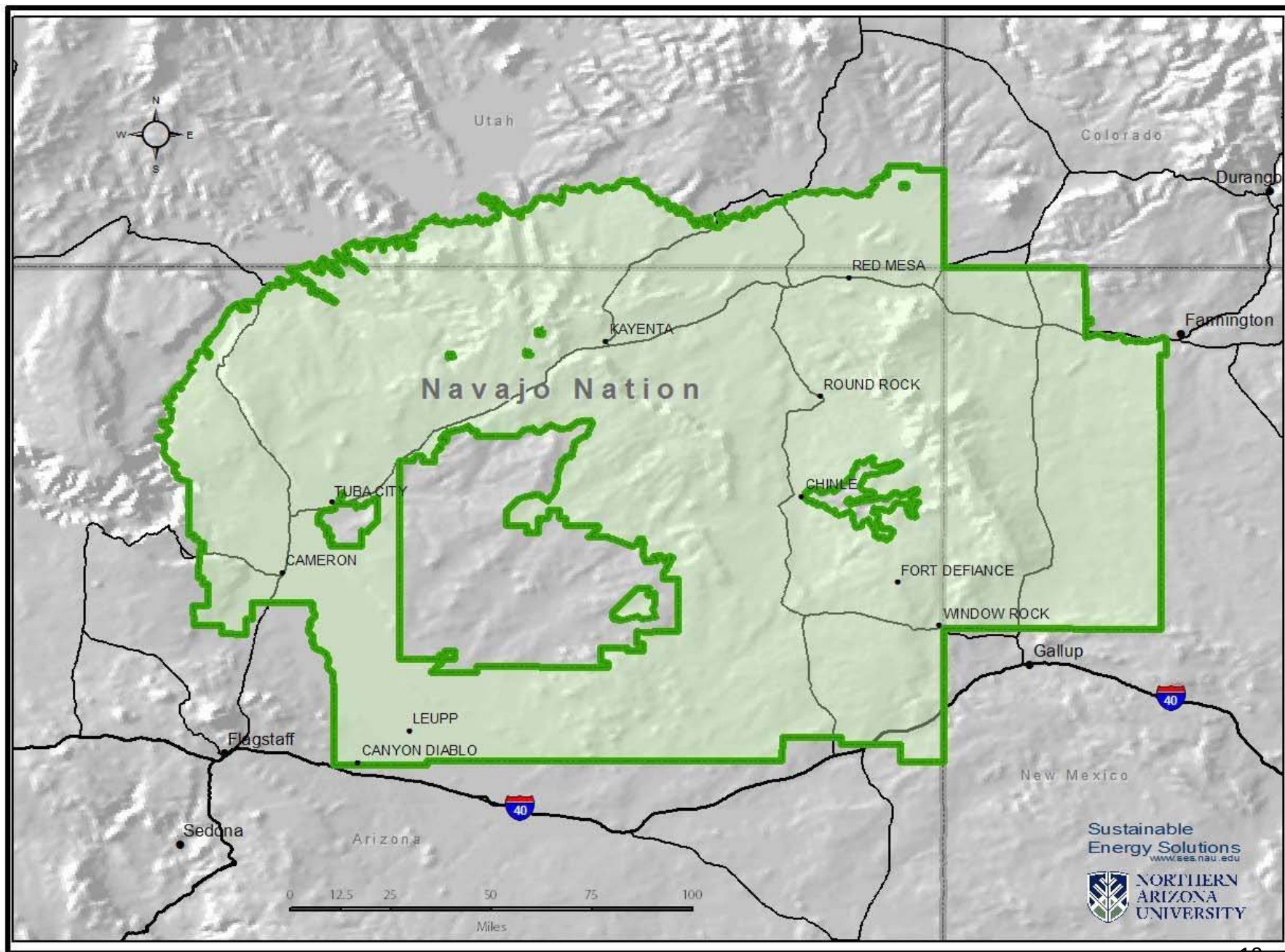


ELP Projects



The Navajo Language





Navajo is...

- The most widely spoken of all North American native languages (est. 150,000+ fluent speakers)
- Spoken and taught in 3 or more states
- Growing in number of speakers?



BUT...

1970

90% of Navajo BIA boarding school
children spoke Navajo

1992

18% of Navajo preschoolers knew
Navajo

2011

< 5% of Navajo school-aged children were fluent in Navajo



Why is Navajo Endangered?

Historical: Colonialism

- Disease
- Missions
- War

Social:

- Language prestige
- English dominance in mainstream culture and media

Educational:

- Boarding school system
- Lack of educational support (teacher training, curricula)
- No Child Left Behind
- English-Only Act of 2000



The Rosetta Stone Endangered Language Program
+
Navajo Language Renaissance
=

The Goal:

- Use of Navajo Rosetta Stone in 100% of Navajo Nation schools
- Navajo Rosetta Stone available in all Navajo Nation Chapter Houses
- Use of Navajo Rosetta Stone by Navajo living outside of the Nation



Navajo Language Renaissance

- 501 (c)(3) non-profit corporation
- Composed of Navajo linguists and language educators from Arizona, New Mexico and Utah
- Has full support of the Navajo Nation Board of Education
- The recipient of a 2007 Rosetta Stone Endangered Language Program grant for software development



- 
- A woman with dark hair, wearing a red long-sleeved shirt, is seated at a desk in a community center. She is looking at a large white computer monitor that displays a website with a photo of a group of people. Her hands are on a white keyboard. On the desk, there is also a white mouse, a yellow folder, a clear plastic water bottle, and a pair of glasses. In the background, other computer monitors and a framed picture on the wall are visible.
- All language knowledge is provided by the sponsoring community
 - All language work takes place within the sponsoring community
 - All intellectual property, sales, and distribution rights belong to the sponsoring group

Navajo is...

- An Athabaskan language of the Na-Dené family
- An agglutinating, polysynthetic language. A verb can have up to 11 prefixes!
- A “verb-heavy” language (many verbs, few nouns)
- Tonal – Vowels can be either high or low tone





Bikáá' + dah + 'a-sdáh-í

on

up there

the thing you

sit up on



Language Endangerment

A Global Phenomenon



How many languages are in the world?

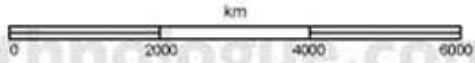
About 6,900

- By 2100, half these languages will be extinct
- One language dies about every two weeks
- Half of the world's languages have fewer than 5,000 speakers
- Over 500 languages have fewer than 100 speakers each



LANGUAGES OF THE WORLD

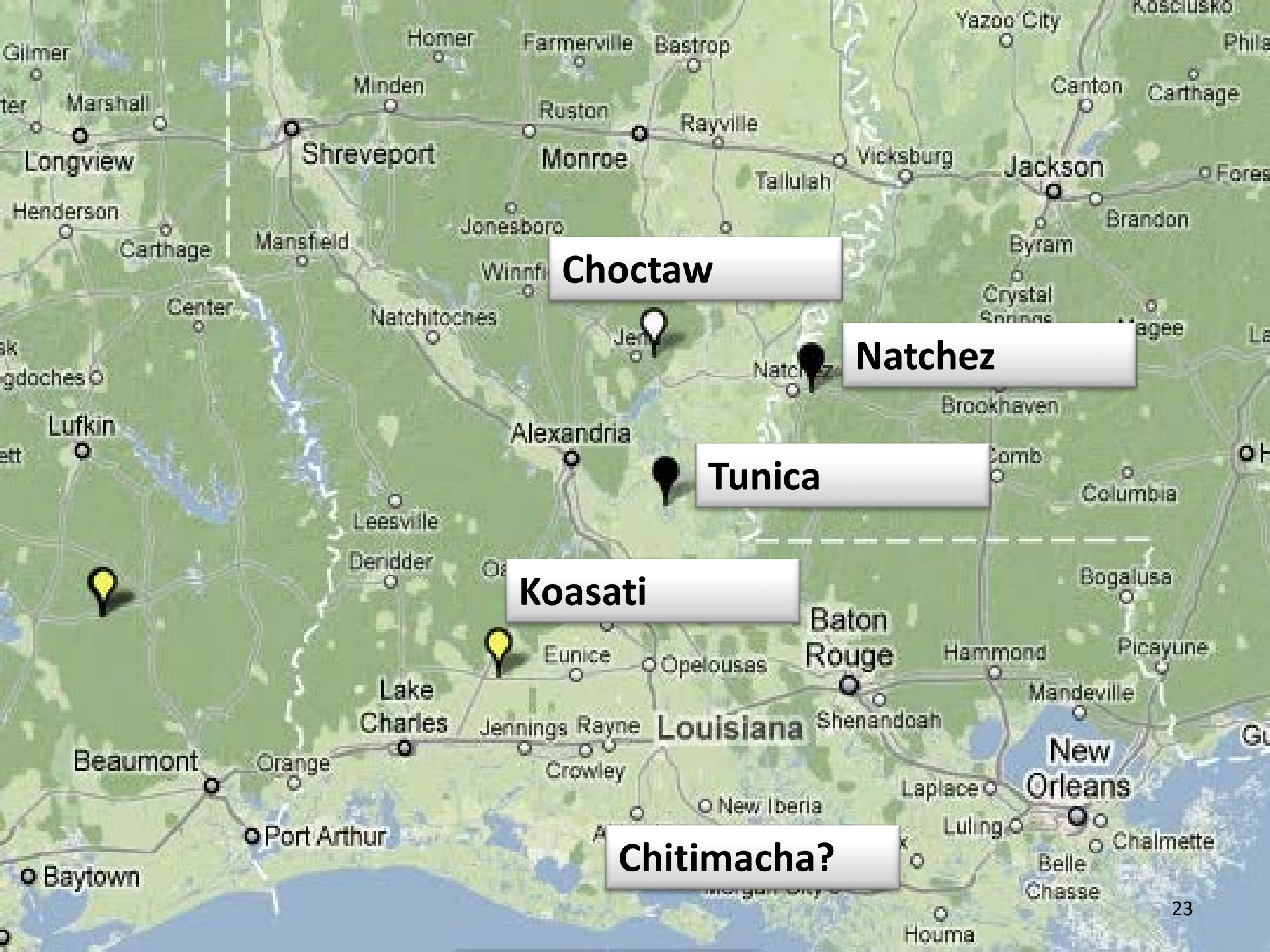
EACH DOT REPRESENTS THE PRIMARY LOCATION
OF A LIVING LANGUAGE LISTED IN THE ETHNOLOGUE.



Living Languages



Endangered Languages



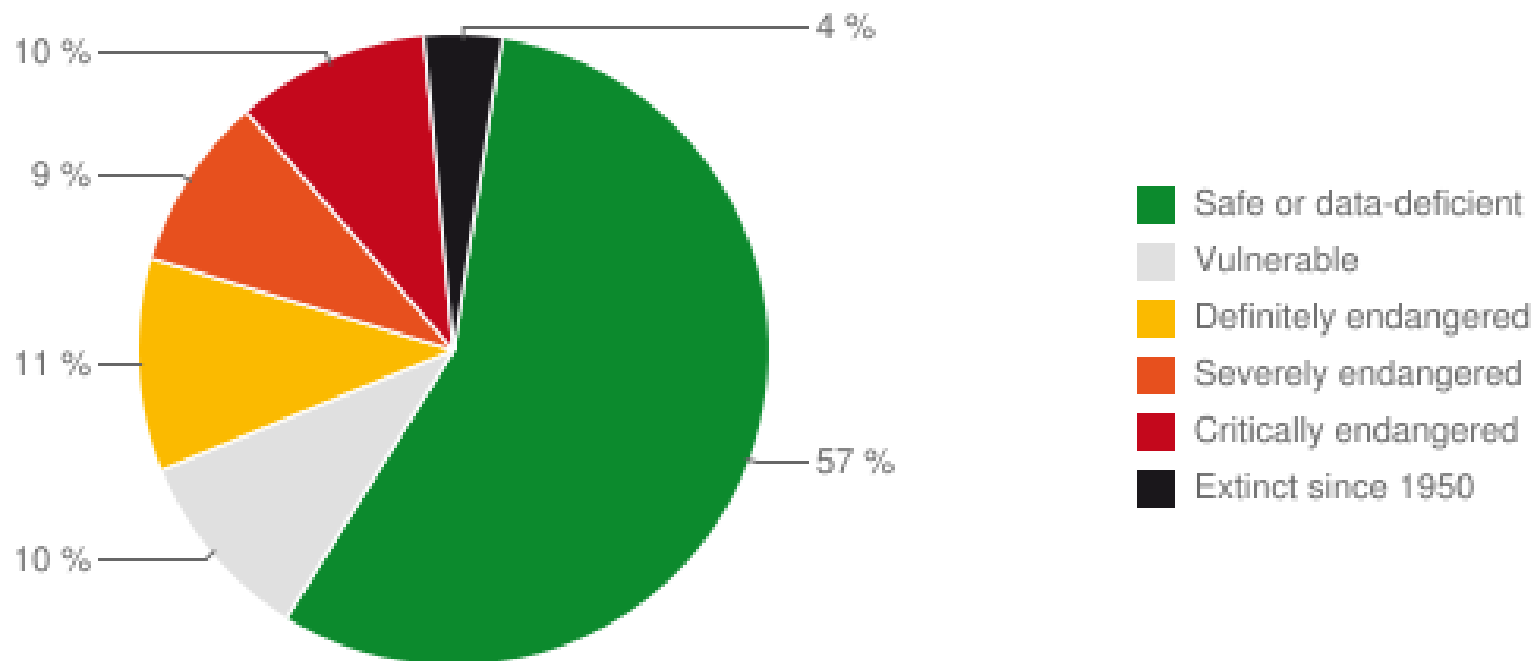
Choctaw

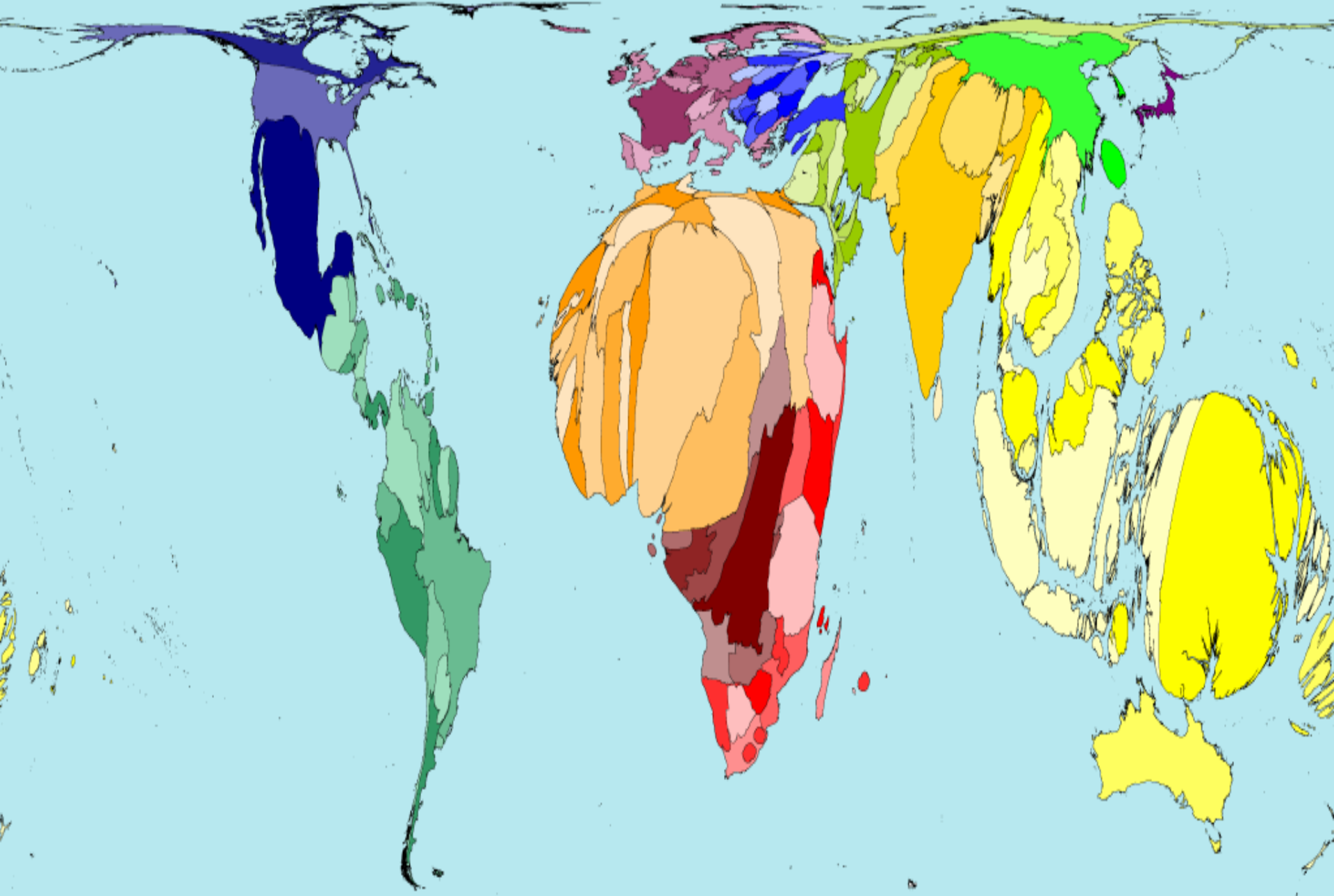
Natchez

Tunica

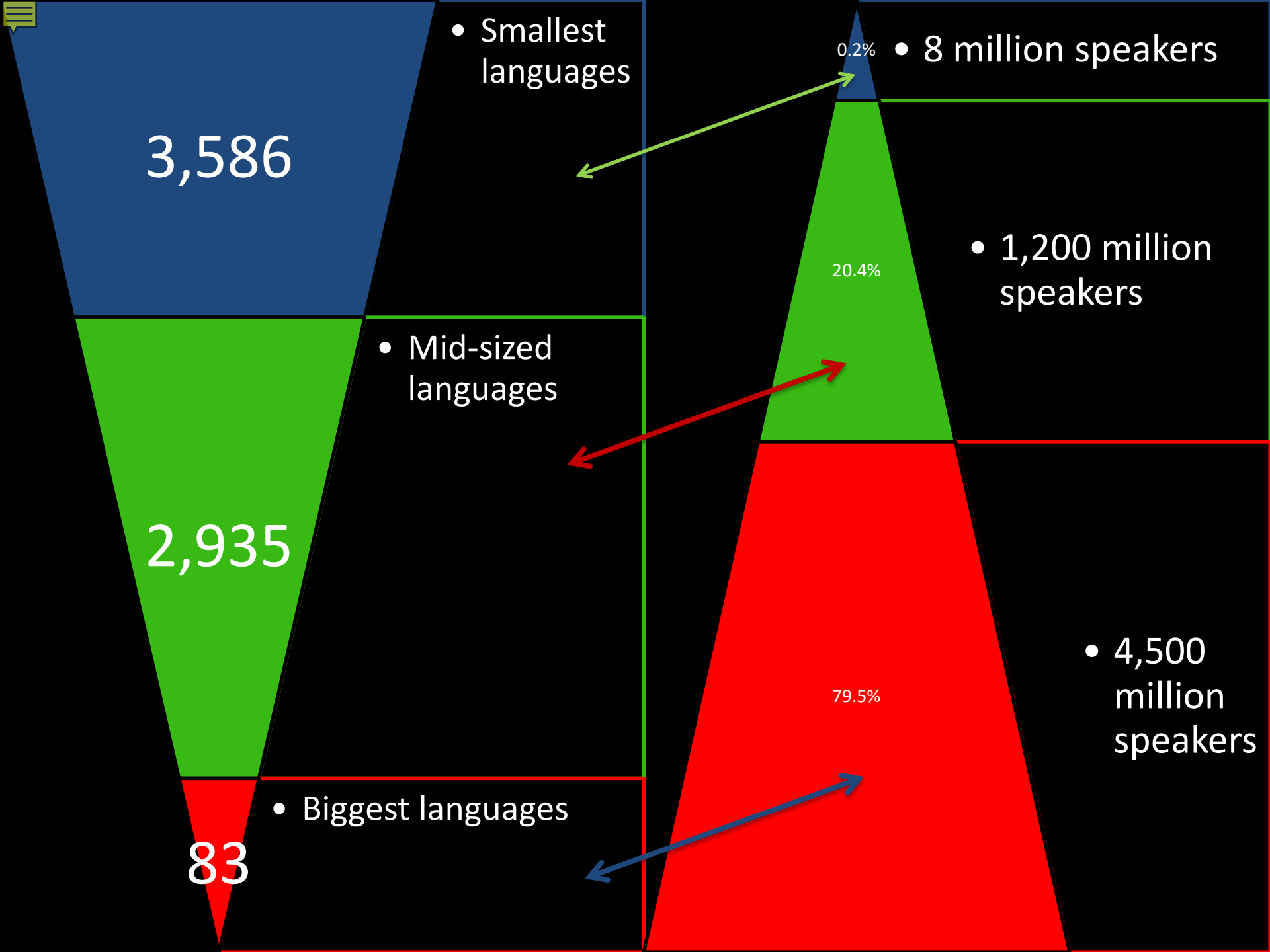
Koasati

Chitimacha?





Countries by Number of Languages⁵



3,586

- Smallest languages

0.2%

- 8 million speakers

- Mid-sized languages

20.4%

- 1,200 million speakers

2,935

- Biggest languages

79.5%

- 4,500 million speakers

83

Should We Revitalize?

“We have room for but one language in this country, and that is the English language, for we intend to see that the crucible turns our people out as Americans, of American nationality, and not as dwellers in a polyglot boarding house.”

~ Theodore Roosevelt

“Nothing is more American than the languages of her first people.”

~ Ryan Wilson (Oglala Lakota)



Language Choice

“The right to language choice includes the right to choose against a language.”

Costs of revitalization:

Language revitalization or...

- Development
- Education
- Social services

“Endangered languages are *always* endangered for economic reasons.”

“The decision tends to be made by the very youngest speakers, 6- or 7-year olds, under duress or social pressure.”



Challenges to Revitalization

- Political
 - Tribal – lack of community consensus; tribal politics
 - Legal – state, federal, and tribal law
- Informational vacuum
 - Level of endangerment
 - Assessing success in revitalization
- Logistical
 - Travel – remote geography
 - Technical – elders and technology; digital infrastructure
 - Surprises – hurricanes, oil spills, drought, snowstorms, whaling festivals, mardi gras



Challenges to Revitalization

- Cultural
 - Divergent goals between linguists and communities
 - Traditional versus evolving views of language
- Linguistic
 - Lack of standardization (vocabulary, orthography)
 - Complex grammatical structures
 - Sacred language
- Financial
 - Compensation – experts work mostly *pro bono*
 - Funding



Language Choice

Do language revitalization and other forms of development always have to be mutually exclusive?

No!

- Development programs combined with a focus on the local language tend to work better
- Dropout rates decrease and test scores increase for schools taught in their mother tongue
- Language is learned better in its social context
- Language and culture are best taught together

Holistic and integrated solutions work best



Reasons for Revitalization?

- Languages are inherently valuable
- Languages are valuable for scientific inquiry
- Languages are valuable as a cultural heritage
- Languages are valuable as a store of knowledge (relates to Sapir-Whorf)
- Languages are valuable for the social functions they fulfill
- Languages are valuable for economic purposes
- Languages are valuable because people value them
- Languages are a necessary marker of identity



Special thanks to:

**Our many Navajo friends and
colleagues**



Hágoónee'.



Hágoónee'.



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Slide 12:

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- 2011 statistic: anecdotal

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- Extinct by 2100: Krauss, Michael. The world's languages in crisis. *Language*, Vol. 68, No. 1, pp. 4-42. 1992.
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- Language numbers: Lewis, M. Paul, ed. *Ethnologue: Languages of the World*, 16th edition. SIL International. 2009.

Slide 21: [Ethnologue.com](http://www.ethnologue.com)

Slides 22-24: UNESCO [Atlas of the World's Languages in Danger](http://www.unesco.org/new/en/unesco/themes/languages-and-multilingualism/endangered-languages/)

- <http://www.unesco.org/new/en/unesco/themes/languages-and-multilingualism/endangered-languages/>

Slide 25: Worldmapper.com

- http://www.worldmapper.org/display_languages.php?selected=583#

Slide 26: Languages by size

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