

UNIVERSITY OF OKLAHOMA

GRADUATE COLLEGE

UMÓⁿHOⁿ ITHÁE T^hE -- UMÓⁿHOⁿ BTHIⁿ
I SPEAK OMAHA -- I AM OMAHA:
OMAHA LANGUAGE CHOICE, 1971-2001

A Dissertation

SUBMITTED TO THE GRADUATE FACULTY

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Doctor of Philosophy

By

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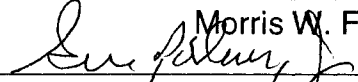
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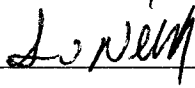
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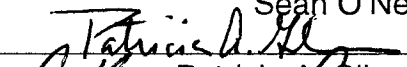
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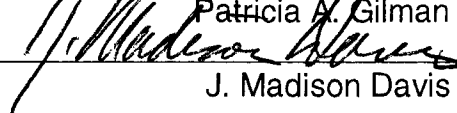
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This work is dedicated to the Omaha speakers, past and present, who gave us an unrivaled oral treasure. It is dedicated to the parents and grandparents of today who were born speaking the language, but who are now silent. May they find the courage to again speak to the family. Finally, this work is dedicated to our children who are here, and to those who are coming, that they may be able to rightfully claim their Omaha language heritage.

Uthixide

Lincoln, Nebraska, 2003

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ABSTRACT

Keywords: native language choice, language revitalization, reversing language shift, grounded theory, Dhegiha, Omaha Tribe of Nebraska.

The creation of an indigenous language program at the University of Nebraska is the impetus for this study. It is informed by the local and national movement in native language revival and maintenance. This study examines the efforts of, and difficulties in, the reversal of language shift by the Omaha Tribe of Nebraska. The transmission of cultural knowledge/language is negatively impacted by social, political, economic, and colonial pressures on the family and community. The family is cited as the preferred site of language and culture learning. Individuals generally shift responsibility for the revival and/or maintenance of the Omaha language away from themselves and onto the public school and tribal government. There is an absence of consensus within the Omaha community. A grounded theory approach is used to maximize the local perspective in the data, drawn from qualitative interviews with ten community leaders. Respondents describe their language ideology, and what they are doing to act upon those attitudes. A first person participant observation account of native language use and change spans the years from 1971 through 2001. Topics include the development of the 1977 Omaha dictionary; vignettes of native language performance, emergence of the language programs at Omaha Nation Public School and the University of Nebraska, recent research narratives, orthographic debates, and language assessment reports. The problem in reversing language shift resides in the nature and goals of the imposed western-model government and social structure. They do not encourage consensus decision-making. This

study suggests a shift to programming and institutions that maximize pre-reservation ideals of community-wide fusion, interdependence, and action in the face of divergent ideologies. The principles and approaches of the successful Pūnana Leo preschool immersion and Kula Kaiapuni Hawaiian immersion schools are offered to the Omaha community. The next step in this study is to develop questions to elicit ideas about ways to motivate the English-only Omaha parents into a groundswell of action. The hesitant speakers must be encouraged to risk the embarrassment of mispronunciation and become active models of the language. The practice of critical ridicule without proper modeling must change. The fundamental key to this, or any action, requires the complete commitment of the parents. This commitment must be encouraged and supported by tribal leaders.

Chapter 1

The Question - The Methods - The Community Setting

. If you don't take time to teach your kids, they'll never learn

Barry Webster, 2001

Idadoⁿ ubthixide a? What am I looking around for?

In 1998, this research project was initially formulated as an extension of my M.A. thesis work that had examined native language attitudes and abilities among school-age children on the Omaha Reservation, Macy, Nebraska (Awakuni-Swetland 1996). It seemed reasonable, at least from an academic perspective, to formally extend the exploration of native language issues into the community's adult population. In 1999, I was invited to return to the University of Nebraska-Lincoln (UNL) under a joint appointment in Anthropology and Native American Studies. Besides teaching and working with local native communities, my primary responsibility was to create a native language course. The Lakota Sioux language had been previously taught at UNL but was discontinued for lack of instructors. Given the opportunity to select the native language I would work with, I chose Omaha. I proposed taking a language and culture approach to teaching the language through the development of collaborative projects with the local urban and nearby reservation Omaha community. To make this endeavor succeed, having a more detailed understanding of the Omaha community's attitudes towards, and abilities in, the native language became very important. Thus, what had begun as a purely academic dissertation research question took on a more immediate practicing anthropology application.

The creation of an indigenous language program at the university level as well as the growing strength of the various native language activities within the indigenous communities are indicative of a national and international trend. The concern with the status of, and changes within, indigenous languages has increased in recent years. The foci of recent studies include research in language obsolescence, language shift, language death, reversing language shift, language maintenance, and language revitalization. There appears to be a continuum of language death and language rebirth. Two of the more recent publications in the field encapsulate this range. Dorian looks at the downhill slide of many of the world's languages in her edited volume, *Investigating Obsolescence: Studies in Language Contraction and Death*. She notes that, "there is even some difficulty in locating any such area: [as] "obsolescence", "contraction", and "death", resulting in an uncertainty about the designation of the field. Because of the immaturity of this area of investigation, comparisons are still difficult to make" (1989:1-2). On the other hand, Hinton and Hale's *The Green Book of Language Revitalization in Practice* discusses languages that are endangered but concentrates on maintenance and revitalization efforts. Hinton notes that Nettle and Romaine (2000) link the loss of indigenous languages

...to the usurpation of indigenous lands, the destruction of indigenous habitats, and the involuntary incorporation of indigenous peoples into the larger society (generally into the lower-class margins of that society), language death has become part of a human rights struggle. [Thus for Hinton], language choice is part of the right of indigenous peoples to their own land, to autonomy, and to cultural and economic self-determination [Hinton 2001:3].

This linkage to political, economic, and social issues indicates the increasing complexity of variables through which indigenous languages must be considered. In effect, issues ranging from national sovereignty to personal identity and everything in between impacts, and is impacted by, language.

Locally, the concern for the preservation of indigenous language and culture emerges in nearly every forum available to native people. In a recent summit of regional tribal leaders drawn from multiple districts as defined by the National Congress of the American Indian, the following statement was presented:

Dynamic cultures constantly change. What should we try to save? The elements most vulnerable to loss are those intangibles held in human cognition, such as language and tradition. Many participants expressed an urgent concern for language preservation. Language preservation involves more than just recording words and sounds. It must include the preservation of mannerisms and usage in relationship to culture and spirituality. While recordings will preserve the sounds of language and, with video recordings, the speaker's mannerism, these recordings present an incomplete snapshot. If language is to be perpetuated within an indigenous group, it must be accessible to tribal members and its use must be encouraged [Nebraska State Historical Society 2001:n.p.].

The development of a UNL program is informed by such sentiments. This current study enters the language struggle with an interest in the pivotal area between language death and language rebirth -- the reversing of language shift. More specifically, I want to understand what hinders the Omaha community's efforts at reversing their language loss and achieving the goals described by the regional tribal leaders. There are a number of people in the recent past, and others active today (myself included), striving to put out the fire which is consuming the Omaha language... and the Omaha culture. Yet, despite all of the physical exertions at

the pump handles, little life-saving water is flowing through the hose. My interest is in what causes the diminished rewards for all the effort.

By trying to understand the local attitudes and potentials, I hope to design more effective college-level language courses. They, in turn, can be offered back to the native community. That I perceive the community's efforts are being hindered is the outcome of more than thirty years of personal association with the community. Those experiences will be detailed below.

It is important to note what this study does not include. I acknowledge that others have recognized the hallmarks of a moribund language on the brink of extinction (see Rudin 1989; Omaha Tribe 1994). Nor do I need to validate the existence of language shift in the Omaha community. Ample evidence of such a shift can be found by the simple act of talking with the people. Metaphorically speaking, ninety-nine percent of the discourse with ninety-nine percent of the people will be in English. This study does not focus on detailing descriptive linguistic examples of language contraction. However, such a study could be useful in the development of a language program if the end goal was to expand language fluency.

As illustrated by several of the following interviews, many community members feel that native language loss and current language choice are the result of colonial processes. Examples of federal policies and programs of cultural assimilation are provided which support that viewpoint. On the other hand, many community members, their leaders, and outsiders, describe the Omaha people collectively as remaining a stubbornly "tradition-minded" group

unwilling to give up their distinct cultural beliefs and social practices. How does colonial hegemony, past and present, intersect with the "Indianness" now being protected and strengthened with today's upsurge of native national sovereignty, economic self-sufficiency, and self-direction?

This study proposes that there are several related issues in the question about language choice. First are the deleterious effects of alcohol and drug abuse on the functioning of the family. This interrupts the process of the transmission of cultural knowledge, including language, from one generation to the next. This dysfunction is further exacerbated by the lack of a viable economy and adequate education. The fundamental struggle to survive draws energy and attention away from the maintenance of non-mainstream Omaha values and practices.

Throughout the interviews there are numerous examples of individuals shifting responsibility for the revival and/or maintenance of the Omaha language away from themselves. Every respondent pointed the finger of responsibility elsewhere, to other parents, other speakers, the passive non-speakers, the school, the tribal council, the tribal program directors, and the community at large.

A result of these aforementioned conditions is the absence of consensus within the Omaha community. There are divergent views on the status of the native language. Some individuals believe Omaha is extinct or moribund. Others see that language as still being viable as a form of communication or cultural identity. There are competing ideas about its value to the functioning of the

community. There does not appear to be agreement on the issue sufficient to mobilize community-wide, effective, lasting change. For now, native language revitalization and usage remains localized at limited venues (e.g., senior citizen center, public school culture program) with an undetermined long-term effect.

Preliminary conclusions indicate that external influences have helped to create and maintain the environment of an inadequate economy, substance abuse, dysfunctional families, low self-esteem, and the dependency upon others. This contributes to the difficulty in achieving Omaha consensus on the issue of native language retention. With the removal of pre-contact, pro-fusion institutions and processes, the Omaha people have returned to an earlier state of contending group and individual ideologies. Oral accounts and anecdotal data describe the Omaha as having achieved a consensus-driven, accountable government with a viable economy and a functioning family structure in an environment of competing ideologies at the time of White contact. The institutions of that government often melded secular and sacred realms together. That government was disrupted by, and continues to be modified by colonialism. We conclude that simply replacing white personnel with native personnel in existing programs and institutions will not automatically result in achieving consensus on critical issues, nor will it fix the economic and social problems. The problem resides in the nature and goals of the western model government and social structure. With power centered in a political majority, they do not necessarily require consensus decision-making. They do not support Omaha values of extended families, reciprocal relationships, the respect for one's own body, and

the redistribution of wealth. This study concludes there is a need to shift to processes and institutions that maximize pre-reservation ideals of community-wide fusion, interdependence, and individuals taking responsibility for action in the face of divergent ideologies.

Eatoⁿ ubthixide a? How do I look around for it?

Because I am trying to understand the community leaders' language ideology, it becomes imperative that my data are drawn from their voices and experiences. I have many ideas and feelings about the status and survival of the Omaha language. However, I wish to minimize my bias in the construction and analysis of the interviews. I used a grounded theory approach to maximize the community perspective in my data.

In Creswell's (1998) outline of the evolution of grounded theory he notes that the intent of this approach is to generate or discover a theory about some phenomenon and the actions or reactions that it stimulates in people.

To study how people act and react to this phenomenon, the researcher collects primarily interview data, makes multiple visits to the field, develops and interrelates categories of information, and writes theoretical propositions or hypotheses or presents a visual picture of the theory [Creswell 1998:56].

Barney Glaser and Anselm Strauss first described grounded theory research in 1967 in their book, *The Discovery of Grounded Theory*, and continued to develop it in later publications. They proposed that

theories should be 'grounded' in data from the field, especially in the actions, interactions, and social process of the people. ...The centerpiece of grounded theory research is the development or generation of a theory closely related to the context of the phenomenon being studied [Creswell 1998:56].

The researcher conducts twenty or more interviews of participants who have been theoretically selected, i.e., they fit criteria central to the question under investigation. The interviews continue until the emerging categories (units of information composed of events, happenings, and instances) have been exhausted. Creswell (1998:57) characterizes the data collection as a "zigzag" process. The researcher gathers data and begins analysis immediately. S/he returns to the field to collect more data, followed by analysis, followed by more data collection, and so on. Creswell describes this process of taking data and comparing it to emerging categories as the "constant comparative" method of data analysis.

The systematic process of data analysis in grounded theory uses the following arrangement:

In *open coding*, the researcher forms initial categories of information about the phenomenon being studied by segmenting information. Within each category, the investigator finds several properties, or subcategories, and looks for data to dimensionalize, or show the extreme possibilities on a continuum of, the property.

In *axial coding*, the investigator assembles the data in new ways after open coding. ...The researcher identifies a central phenomenon (i.e., a central category about the phenomenon), explores causal conditions (i.e., categories of conditions that influence the phenomenon), specifies strategies (i.e., the actions or interactions that result from the central phenomenon), identifies the context and intervening conditions (i.e., the narrow and broad conditions that influence the strategies, and delineates the consequences (i.e., the outcomes of the strategies) for this phenomenon.

In *selective coding*, the researcher identifies a “story line” and writes a story that integrates the categories in the axial coding model. In this phase, conditional propositions (or hypotheses) are typically presented.

Finally, the researcher may develop and visually portray a *conditional matrix* that elucidates the social, historical, and economic conditions influencing the central phenomenon. This phase of analysis is not frequently found in grounded theory studies [Creswell 1998:57].

The result is a substantive-level theory centered in a particular problem or population of people. With the identified categories the theory can be further tested in other populations. However, the study may end with the generation of the new theory grounded in data.

In this current research, I first began gathering data from community meetings and sponsored feasts. In effect, I was using focus groups as the initial point of entry to the question of current Omaha ideology and strategies. These early data were considered (open coded) as I formulated the questions for formal interviews scheduled the following summer. As I worked through each interview, I incorporated responses and any questions raised by the interviewee into the interview with the next community leader. I loaded the transcripts of each interview into the *Ethnograph v5.0* computer software program. This program facilitates the analysis of qualitative data by allowing the user to block, extract, and code portions of a narrative or interview. The results can be sorted and given some quantitative interpretation. However, I used the software to assist in a more thorough round of open-coding, followed by a round of axial coding resulting in suggestive hypotheses.

Note: This current paper reflects a preliminary analysis of data and categories after two forays into the field. Given my future prospects of remaining at the University of Nebraska and working in the Omaha language, I foresee the opportunity to refine the questions and return to the field.

Data for this current work are drawn from several sources. A strengthening Omaha sociopolitical presence has sparked the publication of a number of useful books. At a time when local and national attention was focused on Indian grave goods and human remains, O'Shea and Ludwickson's (1992) *Archaeology and Ethnohistory of the Omaha Indians* provided a description of archaeological materials excavated 50 years earlier at the Big Village Site. Ridington and Hastings' (1997) *Blessing for a Long Time* recounts the return of two pieces of cultural patrimony, the Sacred Pole and White Buffalo Hide. Scherer's (1999) *Imperfect Victories* examines the Omaha strategies and struggles with land claims. These join the standard ethnographic accounts of the past century: Dorsey's (1884) *Omaha Sociology*, Fletcher and La Flesche's (1911) *The Omaha Tribe*, and Mead's (1932) *Changing Culture of an Indian Tribe*.

The following chapter presents a first person participant observation account of language use and change based upon my interactions with members of the Omaha community since the late 1960s, and direct involvement in the Omaha language since 1971. Initially, I had some misgivings about the suggestion of foregrounding my experiences, preferring instead to focus exclusively on what community members have to say. However, my experiences

and interpretations of language use from 1971 to the present inform the questions I pose and the decisions I make regarding the development of the UNL program. These experiences include a discussion of the development of the Omaha dictionary; *Umo'ho' lye of Elizabeth Stabler* (Swetland 1977), selected vignettes of native language performance, and impressions from the 1970s American Indian Movement (AIM) days. I consider the emergence and metamorphosis of the Omaha language programs at Omaha Nation (previously Macy) Public School (ONPS), and UNL. Recent research, grant application narratives, and language assessment reports provide additional perspectives. Public activities (feasts, council meetings, powwows, other social events, and Native American Church gatherings) provide useful examples of contemporary language use and ideology. On-going orthographic debates, as well as the role of the Dhegiha working group of linguists are considered.

A sampling of qualitative interviews helps to capture a more detailed understanding of the Omaha community's attitudes toward, and aspirations for, the native language. Ten formal interviews (averaging 90 minutes each) and ten informal interviews of selected community leaders seek to understand how Omaha language fits into the community today. The interviews examine how community decision-makers are thinking about the language, and what they are doing to act upon those thoughts.

Creswell (1994:122) states that interviews play *the* key role in data collection in a grounded theory study (emphasis his). He suggests that other data collection forms such as participant observation, researcher reflection, and focus

groups play a secondary role. I would contradict this conclusion by suggesting that other ethnographic field methods can provide critical sources of validation for what is otherwise primarily subjective interview data.

Permission to conduct this research has been approved by the Omaha Tribal Council (Appendix A). As a student at the University of Oklahoma (OU), authorization to conduct this research has been given by the OU Institutional Review Board (FY2001-218). As a member of the faculty at the University of Nebraska-Lincoln (UNL), additional authorization has been obtained from the UNL Institutional Review Board (2001-01-138 EX). All three government entities have protocols aimed at the protection of human subjects and the pursuit of ethical research. A copy of this dissertation will be deposited with the Omaha Tribal Council and Omaha Nation Public School. As well, several of the interviewees have requested copies of the final paper.

Note: The title of Omaha Nation Public School is frequently pronounced as *Umo'ho'* Nation Public School (UNPS) by many members of the local community and is the form emblazoned above the door to the recently remodeled main school building (2003). The English form, as found on public record, is used in this paper without prejudice.

Umo'ho' nikashi'ga ama. The Omaha People.

It may sound clichéd, but after two centuries of outside scrutiny, the Omaha remain a much studied but little understood people. Their strategic

location and socio-economic influence on the Middle Missouri River fur trade brought them to the attention of early explorers, both military and scientific (for selected examples, see Edwin 1905; Bradbury 1904-7; Thwaites 1906,1969). After the Omaha signed the 1854 Treaty and moved to the reservation they were subjected to intense ethnographic examination. The first researcher on the scene was James Owen Dorsey (selected examples: 1884, 1890, 1891, and 1896). He was followed by Alice Cunningham Fletcher who published and spoke widely on the Omaha, both alone (1883, 1885, 1896) and in partnership with Francis La Flesche (1911). Much early federal Indian policy was formulated and influenced by Omaha actions and reactions to Americanizing and civilizing efforts of missionaries, government agents, and a group of Christian zealots who called themselves "Friends of the Indian." The Omaha's reactions to such efforts played a critical role in shaping land allotment and land leasing policies and later affected how the Indian Claims Commission crafted compromise settlements for Native claimants. In spite of generations of intense assimilation efforts by outsiders, the Omaha remain socially and culturally distinct from mainstream society. This conundrum of culture change and culture maintenance makes the Omaha well suited to the current study of post-colonial Native language use.

The following sketch places the Omaha in an ethnographic context. It is excerpted from a more detailed contemporary description prepared by this writer for the Human Resources Area Files *Encyclopedia of World Cultures Supplement* (Awakuni-Swetland 2001). Note: this ethnohistorical account draws heavily from Fletcher and La Flesche (1911), *The Omaha Tribe*. That late

nineteenth and early twentieth century source presents an intentionally homogenized view of Omaha history and cultural practices. Most contemporary Omaha people seem to prefer this view of a unified, relatively contention-free society as part of their immediate history. More recent political and economic developments, and a more detailed examination of Omaha tendencies towards factionalism, will be presented at the end of this account.

The Omaha are headquartered in and around the northeastern Nebraska town of Macy on a portion of their aboriginal lands retained under an 1854 treaty. In the 1990s, the much-reduced reservation still includes arable Missouri River bottom lands to the east, bordered by steep bluffs and fertile rolling upland prairie extending west to Logan Creek (Figure 1.1). Records prior to 1800 indicate an Omaha population of over 2,000. A smallpox epidemic in 1800-01 reduced the number by more than half, but high birth rate and productive subsistence practices permitted a return to earlier numbers by the 1820s. The Omaha suffered years of displacement and famine that again reduced their numbers to less than 800 by the 1850s. Indian Agent records indicate a relatively steady population increase since the latter half of the nineteenth century in spite of intermittent epidemics.

The descriptive name Omaha (*umóⁿhoⁿ*, "against the current" or "upstream") was used prior to 1541. The name captures the oral histories of eighteenth century migrations and divisions from other groups (Ponca, Osage, Quapaw, Kansa) in which the Omaha parted company and moved up the

Mississippi River drainage. The Omaha language is related, with increasing distance, to the Ponca, Osage, Kansa, and Quapaw languages. Linguists view Omaha and Ponca as dialects of the same language.

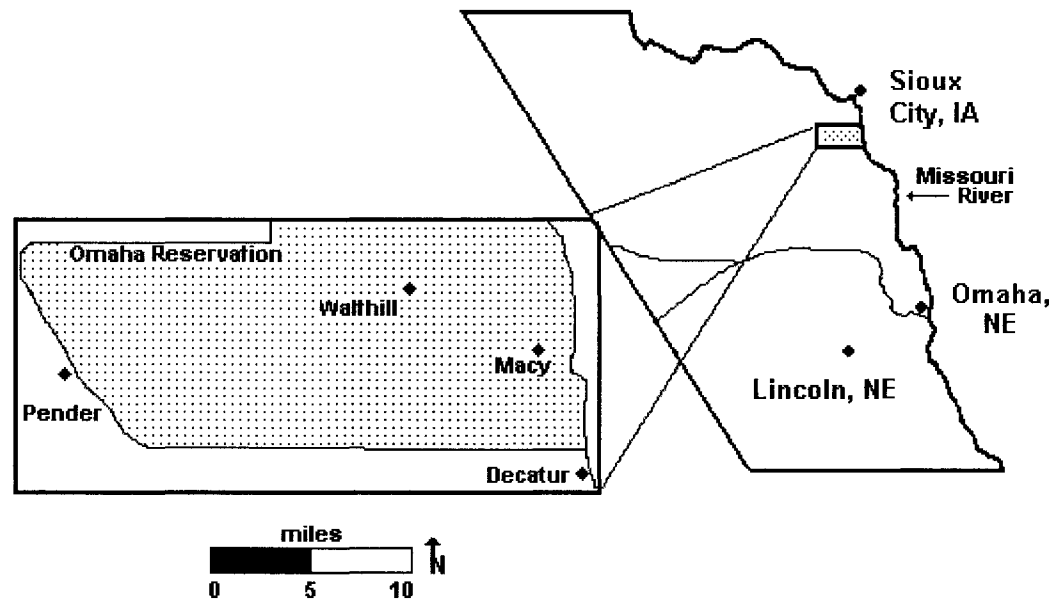


Figure 1.1 Location Map of the Omaha Reservation, 2003. Area shown after the allotments, sale of surplus lands, and sale of lands to the Winnebago on the northern boundary.

Omaha oral traditions acknowledge a migration to the Great Plains from the East. Archaeological evidence generally points to the Ohio River Valley region as a probable point of origin. Colonial European documents note the Omaha were in southwest Minnesota and northwest Iowa by the 1670s. They arrived at the Missouri River by 1714. For a time the Omaha dominated the Missouri River fur trade and had relations with French, Spanish, British, and later American traders. Introduced diseases and encroaching hostile tribal groups from the north drove the Omaha to the mouth of the Platte River in the 1840s. The 1854 Treaty established the current reservation while relinquishing all other

lands. Northern portions of the reservation were sold to the Winnebago in 1865 and 1874. The Omaha were immediately subjected to American colonial pressures of assimilation on the reservation, which sought to intervene in all aspects of their culture and society. The Omaha were the first U.S. tribe to participate in land allotment. They have experienced land loss, boarding schools, and Christianization.

The Omaha occupied sites in Minnesota and South Dakota prior to moving in the Nebraska region. Their most prominent Nebraska village was *Tó'wo'no'gatho'no'ga*, Big Village, on Omaha Creek in Dakota County. Occupied from 1775-1845, it was deserted several times due to disease and enemy attacks. The Omaha returned to the area on the newly formed reservation in 1855 and divided into three villages. The villages reflected important socio-political divisions emerging in the group. The northern village, *Win-dja'-ge*, was situated near the Presbyterian Mission and consisted of milled-wood homes. Parents sent their children to school and encouraged the speaking of English. Hence it was dubbed the "Make-Believe White Men" village. A larger centralized village, *Bikude*, was comprised of earth lodges and tipis. Its inhabitants maintained many pre-reservation cultural practices (society dances, buffalo hunting, clothing styles), continued to speak the Omaha language, and were often referred to by the Indian Agents as "primitive." Residents of *Jan-(th)ca'-te* (Wood Eaters) south of Bikude acquired their name from the practice of cutting timber from the Missouri River bluffs and selling it to the steamboat crews who stopped at nearby Decatur.

Oral histories of pre-reservation life recount that the Omaha learned about the earth lodge from the Arikara or Pawnee. While in the eastern woodlands the Omaha used bark-covered houses. Earth lodges up to 40 feet in diameter were built for village use and often arranged in relation to matrilineal residence patterns. The buffalo hide teepee was employed during bison hunts and erected in association with patrilineal clan patterns. By the late nineteenth century earth lodges had given way to mill-cut lumber houses built on the floor plan of area white settlers. Teepee covers were sewn from cotton canvas material, and then faded from the landscape. By the end of the twentieth century, tipis are only used by the Native American Church for all-night worship services, and by a few community members at the annual August powwow. Most Omaha at Macy reside in housing projects built through federal programs and managed by the tribe. Other tribal members rent or own houses, apartments, or mobile homes in the surrounding countryside and non-Indian towns. A general shortage of quality affordable housing on the reservation has been a chronic issue during the latter half of the twentieth century.

Pre-reservation Omaha practiced an annual cycle of spring planting, summer hunting, fall harvesting, and winter hunting. Women owned and worked the garden plots containing maize, beans, and squash. They also exploited a wide range of native plants for food and medicines. The tribe participated in annual summer and winter buffalo hunts into western Nebraska and Kansas. While the buffalo held great ceremonial and economic significance, the people also depended upon deer, antelope, bear, smaller mammals, birds, fish, and

crustaceans. The Omaha were active in the fur trade until its collapse at the end of the nineteenth century. The Omaha successfully transitioned to American style farming and produced annual surpluses using imported seeds and agricultural techniques. As a result of the loss of land ownership following allotment many Omaha innovated and began leasing their dwindling land base. Most shifted to a wage labor economy. Today, the post-reorganization tribal government, together with the local public school district, provides the majority of the jobs in an otherwise economically depressed rural agricultural area.

Ceremonial and utilitarian arts which were practiced prior to the early 1900s but which have since disappeared include the manufacturing of woven rush mats, painted rawhide containers, wooden burl bowls, buffalo horn spoons, canvas or hide teepee covers, bows and arrows, heddle woven beadwork, finger woven sashes and bags. Today, the majority of the Omaha tribe participates in ceremonial activities by attending hand games, war dances, gourd dances, Native American Church meetings, funerals, sweat lodge, and the recently acquired sun dance. Most participants rely on a very few community members to fabricate the dance regalia, ceremonial objects, and traditional giveaway objects needed for these activities. While many community members can produce common beadwork items (belts, hair barrettes, moccasins), few individuals create the more technically challenging bead work items (applique breechcloths and blankets, net beaded feather fans and gourd rattle handles, diagonal hair pendants). Few individuals have maintained the arts in other traditional media (feather, wood, ribbon, cloth, stone, rawhide, leather, bone, and quill). While

maintaining several distinct features and motifs in their material culture, the Omaha also borrow and innovate from surrounding cultures.

The Omaha provided quantities of fur-bearing animal hides, bison robes and related products, along with agricultural produce (primarily corn), and horses to the fur trade of the late eighteenth and early nineteenth century. As bison declined, agricultural production of corn, wheat, and potatoes increased, and they were routinely traded to whites and neighboring tribes. The Omaha were noted for maintaining quality blooded horses through the early 1900s. With the loss of lands and changing wage labor practices, currently the tribe produces only small quantities of agricultural products for market. Occasionally the tribe has sold timber from tribal lands, primarily for utility-type lumber production. A tobacco finishing plant was in operation producing packaged cigarettes in the late 1990s. A few individuals maintain private gardens from which small, sporadic amounts of dried corn and hominy are produced for sale, trade, or gift-giving in an informal market. Dance regalia and other ceremonial paraphernalia are also produced in limited quantities for sale, trade, or as gifts.

Prior to the 1850s, the Omaha divided much of the labor along gender and age lines. Females were responsible for all child and home care, including collecting fire wood, hauling potable water, moving and maintaining tipis, and building and maintaining earth lodges. They developed and maintained the gardens as well as gathered other plant materials for home use. They shared these duties with their female kin and offspring. The result was that the teepee, earth lodge, and products of the garden were the property of the woman. The

husband and other male kin would assist in some of the heavier duties related to earth lodge construction and gardening. Participation in the fur trade placed extra burdens upon the females to prepare furs and hides for market. Males hunted, trapped, fished, and provided defensive protection for the community. Political organization and ceremonial duties were the responsibility of the men, although the completion of such duties often relied upon the labor and cooperation of the wife and female kin. Young boys herded the horses and hunted small game. Young girls provided childcare to younger siblings while assisting their female kin in other duties. The assimilation pressures of the reservation have removed many of the hunting and defensive warfare duties from the men. Men still principally fill ceremonial and political roles. Female roles related to home and childcare have not changed. Since World War II women have expanded into the wage labor economy by taking jobs in all areas of the community. Some women have entered the political arena and have served on the tribal council or as government program directors. Beyond gender and age, some ceremonial duties remain fixed according to clan membership.

Garden plots and earth lodge sites were generally the property of the wife, her sister(s), and daughter(s). The tribe collectively laid claim to the lands upon which they routinely hunted. The communally held reservation lands were allotted to individuals beginning in 1871, and continuing through the early 1900s. Surplus communal lands were sold to white settlers and land speculators. Lacking funds to develop their newly acquired farmsteads, many Omaha resorted to leasing their lands to neighboring whites. Much of the land is in federal trust

status so it cannot be used as collateral for development loans. The bulk of Omaha lands have been subsequently sold or lost to outsiders. The economic options available for the remaining lands have often been diminished for all practical purposes following the death of the original and succeeding owners. Without estate planning, many allotments pass into undivided ownership among increasing numbers of patrilineal and/or matrilineal heirs. The result is that land remains leased to outsiders, the original allotment house often stands empty, and the heirs reside in tribally managed housing in Macy. The tribal government is currently developing land management programs to protect natural resources such as game, water, and soil.

There are ten major clans, of which many are further divided into smaller discrete sub-clans. Collectively, the clans are visualized as a circular encampment called the Húthuga, symbolizing the cosmos. The clans are equally divided along an east-west axis into a moiety system often described as northern, male, sky clans and southern, female, earth clans. The clan governs duties, rights, taboos, and personal names. Membership is ideally patrilineal but increasingly includes matrilineal trends in order to incorporate children produced by non-Omaha fathers. The role of the clan has atrophied in some families, but remains a strong symbol throughout the community. Today, most contemporary Omaha summarily refer to the existence of only seven clans, usually listing clans associated with the pre-reservations Council of Seven.

Kinship follows a bifurcate merging pattern. Cross cousins are referred to as "Aunt" and "Uncle." As generational distance increases, these terms are often

modified to become "Little Aunt" and "Little Uncle." Parallel cousins in the first generation are referred to as "Brother" and "Sister." The traditional Omaha kinship system is used as a model of one of the major classification systems in anthropology relating to cousin terms. The imposition of the Euro-American descent model has since created a mixture of surname options and kinship patterns, including the acceptance of the term "Cousin." Public and private use of correct kin terms, although increasingly rendered in the English language, remains a cultural ideal. Kin terms are used to account for blood, marriage, fictive (including Pan-Indian and non-Native), ceremonial, and potential relationships. Individual kin terms are linguistically marked by the gender of the speaker.

Clan exogamy is the preferred practice, and moiety exogamy is held as the cultural ideal. Potential marriage partners are identified through the use of kin terms that reflect the possibility of future claims. The practice of both sororate and levirate marriage rules help to hold the family together, especially for supporting children in the event of the death of a parent. In the early reservation era friends served as courtship go-betweens. Since chaperones routinely escorted all girls when outdoors, young men had to wait surreptitiously at the water spring or other location for an opportune moment to talk to a girl. Love songs played on a flute from afar were one method of indicating an interest in a girl. Marriage was often by elopement in order for the girl to escape the claims of all her potential marriage partners. After escaping to the home of one of the boy's relatives, the young couple would return a few days later to the girl's parent's home. The boy's relatives presented gifts to the girl's relatives. If they were

accepted, it signaled the recognition of the marriage. Post-marital residence depends upon the resources available from the families of the bride and groom and may shift between matrilineal and patrilineal before becoming neolocal. Polygamy existed into the early twentieth century, although it was not the rule. A man rarely had more than two wives, and these were generally sisters or aunt and niece. The practice was more often found among the prominent men who had political and ritual duties requiring extra labor and resources. Divorce was not uncommon. An abusive husband could be turned out, the children remain with the mother, and the father's male kin expected to continue to support the family. An immoral wife could be turned out and punished by her husband. Generally the Omaha did not favor the changing of the marriage relation due to whim. Today, courtship behaviors more closely follow mainstream white society, and serial monogamy is the general practice. Long-term, stable marriages remain the honored ideal.

From the early reservation days most households have been extended collateral households to varying degrees, consisting of a husband, wife, children, one or more grandparents, and occasionally the married or unmarried sibling(s) of the parents or children and their family. The pattern continues through the twentieth century, although single parent and female-headed households are not uncommon. The composition of the household is flexible as the needs of other kin change. Some households include one or more unrelated persons living with, and assisting, the family. Overall composition remains linked to economic factors, availability of housing, and personal preferences. Figures on family size are not

available. The father is recognized as having the highest authority, but the mother exercises equal authority regarding the welfare of the children. The grandparent(s) are often the primary caregivers while the parents and other adults are working or absent.

Inheritance of clan name, clan rights, land, and other tangible objects usually follows a patrilineal pattern. However ritual knowledge and rights may also pass from the wife's kin to her husband or children depending upon the receiver having shown a marked interest in such knowledge. Most of a person's personal property is distributed to kin and non-kin mourners at the funeral. Without estate planning, most land passes into undivided ownership among increasing numbers of patrilineal and/or matrilineal heirs, sometimes including adopted kin and step-children.

The first line of socialization for all children is the mother, who may be supported by other adults in the extended family. Physical punishment is not a norm. Good manners, including respect for self and others, are the ideal. Children are viewed as individuals and are understood to develop at their individual pace. The Turning of the Child and other pre-reservation rites of passage have given way to Pre-School, Kindergarten, and High School graduation ceremonies. Those children who show an interest in the dance arena or any of the various religious ceremonies are introduced individually into those respective venues. Long-term relationships are often established with adults who serve as mentors and sponsors. Teasing as a socialization tool is widespread and is applied to both children and adults, especially between particular kin.

The community remains loosely organized around the clan and moiety system with membership being ideally patrilineal. The clans are symbiotic in that the performance of most social or religious rites requires the assistance of other clans. Social stratification is moderately flexible and quite complex. It is based upon a family's historic and contemporary practice of religious ceremonies, an individual's ownership of ceremonial materials, their relationship to traditional leaders and/or women bearing the Mark of Honor, clan membership, blood quantum, and attainment of educational or economic standing. Until World War II, several secret societies existed in which membership was attained by virtue of a dream, vision, or purchase. Social groups and clubs focused on the maintenance of Omaha cultural practices continue to emerge and evolve both on- and off-reservation.

Through the late nineteenth century the Omaha were governed by the Council of Seven, whose representatives came from seven specific sub clans. The council's authority originated from, and was sanctioned by, the existence and use of two Sacred Pipes that represented the moiety system. Keepers of the Sacred Pipes, Sacred Tent of War, Sacred Buffalo Hide, and Sacred Pole attended council meetings but held no voting authority. There was no tribal assembly or tribal council, per se. Duties of the Council of Seven included maintaining internal peace and order, securing allies, setting the date of the annual buffalo hunt, and confirming the man who was to act as leader for that hunt. Soldiers were appointed by the council to carry out their commands and to mete out punishment for transgressions of tribal law. Aggressive warfare was

sanctioned and controlled by the Sacred Packs of War. Clans did not have a chief or council, nor could a clan act by itself in a political sense. United States Government officials appointed pliant men as "paper chiefs" whose presence and influence disrupted the traditional order.

The effects of generations of poverty, alcoholism, and conflicting control policies implemented by non-Omaha agencies have wreaked havoc on the Omaha social control system. In pre-Reservation days, the authority of the chiefs and social order was safeguarded by various punishments. A man who made light of the authority of the chiefs or sacred packs of war could be struck with a staff tipped with rattlesnake poison and be killed. That practice has been discontinued. In modern times as in the past, most offenses are directed towards an individual and tend to be dealt with by the families involved, although taking the law into one's own hands is frowned upon. Perpetrators of assault can expect themselves or their relatives to be attacked by the victim's family. The husband or near relatives often will administer punishment to a man committing adultery. A wife might assault a woman who shows undue attention towards her husband. Mainstream U.S. and tribal law codes and institutions are in place, but questions about jurisdiction and enforcement create conflict. Within the family unit, an adult talking to or admonishing a child is the primary form of social control. Corporal punishment is generally frowned upon. Teasing is a common control tactic. Ostracism is occasionally used. The belief in a supernatural penalty for inappropriate actions, and attempts to direct supernatural punishment towards

someone, are fragmentary. Tribal government leaders, Native American Church leaders, and respected elders are occasionally called upon to arbitrate conflicts.

While the Omaha have maintained a legacy of "peace" with the federal government, armed conflicts with others were not uncommon prior to the 1900s. In order to maintain control of the fur and gun trade of the Middle Missouri, the Omaha battled on one occasion with the Spanish. Causes for battles with surrounding tribes included raids by encroaching groups, retaliation, and the seeking of war trophies and battlefield prestige. Adversaries included various bands of Dakota and Lakota Sioux, Arikara, Cheyenne, Pawnee, Oto, and the Omaha's nearest kin, the Ponca. Alliances and peace were established and breached through time. The performance of the *Wawaⁿ* or Calumet Ceremony was one method of establishing a peace. Peace with the Arikara probably facilitated the transferal of local strains of maize and earth lodge technology to the Omaha. Peace with the Pawnee permitted joint use of the prime buffalo hunting grounds of the central Great Plains.

Omaha citizens have served in the American military from earliest times. Over 260 men reportedly enlisted in the Union Army by 1865 (ARCIA 1865:576). Many served in World War I, World War II, and more recent conflicts in Vietnam, Korea, and the Middle East. Struggles with outside groups in the twentieth century have included bloodless but fiercely fought legal battles to retain or reclaim sovereign Omaha rights and resources. The unarmed occupation of the Blackbird Bend area of Iowa, followed by lengthy court battles, resulted in the return of some lands reserved under the 1854 Treaty. Occasional

legal actions against the neighboring Winnebago seem to reflect competition for limited resources rather than any fundamental animosity.

Prior to the influences of Christianization and Americanization, the Omaha believed in a continuous and invisible life force called *Wakóⁿda*. This force manifested itself in the duality of motion and the action of mind and body as well as in the permanency of structure and form as seen in the physical environment. This duality was further developed in the conceptualization of the universe as containing male and female parts whose union perpetuated order in all living things, including people's lives. Religious rites and social organizations such as the húthuga moiety system and the presence of two principal chiefs symbolized this concept. Young males would maintain a solitary fast for four days on a hilltop, praying to Wakóⁿda for help throughout life. Since the early 1900s, traditional beliefs have melded with multiple denominations of mainstream American Christianity and the syncretic peyote religion as codified in the Native American Church to produce a complex, and sometimes conflicting world view. The conception of Wakóⁿda has acquired many of the anthropomorphic characteristics associated with the Christian God including becoming the father of Jesus Christ.

Prior to the 1900s, every clan and sub-clan had a particular family to which belonged the hereditary right to furnish the keeper of the sacred objects of the clan or tribe together with its rituals and rites. The keeper alone possessed the authority to perform the ceremony. His son would follow him in this duty.

Assimilation, Christianization, and the deleterious effects of alcohol have contributed to the decline and disappearance of nearly all pre-Reservation practices. The majority of Omaha maintain a pluralistic religious practice through participation in Native American Church, attenuated traditional Omaha, and mainstream Christian ceremonies. Leaders of the Native American Church acquire their authority by demonstrating a belief in the church and its worldview, sponsoring prayer meetings, and receiving the ceremonial instruments with the blessing of church leaders through petition or inheritance. The use of personal medicine bundles, pipes, sweat lodge ceremonies, and the newly acquired sun dance ceremony follow a similar pattern.

All important changes in life are marked, to varying degree, with either a family or public ceremony. All ceremonies involve the offering of prayers to Wakó'da. Many include the sharing of food provided by the ceremony's sponsor, and the redistribution of material goods through gift-giving. Family or public feasting marks such life events as birth and birthdays, recovery from illness, graduation or social promotion of any kind, marriage and anniversary, homecoming, death, and memorials. Tribal and national holidays are also observed. Joyous occasions may also be marked by the addition of a war dance, hand game, gourd dance, or Native American Church prayer service. One child may be singled out of a family to be the focus of a total of four yearly birthday dances or church meetings. Memorial meetings or feasts often follow this four-year pattern. Since the mid-twentieth century, prayer service leaders in the

Native American Church have primarily filled the role of Man-In-Charge at most ceremonial and social functions.

In the twentieth century, artistic production and performance remains culturally centered on the big drum of the dance arena and the small drum of the Native American Church prayer service. The ability to accurately render old songs and create new songs is an honored skill. Singing and drumming is a male role, although women often harmonize the chorus of the songs. A few males play the cedar flute. Types of dancing are identified by the style of movement and distinctive regalia including male traditional war dance or Hethúshka, fancy dance, straight dance, grass dance, female traditional buckskin, traditional cloth, fancy shawl, and jingle dress. The Kiowa gifted the gourd dance to the Omaha in the late 1960s. Literary production, mostly in the form of poetry or ethnohistorical sketches, is limited. A few individuals play Western musical instruments beyond the public school music program for their own enjoyment. A handful of community members work in oil, water colors, charcoal, and pen and ink media for local consumption.

Prior to allotment, several secret societies had knowledge of medicine, roots, plants, and curative practices. Original knowledge was gained through visions or dreams and tended to be specialized within each society. For example, the *Téithaethe*, "those whom the buffalo have shown compassion," had knowledge for the curing of wounds. The Omaha utilized a vast pharmacopoeia derived from plants, animals, and minerals. Other techniques included the use of prayer, song, massage, sucking, and hacking (controlled bloodletting). By the

late twentieth century all traditional knowledge and practice of medicine had nearly disappeared. Western medicine is used for most daily or chronic medical needs, and several Omaha have entered the health care field. Some community members rely on Native American Church prayer services and the ritual ingestion of peyote (*Lophophora williamsii*) to treat a wide range of illness. Sweat lodge and other prayer ceremonies are sometimes used to treat physical and mental illness.

Through the early 1900s, the Milky Way was believed to be the path made by the spirits of people as they passed to the realm of the dead. The family or the society in which the deceased was a member prepared the body for burial. Burial was usually within a day of death. The deceased was placed in a shallow hilltop grave in a seated position facing east. Poles were arranged over the opening upon which earth was heaped into a mound. Personal belongings were left at the grave. Some mourners cut their hair or made blood offerings by slashing the forearms. A fire was kept burning at the grave for four days to cheer the deceased in his journey. Food was left at the grave as a token of remembrance. The spirit of a murderer never reached the afterworld but was forced to wander the earth. By the end of the twentieth century the Omaha funeral has undergone profound changes. The embalmed body lies in state, usually in the home of a kinsman, for four nights and is buried after a public funeral on the fifth day. Mourners visit the family, partake of regular meals and prayers for the deceased, and keep all night vigils. A wake service or Native American Church funeral service marks the fourth night. A key component of the final all night vigil is the

opportunity for family members to speak to the deceased for the last time. This is consonant with the older belief that under certain conditions the realm of the dead is accessible to the living, and the dead can lend their assistance in the avocations with which they have been familiar. As in the past, the environment of the afterlife is believed to be similar to the physical world, although free of want and illness. It appears that the conception of supernatural punishment and reward after death is derived from Christianity. The modern funeral involves a communal feast, distribution of gifts to mourners, and a graveside blessing. Males will assist in both digging and filling the grave. Interment is in a modern casket inserted into a rough board box. Stone markers are used. There is a central hilltop tribal cemetery at Macy and several smaller cemeteries near old allotment homes. Dancing, singing, and other social events are normally canceled while a body is above ground. Stories of ghostly visitors remain common, especially in old village sites, abandoned or old allotment homes, and near certain geographical sites. Of all the ceremonies performed in the twentieth century, it can be said that the Omaha funeral is the single activity in which nearly all Omaha, whether traditionalist or assimilated, will participate. It embodies the fundamentals of Omaha worldview including the value of kinship, food sharing, self-sacrifice, reciprocity, and the interrelation of the physical body and spiritual soul.

In the summer and fall of 1930, anthropologists Margaret Mead and her husband, Reo Fortune, performed fieldwork on the Omaha Reservation. Fortune was interested in the esoteric knowledge and its organization in the community.

His findings became part of *Omaha Secret Societies* (1932), a monograph in the Columbia University Contributions to Anthropology series. Mead reported that Fortune used interpreters to interview the elderly informants. It suggests that the elderly keepers of knowledge preferred to use the Omaha language. Mead, on the other hand, worked surreptitiously observing and talking to women and children for her own study on the condition of Indian women, *The Changing Culture of an Indian Tribe*. She remarked that, "The conditions of work and the lack of the [Omaha] language precluded research on little children" (1932:xiii). It suggests that children were still being born in the late 1920s as Omaha-only speakers. This barrier to research was balanced by her belief that the existence of three generations of English-speaking people would produce sufficient data. Mead surmised that it was not justifiable to take the time to learn the language for the purpose of fieldwork in a disintegrated culture.

Mead's description of Macy and its environs comes a generation after the Omaha received fee patents to their trust lands, allowing land to be sold. Tribal economy eroded with the increasing loss of land to white settlers and speculators.

The list of the commercial establishments available at the time, included:

two stores, two restaurants, a post office, a shoe and harness repair shop, two filling stations, a garage and car wrecking establishment, a blacksmith, a Pentecostal church, a deserted white Presbyterian church, a pretentious school building..., the agency building, ...and the mission [Mead 1932:32].

Mead (1932:30) describes the 1930 Omaha culture as "deleted and attenuated,... existing in a just attained and slender equilibrium." Some of the attenuated aspects of Omaha culture that had been retained included

...notably the accumulation of counts so that one's daughter might be tattooed, burial and mourning ceremonials including the "give away" of all the personal possessions of the deceased, the watch at the grave, the contribution to the mourners, and the mourner's subsequent distribution of gifts to "end mourning." The kinship system was kept, in terminology-exogamic rules and gentile taboos...[Mead 1932:28]

Completely abandoned customs included use of the menstrual hut and menstrual taboos, early childhood rituals (e.g., Turning of the Child, Dedication of the Boys to Thunders), fasting for religious experience, and both military and civil chieftainship.

Mead recognized that the Omaha made a significant adjustment to white culture with the adoption of the syncretic Peyote religion which arrived in 1906.

She noted that other adjustments had been made

without sacrificing their tribal individuality, without giving up their language, [but notably] with the surrender of half of their institutions, their political autonomy, and their existence as a self-governing community, and by absorbing a fair number of traits of white material culture. But they had made for themselves a sort of existence, although it was only the shadow of the rich complexity of their former lives [Mead1932:29].

Acknowledged as still comprising a coherent standard, Mead surmised that if the economic base had been left intact, further changes would have been kept at bay for a generation or more. In other words, the loss of a land base resulted in the loss of a viable economy, and hence, was a catalyst for dramatic changes in both cultural beliefs and social practices.

An attempt to reverse land loss came with the passage of the Indian Reorganization Act of 1934. While permitting tribes to reorganize their traditional governments under a more western model, it halted land allotments and returned unallotted surplus lands to tribal ownership. The Omaha ratified a constitution and bylaws by a vote of 311 for, and 27 against, in an early 1936 election. Later that year a corporate charter was ratified by a vote of 221 to 14. With these actions the Omaha shifted to a popularly elected seven-member Tribal Council holding three-year terms. Off-reservation tribal members were disenfranchised. Council members were faced with a growing population and a lack of revenues. Tribal lands were cleared east of Macy and the timber sold to finance government operations. The cleared lands became part of a farming operation to supply additional funds (Awakuni-Swetland 2001).

Data from a 1946 survey compiled by Bureau of Indian Affairs (BIA) personnel for inclusion in an unidentified congressional report noted that of 175 families, 134 had an income under \$250 per annum, 20 under \$500 per annum, 9 under \$1000 per annum, and only 12 above \$1250 per annum (Longwell 1961:23). In the years following World War II, the Omaha had lost most of their western lands and were regrouping along the Highway 75 corridor on the eastern Missouri River bluffs, the location of the early reservation villages. Of the 1,127 persons living on the reservation in 1956, nearly 75% were half-blood or more Omaha. Of the 1,087 enrolled members living off-reservation, over 50% congregated in Lincoln, Omaha, and Sioux City. Overall, the Omaha remained impoverished. In Longwell's thesis on the status of Omaha lands in the mid

1950s, he reported high unemployment, the lack of demand for Indian labor for farm work, and the lack of industry on the reservation. The depressed economic situation mirrored his assessment of the education environment, including poorly maintained facilities, educators untrained to meet the particular cultural and social needs of the Omaha children, and a generalized lack of interest in the community towards acquiring an adequate education which resulted in a high truancy rate.

Many policies of the Indian New Deal were reversed following WWII. In retrospect, policies such as the Indian Reorganization Act helped to further the assimilation of communal tribal nations into the western mainstream model. Termination of federal responsibilities for Indian affairs began in the 1950s. While the Omaha avoided termination of their tribal status, they were alarmed when the BIA discussed transferring many Omaha services to county and state agencies as cost-cutting measures. The Tribal Council Chairman surmised that the tribe would experience the same effect as termination (Awakuni-Swetland 2001). They were especially anxious when their close cultural kin, the Northern Ponca, were terminated in 1962.

Thus the Omaha continued to struggle with many fundamental survival issues. They had a growing population, a diminishing viable land base as properties acquired heirs in an exponentially expanding manner, insufficient housing, insecure revenues for the operation of their government, and nearly one-half of the enrolled population disenfranchised due to their off-reservation residence. In 1958 an urban journalist characterized the Omaha as being

...among the most culturally disintegrated and socially ill in the country. ...the 800 residents were a divided people, barely able to recall the last time they all did something together [Miller 1958:2].

While this was surely an exaggerated assessment, it was probably widely held by non-Indians. Tribal Council Chairman Alfred "Buddy" Gilpin summed up the situation when he characterized the BIA as having taken care of the Omaha in a way that made the Omaha forget how to care for themselves. Perhaps he had caught a glimpse of the future when he told a *World Herald* reporter (1958: B11), "Today, [the Omaha] are just waking up and beginning to hate this helplessness."

For the Omaha, the current cultural renaissance has been ongoing since at least the late 1960s and early 1970s. For a useful summary chronology of developments during this period as it affected Plains tribes, see Fowler's (2003:113-137) *The Columbia Guide to American Indians of the Great Plains* chapter on The Self-Determination Era. The stimuli for the renaissance are a combination of many factors. These include increased expressions of native sovereignty brought about by the economic and political reforms demanded by grassroots and national groups such as the American Indian Movement (AIM). Members of the Omaha tribe participated in the AIM occupation of Wounded Knee, South Dakota, the occupation of Alcatraz Island, and several protest demonstrations in Nebraska. Federal policies began shifting to encourage self-determination without termination. The 1975 Self-Determination and Education Assistance Act gave the tribal government the opportunity to contract for Bureau of Indian Affairs-controlled programs and garner overhead costs which they could apply to other tribal programs. Significant monetary awards realized through

Indian Claims Commission settlements funded early housing construction and infrastructure improvements at Macy. This was followed by Housing and Urban Development programs aimed at reducing the critical housing shortage across the reservation. The 1978 Indian Child Welfare Act returned a measure of control over the welfare of Omaha children to the Omaha government. Changes in the political climate, as well as the initiation of casino gaming and other economic ventures, have attracted the return of many expatriate Omaha to the reservation. In 1994, the Omaha Tribe reported an enrolled population of over 7,000. Well over one-half of the enrolled members of the tribe live off-reservation in neighboring urban areas. The tribal government is struggling to create jobs and provide housing for its growing population.

Northeast Nebraska remains primarily an agricultural district. Much of the remaining Omaha lands are comprised of the heavily timbered, but otherwise non-arable Missouri River bluffs with limited economic development potential. In past years the Omaha tribe has run a tribal farming and dairy operation on the Nebraska side of the river. A small but lucrative casino was established on the Iowa side of the river in the 1990s. Competition from surrounding casino operations, both Indian and non-Indian, has since reduced profitability. Other economic development ideas that have been considered or attempted since the 1970s have included an ethanol plant, classic car business, cigarette manufacturing plant, farm equipment manufacturing plant, sportsman camping area, and a convenience store/gasoline station.

Evidence of an Omaha reassertion of political sovereignty includes the partially successful litigation for reclaiming reservation lands at Blackbird Bend. There are ongoing negotiations to remedy jurisdictional problems in law enforcement as well as efforts to control other federal programs operating on the reservation. On the cultural front, in 1989, the Omaha successfully retrieved two of their paramount sacred objects from eastern museums, the Sacred Pole and the White Buffalo Hide. The intention is to provide a cultural heritage center facility to house these and other artifacts and archives for tribal members' use. As the twenty-first century opens a new millennium, the Omaha find themselves continuing to struggle with uninterrupted assimilation pressures. They remain active participants in national discourse related to high profile Native issues of tribal sovereignty, human remains and grave goods repatriation, and economic development through casino gaming.

So, how does this relate to what I am looking for?

The preceding ethnohistoric description tries its best to mirror the origin and evolutionary story of the Omaha as recounted by the majority of today's community members. There are variant descriptions both within and outside of the community. It may be that in the current interest of showing a unified national front in response to the majority mainstream white society, the Omaha have chosen to not speak of examples of past tribal factionalism and discord within its ranks. This may be in keeping with the tradition of not speaking ill of deceased relatives. However, it is important to consider that the oral, archaeological, and

documentary record attests to such conditions in the past. It is my belief that the Omaha have had a social tendency towards individual and small group (i.e., family/clan) decision-making from earliest times. Such behavior often leads to actions that diverge from the group's goals. Various tribal institutions emerged to fuse the many divergent individuals and small groups into a more stable and powerful whole.

A respected elder of the *l'nesabe*, "Black Shoulder Buffalo," clan residing in Omaha, Nebraska, has preserved a story in the oral tradition from the period of Omaha migration out of the wooded east. While it has taken on a resemblance to the story of "The Industrious Ant and the Lazy Grasshopper" of western literature, it illustrates a clan-centered, dispersed sociopolitical arrangement rather than a single integrated tribe. The core of the story tells of the migration westward of the *l'nesabe* and the *Ho'ga*, "Leader," clans. After traveling a great distance, the party decides to remain in one place for a period of rest and reprovisioning. Since it is spring, the *l'nesabe* people proceed to clear some garden space and plant corn and other cultigens. They send hunting parties out to secure quantities of meat and hides. A large earth lodge structure ample enough to accommodate all of the *l'nesabe* is built. Meanwhile, the *Ho'ga* pitch their tents a short distance away and relax with dancing, gambling, and other games. They invite the *l'nesabe* to join them from time to time, but are repeatedly turned down. The *Ho'ga* deride the *l'nesabe* for being consumed by their work. The *l'nesabe* respond that it is not the time to be playing. The seasons turn, and winter arrives. The *l'nesabe* retreat to their well-stocked earth

lodge and close the door against the raging blizzards. Their leader applauds them for having worked so hard to prepare food, fuel, and shelter for the winter. He announces that it is now time to relax and have some fun. They begin to play hand game, dance, and socialize. Meanwhile, the *Hoⁿga* are starving and freezing in their disintegrating tents. They come to the door of the *lⁿkesabe* earth lodge and beg entrance and sustenance. The *lⁿkesabe* leaders agree to admit the *Hoⁿga* but admonish them for having squandered the warm days with games rather than preparing for the inevitable coming of winter. The *Hoⁿga* people are given a place in the back of the earth lodge but are not permitted to join in the festivities. When it is time to eat, the *Hoⁿga* are invited to join the *lⁿkesabe*, but must then return to their place at the back of the lodge. In this manner, the *Hoⁿga*... and by the storyteller's interpretation, the Omaha, were saved by the industry of the *lⁿkesabe*. As well, it was described as a reason for the interconnection between these two clans in social, political, and ritual activities in future years.

The story in its entirety contains a wealth of social and cultural information. Some of the details are at odds with the homogenized origin narrative. For instance, the acquisition of earth lodge technology is usually attributed to a post-Plains era. Of interest here is the composition of the party. Only two clans are named. Of additional interest is that the story has only been told to the author from an *lⁿkesabe* source. Inquiries in the past 30 years, admittedly unsystematic, have not yielded this story from other clans. However, it supports the interpretation of O'Shea and Ludwickson (1992:18) which describes

the Omaha in the early 1700s as being "...dispersed, apparently composed of several autonomous villages or bands." An outcome of a dispersed subsistence pattern would be diversity in experiences, interpretations, and behaviors. Ridington and Hastings (1997), in their discussion of the differences of opinion among contemporary Omaha towards the return of the Sacred Pole from Harvard's Peabody Museum, summed up what I perceive as individual and clan-level polyvocality as follows:

In the 1880s there were differences of opinion among Omahas who spoke to the first anthropologists. Dorsey's publications are famous for the honesty with which he presents the conflicting perspectives of different informants.. The books are full of statements like "Two Crows denies this," "Frank La Flesche denies this," or "These were disputed by La Flesche and Two Crows." However, such inconsistencies are found in documenting any living tradition. Where Dorsey freely reports differences of opinion about tribal organization, Fletcher and La Flesche sometimes present an unrealistic homogeneity of opinion. Differences of opinion continue to be heard among the present generation of Omahas. Now as then, each family and clan passes on information about the tribe's past from its own perspective. Each one looks toward a common center from its own particular direction.

When the tribe camped together in their camp circle, the *hu'thuga*, each clan had its assigned place in the circle. Each one viewed the tents of the Sacred Pole and the White Buffalo Hide from that position. Each was assigned a special place in the ceremonies that pertained to the tribe as a whole. Indeed, the fundamental idea that defines the Omahas as a tribe is the union of different but complementary points of view. In a speech to the tribe in 1988, I [Ridington] quoted Fletcher and La Flesche who said, "When an orator addressed the people of the tribe he did not say *Ho! Omaha!* but *Ho! Inshta'thunda, Hon'gashenu ti agathon kahon!*," which means "Ho! Sky people, Earth people, both sides of the house" ([Fletcher and La Flesche] 1911:138) [Ridington and Hastings 1997:xxii].

So the opportunity for differences of experiences and divergence in interpretations and behaviors existed in the scattered subsistence pattern of the

early 1700s, and became reified in the unique clan positions as they related to the *Húthuga*. Paradoxically, the *Húthuga* is the prime institution developed to create fusion, unity, and consensus.

Fletcher and La Flesche (1911: 85-6) recount the story of the separation of the people following a marital dispute that erupted into open warfare and death between contending groups. The site of the event was *Toⁿwoⁿpezhi*, "Bad Village," on Bow Creek, Nebraska. The result of the conflict was an abandonment of the earth lodge village and the two groups departing, one east, and one south. Years later the Omaha who had relocated to Iowa were encountered by a traveling war party and invited to re-unite with their Nebraska relatives. Of interest here is Fletcher and La Flesche's (1911:85) statement that "It is a story used frequently to be told and is probably historical and suggests how separations may have come about in the more distant past."

Recall that the Omaha divided into three villages when they took possession of their reservation in 1855. War, but more especially the fur trade, furnished opportunities for young men to enhance their wealth and status, challenging the authority of the traditional hereditary leaders in the villages. They and their followers formed factions in the society. In the 1855 case, Joseph La Flesche's "Young Men's Party" with their progressive views about Americanization used the move from Bellevue to the reservation as the occasion to separate themselves and establish the "Make-Believe White Men" village near the Presbyterian Mission.

An example of a tendency towards small group formation can be considered from the early reservation period. As a result of the allotment process, Omaha found themselves isolated on farmsteads scattered across the landscape. The Americanized approach to agriculture changed the nature of farm labor and time required for the maintenance of the new homestead. To this was added the physical distance created between families. The result was the emergence of localized social groups who built and utilized circular dance lodges erected in their respective neighborhoods. At a time when the traditional tribal government system and its sociocultural practices were under attack by federal agents, the dance lodge groups provided a camouflaged refuge for many key ideologies and rituals. The lodges remained intact until the 1940s, and remnants of the social groups can be found in the community today (Awakuni-Swetland 1996).

It is within this perspective of a tendency toward factionalism that I situate contemporary Omaha language ideology, and questions about the programs and policies related to Omaha language retention. One Interviewee summed up the current state of community affairs by describing the lack of pre-existing clan and tribal boundaries whose purposes were to limit confusion and chaos (Wehnona St. Cyr 2001). What I propose is that colonialism and post-colonialism have facilitated the return of chaos and lack of consensus by removing the tribal institutions, the checks and balances, which encouraged conformity and cooperation among otherwise contentious factions.

The following chapter presents a first person account of language use and change based upon my interactions with members of the Omaha community. It more fully describes the inception of the Omaha language classes at the University of Nebraska.

Chapter 2

Omaha Language, 1971-2001: Personal Recollections

Grandson, I have selected a Buffalo Clan name for you.
I think I will name you *l'ngthe To'ga* (Big [Buffalo] Manure)?
Charles Stabler, 1974

Why does a research project focusing on Omaha language use and ideology permit an outsider's perspective, an outsider's voice, to take center stage? Clifford (1988) wrestled with such a question when he examined the emerging concept of ethnographic authority. In the first half of the twentieth century, anthropology saw the development of the practice of intense fieldwork by professionally trained specialists, such as Malinowski, Mead, and Radcliffe-Brown as a "privileged, sanctioned source of data about exotic peoples" (Clifford 1988:24). This first-person authoritative approach came to replace the early methods of ethnographic research based upon, a) new descriptions derived from previously written documents, and b) written descriptions in the third person form, excluding the researcher's persona from the text. First-person participant observation allowed for a richness of ethnographic description previously unattained by researchers relying solely on archival documents. As this new scientific and literary genre - ethnography - matured, it resulted in several innovations or conditions as outlined by Clifford:

First, the persona of the fieldworker was validated, both publicly and professionally. The professional ethnographer was trained in the latest analytic techniques and modes of scientific explanation. This conferred an advantage over amateurs in the field; the professional could claim to get to the heart of a culture more quickly... A prescribed attitude of cultural relativism distinguished the fieldworker from missionaries, administrators, and others...

Second, it was tacitly agreed that the new-style ethnographer, whose sojourn in the field seldom exceeded two years, and more frequently was much shorter, could efficiently “use” native languages without “mastering” them.

Third, the new ethnography was marked by an increased emphasis on the power of observation...A general suspicion of “privileged informants” reflected this systematic preference for the methodical observations of the ethnographer over the interested interpretations of indigenous authorities.

Fourth, certain powerful theoretical abstractions promised to help academic ethnographers “get to the heart” of a culture more rapidly than someone undertaking, for example, a thorough inventory of customs and beliefs....

Fifth, since culture, seen as a complex whole, was always too much to master in a short research span, the new ethnographer intended to focus thematically on particular institutions... parts were assumed to be microcosms or analogies of wholes....

Sixth, the wholes thus represented tended to be synchronic products of short-term research activity... It was all too easy to exclude diachronic processes as objects of fieldwork...[Clifford 1988:30-32].

Of special concern to me are the second, third, and sixth conditions: the ethnographer’s so-called mastery of a native language, the rejection of native authority in favor of the ethnographer’s own observations, and the snapshot view of culture. In my case, thirty years of working with the Omaha language has not resulted in fluency equivalent to my first language. While all Omaha people are functioning English speakers to varying degrees, it does not necessarily mean that every native speaker has the training, ability, or desire to explain the rules of grammar of Omaha. The discounting of native authority outlined by Clifford would further undermine such an exercise. Even a community member with limited knowledge of the native language has much to offer the anthropologist seeking to

understand issues of language and culture change. This does not mean we should discount all anthropological observations from the field. Rather, their validity should be measured based upon the quality of the researcher's interactions in the native community. The depth of descriptive knowledge, the number of experiences (diachronic), and the flavor of one's interpretations are affected by such variables as length of time in the community, native language abilities, level of integration, gender, and personal cultural perspectives.

***Umo'ho' nikashi'ga ama Umo'ho' ie t^he o'?*: The Omaha People Give Me The Language**

Let us begin at the beginning. To paraphrase comedian Steve Martin's classic line, "I was born a poor black child," from the 1979 film "The Jerk," I could say, "I was born a poor red child." In the case of Martin's movie character, he was a white man raised and socialized by a poor black family. In my case, I was born into a white, Lincoln, Nebraska family, but socialized and later adopted as a grandson by an Omaha family. I use the terms "Native American" and "Indian" interchangeably and without prejudice, just as my Omaha relatives do. The following narrative will describe the socialization process with a focus on my observations and experiences related to issues of native language use, language shift, and language attitudes. Before that description can begin, I must provide some background information that will help to situate my foundations and preconceptions about things "Indian."

I do not know where or when the interest in Native American cultures originated in my elementary school days. As a young man reflecting on that question I often attributed it to being the overlooked middle sibling in a very large family. From my perspective, my parents were too busy arguing with my four elder siblings, and too busy doting on my three younger siblings... leaving me out in the cold. In truth that was not the case. Regardless of how it all started, I developed a passion to learn about other cultures. Everything seemed so exotic and enticing in comparison to the homogenized, yet detached, Midwestern lower-middle class culture that I was living.

My older sister followed her friends in joining a co-educational Boy Scouts of America program in Lincoln. Explorer Post 500, the *Wacisa* Indian Dancers, was a junior-senior high school-aged group founded in 1958 that focused its attention on Native American cultures. To my knowledge, there was at least one other such scouting group in La Junta, Colorado, the "Koshare Indian Dancers." The *Wacisa* group was composed almost exclusively of non-Indian youth and their adult advisors who had passed through the regular scouting program. I recall only one or two Native American members in my sister's group. The primary activity of the group was the replication of dance regalia and the performance of Indian dances at public and scouting events around the region. The group choreographed or adapted dances from throughout North America and Mexico, and constructed theatrical props to enhance the show. The group was divided loosely by age, and each subgroup given an Indian name, with the entire membership electing a "head chief" as leader.

As a meddlesome younger brother, I tagged along with my older sister to some of her meetings and activities. I quickly made acquaintance with the head adult leader who noted my enthusiasm for Indian culture and encouraged me to join the group. In fact, he permitted me to join a full year before my age made me eligible. I set to work constructing my first dance regalia featuring a turkey tail feather bustle and all the necessary beadwork and accoutrements. I learned the dances, traveled with the group to performances, and tried to make sense of what I was experiencing. The songs that accompanied each dance were obviously Native American in origin, but I never heard anyone offer a translation. In effect, we were simply repeating a rote pattern of sounds with questionable accuracy. By the time I joined the group, the Native American members had dropped out. Most of the group seemed satisfied with the lack of Indian membership or interaction with the local Indian community. The high school-aged members and many adult advisors seemed more interested in the co-educational “recreation” opportunities being offered instead of pursuing research and outreach to Indians.

After two years I had outgrown my dance regalia. I was determined to assemble a dance outfit that looked more like those worn by the Indian men I had encountered in my travels and research. My older sister introduced me to an Omaha classmate who agreed to introduce me to an elder relative who was a regular dancer on the powwow circuit. I was given the telephone number of an Omaha couple living on the other side of town. Proceeding with the blind faith of youth, I called the number and spoke to Theodore (Ted) White, Jr. I told him that

I heard he was a dancer in the powwow arena, that he knew something about making dance regalia, and asked if he could help me put together an outfit. To my relief, and excitement, he agreed to meet with me. I did not know at the time that I had used the appropriate Omaha formula to petition for help by 1) acknowledging the individual's authority on the matter, 2) admitting my lack of knowledge, and 3) begging assistance. On the designated Saturday I arrived at Ted and Betty White's home. They lived in an upscale, lake front neighborhood... confusing my previously held notions about where and how the Indians of Lincoln lived. We made our introductions and Betty provided a light lunch. Then Ted brought out a suitcase containing his dance regalia. He showed me a stunning pair of colorful fluffy feather fancy dance bustles (black and orange), topped by a fluffy feather-on-wire headpiece. Even from my limited exposure to real "Indian Country," i.e., "Oklahoma" dancers, I recognized his outfit as being very trendy for the late 1960s. Ted and Betty gave me a list of materials to gather and invited me to return to begin work on my own outfit. I spent my Saturdays over the next few months at their home assembling my bustles and feather crest headpiece. It was an eye-catching red and blue fancy dance regalia unlike any in the Wacisa group.

Shortly after completing my new regalia the Whites invited me to accompany them to a summer dance in Oklahoma in order to "break in" my outfit. My parents surprised me when they gave permission for me to go with "strangers" on a 500 mile trip. It reinforced my idea about not being too important to my parents. Years later my mother confided that they had let me go because,

unlike some of my other siblings at the time, they saw that I exercised good judgement and was making trustworthy friends. So, I accompanied Ted and Betty, their dachshund Charlie, and one of their nephews who was about my age. The dance was held near Ponca City, Oklahoma, in an open-air pavilion situated in the middle of a dusty red field surrounded by wheat stubble and oil pumping rigs. The pavilion was hot and crowded. During a break in the afternoon dance we were sitting on the benches surrounding the dance arena. A Ponca man sitting behind us leaned forward and asked Ted about the two boys dancing with him. Ted casually responded that we were two of his nephews from Nebraska. It was at that moment I realized I was the only “white boy” in this crowd of several hundred people. And yet, I had been validated and included in the scene... a very “Omaha” practice.

Over the next few years I would accompany Ted and Betty to more dances in Oklahoma, Kansas, and Nebraska. Meanwhile in the Wacisa group I rose through the ranks and was elected head chief in 1969 or 1970. I became part of a handful of adult advisors and youth members who wanted to inject more authenticity, more “Indianness,” into our group. I invited local Omaha to bring a drum and their dancers to one of our dance practices. Members of the Sheridan, Saunsoci, Stabler, and Phillips families were at that activity. In turn, the Wacisas were invited to a Lincoln Indian Club powwow held at a rural church camp near Milford, Nebraska. Our endeavors were short lived. Soon our revolutionary efforts began to chafe at the white sensibilities of the majority of the group. In 1973, several of us were told to either abandon this push for “Indianness” nonsense, or

leave the Explorer Post. Shortly after that, five or six of us departed. We regrouped for a brief period as the Great Plains Indian Hobbyist Association (GPIHA). I began work on my third fancy dance regalia while attending Indian- and white-sponsored powwows in the region. The new group was short lived as life-changes distracted and slowly dismembered GPIHA. My feelings of disappointment at being “kicked out” of the Wacisa group, followed by the dissolution of GPIHA, hit me fairly hard. However, there was a silver lining to the dark cloud sitting on my teenage shoulders. I did not know it at the time, but I was on the threshold of a major shift in my Indian activities. As for the Wacisa group, they slowly fell into decline and disbanded a few years later.

Umo'ho' ie t'e webaxu: The Written Omaha

Autumn, 1971, marked the beginning of my high school years. My eldest brother was engaged in the “back to nature” movement occurring at the time. He talked about making himself a tipi, learning some Indian survival skills, and moving out into the woods. In September he asked me to accompany him to the opening night of Omaha language classes being offered at the Lincoln Indian Center. Prior to this time I had never been to the Center. It was located at 9th and O Streets, upstairs, above Maria's Bar and Grill. My brother never attended that class, but I did. There were twenty or more students. About one-half were Omaha, the rest were mostly non-Indian students from the University of Nebraska. The class was scheduled to meet two nights a week. The teacher was Elizabeth Saunsoci Stabler (Swetland 1977:ix) (Figure 2.1). With that chance

encounter I started on the path to becoming a better human being through the vehicle of learning the Omaha language. Elizabeth and her husband, Charles (Figure 2.2) (Charlie, to everyone), opened the door to their home - opened the door to Omaha culture - welcoming me with tolerance, compassion, and humor.



Figure 2.1 Elizabeth Saunsoci Stabler (1905-1985) ca. 1973. Photo by Kevin Higley, Daily Nebraskan. Figure 2.2 Charles D. Stabler, Jr. (1900-1992) ca. 1973. Photo by Mark Swetland.

Mrs. Stabler was using an original copy of the Twenty-seventh Annual Report of the Bureau of American Ethnology (1911), written by Alice C. Fletcher (Figure 2.3) and Francis La Flesche (Figure 2.4), as her guide. The book contained subject lists of Omaha words that we memorized for class (Appendix B). I found copies of the reprinted two-volume edition published by the University

of Nebraska Press. Once I caught on to the orthography, I volunteered to help Elizabeth write words for the classes. A typical class meeting gathered around a large table with Elizabeth at the head. She would have a copy of the Fletcher and La Flesche book at hand but only consulted it rarely. She would have me write a list of Omaha and English words, usually grouped by subjects, on a legal tablet. Students were asked to repeat the words in turn, and to copy the words onto their own tablets. Sometimes the words were put into simple sentences, such as, "Give me X," or "I have X."



Figure 2.3 Alice Cunningham Fletcher as a young woman. National Anthropological Archives, Smithsonian Institution. Figure 2.4 Francis La Flesche ca. 1900. From the *Twenty-seventh Annual Report of the Bureau of American Ethnology* (1911: Plate 1).

We were not given a pronunciation guide of any sort, syntax instruction, or orthography instruction. These shortcomings were noted by some of the students

and their parents as the weeks progressed. In retrospect, I am unsure just how much Omaha Elizabeth could read. I suspect that when she was reading, she would use the English in combination with the Omaha to know what to say. I never experienced hearing her read a passage written in Omaha in the text books. Her own fluency probably bridged any gaps in literacy. My readiness to be her secretary may have facilitated her not having to grapple with the details of literacy. I just don't know. I realize now that Elizabeth assumed that the students were functionally literate in English and able to read and take notes. From my personal observations, for many of the Native children in the 1970s, that was an unfounded presumption. Many of the Native students who were my age or younger in the class clearly had difficulty reading and writing.

Unfortunately, these shortcomings in both learning skills and teaching skills caused the class enrollment to dwindle. By late October the average number of students had fallen to two or three. Elizabeth was worried that the low enrollment would cause the Indian Center to cancel the class altogether. I believe she was more concerned about losing this venue for socializing and teaching the language rather than losing the token compensation she was being paid. She asked me if I intended to carry on learning Omaha. When I assured her that I was committed to learning it, even if I was her only student, we decided to continue working.

Sometime during that first winter the idea of putting together a dictionary was hatched. I cannot recall who brought up the idea first. We agreed that it might be a helpful tool, since the Fletcher and La Flesche word lists were limited.

From then on, I started compiling lists of words for Elizabeth to translate. We expected the project to last through the winter, with publication of the dictionary the following summer. In reality, the work stretched for six years culminating with the publication of *Umo'ho' lye of Elizabeth Stabler* (The Omaha Language of Elizabeth Stabler) (Swetland 1977).

The six years from 1971-1977 was a period of intense socialization into Omaha culture in Lincoln and on the Omaha reservation. The Indian Center language classes were cancelled late in the winter of 1971 for lack of attendance. An important lesson in Omaha attitudes and behavior came when Elizabeth invited me to her home at 1844 "G" Street to continue our work on "The Book." I can clearly recall riding my bicycle the two miles from my parents' home to begin our work for the first time. I arrived at Elizabeth and Charlie's rental house, a small one-story property. I cautiously knocked on the door. A tall, slim man with his hair in two long braids answered the door. I explained who I was and that I was to work with "Mrs. Stabler." The man (Carroll) told me his mother was in the kitchen and backed away from the doorway so I could enter. I stepped into a darkened room crowded with adults and children watching a television show while lounging on a sofa, daybeds, and blankets spread on the floor. The room grew quiet as everyone stared at me walking past and into the dining room. I found Elizabeth working in the kitchen at the other end of the house. She cordially invited me to sit at a small table against the west wall. She then bustled about collecting coffee cups, sugar bowl, and spoons from a cupboard. She poured two cups of coffee from a restaurant-sized urn sitting on a nearby

counter. After serving me she sat down at the table. As a way of breaking the ice she mentioned having heard my knock at the door. She instructed me to consider this house as my own home... that the door was always open to me... and to just come in without knocking. Then she turned to point at the cupboard and coffee urn. She was laughing when she told me that she had served me the first time because I was a visitor, but next time I would have to help myself to coffee like other family members do.

Language work proceeded at Grandma Elizabeth's home. A typical winter work session at the Stabler home lasted four or five hours. It included visiting with family members, getting updated on the latest community news or crisis (both Lincoln and Macy), then sharing a meal followed by coffee. While drinking coffee Grandma and I would work on the elicitation of Omaha words and phrases. I would work from a list of words, sometimes in an alphabetized order, or sometimes grouped under a particular subject. I would give Grandma the word and she would provide an Omaha equivalent. Often I would be required to place the word into a sentence or other context. I would record the word using the orthography from Fletcher and La Flesche's *The Omaha Tribe*. Sometimes Grandma gave stories to illustrate a word or concept. Other stories were completely tangential to the dictionary work and seemed meant to inform me of some aspect of Omaha culture or family history. Many times these work sessions were interrupted by community members stopping by for a visit. Occasionally the visitors would join in the language discussion. More often, our work was set aside and attention given to the visitor. Such visits helped to spread the word in the

community about Grandma Elizabeth's language work, and to further validate my own position in relation to that work.

I was drawn early into the community in the role of *iéska*, or translator. In spite of my fledgling abilities, I was increasingly asked by people to offer English translations for their Omaha clan names, or to write a deceased relative's Omaha name so that it could be engraved on the occasional tombstone. Elizabeth and I were asked by the Nebraska Educational Television producers to deliver the famous nineteenth century "Flood" speech of Chief Big Elk in Omaha. It had been recorded in Fletcher and La Flesche (1911:84) in English. We worked for several hours translating the English back to Omaha. Later at the ETV recording studio I was asked to recite the speech for a video soundtrack. It took several attempts before the producers were satisfied that I had pitched my voice low enough to sound "elderly." Months later the video was aired on local television in the early afternoon. At that time the Indian Center was located at 20th and M Streets in Lincoln. It did not have a television set so several of the employees and senior diners crowded into "Daddy's Laundromat" next door to watch the show. After the show, Grandma Elizabeth innocently asked the crowd if they recognized the speaker in the Big Elk speech. Names of several of the older males living on the reservation were offered. Elizabeth laughed and admitted that it was "Uthixide." Needless to say, that stunt solidified the community's attitude about my Omaha abilities... far and above what they actually were! The role of *iéska* has continued to the present, with requests that I speak on behalf of families at give aways, funerals, and feasts, as well as serving as Master of

Ceremonies at social events such as dances and hand games. While most of the speech-making is in English, the community assumes that I can understand more Omaha, that I will employ the appropriate terms of kinship, and because of the caliber of my mentors, will know how to execute the correct Omaha procedures.

Work on the dictionary in a formal sense diminished in the warm days of summer. With the grandchildren on summer break from school, there were many more childcare duties placed on Grandma and Grandpa's shoulders. There were many more social activities (powwows, hand games, gourd dances, family feasts) to prepare for or to attend. I would accompany the Stablers to these activities in Lincoln, Omaha, and Macy. Once I acquired a driver's license, I helped them by serving as a driver in their old station wagon. Both on the road, and at the activities, language material was constantly being presented and discussed in an informal manner. However, extended Omaha conversations were not common. Short phrase Omaha bantering was more the norm. Grandpa Charlie preferred using Omaha for most public speeches. A few times I heard what I took to be fatherly admonishments to his adult children given in the Omaha language while everyone was seated at the dinner table. Grandma Elizabeth rarely gave public speeches at hand games or war dances, following Omaha customs of such acts being controlled by gender and relegated to the woman's male kin. I often heard her conversing with her female peers and same-generation relatives in Omaha. However, she spoke mostly English to her adult children, and only English to her grandchildren. I have always presumed it facilitated childcare tasks by speaking English in the urbanized western setting.

The oldest of their children spoke Omaha to varying degrees, depending upon the venue. Language use and understanding appears to have diminished among the younger siblings. None of the grandchildren who I encountered evidenced any native language ability beyond understanding a handful of simple words or phrases. This pattern of language use was mirrored in other Lincoln Indian families with the same generational mixes. The grandparents were undeniably fluent. Their adult children were a mixed bag of fluency, with most of the children becoming passive or non-speaking. The grandchildren and great grandchildren were born speaking English as their first language and only acquired a smattering of Omaha vocabulary without grammatical or syntactic abilities.

At this point I must insert a reminder about my motivations for pursuing this current line of research and for writing the dissertation in this reflective, self-proclaiming manner. As I had stated in the introduction to my M.A. thesis:

I did not attend the 1971 Omaha language class as an anthropologist or linguist. I did not pursue a relationship with Grandma Elizabeth and Grandpa Charlie Stabler as an anthropological exercise, or for that matter, for any "academic" motives. It was purely personal. Due to those experiences I remain committed to working, researching, and writing in a manner that keeps people like Grandma and Grandpa in mind [Awakuni-Swetland 1996:ix].

It was about this time, a few years after we met, that Grandpa Charlie noted, "I was catching on to the Omaha ways fairly well." He told me, "If someone asks you about our Indian ways, if you know it, tell it." But, he had two constraints. The first was to not invent an answer if I did not know about it, just to satisfy someone's curiosity. The second was that I not talk to outsiders (i.e., non-

Omaha) about our religious beliefs. Instead, I was to advise such people to go to the elders on the Reservation in order to have their questions answered. I have tried over the years to operate within those parameters. The wisdom of his admonitions, especially concerning talk about our spirituality to outsiders, has protected me from many problems as I moved into public speaking roles.

Up to this point, how much native language had I encountered? Honestly, I was not paying too much attention. The Omaha singers who visited the Wacisa meetings years before could be heard speaking Omaha among themselves. However, they usually confined it to brief comments which seemed to elicit a chuckle from them. I suspect they were making humorous observations about the antics of us “white guys” on the dance floor. Many of the songs they sang had distinct words in them, suggesting they were tribal rather than intertribal songs. Omaha language was evident at the Milford powwow and similar venues, but I was not keyed-in to notice it at the time. That changed after I began working with Grandma Elizabeth and Grandpa Charlie.

Compilation of the dictionary extended over the next three or four years. After graduating from high school I spent the summer of 1974 on the Omaha Reservation, camped out in the garage of Art and Barb May. During those 2 months I visited several elders (Lizzie Springer, Naomi Gilpin, Sam Al and Suzy Robinson, among others) with the goal of double checking some of Grandma Elizabeth's entries and eliciting extra words. I had already been to Macy for weekend dances, hand games, powwows, and funerals. This was my first extended stay. I recall walking to the Missouri River several times, getting lost on

the country roads, and thoroughly loving the adventure. It was during this summer that I developed my acquaintance with John Mangan, a Macy Public School music teacher. I returned to Lincoln in August in time for the Lincoln Indian Club powwow. At that time I was pinned with eagle feathers by Raymond Phillips, Sr., a WWII veteran. That action bestowed on me the right to dance with eagle feathers in the arena at any time. I then went to central Mexico as a foreign exchange student for one year. When I returned to Lincoln I got a job with the State Department of Education and resumed work on the dictionary. On evenings and weekends I worked on typing camera-ready copy and adding line illustrations for the 4,500 word entries. A small grant was acquired from the Center for Applied Linguistics in Arlington, Virginia, to cover the costs of printing. Publication took place at the Nebraska Indian Press, a small offset printing operation housed at the Nebraska Indian Inter-Tribal Development Corporation at Winnebago, Nebraska. John Mangan, a jack of all trades, prepared the printing plates, shot the photographs, and ran the press. A total of 488, signed, first-edition copies were produced in 1977.

In spite of our expectations, the dictionary was not initially embraced by Macy Public School. It turned out that the elders involved in the culture program at the school preferred to teach from an oral standpoint. The school administration decided not to force the issue of Omaha literacy by ignoring the availability of the new dictionary. Meanwhile, copies of the dictionary were distributed and sold to individuals in the community. A few years later, when the

school administration changed its mind and ordered 100 copies of the dictionary, only a portion of that number was still available.

Criticism of the dictionary generally focused on three issues: 1) unfamiliarity of Omaha people with the written form (in spite of the common availability of Fletcher and La Flesche's *The Omaha Tribe*, in reprint), 2) questions about alternate Omaha words for the English words, 3) the lack of additional Omaha words, and a minority concern 4) expressing dissatisfaction that a white man was involved in the language. Grandma Elizabeth never mentioned any of these criticisms, although she must have been aware of them in the community chat-groups. I emerged as the person targeted to answer dictionary questions. Of the first issue, I hoped that time, the reality of diminishing speakers, and the proliferation of additional written materials would turn the tide in favor of Omaha literacy. Of the second and third complaints, I simply reminded the people that this was the vocabulary of a single speaker. That is the reason for adding Elizabeth's name in the title. It was not meant to represent the sum total of all Omaha language. I encouraged anyone with additional words or alternate translations to allow me to add them to a list for future editions.

The issue about a white man's involvement in the Omaha language reflected an emerging attitude of some people that Omaha should be the participants in Omaha cultural activities and occupying the economic roles currently held by non-Indians in their community. The practicality of that ideology is often challenged by issues of applicable skills required for the job and an individual's interest in a particular cultural practice (including language). For

Elizabeth Stabler's part, she was consistently encouraging my interest in the language and participation and integration into the Omaha community at large.

Elizabeth continued to teach Omaha in various venues until she retired from Lincoln. In the late 1970s, Elizabeth spent many evenings at the Nebraska State Penitentiary or other local correctional facilities teaching Omaha language classes to the incarcerated Native Americans. This was during a time of emerging calls for wardens to recognize the cultural needs of their ethnically diverse prisoners, especially Indians. Religious ceremonies were in the forefront of these needs. Sweat lodges were built in prison yards, Native American Church and other traditional Healers and Holy People were brought inside the walls to work with inmates. Elizabeth met with a group of inmates at the Penitentiary that included Omaha, Sioux, Mexican, and other non-Indians. I helped her to prepare lesson plans and word lists similar to the earlier classes I had taken with her in 1971. When the dictionary became available, several copies were given to the inmates. Elizabeth asked me several times to accompany her to the classes, but I balked each time. I believe I had a general fear of the penal environment and imagined myself being locked inside. Grandpa Charlie was her constant companion. He was asked to bring his Native American Church instruments inside the walls in order to bless the class of inmates. On the appointed day he was stopped at the entrance for the routine body search. He found it unconscionable that the guards insisted on opening and "pawing through" his small cedar box of religious instruments. Instead, he turned around and went home. Grandma Elizabeth continued to teach until an altercation and stabbing

elsewhere in the facility shook her resolve. Just as it was at the Indian Center, I believe Elizabeth relished the opportunities to share her language with anyone willing to ask. More often than not, her classrooms were in less foreboding locations. A favorite anecdote tells of a time when Lillian Sheridan and Elizabeth Stabler took Russell Parker into the women's bathroom of the Muni Pool building. In the "privacy" of the bathroom they taught Russell several hand game songs so he could serve as the head singer for the Lincoln Indian Club activity in the adjoining room.

Words of adulation for Grandma Elizabeth came from many directions. When her health began to fail in the following years, it was still easy to get a smile from her when anyone began talking about "her book." The Stablers "retired" from urban life and returned to the Omaha Reservation in the early 1980s. Elizabeth Saunsoci Stabler passed away in the summer of 1985. While Grandpa Charlie, her partner of so many years, remained physically behind, many of us in his family believe that part of his spirit went with Grandma. Grandpa Charlie retreated into his boyhood days of speaking only the Omaha language and riding horses in his dreams. He joined his beloved Elizabeth in the spring of 1992.

I spent the 1980s traveling, working, and searching the West for... I don't know what. The six year dictionary project had been completed, and there was an undeniable void to be filled. The loss of Grandma, and then the painful decline and loss of Grandpa made it a sad time. I found work with the National Park Service in California. In time, that job would re-focus my attentions onto other

aspects of Omaha culture. For seven summers I lived and worked in the high Sierras of Yosemite National Park. During the off season I traveled elsewhere or returned to Nebraska to starve. On one such return in the winter of 1988, I was offered a job as a Culture Program Coordinator at the Macy Public School. John Mangan, music teacher, itinerant printer, and now my "elder brother," had found himself pressed into serving as the Director of the school's Culture Program. He convinced the administration that he needed an assistant for the spring semester. My job was to make sure the four elders arrived each day, discuss with them what they would each be teaching in their respective 20 minute classes for K-6 grade students, and to develop language and cultural activities for various grades and groups of children. More of this experience will be described below. What is salient here is that the opportunity to reprint the English-Omaha dictionary was developed. The school allocated some of its federal funding to purchase materials to reprint 300 copies of *Umo'ho Iye*. John Mangan and I pooled our beer money and covered the cost of an additional 300 copies for public sale and distribution under a different colored cover. With this unique opportunity to revisit Grandma's dictionary, I explained to John how we had discussed years ago creating an Omaha-English version. However, the funds available in 1977 would not have covered the additional number of pages. Ten years later, I decided to take the time to re-alphabetize the English-Omaha into its Omaha-English compliment. The original 1977 edition was reprinted as *Umo'ho' Iye of Elizabeth Stabler with an Omaha-English Lexicon* (Swetland 1991). The public copies were quickly distributed to an increasingly interested

Omaha community. The most common comment from people acquiring the dictionary in the 1990s was that they wanted a copy so that their children could learn the language. In other words, the dictionary was to be the teacher of the next generation!

One area of continuing debate for some people in the Omaha community has surrounded the choice of orthography. The question of how to represent the sounds in writing surfaced when *Umoⁿhoⁿ Iye* was first published in 1977, and again when reprinted in 1991. The dictionary followed the Fletcher and La Flesche orthography used in *The Omaha Tribe*. Generally, each symbol represented a single sound. One exception was their use of the c-cedilla / ç / which represented both / z / and / s /. In the dictionary, the glottal stop was mistakenly given the same hash mark symbol / ' / as was used to mark accent on a syllable. The decision to use the Fletcher and La Flesche system flowed from two considerations. First, it was relatively user-friendly, provided the user took the time to master the symbol-sound connections. Secondly, the bulk of easily accessible Omaha language material in print was in *The Omaha Tribe*. Its existence would support acceptance of the dictionary and any future publications.

An alternative orthography available at that time came from the many writings of James Owen Dorsey (Figure 2.5). His system appeared in BAE publications including *Omaha Sociology* (1884), *ϕehiga Language* (1890,) and *Omaha and Ponka Letters* (1891. Long out of print, most copies resided in scholarly libraries and other institutions. His writing system contained many more symbols and diacritical markings in an attempt to capture the wealth of nuances

of sound. It is an archaic system that enchants many trained linguists, but appears too formidable a system to present to the public.



Figure 2.5 James Owen Dorsey. National Anthropological Archives, Smithsonian Institution

The current orthography used by many linguists is the Americanist version of the International Phonetic Alphabet. A computer-friendly subset has been developed for use by scholars studying the Siouan languages (which includes Omaha) and is referred to as “NetSiouan.”

There have been several Omaha people, both past and present, who have developed personal writing systems. These are largely base upon the English phonetics system and are generally non-standardized. “Spelling like it sounds,” is the desire of any good system. However, when Language A is being applied to the sound system in Language B, and everyone’s interpretation is equally valid,

the resulting spelling is rarely replicated or recognized by the next reader. A more critical concern is that “spelling it [Omaha] like it sounds” using English phonics will result in mispronunciations. A number of samples of this form of personal orthography were delivered to me during the course of my fieldwork. Two examples will suffice to illustrate a pronunciation problem.

English	ONPS/UNL orthography	Spell it like it sounds
spoon	<i>Tehe</i>	tay-hay
dish/plate	<i>uxpe</i>	ux-pay

In the “spell it like it sounds” column, the /t/ and /p/ would be pronounced as English aspirated consonants. In the ONPS/UNL orthography, both letters would be pronounced as unaspirated tense stops. Another way to demonstrate the difference in sound would be to place the palm of your hand in front of your mouth. Alternate saying the English words “top – stop – team – steam.” You will feel a puff of air (aspiration) striking your hand with t-initial words. Placing the /s/ in front of the /t/ blocks (unaspirates) the sound. In Omaha, the presence or absence of aspiration can change the meaning of a word. In our example above, the unaspirated “*te*” means “buffalo.” In contrast, the aspirated “*t^he*” is an article that is inanimate and standing on its own.

Sadly, I have heard several Omaha people justify the use of an English phonics approach to spelling Omaha with the following explanation: “Our children are struggling to learn the English language using English phonics. We should let them learn Omaha using the same system because learning a second system is too hard.” This explanation makes me nervous because it suggests that our

Omaha children are somehow too mentally deficient to master two separate systems, unlike millions of other multilingual children worldwide.

The current orthography used by Omaha Nation Public School and the University of Nebraska reflects a minor revision to the Fletcher and La Flesche system. With an eye towards making it more accessible to non-Omaha speakers, (i.e., the school populations at Macy and Lincoln) the following changes have been rendered: replace the c-cedilla / ç / with the corresponding / s / or / z /, add a superscript / ^h / to show aspiration, and use the / ʔ / with, or without the under-dot to indicate the glottal stop (Appendix C). The real issue concerning the orthography is to make it non-issue. In discussions with the Director of the ONPS Culture Program, we both acknowledged that once a person can read, then we get past that issue and can now focus on discussing the content and semantics of the word or sentence.

Umoⁿhoⁿ ie t^he: The Oral Omaha

There were many venues where Omaha language could be encountered in the early-mid 1970s. The Lincoln Indian Club met on a monthly basis. Leaders and prominent members of this social club were of Grandma Elizabeth's generation, being in their early sixties to early seventies. Club meetings included much discussion since decisions were made more by consensus than by executive rule or simple majority voting. Elders would rise and speak, in turn, on the issue of the day. Females were permitted to speak in these informal forums. Folklorist Roger Welsch captured the essence of one such club meeting in the

late 1960s. He also witnessed a member of the Stabler family rising to speak at a social gathering. While his narrative is rather lengthy to be quoted in full, it illustrates the eloquence of Omaha speech and its role in Omaha society.

About 15 years ago, on a cool, fall evening, I attended a joint meeting of the Little Warriors Club and the Lincoln Indian Club. We met in the old Lincoln Indian Center in Lincoln, to consider acceptance of a gift offered us by the Kiowa Tribe. The Kiowas, impressed by the dignity and integrity of many Omaha friends, and especially Clyde Sheridan, had decided to give the Omaha Tribe their Tia-piah (or Warrior) Society. The dance, songs, costumes, hereditary offices, and high standards of patriotism and morality would become a part of Omaha tribal ways.

I was struck by two things that evening, even though I had spent a good deal of time and energy exploring Omaha culture. First, I was impressed by the profundity of the thinking that went on that evening. I had never heard philosophical and ethical considerations more seriously dealt with than by that group of 50 Omaha Indians.

They wondered whether cultural possessions can be given or accepted at all, how one can assume hereditary offices, thus encumbering children and grandchildren for generations to come, and what the assumption of this new Tia-piah Society would mean for older tribal institutions like the Native American Church. In my own culture I had never experienced such genuine philosophical considerations -- not in my church, not in my schools, not in my society's legal system.

The second thing that impressed me that evening was nothing new to me. I had encountered it early and often among the Omaha. It was their eloquence, their profound skill with language, the power of their expression, the poetry of their diction.

On this particular evening, however, there seemed to be a vivid focus to the speeches and comments; although I had seen this skill with language many times, tonight it seemed especially clear to me.

For one thing, there were no interruptions. Think about the last time you were in a serious discussion -- about politics, perhaps, or religion. I'll bet the arguers interrupted each other, talked at the same time, shouted, and made it very clear that there was not much listening going on. Well, this night at the Lincoln Indian Club,

as had been the case at a hundred meetings I had attended before, there were no interruptions. In fact, I was reminded of the passage in Frank Water's *The Man Who Killed the Deer*: "A Council meeting is a strange thing. The fire crackles. The candle gutters. And the old men sit stolidly on their benches round the walls. When a man speaks they do not interrupt. They lower their swathed heads or half close their eyes so as not to encourage or embarrass him with a look. And when the guttural Indian voice finally stops, there is silence. A silence so heavy and profound that it squashes the kernel of truth out of his words, and leaves the meaningless husks mercilessly exposed. And still no man speaks. Each waits courteously for another. And the silence grows round the walls, handed from one to another, until all the silence is one silence, and that silence has the meaning of all. So the individuals vanish. It is all one heart. It is the soul of the tribe, a soul that is linked by that other silence with all the souls of all the tribal councils which have sat here in the memory of man.

A council meeting is one-half talk and one-half silence. The silence has more weight, more meanings, and more intonations than the talk. It is angry, impatient, cheerful, but masked by calmness, patience, dignity. Thus the members move evenly together."

So it was, too, among the Omaha, and so it was at this meeting. Lillian Sheridan, a woman with intense personal presence, spoke, and when she finished there was a quarter of an hour or more of silence as we all rolled over in our minds the serious idea she had laid before us. Another spoke, and again there was silence. Admittedly, here was a speaker who complained in a trivial way about the potential cost of the Society's special costume, but there was not a moment's hesitation when he finished his complaint; a third immediately spoke of an *important* issue, thus emphasizing the triviality of the one who had been concerned about a few dollars.

All through the night, men and women, elders and teenagers, presented their views quietly and powerfully. Again and again I thought how remarkable it was that relatively uneducated, generally poor, by-and-large powerless people were making such beautiful, extemporaneous speeches, when the educated and powerful people of my own culture seem so painfully inarticulate. Here were ordinary working people speaking much more beautifully than people who in my culture presumably are the spokesmen, the people who make their livings with their language -- in the pulpit, in the courts, in the classrooms.

Then it struck me like a bolt from the blue that I was thinking only in terms of the speeches that were being made in English, a second language for many of these people. I couldn't say how eloquent those speeches were that were being spoken in the native Omaha language, but could they possibly have been less?

At every Omaha occasion -- hand games, powwows, prayer meetings, gourd dances -- there are times set aside for speech making. Fear of public speaking is said to rank above fear of cancer or of dying by fire for most Americans, but not for the Omahas. Perhaps it is the legacy of a culture that had no system for writing: the Omahas' poetic language, its "literature," was spoken rather than written.

I was once sitting at a hand game drum when Carroll Stabler motioned to the scorekeepers' table, asking for permission to rise and speak to the 100 or so participants at the game. I was surprised by this, for Carroll is a very quiet young man. He barely spoke to the rest of us at the drum, yet here he was, rising to make a speech.

What he said, approximately, was, "I have asked permission of my uncle here to speak to you all tonight. My father said to me that it is time for me to rise and speak to my friends and relatives. So here I stand. I know it is not easy for you to listen to me because I am not a practiced speaker, so I appreciate your patience. It is hard for me, too. You know that it is hard for me to speak, but I know this is something I must do." He went on in that vein for perhaps 10 minutes, and when he finished there were many calls of "Uda! Uda!" -- "Good! Good!" Carroll was expressing his understanding that part of being an Omaha is speaking, and what he was doing, plain and simple, was exercising and practicing that cultural skill.

...It is a classic Hollywood stereotype of the Plains Indian that he does not smile or laugh, and certainly never cried. But I have seen whole families weep while doing a dance that was perhaps written by a grandfather or which had been sung when a son came home from war. And the Plains Indian had -- and has -- a tremendous repertoire of jokes that are Indian through and through. Plains Indians are often thought of in terms of deeds of courage in war and hunting, of spectacular color in costume. And all that is true, but there was a good deal more to Plains Indian culture than that.

Frankly, I don't think we have stolen nearly enough from them. We've left the best treasures unlooted -- profound harmony between man and the land, a sense of wonder in the miracles that occur about us on a daily basis, and an understanding of the power of a word well spoken [Welsch 1984:112-113].

Such eloquence could be heard at the informal Indian Club meetings, the Ladies Sewing Club meetings (a female auxiliary group), and at the feasts, hand games, and war dances held at the Indian Center, in neighborhood parks, or in private homes. If I had to quantify Omaha language spoken at Omaha social events in Lincoln in the 1970s, I would propose the following: age 70+ (75% Omaha), age 55-69 (50% Omaha), under age 55 (negligible Omaha). Recall that younger people were less likely to rise and speak at public functions. My impression has always been that the younger adults did not speak Omaha to any viable extent.

In the early 1970s, I became more aware of the amount of Omaha language being spoken, or rather, not spoken, when Sioux (Lakota and Dakota) members and supporters of the AIM movement arrived in the Lincoln area. It was shortly after the high-profile national events which included the occupations of the Bureau of Indian Affairs building in Washington, D.C., Wounded Knee II, and Alcatraz. Many of the AIM members were drawn from various Siouan tribes. There was a mixture of both urbanized and traditional reservation followers. Lincoln was the site chosen for many of the federal court hearings that arose from AIM activities. The Sioux presence seemed to heighten an "Indian" awareness both in and out of the Omaha community. The media coverage of the AIM trials helped to fuel this consciousness. The Sioux people seemed to have, or presented themselves as having, more of their language and cultural practices

intact. Omaha people interacted with the Sioux visitors, often providing resources and personal support during their time in Lincoln. At many of the activities where Omaha and Sioux interacted, I heard comments from the Omaha contingent noting their amazement that most of the Sioux were publicly speaking their own language. As intriguing, perhaps with a hint of bittersweet nostalgia, many of the Sioux children (toddlers to teens) were also fluently using the language. It was hard to avoid making the comparison between the two groups. It is unclear just how this period of interaction in an atmosphere of social activism affected the Omaha as a whole. I know that many of the Omaha AIM members and supporters continue to push for social reforms coupled with a return to traditional Indian values long after the national AIM efforts disappeared from the newspaper headlines.

The Omaha language production of Lincoln can be contrasted with my experiences at activities at Macy. During those intense socialization years of the 1970s and early 1980s, I had many opportunities to participate in feasts, war dances, gourd dances, and Native American Church services in company with the Stabler family and on my own. First, the very number of speakers in each age group was exponentially larger. Secondly, the Omaha were on home ground. In other words, they were the majority within their own community and did not seem to be bothered by criticisms about language choice from whatever white minority resided in their midst. Few whites attended Omaha social events, so it was an insulated community. I recall many times waiting in the community building or at the small powwow arena as people gathered for an event. Casual conversation

seemed to be as much in Omaha as in English between anyone aged 50 or older. English was routinely directed at all younger adults by the elders. The Man-in-Charge, Master of Ceremonies, or Minister (at NAC services) would generally speak first and longest in Omaha. English translations seemed cursory or were sometimes not even offered if the audience was mostly older adults. At these social events I am thinking of my many male relatives such as John Turner, Adam Grant, Clifford Wolfe, Sr., Clyde Sheridan, Jr., Sam Robinson, Victor Robinson, Laurence Gilpin, Buddy Gilpin, Joe Gilpin, Charlie Cook, Charlie Edwards, and others who rose to speak. Their spouses, while usually not encouraged to be active public speakers, all used Omaha in their private conversations.

At my first Native American Church meeting, I recall that my Father, Lorenzo Stabler, was the Road Man. It was the spring quarterly meeting of the local chapter. He has always preferred to speak in Omaha, and did so the entire evening. Because he had invited me to attend, he had asked his father, Charlie, to be the Fire Man (so that I could sit next to Grandpa and keep out of trouble). When Grandpa Charlie offered the Fire Man's prayer, it was in Omaha. I recall that the Omaha Native American Church Chapter Chairman, Laurence Gilpin, rose to speak/pray for at least 30 minutes... all in Omaha. Other church officials and adults followed suit.

Sadly, these experiences are things of the past. Today, only a handful of event leader males are still active speakers. The larger number are in the following generation and appear uncomfortable speaking Omaha beyond short,

hesitant speeches or prayers. Even the fluent elder speakers have acquiesced to the reality that the majority in the audience do not understand the language. Their Omaha prayers and comments have been foreshortened and English predominates. The same holds true in the Native American Church meetings. Few of the remaining eldest Road Men are actively leading meetings. The next generation of ministers, including some who were born speaking the language, are hesitant of their abilities to run an all-night meeting in Omaha. They are pragmatic enough to recognize that their congregations are primarily English speakers.

Umoⁿhoⁿ ie t^he ushkoⁿ: Omaha Language in Practice, 1988 and 1995

The following excerpts are drawn from my language ideology study, *Omaha Language Attitudes and Abilities*, a Master's thesis in Anthropology (Awakuni-Swetland 1996). The data for that study developed from two periods spent on the Omaha Reservation. The first was during my work as the Culture Program Coordinator at Macy Public Schools for the spring semester of 1988; the second during fieldwork for the M.A. thesis in the spring semester of 1995. The first period provided insights into past and current (as of 1988) public school approaches to teaching Omaha language and culture. From my perspective, many of the teaching efforts up to that time seemed ineffective. The fieldwork period in 1995 found a much-diminished native language effort being put forth at the school: a single elder

shuttling between the elementary grades without lesson plans or materials. The resulting thesis painted a dismal picture.

I had the pleasure of working with four fluent speakers in 1988. They included the husband-wife team of Clifford and Bertha Wolfe, Sr., Coolidge Stabler, and Mary Clay. Whereas I was previously familiar with all of these elders, they confirmed that I should continue to address them with my existing terms of Brother-in-Law, Elder Sister, Clan Uncle, and Grandmother, respectively. We used these kinship terms in the classrooms as a reinforcement of an Omaha cultural value.

When I met with the elders early in the semester I discovered that

...the program had no long-range lesson plans, no short range lesson plans, and only a limited selection of Omaha language materials available. A clear statement of the purpose or goal of the Culture Program was lacking, and with it a way to measure a student's success or failure. *The Omaha Tribe*, Fletcher and La Flesche's 1911 text, was often cited when interpreting language and culture questions. Classes for elementary grades (Kindergarten through sixth) consisted of 20-minute sessions twice a week. Class groups were divided so that elders met separately with children of their own gender. The primary emphasis of the program was teaching Omaha words and phrases with an expectation that students would acquire fluency [Awakuni-Swetland 1996:19].

The goal seemed unattainable in my inexperienced view. Nonetheless, I was heartened by the sentiment of the school board (as interpreted to our staff by the administration) that made the culture program a necessary part of the students' experience, so much so, that attending "culture class" was considered mandatory. The problem was that there was no recourse for the few non-Omaha students, and students not interested in language or culture, to be excused from class. Their presence often resulted in disrupted classes.

On the other hand, there did not seem to be any plan in place to “teach the teacher,” that is, to help the untrained elders in becoming effective teachers at the elementary grade level. The reality was that

...none of the elders were completely comfortable working with materials written in the available Omaha orthography, including the Omaha lexicon, *Umoⁿhoⁿ iye of Elizabeth Stabler*, purchased by the school. Their lessons consisted of reviewing English and Omaha word lists and simple phrases organized by topics. They also used story-telling techniques. They all voiced frustration at the lack of a systematic program of instruction, while sympathizing with the students' growing boredom and inability to learn the language [Awakuni-Swetland 1996:20].

My solution to the situation was to build on the available strengths of the elders by encouraging them to take a culture and language approach. They elicited stories of all types from the students, and then inserted some common Omaha language to the narratives. We brought many activities and games into the classroom. One elder enjoyed playing “Tonkaway,” a card game popular with the local senior citizens. I encouraged bringing the game into the classroom, provided that the students only used Omaha language to call and respond. Because the activity was very “Omaha,” and an emulation of the elders, it was readily accepted by the students. Many second and third grade students became adept Tonkaway players.

There was a hunger for some sort of language/culture activity by the upper grades. However, funding and focus had traditionally been applied to the lower elementary students. John Mangan worked with sixth grade students writing short, contemporary stories. These were translated into Omaha by the four Culture Program elders and myself, illustrated, and then printed in the school's print shop. The story book efforts helped the Omaha Language and Culture Program receive

national recognition by the Office of Indian Education in 1988. It was one of ten programs out of over 600 programs to receive acclaim (Macy Public Schools 1995). Meanwhile, I worked with older elementary students on material culture projects spiced with relevant Omaha terms and phrases. Projects included making Omaha winter outdoor game pieces, brain-tanning and fabricating a coyote skin arrow quiver, and scraping a beef hide to create two painted rawhide trunks and many knife sheaths. Fifth grade girls made beaded bone awl cases. A group of seventh grade boys made arrows as an experiment in extending the Culture Program into the junior high school. Due to the overall in-school interest generated by these activities, the program was extended the following year to the seventh grade. Some of the activities were videotaped for classroom viewing. The school year ended with many students being able to take home a tangible reminder of their Culture Program work. Unfortunately, it was hard to measure how much, if any, Omaha language went home with the child.

During the 1987-1988 school year, and unbeknownst to me, the Culture Program efforts were being evaluated by linguist Catherine Rudin of Wayne State College, Wayne, Nebraska. She focused on the language component of the program, and her findings reported at the 1989 Mid America Linguistic Conference. I found her depiction to be open-eyed and pragmatic. The Omaha language was characterized as a dying language one generation away from extinction, with

...about 100, mostly elderly, fluent speakers on the Omaha Reservation. Culture Program tests of kindergarten children entering school in Macy indicated virtually no knowledge of the language. She acknowledged the importance of the language to tribal consciousness by its use in ceremonial speeches at feasts, funerals, Native American Church services, and the annual Powwow.

Rudin (1989:2) noted "the program has suffered from a lack of consistency, with frequent changes in personnel, funding, and curriculum. In particular the degree of emphasis on language as opposed to general tribal culture has varied widely." Language instruction was limited to isolated nouns, counting, and greeting. Pre-tests administered at the beginning of the 1987-88 school year indicated that most students could count to ten in Omaha but very few of them could say the word for 'seven' without counting up to it. John Mangan, who had previously been dividing his time between directing the Culture Program and teaching, was returned to full-time classroom teaching in the fall of 1989 and no new Title IV Director was selected to take his place. The elders who served as the program's instructors returned to the classroom without a director.

Rudin reported a general enthusiasm among the students for Culture Program classes, as well as positive feedback from some parents. The Title V survey appears to support this observation. However, she identified the lack of student training in syntax, morphology, and conversational competence as hindrances to the production of any fluent speakers. Small bilingual booklets prepared by the school were plagued with inexact translations that reduce their usefulness. The language is not being passed on at home, while the 15 or 20 minutes a day devoted to Omaha language in the school is viewed as inadequate. The Culture Program coordinator (director) and elders did not have training in linguistics or language pedagogy. There was little continuity in curriculum and goals from year-to-year. The result was sixth graders not knowing much more Omaha than first graders, and junior high instructors seemingly starting from scratch each year.

On the positive side, Rudin suggested that the Culture Program could be successful if the goal was to use the language as a symbolic step toward tribal solidarity and pride. She observed that nearly every child knew some Omaha words and phrases. The classes seemed to improve self-concept for both the children and the elders, as well as parents and other tribe members. Some "teachers not directly involved with the language program had commented that success in the Omaha language activities and the resulting positive feedback from parents and peers had led to better attitudes and academic performance in other areas, at least for some students" [Rudin 1989:11] [Awakuni-Swetland 1996:23-25].

Rudin's report, along with my own retrospection of my involvement with the Culture Program, was a bit disheartening. I recognized the lack of classroom teaching and

linguistic training on my part. It was also clear that the school did not have a coherent plan or articulated goals for teaching language or culture. When the opportunity presented itself to develop an M.A. research project, I returned to the topic of Omaha language in the school.

My interactions with the Omaha community over the years had given me an undeniable impression that the adults wanted their children to learn and speak the Omaha language. It occurred to me that no one had taken the time to ask the children if they wanted to take on that task. I designed a two-part study that would, 1) assess their current ability in the Omaha language, and 2) elicit students' attitudes towards the Omaha language. I received parental permission to interview and test 56 students, or 20% of the student body in grades 2 to 12. There was a very low junior/senior high school response due to high absenteeism. This may have been a reaction to a community protest against the school for an unrelated issue. Picketers did not overtly encourage absenteeism, but community feelings toward the school were generally strained.

The first portion of the study was a simple language proficiency test drawn from samples of curriculum materials provided by the school. Time restrictions placed on the project prevented individual oral responses. A written answer sheet was developed which included both simple and difficult names of things, both simple and difficult questions and sentences, and words used to describe things. The answer sheet contained words, questions, and sentences written in Omaha as taken from Culture Program work sheets. Lower grades answered only the "simple" sections, and upper grades answered all sections. I administered the test in small

groups, reciting the Omaha words provided on the sheet and requesting a written response in English. I had tested my Omaha pronunciation skills with the Culture Program elder, as well as the fluent speakers working in the school's lunchroom.

The results were as follows:

Ninety-five percent of the students answering the survey also took the proficiency test. This high rate allows for an excellent comparison of an individual's Omaha language attitude and his/her Omaha language proficiency. The bleak news is that, on average, 84% of the students sampled did not recognize or correctly translate common Omaha words from their Culture Program curriculum such as *tapučka* (school), *nishude* (Missouri River), *hiⁿbthiⁿge* (bean), or *nikagahi* (chief). As part of the school's emblem, the word *nikagahi* is written on newsletter headlines, signs, and sports jackets throughout the community. *Tapučka* (school) is part of an Omaha phrase displayed in large letters over the entry door of the main school building.

Ninety-four percent did not recognize or correctly translate common Omaha phrases or questions from their Culture Program curriculum such as *zhoⁿni koⁿbtha* (I want candy/sugar), *wiⁿbthuga abthiⁿ* (I have a dollar), or *moⁿçeçka duba abthiⁿ* (I have some money) [Awakuni-Swetland 1996:67].

I administered the proficiency test before the ideology survey. Results from the proficiency test seemed to uphold Rudin's report and my earlier impressions. There did not appear to be any Omaha speakers in the student body... beyond an isolated word or phrase. I tried to interpret my findings and allow for test biases. The numbers still spoke for themselves. Oddly, there was a single high school student who performed quite well on the proficiency test. I was curious to see what factors might have contributed to that condition, hoping the survey would give me some clues.

The ideology survey was divided into three parts, with the youngest grades answering only the easy part #1, middle grades also answering the moderately difficult questions in part #2, and the junior/senior high school students answering all three parts. Questions on the survey sought to gather demographic information, levels of exposure to Omaha in the home and community, attitudes towards the value of Omaha, and the student's personal assessment of his/her own Omaha language abilities. The excerpt is lengthy but critical. The data helps to ground many of my impressions and decisions about the difficulties facing anyone dealing in Omaha language issues. The results were as follows:

The participating students indicated a generally high, positive attitude towards the Omaha language, with 93% reporting that Omaha language is important to learn. Group-wide, 81% would like to speak more Omaha, 89% thought Omaha children should learn to speak the language, and 85% thought Omaha children should learn to read and write the language. Parents should learn the Omaha language according to 83% of the responding students, while 82% wanted their (future) children to know and speak the language.

Attitude, Exposure, and Gender Differences

A higher number of females tended to give a *don't know* response to attitudinal questions that resulted in percentage differences appearing between genders. Of the females in grades five and above, 61% said they *don't know* if Omaha culture should be included in all class subjects, while 56% of the males responded *no*. In the same group 50% of the females said they *don't know* if having to pass a test in the Omaha language before passing to the next grade was a good idea, while 67% of the males said yes, thinking it a good idea. There were occasional marginal differences between male and female answers not impacted by *don't know* responses. In grades seven and above, 88% of the males thought Omaha people living at Macy should speak *mostly Omaha*, while 81% of the females thought they should speak *English and Omaha in equal amounts*.

The students' exposure to the Omaha language in the home environment appeared limited. Of those students surveyed, only 9% reported their father spoke to them in *mostly Omaha* language while

5% reported their mother spoke to them in *mostly Omaha*. Only 2% reported brothers or sisters spoke to them in *mostly Omaha* language, but 11% said uncles or aunts spoke to them in *mostly Omaha*. Grandmothers reportedly spoke to 22% of the students in *mostly Omaha*, and grandfathers spoke to 24% in *mostly Omaha*.

Two questions resulted in notable gender differences related to Omaha language exposure. They involved grandfathers and church services. Of the male students in grades two through twelve, 42% reported their grandfathers spoke to them in *mostly Omaha*. Only 14% of the females reported their grandfathers spoke to them in *mostly Omaha*. Responses to the companion question "Do you speak to your grandfather in English or in Omaha?" were more evenly matched. Sixteen percent of the males responded they spoke *mostly Omaha*, while 6% of the females responded in that manner.

When asked what language they used at church services, 44% of the males in grades five and above reported *English and Omaha in equal amounts*, and 44% reported *mostly English*. Sixty-seven percent of the females reported *mostly English*, and 17% reported *English and Omaha in equal amounts*. Because the survey did not specify church denomination, it is suggested that students referred to the locally predominant Native American Church. The higher reporting of Omaha language among young males may stem from the gender differentiation practiced by members of the Native American Church. Young males are encouraged to participate in the church's activities, including taking an active role in the all-night prayer meetings. Young females may attend the services, but are usually restricted to a more reserved level of participation.

Self-Evaluation of Omaha Language Ability and Gender Differences

In a self-evaluation of their Omaha language comprehension, 15% of the students in grades two through twelve said they could understand *very well* when someone was talking in the Omaha language, 54% said *not very well*, and 31% said *not at all*. Of those students surveyed in grades five and above, only 4% reported they carried on a conversation in the Omaha language *very well*. Of the remainder, 41% said they could converse, but *not very well*, and 56% answered *not at all*. The same students in grades five and above reported their ability to read or write in the Omaha language as *very well* (4%), *not very well* (67%), and *not at all* (30%). Nonetheless, 26% were confident that their school grades would *get higher* if they had to use the Omaha language in classes, while 37% felt their grades would *stay the same*, and the remaining 37% said their grades would *get lower*.

Significant differences in responses between genders were restricted to two hypothetical personal ability questions. Students were asked to imagine their own Omaha language ability being equal to a pre-English speaking person such as a great-great grandparent. They were then asked if they thought they would be able to explain "Indian" things as good as someone speaking English. Fifty-six percent of the males in grades five and above said *yes*, 11% said *no*, and 33% said they *don't know*. Thirty-three percent of the females said *yes*, 6% said *no*, and 61% said they *don't know*. The companion question asked if students would be able to explain "non-Indian" things as good as someone speaking English. Twenty-two percent of the males said *yes*, 56% said *no*, and 22% said they *don't know*. Seventeen percent of the females said *yes*, 17% said *no*, and 67% said they *don't know* [Awakuni-Swetland 1996:63-66].

Granted, there is a difference between "understanding" when someone is speaking to you, and "speaking" yourself. Nonetheless, I was confused by the unexpected numbers of students who self-evaluated as being able to speak or to understand to any degree.

I was faced with two questions. First, how could I account for the disparity between these students' relatively high self-identified "ability" and their actual performance? I surmised two possible answers.

...The first is that the proficiency test was poorly designed, or executed in such a way as to not allow students to show their true ability. There is no evidence that this is the case. The second explanation challenges the individual's definition of "ability" (i.e., fluency or competence) in the Omaha language.

Recall that Hymes (1974:96) cautioned how "fluency" could mean a different characterization of ability in different communities. It may be that the students are measuring their current abilities against the witnessed abilities of their parents, siblings, and the greater Omaha language community. Positive attitudes notwithstanding, the students do not seem to currently evidence skill levels adequate to perpetuate the Omaha language as a self-sufficient form of communication [Awakuni-Swetland 1996:80-81].

In the course of this current study many of the interviews support the fluency angle. Whereas the greater community uses the Omaha language in very isolated venues, the students are most likely measuring their own abilities against that standard.

The second question revolved around the high school student who was quite proficient in the language, as measured by my test. What was the difference between this student and the other respondents? In the design of the survey I had suspected a positive relationship between a student's ability and the number of Omaha speakers in his/her own environment. From the survey responses I found

...there was not an automatic or consistent relationship between exposure to Omaha speakers and high language proficiency scores. The student with the highest score (80%) reported three classes of family members that spoke to him/her in *mostly Omaha*. He/she was the only student to self-evaluate an ability to both understand *very well* when Omaha was being spoken, and to converse *very well*. Two students each reported two classes of family members speaking to them in *mostly Omaha*. Only one of the two students took the proficiency test, scoring 10% despite self-evaluating an ability to understand *very well* when Omaha was being spoken [Awakuni-Swetland 1996:81

While the sample size was too small to support a definitive conclusion, the home environment of the single student gives some tantalizing hints at the dynamics necessary to transmit Omaha into the next generation. The overall conclusion to the M.A. study was that while the students held a high opinion of the Omaha language and wished to see it carried forward, their level of exposure did not give them a realistic ability to do the job. The expectation that a single Omaha speaker in the household is sufficient to transmit the language doesn't hold water. As in the case with the proficient student, it is not simply that someone is speaking to him/her

in Omaha. Rather, he/she is witnessing Omaha being spoken and interacted with in a living, daily world.

My 1995 period at Macy coincided, in hindsight, with the nadir of the ineffective and frustrating state of affairs concerning the teaching of Omaha language. Shortly after the completion of my fieldwork the School Board appointed Vida Stabler, a highly motivated and trained teacher, as the Director of the Culture Center. Working with a group of dedicated elders she brings a pedagogical rigor to the program. She and her team are producing articulated lesson plans with concise goals and objectives, backed with linguistic and cultural explanations. Several of her elder staff are becoming literate in the Omaha orthography, thus facilitating the documentation of their own lexicon and oral histories.

Vida is reaching into the community to encourage members of the Omaha-born, non-speaking generation to join in the language and culture work. Using the Master-Apprentice model, she brings a fluent speaker together with a passive listener in an approach described and used by Leann Hinton with California native language speakers (Hinton and Hale 2001). Vida is stretching her professional and personal resources to the limit as she struggles to document classroom activities, preserve samples of Omaha speech on video and audio tape, write lesson plans, meet with community members, faculty, and tribal leaders, and work on improving her own Omaha language skills. You get a clear feeling from reading her interview in the following chapter that she knows the clock is ticking on the time remaining to work with many of the eldest speakers. However, instead of a sense of defeat in this upstream battle, one gets the impression of a slowly brightening horizon as

dawn pushes back the dark night sky. Vida Stabler and her Culture Center staff, along with other members of the community, have committed their energy, their spirit, to the cause of the Omaha language.

A very few examples of written Omaha have appeared in the community over the past thirty years. The seven metal pillars supporting the lobby roof of the Tribal Council building are painted with the names of seven clans, reportedly representing the traditional Council of Seven. Until its 2003 remodeling, the Omaha Nation Public School building was adorned with the following phrase over the main entrance:

UMO^NHA TA'PASKA
waba gthe-seatha-diti

The school's athletic field is identified with a large wooden sign that reads:

WADE MILLER
Thio-um-baska
MEMORIAL FIELD
HOME OF THE Ni-kagahi
CHIEFS

Two examples of written Omaha graffiti have been found. On the alley-facing cinder block wall of the Walthill hardware store is the spray painted, block lettered message:

CHEE
U
RYAN
P

Which translates literally into “Fuck You Ryan P.” A second instance of graffiti has adorned the Nebraska Highway 94-75 junction sign east of Walthill for at least two years (Figure 2.6). The term “**ASHTONA**” is the Omaha slang word “*eshto^{na}*” which is often used as an expression of humorous disbelief when listening to someone tell a story or boast upon themselves. Painted on a highway sign gives it an enigmatic meaning.



Figure 2.6 Omaha Language Graffiti. Macy, Nebraska, 2001.

***Zhuawagthe*: I Join Them, The Dhegihanists**

I began my doctoral studies in anthropology at the University of Oklahoma in the Fall of 1996. Upon my arrival in Norman, Oklahoma, I was advised to begin thinking about a dissertation topic on something other than Omaha Indians. The reasoning was that I already knew quite a bit about the Omaha, but needed to

expand myself into becoming more of an “anthropologist.” Disappointed by the advice, nonetheless I saw its validity.

A second piece of advice was that I should avail myself of every opportunity to gain classroom teaching experience. I had not done any teaching in my M.A. program. I recognized my shortcoming in that area, especially if I expected to land a teaching job after I graduated. Fortunately, I was presented the opportunity to either teach or be a teaching assistant each semester for the next three years. I was exposed to all sizes of classes, from 30 to 200 students. I honed my skills at organizing lectures, lesson plans, and research assignments. I also gained insights into the personalities of students and the multitude of attitudes that they bring into the classroom.

A third bit of advice was that I should take some courses in linguistics since I had dabbled for so many years in Omaha language. This was heartening news, since I expected to return to Omaha language issues at some point in the future. I proceeded to enroll for three semesters of phonetics, phonology, morphology, syntax, and grammar coursework. I admit to not being overly excited about descriptive and historical linguistics. However, I found it useful to arm myself with some of the tools of linguistics as an aid to examining my sociolinguistic data.

The Oklahoma classes ultimately helped me to better understand the discussions of the “Dhegihanists.” The Dhegihanists (Figure 2.7) are a handful of scholars working with the five cognate languages: Omaha, Ponca, Osage, Kansa (Kaw), and Quapaw. Collectively these five languages form the Dhegiha branch in the Siouan language family. The term is derived from the Omaha word, *thegiha*, “on

this side,” as in teams in a game. The spelling varies between orthographies. While the Omaha do not refer to themselves as Dhegiha, linguists find it a useful rubric.



Figure 2.7 *Niskithe Dhegiha* Working Group, Lincoln, Nebraska. April 8-9, 2002. From left to right: Quintero, Eschenberg, Rudin, Rankin, Koontz, Shea, Awakuni-Swetland

I met my first Dhegihanist in the late 1970s. I was sitting with a group of ten or twelve elders at the Lincoln Indian Center. They had just finished eating their Senior Diner noonday meal and were relaxing playing cards and telling stories. I often joined Charlie and Elizabeth Stabler at the Center to visit when I was in town. At the time I was living in an old allotment era house in the country west of Macy, inherited in heirship by Grandma Elizabeth. I was working at Winnebago, Nebraska. We all noticed a short white man enter the building and approach the front receptionist desk. After a few minutes talking to the secretary he was led over to the table of elders. The secretary announced that the man's name was John Koontz. He was a linguist from Boulder, Colorado. He was interested in the Omaha language and wanted to talk to someone who could speak the language. With typical Indian humor, all of the elders turned their gaze towards me and smiled,

while two or three chorused, "Talk to Uthixide. He talks good Omaha." Everyone laughed at the joke. Koontz came over and shook my hand. I introduced him to everyone, and they encouraged me to go ahead and see what this fellow wanted.

It turned out the John had been studying Omaha-Ponka using Dorsey texts as his primary source. He evidenced a working knowledge of the language based upon his study of its structure. He offered some oral examples of speech, but had never actually heard the language spoken. It was amazing! He explained that he was working on an Omaha-Ponka grammar as his dissertation project for UC-Boulder. He was also working with other linguists on a Proto-Siouan dictionary project. He was aware of the recently published Omaha dictionary and quite pleased to make Elizabeth's acquaintance.

I described my relationship to the Omaha community and identified some of the speakers available in Lincoln, Omaha, and at Macy. Since he planned to return for several weeks of fieldwork, I suggested his best opportunities for several reasons would be to work with the elders at Macy Public Schools. I could introduce him to the speakers, and they were familiar with elicitation-type work. This seemed to suit his needs, and so we agreed to meet at Macy. Ultimately, John ended up working with Clifford and Bertha Wolf, Sr., Coolidge Stabler, and a few other speakers at Macy. He visited me in the countryside a few times to update me on his progress.

Out of this experience developed a personal friendship and scholarly association with John. Through the years we have maintained an on-going discussion about aspects of Omaha language. While John is interested in the

technical and historical aspects of the language, he has been generous in his encouragement of my more socio-cultural tangents. He willingly shares materials and references. A few years after our meeting in Lincoln he alerted me to the wealth of linguistic materials at the National Anthropological Archives in the Smithsonian's Museum of Natural History. It was with his support that I traveled to Washington, D.C., and arranged to microfilm a portion of Dorsey's notes and manuscripts, including the unpublished 20,000-slip lexicon (word list) of Omaha-Ponka. When I announced my intention to begin teaching Omaha language at the University of Nebraska in Lincoln (UNL), John graciously agreed to let me copy any parts of his unfinished Omaha-Ponka grammar dissertation that I wished. In recent years John has organized an Internet discussion group known as the Siouan List. Linguists, scholars, and students of the various Siouan languages now have a forum to explore the many facets of their field. The Dhegihanists form a small subset of the Siouanist group.

Catherine Rudin, the Wayne State College linguist mentioned earlier, is another Dhegihanist. We have crossed paths frequently at Macy as we work with many of the same speakers and their families. Like many linguists, Catherine studies a number of languages, using data in a comparative manner. She has freely shared information and articles that I am able to use in my own work. Catherine recently was tapped to teach an introduction to linguistics class as part of a UNL teacher training program for adult Native Americans seeking a teaching certificate at Macy. I was invited to attend the classes and gratified to see her integrating many Omaha samples in her instruction. Catherine has agreed to host

the 2004 Siouan and Caddoan conference at Wayne, Nebraska. This is an annual gathering of linguists working in those languages... including the Dhegihanists. Invitations have been extended to the Omaha Nation Culture Center to participate.

Robert Rankin is the senior scholar of the group. A professor of linguistics at the University of Kansas in Lawrence, he has worked most extensively with the Kansa (Kaw) and Quapaw languages and communities. He brings a theoretical rigor to any discussion but is not hesitant to also discuss the pragmatics of cultural and social issues related to language. Bob's experiences in numerous Indian communities over the years brought many examples to bear when I posed a question about an Omaha proposal to copyright the Omaha language and restrict its use by non-Omaha.

Kathy Shea is a Ph.D. student at Kansas. She is working with the Southern Ponca at White Eagle, Oklahoma, in their efforts to develop curriculum materials for their school programs. The similarities of Omaha and Ponca languages provides me with an interesting mirror in which to examine my own programs. Some of Kathy's native speakers share kinship with my Omaha relatives and speakers. These linkages may open the door to collaborative projects in the future.

Carolyn Quintero runs an interpreter service in Tulsa, Oklahoma. Her work with the few remaining Osage speakers has resulted in the compilation of an introductory text book for teaching the language. I acquired a copy of Carolyn's book and use it as a reference in developing lesson plans for the UNL classes.

Ardis Eschenberg is a Ph.D. student from New York. Her interest in Omaha language brought her to Omaha Nation Public School in search of dissertation data.

The routine approach of too many researchers is to enter a community, gather data, and then disappear without regard to the community's feelings. Fortunately, Ardis met Vida Stabler and the elders at the Culture Center. They made it clear that they would help Ardis if she was willing to help them. Both parties went through a trial and error period while measuring each others' commitment to Omaha. In time Ardis was offered a position as linguist for the Culture Center. From a linguist's standpoint, it provides her with access to some of the best Omaha speakers available. For the Culture Center's part, they have a motivated and well-trained scholar assisting them in the preparation and execution of their classes.

Rory Larson is a recent addition to the Dhegihanist ranks. An M.A. student at the University of Nebraska, Rory attended the Lakota Sioux classes prior to enrolling in the Omaha courses. Like Koontz, Rory has a good grasp on the mechanics of the language based upon his study of Dorsey's materials. He has been very helpful to me in the organization of the current Omaha language classes at UNL, providing linguistic explanations for both me and the students. As noted below in the discussion of the Nebraska program, Rory served as Teaching Assistant during semesters that I was incapacitated.

These, then, are the Dhegihanists (Figure 2.6). All have committed themselves to the study and understanding of their various languages. Some have worked mostly in the academic and theoretical realms. Others have been invited to assist Native communities and individuals in language documentation, revival, and maintenance projects. Much of the work is pro bono, motivated by a passion for language rather than an expectation of profit. All of the above named

individuals have extended help to me over the years. When I notified them of my intention to teach Omaha language at UNL, they each renewed their offers of assistance in any manner necessary. I am honored that this group of professionals has permitted me to join their ranks.

le t^he oⁿmatathishoⁿ atha: The language shifts (to the other side)

I have been blessed with warm personal relations with many Omaha people who are now deceased. I believe that many of these individuals truly cared for me, nurtured my growth as a human being, and always spoke honestly. Sometimes we had our differences of opinion, but in every case the rift would be healed and we would enjoy each other's company once again. It is their children, grandchildren, and great grandchildren whom I now call "my relatives." It is contrary to Omaha custom to mention the names of the deceased, hence the importance of terms of relationship. Kin terms permit a person to talk about a deceased relative without dishonoring or disturbing them. I apologize for the discomfort that is caused as I utter our deceased relatives' names.

The complete shift from Omaha to English as the first language has taken place just within the past one hundred years. To understand how that shift took place -- is taking place -- can provide insights for any program of language reversal or language maintenance. This is a broad description of Omaha language shift. Native language retention varies within each family, depending upon a multitude of pressure points such as number of in-house active speakers,

attitudes towards assimilation, and adherence to traditional roles in the community.

The Omaha have a long history of interaction with groups speaking other languages. Choices have always been made about the acquisition of, or maintenance of, non-Omaha languages. Does the successful hunter understand that learning some French, Spanish, or English will assist him in communicating with his fur trader *du jour*? When the Omaha join with the Pawnee under the peace of the calumet ceremony to trade and hunt, does either side recognize an advantage to learning the other's language? To all of these I say, "Undoubtedly." Sign language may have served the immediate needs of the warrior, hunter, and trader, but it could not replace the depth of meaning and richness of vocabulary found in an oral language. With increasing white contact, the role of the interpreter gained much prestige.

By the early reservation era, many Omaha began moving towards becoming multilingual Omaha-English speakers. Language choice indicated one's acceptance of, or resistance to, the Americanization process being forced upon native peoples (Swetland GPR4.2). However, it can be safe to assume that the majority of Omaha born prior to the 1930s still spoke Omaha as their first language. I do not dispute the possibility of isolated exceptions. My interest is in the bulk of the tribe. Exemplary individuals from my grandparents' generation with whom I spoke include Charles and Elizabeth Stabler, Oliver and Mae Saunsoci Sr., Charlie Edwards, Maggie Johnson, Coolidge Stabler, Charlie Cook, Clyde Jr. and Lillian Sheridan, Nellie Canby Morris, Mary Lieb Mitchell,

Lizzie Springer, John and Suzette Turner, Joe and Irene Gilpin, Thomas C. Walker, Sam Al and Suzy Robinson, and many others. Some of these individuals were students in off-reservation government boarding schools such as Hampton, Carlisle, and Genoa. They gained an exposure and proficiency in English, often at the expense of their native language and culture. In spite of the pressures, it seems that the majority were able to regain and maintain their native language when they returned home.

The children of many of these boarding school students, born between the Depression years and the end of World War II, also spoke Omaha. This is the generation of my Omaha "mothers, fathers, aunts, and uncles. They became the victims of a weakness in the language chain that had been forged in the preceding generation. Many of the parents -- but not all -- chose not to continue speaking Omaha to their children when their children entered the English-speaking public school system. Perhaps the boarding school experience had shown the parents the usefulness of English in a growing white society. Perhaps they wished to pass that advantage on to their children. Perhaps the elders had internalized the negative, derogatory feelings that their boarding school teachers had drilled into them concerning all things native. Several of the interviewees in Chapter 3 touch upon such issues. It is in this generation that we see the emergence of Omaha-born, English-shifted children who are the passive or non-speakers today. Of those children who maintained a native language ability into their adult years, the shift to English as the birth language came with their offspring, the generation of my Omaha "brothers and sisters." The shift to

English-only birth language has become complete in the following generation -- my Omaha "nieces, nephews, and grandchildren."

Language and cultural practices are often viewed as being tied together by the Omaha. The continuation of the one is dependent upon the continuation of the other. The concern for the native language comes up in nearly every venue. At a recent economic conference attended by leaders from state government and regional tribes, statements about the status of native languages (including from the Omaha delegation), were brought to the table (NSHS 2001). Interest in the language remains high in the community as illustrated by school surveys mentioned earlier. However, the paucity of spoken Omaha belies viable positive action on that interest. Increasingly, when a person gives a greeting or mentions a word in the Omaha language to a known speaker, they will more often than not, receive an English response. There are increasing feelings of isolation being voiced by many of the fluent elders and their non-speaking, Omaha-born children. It is rooted in the frustration of not having anyone else to talk to in Omaha.

Umoⁿhoⁿ ie t^he niskithe toⁿwoⁿgthoⁿ ati: The Omaha Language Arrives at Lincoln (UNL)

The University of Nebraska opened the door for the re-development of Native language classes in the Fall of 2000. This effort is housed in the Department of Anthropology and jointly supported by the Native American Studies/Ethnic Studies programs. Eight students completed the first four

semester series of Omaha language courses in May 2002. The following narrative outlines the process and strategies in developing a comprehensive Omaha Language Program using a language and culture approach. My focus is on the integration of culturally appropriate Native community approaches for program development, including receiving permission from the community to offer their language to non-Indians, maintaining communication with community constituents, collaborative projects with Omaha Nation Public School, and use of Native speakers in an otherwise non-Native academic setting. I discuss the initial curriculum projects and products developed by the instructor, students, and Native speakers during the four semester sequence. These include immersion lesson plans, a bilingual recipe booklet, card games, material culture projects, working cookouts, and the hosting of a final hand game and feast for the community.

It should be noted here that I use the term "program," as in "Omaha Language Program" and "Native Language Program" to refer to a comprehensive endeavor which includes a four-semester language class, public outreach, collaboration, and research. The Omaha language efforts are embedded under a Native Language umbrella which hopes to encompass additional Native languages in the future. "Program" is not used in the sense of a defined unit within the University of Nebraska's academic hierarchy, i.e., college, department, center, school. I decided against referring to it as an "initiative" because it might distance it from community parlance. As well, calling it a "project" conjures interpretations of being ephemeral. The task yet remains to adequately name this

undertaking in a manner acceptable to both academic and native community sensibilities.

In the fall of 1999, I was brought back to Nebraska from Oklahoma under a three-year contract to develop a Native language program. I was given a joint appointment in the Department of Anthropology and the Institute for Ethnic Studies in the Native American Studies (NAS) program. After early discussions with the Anthropology chair, Institute director, and NAS co-coordinator, it was left to me to choose which Native language to focus on. Lakota Sioux had been taught at UNL for several years, but had been recently discontinued due to the departure of the instructor. The strengths associated with reviving Lakota included the availability of curriculum materials (UC Boulder) and the assistance available from Lakota programs at other colleges in the region. The weaknesses included my lack of familiarity with that language, and the questionable status of local native speakers as resources.

The choice of teaching Omaha language was derived from several considerations. While the lack of curriculum materials and other college programs to draw upon for assistance seemed daunting, nonetheless I had a working familiarity with the language, I had compiled the only extant Omaha dictionary, and knew of several native speakers (and the Dhegiha linguists) who could serve as language resources. I reasoned that offering Omaha language would place UNL in a field of its own. It could also serve to reinforce the efforts of the K-12 language and culture efforts at Omaha Nation Public School on the Omaha Reservation.

Announcing my desire to develop Omaha language brought a positive response from my supervisors. They assumed that their assent was sufficient to start the classes. I described the need to approach the Omaha community in order to explain UNL's interests, and to ask for the community's authorization and support. I believe my supervisors were puzzled, if not amused, by such a notion. On November 3, 1999, my wife and I hosted a dinner at the Lincoln Indian Center with an open invitation to all Omaha living in the Lincoln area (SEE Appendix D). Sacrificing food (i.e., placing it in front of a person(s)) is the appropriate Omaha way to ask someone to share knowledge. It is serendipitous that gathering a focus group fits well with the intent of the grounded theory approach. It calls for theoretical sampling; selecting a sample based upon some characteristic critical to the research question. In this case, the unifying characteristic is the participant's interest in the language topic. In a grounded theory approach, it represented the first field experience in this emerging study.

After a communal meal, the people were invited to express their concerns and ideas about the UNL proposal to teach Omaha language. Of the more than thirty people in attendance, many rose to speak. The majority of the responses ranged from strongly supportive to hesitant fence sitting. The minority dissenting attitude was summed up in the statement; "The white man has taken our lands; now they want to take our language." Ironically, the person who held that opinion was the same person I was planning to ask to join the class as a Native speaker. The opinion also reminded me of the occasional comments, usually offered in a nostalgic tone, that wished for Omaha people to be sitting in the director's chair

or job position, rather than a non-Indian. Nonetheless, the majority of the group seemed favorable to the idea, with the caveat that Omaha religion did not become a focus of classroom discussion by non-Omaha students.

In November 1999, I attended a quarterly stated meeting of the Omaha Tribe and addressed the Omaha Tribal Council. Three of the Council members spoke in favor of the proposition. Several community members in the audience also spoke favorably. This meeting was followed by a second dinner hosted in Omaha on December 29th for residents of that city (Appendix E). More than twenty people attended. All who rose to speak were unanimously in favor of the UNL interest in teaching Omaha language.

The ritualistically important fourth meeting took place the following week when I joined the Macy Senior Citizens at their noonday meal. I explained the UNL proposition and reported on the responses at the three prior meetings with community members and the Tribal Council. Several of the elders rose to speak in favor of the language being offered in Lincoln. They specifically voiced the hope that their grandchildren would benefit by the University's language efforts. Many of the elders recalled the names of the individuals who had taught me the Omaha ways, and thus they had confidence that I would make the right decisions about what would be appropriate to teach to non-Indians. It may be that the recent positive language revitalization efforts at the Omaha Nation Public School Culture Center helped to create a favorable environment for the UNL proposal in the community.

I immediately began working out the details of the four semester series of classes necessary for Arts and Sciences students to qualify for the language requirement. In effect, I had to request approval for four discrete new courses from the college's curriculum committee. The courses were to be housed in Anthropology and cross-listed with Ethnic Studies/Native American Studies. They would count towards the minors in Anthropology and Native American Studies. There was a mountain of paperwork. Ultimately the courses were approved and listed in the student bulletin.

The Native Language program is designed to serve as an umbrella for any number of languages. Using alpha designations, Omaha is labeled "A". When UNL is able to develop other indigenous languages that are not pursued by the Modern Language Department they can come under their own alpha designation in Anthropology. The collection of a Special Fee was approved beginning in 2001 to provide funds for student field trips and related activities.

Fall 2000, marked the beginning of the Omaha I class. The initial enrollment of eleven students included one Omaha, one Ponca/Santee, a Cherokee, a Shawnee, and a Pottawatomie. The latter three students stated that they knew nothing about their own tribal heritages. One student in the History Ph.D. program was advised to study Omaha in preparation for a dissertation project on a Native American topic. An Anthropology M.A. student, Dhegihanist Rory Larson, had studied in the earlier Lakota classes as well as other European languages. He joined the class and provided invaluable technical and comparative linguistic skills (Figure 2.8).

I was able to beg two local ladies to assist me in the classroom on a weekly basis. My elderly Aunt Albert Grant Canby had stopped using Omaha when she attended grade school on the Reservation. My middle-aged Daughter Emmaline Walker Sanchez had also stopped using the language when she attended grade school. Emmaline had married and lived with her Mexican husband in south Texas for the past thirty years. Her children were fluent in English and Spanish, but did not speak Omaha. Both ladies were hesitant about their abilities in speaking. Aunt Alberta commented that since I had been turned down by other local speakers, that she and Emmaline took pity on me and would try their best. There were no male speakers available in the Lincoln area.



Figure 2.8 Omaha Language Class #1, OMAHA III, November 2001. L to R: 1st Row: Katie Morgan, Stacey Sanchez, Seth Lambert, Speaker Emmaline Sanchez. 2nd Row: Rory Larson, Natalie Luben, Tamara Levi, Deb Richards, Tony Schommer, Instructor Mark Awakuni-Swetland, John Gapp. Not Present: Speaker Alberta Canby. Photograph by Ruth Ford.

On the first day of class, the Omaha I students were told, “We are all going on a boat ride, but first we have to build the boat.” In other words, course materials did not exist so we had to make them as we went along. It was also a tacit admission to the students and speakers that I was taking us beyond the limits of my own Omaha language skills. I had a feeling of *deja vu* of Grandma Elizabeth Stabler’s classes of thirty years ago because our only language textbook was Fletcher and La Flesche “The Omaha Tribe.” Other Omaha titles on topics ranging from land dispossession and culture shift to repatriation efforts were to be added each semester with the goal of each student having the basic “Omaha library” by the conclusion of the series.

A small Bessey Hall seminar room housed the class. The walls were decorated with numerous photographs of historic and contemporary Omaha people with the goal of putting a human face on the language. Omaha numbers 1-10; a diagram of the clan system, and other curricular materials adorned the walls. Six small tables that could be rearranged to accommodate a variety of activities replaced the room’s single conference table.

I received two small in-house grants to support aspects of a multi-part Omaha Language Curriculum Development Project. A Diversity Enhancement Grant helped compensate the speakers for a portion of their time, paid for the first field trips, and provided other classroom materials. A Teaching Council Grant was earmarked for language tape development in future semesters. A grant from the Endangered Language Fund managed by Yale University supported work with several Native speakers.

Like other second language classes, we learned the pronunciation of Omaha sounds, struggled with some basic rules of grammar, and began building a vocabulary. We developed several games including Go Fish and Verb Dominoes. Brief immersion activities were developed after the second semester. The students designed many of them. Each activity focused on a particular language domain (commands, positionals) or cultural domains (kinship terms). We had weekly quizzes (oral or written) to measure language acquisition. Regular essay writing assignments permitted students to demonstrate their growing knowledge of Omaha history and culture. It was a venue for students to pose questions and give feedback about the direction of the course. At the end of each semester students performed a teaching evaluation that also addressed future directions. Guest speakers during the first and third semester included the then-current Omaha Tribal Council Chairman and an elder clan relative from Omaha, Nebraska.

The students, speakers, and various family members gathered at my home for a potluck cookout each semester. Contemporary "traditional" foods were prepared over a wood fire in the same manner used by Omaha cooking for a feast. Students participated in making cowboy bread, frybread with variations, hamburger gravy, and other recipes. Their detailed observations and hands-on experiences were then transferred to paper and translated to Omaha. The speakers worked with the students to edit the recipes. Field trips to the Omaha Reservation each semester permitted students to work with other elder speakers in double-checking the translations. The recipes were compiled into an 87-page

booklet, with illustrations provided by art students at Omaha Nation Public School. Two versions were printed. One version featured only the Omaha language on each page, with an English translation at the end of each recipe (Appendix F). A second version was requested by the Omaha community with English subtitles on each page (Appendix G). As with other materials being developed, the recipe booklets were shared with the Culture Program at Omaha Nation Public School.

Community responses to the cookbook brought a peculiar reaction by a small number of Macy elders, telling us that the words were not recognizable as Omaha. I pondered this comment in light of the process in which we double-checked our words with both the UNL speakers and ONPS speakers Marcella and Oliver Cayou. I proposed the following explanation to the UNL speakers: The Macy elders did not recognize the words as Omaha because they were not literate in the Omaha language. It would be similar to the case of my 6 year old son incorrectly trying to sound-out an English word in a book. The word he produces would not always sound like a recognizable word. But when the appropriate sounds are applied to each letter, the word becomes recognizable. It was the worn-out oral versus written orthography issue, again.

Students were required to attend a number of local social activities in the Indian Community during each semester. They routinely participated in Lincoln Indian Club hand games and dances. This permitted them to learn and practice proper Omaha etiquette, helping to serve food, and the propriety of bringing food donations for the communal feasts. On their first field trip to the Omaha

Reservation I arranged for the students to eat lunch with the Macy Senior Citizen congregation. At that time they presented the Senior Citizens with gifts – a fundamental Omaha practice -- as a way of introducing themselves and thanking the group for their support in the past, present, and future. On subsequent trips the students ate lunch with the Omaha Nation students, and at the Casino Omaha.

The first cohort of students worked on two material culture projects. I believe that studying and replicating material culture helps the student gain a new insight into the Omaha value system. They first learned how to make dance shawls ornamented with long fringes. This permitted the girls to be properly attired when attending social functions. Both boys and girls made shawls in recognition of the role Omaha males play in assisting females in this work. Materials for the shawl project were paid for in part by a grant from a local foundation. In the next semester all students made Omaha style moccasins. During the summer break, between the second and third semesters, students asked to be able to gather at my home to work on various personal beadwork projects.

The Omaha Nation Public School Culture Center organized a one-day Omaha Language immersion workshop in the summer, 2001. I and the UNL Native Speakers were invited to participate. Brief language events were organized around such daily activities as hanging laundry on an outdoor line, transplanting bedding plants to a larger planter, making a fruit salad, and making coffee. It was an eye-opening experience. We encountered difficulties with

speakers staying “in Omaha” for the necessary 10-15 minutes. Most participants recognized the difficulties in remembering the appropriate lexicon at the moment of discussion. Most deferred to the need to “check my files’ for the word in question after-the-fact. I had noticed the same behavior in the classroom with my speakers. Each would defer to the other, or consult with more fluent relatives after class.

I was unable to teach the fourth semester (Spring 2002) due to a life-threatening medical emergency. Fortunately, the History Ph.D. student, Tamara Levi, was willing to serve as a Teaching Assistant with the support of the two speakers. Rory Larson was encouraged to provide linguistic support in the form of weekly summary lectures on the areas of syntax and grammar covered during the preceding three semesters. Videotapes of his lectures helped me to keep abreast of class developments.

As a fourth semester final project, the class organized and sponsored an appreciation hand game and feast for the community. Food sharing is the Omaha way of seeking community validation for some achievement. The students expanded the program to include a war dance. Staff members (Head Man Dancer, Head Singer, Head Lady Dancer, Master of Ceremonies, Man-in-Charge) were selected from the community. Resources were organized to provide the customary gifts to visitors as well as the food needed for the feast. On the day of the event students cooked the food, prepared the building for the activity, greeted visitors, performed an Omaha language skit, and gave a traditional speech in the Omaha language. The hand game was well attended by

urban and Reservation Omaha. A year later I was still hearing positive comments about the manner in which the students handled themselves.

Fall 2002 marked the beginning of the second cohort of Omaha language. There are seventeen students, including: two Omaha, one Ponca/Santee, two Lakota, and three Ph.D. students (two History, one English). The Anthropology M.A. student, Rory Larson, has returned on a volunteer basis to continue learning Omaha and assists in the classroom. Both speakers have returned to work with the new group. Over one-half of the students reported enrolling based upon the recommendations of students from the first cohort. Two students are siblings of the first group. Four individuals are older, non-traditional students (Figure 2.9).



Figure 2.9 Omaha Language Class #2. OMAHA II, Spring 2003, Macy, Nebraska. L to R: Loren Frerichs, Mike Hammons, Andy Pedley, Elaine Nelson, Matt Schumacher, Jessica Waite, Carrie Wolfe, Anna Ramsey, Wynne Summers, Kurt Kinbacher, Speaker Alberta Canby. Not present: Megan Merrick, Sara Anderson, Speaker Emmaline Sanchez. Photograph by Rory Larson.

In the first half of the second semester (Spring 2003) I was again sidelined due to a deteriorating medical situation. Rory Larson agreed to stand in as a Teaching Assistant with the support of the two native speakers. The students grumbled, albeit in a good-natured way, because Rory focused more on descriptive linguistics and less on cultural and historical information. The entire class was brought into the discussion of how they wished to conclude the semester. Using an Omaha consensus approach, everyone was permitted to voice his or her ideas and concerns. The students decide to continue with the planned activities. That included taking a field trip to Macy, finishing a material culture project (moccasins), working on transcribing and publishing a Dorsey Omaha story, and hosting the spring Native American Studies faculty community dinner by organizing and sponsoring a hand game. I provided as much advice and encouragement as possible from the hospital bed. But it was the students, instructor, and speakers, working as a cohesive group, who did the majority of the work in their passionate desire to move the program forward.

So, what makes the UNL Native Language Program special? I believe it is the effort to integrate culturally appropriate Native community approaches for program development. These include receiving permission from the community to offer their language to non-Natives, maintaining communication with community constituents, undertaking collaborative projects with the Omaha Reservation Public School, and use of Native speakers in an otherwise non-Native academic setting. Students are brought to the realization that this program is production oriented rather than consumption oriented. They are responsible for

leaving behind a legacy of materials and goodwill that will benefit the next cohort of students as well as the Omaha community. The goal of the program is not to re-create students as “Omaha”, but rather, to help students become better human beings through an exposure to a unique people, their language, and their culture.

Points of concern for the survival of this program include my limited skills as an Omaha speaker, my incomplete knowledge of the rules of grammar, the continuing lack of diverse curriculum materials, the lack of comfortably fluent speakers available in Lincoln, and the possibility that current statewide budget shortfalls may force the cancellation of this admittedly marginal language class. On the other hand, the strengths of the program include the passion engendered in the students and the personal embarrassment-risking efforts of my Native speakers to resurrect their language abilities. My knowledge and competency in the areas of Omaha culture, history, and material culture replication, together with my long-time engagement with the Omaha people helps to ground the classes in the community. The University of Nebraska’s publicly proclaiming interest in diversity education gives all of us encouragement to struggle on. Most importantly, the support of the wider Omaha community remains the vital key to our continued success.

While the ethnographic authority of a trained observer is of measurable value, I still cling to the notion that people intimately involved in their own community will have some useful insights. The following chapter presents interviews of current Omaha leaders including tribal council members, educators, an early childhood development provider, health care administrator, religious leaders, and other prominent community members. It is time to hear their voices.

Chapter 3

The Data

When you learn about our language, you learn about our culture
Howard Wolf, 2002

Nudo'ho'ga ama ia tama: The Leaders Are Going to Speak

The following data for this study are drawn from formal interviews with ten selected adult leaders of the Omaha community. Following a grounded theory approach, they have been theoretically selected because they all currently hold, have recently held, or can be expected to hold in the future, positions of local authority. Their attitudes have a bearing on programs and policies related to Omaha language retention or rejection. They represent an age span from 34 to 76, with the majority in their early 40s to early 60s. Collectively this group can serve as a litmus test of community attitudes. Members of this group are routinely approached by other community members for advice and opinions on a wide range of issues. Within this group are a number of connections to the predominant religious organization (Native American Church), including ministers and active participants.

Of the ten formal interviews, the following positions of community leadership are represented: Two current tribal government leaders, two tribal government program directors, one public school board member, two public school culture center faculty, one university teacher trainee, one Indian community college faculty member, and one community member. Seven of the interviewees are female, three are male. The disparity in gender is equalized with material from 10 informal interviews with other representative adults in the

community (Senior Center, Omaha Nation Public School, tribal council members past and present, resident community members, and off-reservation community members. Of this informal group, four are female, and six are male. This achieves a composite total of eleven females and eleven males.

Using the grounded theory approach, questions were generated from comments made during the 1999 focus group dinners hosted in Lincoln and Omaha, as well as opinions expressed in the Tribe's Quarterly Meeting, and from the Macy Senior Citizens dinner visit in that same year. The formal interviewees were asked questions to elicit information about the following areas: What was their exposure to the language in their youth? What had been their exposure to the language in recent times? What did they think caused the current condition of the Omaha language? What did they think the future role of the language should be? What could be done to reach that goal? This information was supplemented by questions about their awareness and/or opinion of language-related activities at ONPS, UNL, and Nebraska Indian Community College at Macy (NICC), as well as their opinion about efforts to put into writing the heretofore oral Omaha language. In line with the grounded theory process, questions generated during each interview were added to subsequent interviews.

The informal interviewees were approached and engaged in more generalized conversations on the language topic during brief encounters on the street, in their homes, or place of employment. The interviews were not recorded, although the reason for my talking to them (dissertation research and writing) was disclosed. The majority of their views echoed those opinions provided by the

formal interviewees and are not reproduced here. However, they are taken into consideration as I quantified answers in my analysis.

The interviews were transcribed from audio tape and have been edited only to reduce the number of false starts, and to divide some run-on sentences. The mannerism of each person's speech has been preserved. The general length of each response has been preserved in order to illustrate how the individual forms, rephrases, and qualifies his/her response during the course of the answer. While some interviewees permitted the use of their names in this report, several of the interviewees declined to have their names released. They opted for various other identifiers, e.g., tribal member, tribal council member. Readers familiar with the community may well be able to deduce the identities of the unnamed interviewees. However, the interpretation of these interviews and the synthesis of conclusions offered remain the sole responsibility of the author. I apologize for any misunderstandings that may arise.

The formal interviewees are introduced below with a presentation of each individual's background. No rank order is assigned to the individuals here, although their positions within the community do have a differential of authority and influence.

INTERVIEWEE #1

This Tribal Council Member (TCM1) is in his early forties. He was born in Lincoln but now resides on the Omaha Reservation. He was born into a primarily English-speaking household, although exposed to elders on both sides of the family who spoke Omaha. He has had some post-secondary education, and some tribal government employment experience.

INTERVIEWEE #2

Lena Spears is the Director of the Omaha Tribal Head Start Program. She is in her early forties, and resides on the Omaha Reservation. As a young girl she grew up in alternating Omaha and Winnebago homes and was exposed to both languages. She pursued post-secondary education including time spent at a business school, Haskell Jr. College, and Morningside College. While working part-time for a tribal enterprise, Lena was appointed to her current position with the Tribal Head Start Program.

INTERVIEWEE #3

Wehnona St. Cyr is the Director of the Carl T. Curtis Health Education Center. She is in her early forties, and resides in the countryside on the nearby Winnebago Reservation. As a young girl she grew up in southern Kansas. Her Omaha-speaking grandparents lived nearby. However, she grew up in a household that promoted education and English speaking. Wehnona pursued post-secondary education at various institutions including Riverside, Bacone, and

the Friend University in Wichita, Kansas. She received a Social Work degree from Morningside College. Ms. St. Cyr has held administrative positions at other Indian Health Service sites prior to her appointment as Director at Carl T. Curtis Health Education Center

INTERVIEWEE #4

This Omaha Tribal Member (TM11) is in her early sixties. She was born on the Omaha reservation but raised her family in Lincoln, Nebraska. She and her husband (TM12) returned to a rural home on the reservation in the late 1990s. She was born into an Omaha-speaking household. English entered her life when she started school. She has had no formal post-secondary education. Since returning to the reservation she has worked for the Tribal Head Start and the Macy Public Schools as a language and culture instructor. She has been employed at the Casino Omaha as a service worker. Recently she has been asked to work with the Walthill Public School as an Omaha language and culture instructor. As of the writing of this dissertation in 2003, the Walthill program had been canceled.

INTERVIEWEE #5

Vida Sue Stabler is the Director of the Omaha Nation Public School Culture Center. She is in her early forties and resides on the reservation. Born and raised in Omaha, Vida was surrounded by many Omaha-speaking relatives, but primarily spoke English. Her post-secondary education experiences include work

at Nebraska Indian Community College, Wayne State College, and Oklahoma City University. She has worked in several schools as both employee and volunteer prior to her current appointment as Director of the Culture Center at Omaha Nation Public School.

INTERVIEWEE #6

This 30 year reservation resident is in her early sixties. She was born and raised in an English-speaking home in Lincoln, but lived in Macy for the past 30 years. She currently resides in nearby Winnebago, Nebraska while commuting daily to Macy for work. She is a Nebraska Indian Community College and Wayne State College graduate. She worked as the tribal Head Start director for four years, followed by work at the tribal Housing Authority, Macy Public School, and Nebraska Indian Community College. She has recently worked at the Walthill Public School in the alternative education program.

INTERVIEWEE #7

This Omaha Tribal Council Member (TCM2) is in his early fifties. He was born and raised at Macy, Nebraska. His parents spoke English while both grandparents spoke Omaha. He recalls that "growing up, we've always spoke English in our home." He has had some post-secondary vocational training, as well as education through Haskell Jr. College, Briar Cliff College, and Bellevue College. His primary recent job experience has been as a multi-term Tribal

Council member. He has experience in Child Protective Services, and serving on the Nebraska Indian Community College and public school boards.

INTERVIEWEE #8

This female Omaha Tribal Member (TM13) is in her mid fifties. She resides in the countryside outside of Macy. She was raised in a household where her mother spoke Omaha and her father spoke English. Her post-secondary education includes a dietetic certification program at Auburn University. She worked for many years as a certified dietary manager at the Carl T. Curtis Health Education Center. She has recently entered the political arena by being elected to the school board.

INTERVIEWEE #9

Barry Webster is in his early thirties and resides in Macy. After graduating from high school he received an Associate of Arts degree from the Nebraska Indian Community College. He is participating in the University of Nebraska Teachers College Elementary Education Teacher Training program. He has worked as a youth counselor and at the tribe's Wellness Center. He has served on the local school board. He grew up speaking English, although his father was a fluent Omaha speaker.

INTERVIEWEE #10

Hawate is in her mid seventies and resides in the countryside outside of Macy. She attended Haskell Jr. College. In the past several years she has been working as a teacher of the Omaha language at Omaha Nation Public School, the tribal Head Start program, and at the Nebraska Indian Community College. Her previous work experience includes time spent as a tribal judge and director of the tribal education program. Hawate was born into a household of Omaha speakers. She was first exposed to English when she went to school.

Information presented during informal visits and included in the following data also came from (TM14) a fluent tribal member in her seventies who has extensive experience in elder care and nutrition.

Q1: CAUSE(S) FOR THE CURRENT CONDITION OF THE OMAHA LANGUAGE

Rationale: To explore the range of causes as identified by respondents. Are they induced internally, externally, or in some combination? Does the respondent offer any suggestion for amelioration of the cause?

AWAKUNI-SWETLAND: So in your opinion, why is the Omaha language in the condition it is today?

TRIBAL COUNCIL MEMBER (TCM2): Because we're trying to simulate the non-Indian. I mean, that was the goal that was set out by the government and yet, you know, for us to survive we still have to do that.

BARRY WEBSTER: Because of our social problems, you know. I mean people are so wrapped up in, you know, you can say, lifestyle, you know. Some people, you know, live with alcoholism but still maintain a job, you know. The high rate of alcoholism, the lack of teachings. The lack of the oral teaching.

It's just a lack of concern, you know. It's not really important to a lot of the people, you know. We could do a random survey. Stand right here and stop these cars as they leave Macy, and say, "Where are you going tonight?" "Oh, Bingo." You could easily say that 90 percent of the people are going to Bingo tonight, rather than spending that quality time teaching their kids. So I think it's a lack of carrying on the teachings. A lot of, again, social problems. If you don't take time to teach your kids, they'll never learn. You know, I see it happen all the time. Nobody wants to learn. They want everybody else to do the work.

TRIBAL MEMBER (TM11): Well, that's one mistake that we made. Our parents made. It's because we lived in the city and we were trying to survive every way, you know, to keep our family going. My husband wasn't home most of the time. I was home taking care of the kids. He had two jobs. So most of the time we weren't together except at nights. Where our kids were, when you talked Indian, they weren't there.

Living in the city, you know, you have to try to survive and go to work, and you're busy. That was one mistake that we didn't talk our language there. Because we didn't have time.

TRIBAL MEMBER (TM13): Because the government wanted us to be... wanted to throw us into the melting pot, I guess. They wanted to do away with all of our traditions and our ceremonies and even our language. From the stories that I've heard, they've -- you were punished if you spoke your

language. And so, they almost did what they set out to do, to get us into the melting pot like everybody else was. But they couldn't, because I guess, we're a little bit stronger than they thought we were. We were able to hang on to a lot of that stuff and -- a lot of them are learning how to do all that stuff, and how to speak and all this kind of stuff now. And I don't think it will ever die out. As long as there is someone there to teach even a little bit of it, it will never die out. Not like they wanted it to. When I say "they", I mean the Federal Government.

HAWATE: We were out in the white man's world. So my children weren't exposed to this culture here. We were out there all the time. And I feel bad today, to say that I didn't tell my kids more about my language. See, my husband was Omaha, too. And he spoke it fluently. So he and I would talk. But we never stopped to teach the kids. So now they can't talk. They're trying to, now

WEHNONA ST. CYR: Kids going off to school and alcohol have to be contributing factors in the family breakdown and a big factor in the language loss.

When a child doesn't know what clan they belong to, doesn't have an Indian name, if you go back and start talking to the parents, usually their parents were drinking alcohol. And when you're drinking alcohol that becomes the most important thing. Those things they were taught, the grandparents when they were little, they didn't learn those things.

TRIBAL COUNCIL MEMBER (TCM1): There's drug and alcohol abuse that's within their homes, and I believe those are the main obstacles that are keeping our children from learning a lot of our traditional values.

VIDA SUE STABLER: I think there are a lot of factors for that. I think that hard times had something to do with the loss of our language. That's a general kind of an umbrella. But underneath that hard time, comes kids going to boarding school. Lack of ways for our people to have meaningful work here. Maybe there was an idea or a view that if you learned, a long time ago, if you learned English, maybe it would somehow help you so that life would not be so hard. Because maybe you'd be able to partake in those better jobs. But the reality was when we did move to the cities, we worked in those factories. I don't think that there was ever any real opportunity given to a lot of people.

Maybe once they entered the service or something like that, maybe that was an avenue. But then you were going to be leaving. You were going to be away and leaving your culture. At least in Omaha, you could still partake because of the pockets of Omaha people that were there.

I think social concerns lead to our language not being used. Sadness. Maybe the fact that most of the businesses today, and yesterday on the reservation were white owned. I think that there might have been some pressure within that to learn English, to be able to get the things that you needed.

TRIBAL MEMBER (TM14): Father never said, "Keep the Omaha language," because we were already fluent. He did say, "Learn the white man's ways...language. You have to know their language... have the smarts not to let whites take advantage of you. Speaking Omaha will not bring you food. English will."

Summary: The most common theme in explaining the current condition of the Omaha language points to the deleterious effects of contact with white society. There are many venues for this contact, including: government regulations, off-reservation school experience, the work environment, and the basic struggle to

survive in the white mainstream. Three respondents noted the abuse of alcohol and/or drugs as a factor in disrupting the transference of language and traditional values to the next generation. The lack of meaningful work and an attitude of non-concern with the language/culture were also cited.

Q2: TRIBAL COUNCIL'S ROLE IN LANGUAGE MAINTENANCE

Rationale: What is the Council's role, if any, in language issues? Note its unique position in the community as overseer of all programs and gatekeeper for most funding for activities, its history of gatekeeper to the outside world, and its ability to wield real power in the face of federal constraints.

One interviewee spoke of the tribal council's role in Omaha language preservation.

TRIBAL COUNCIL MEMBER (TCM1): Well I believe that there should always be one individual that sits on the [council] seat that's going [to] preserve all the culture. And one that can be able to speak the language to the people. I mean, I'll use Elmer [Blackbird] for an example. It just so happened he's the chairman and that he's able to communicate with the elders, sharing the language. That's a real strong, positive thing, being a leader, you know, Indian and all that. That there is because of being able to communicate with the elders The elders, that's the only way they understand. We try to share today's modern technical language, but they don't understand it.

Being able to communicate and work together so that those seven seats are working together, understanding and working together. Being a workforce that's going to take on all Government Issue business. I believe that... language should play a big role with them being qualified to be a tribal leader. I

mean, if you went back, these seats here, these individuals were leaders and were able to communicate on both sides to the people. The Omaha people were more able to stand up there and speak to the government people.

Currently, there are no guidelines or requirements. But I strongly believe that individuals should be able to communicate with the elders. Because they're the ones that, I believe, that really need to be first informed of what our government -- of what we're going to be doing. You've seen it at a stated meeting. You don't see our elders there, [or] very few. And then, who's communicating to them? [It is] after the fact of the stated meeting. They pretty much don't read and myself being young and not able to speak fluent enough to understand them. But I can understand a lot of the technical words. I try to simplify it for them to understand, [but] it gets tough. And then it gets irritating for them because they don't understand that word. And then they say, "Well, why don't you share it in our Omaha language?" And that's my downfall, where I can't communicate it specifically to their understanding.

It's just a two-way thing. That's where I think we need to focus. Our younger generation. If possible it [speaking Omaha] could become a requirement within our institutes. We have all these programs here. We've got these programs that put out money for these kids, for their extra curricular activities. They receive money to go to ball games. They give them money to eat on. I think that's where that JOM [Johnson O'Malley school funds) could be utilized. I mean, for them to be involved in sports and all that, they've got to be able to follow these requirements and guidelines. The council can initiate these kinds of mandates. You know, it's probably going to be kind of a long process to get this going. Because there's going to have to be a survey and different things. It can be modified into the programs. The tribe, the council has control of that.

The biggest thing is to implement it into the educational institutions down here. If they recognize it within their curriculum. I don't think it has to be a part of the

required curriculum. I think that it would fall under the other [elective] category. But I think if that one [language] class each year becomes a requirement, I think we would be able to focus on more of the kids getting educated in our language.

Summary: An Omaha-speaking tribal leader emotes strength. The ability of past tribal leaders to communicate in both English and Omaha facilitated explaining complicated ideas to constituents as well as being “more able to stand up there and speak to the government people.” The perceived inability of today’s elders to understand technical jargon combined with the leader’s inability to speak Omaha results in feelings of frustrations. At least one tribal council member should be responsible/able to preserve the language and culture. The council has the authority to mandate Omaha language use in the programs that it controls. A yearly language class requirement should be added to the school curriculum. Johnson O’Malley and similar funds could be applied to extra curricular language education efforts.

Q3: PERSONAL INVOLVEMENT IN LANGUAGE MAINTENANCE

Rationale: How were tribal leaders already involved personally in language issues? Were there indications of future involvement, or not?

BARRY WEBSTER: How would I get involved? I've had this great opportunity in one of my classes. In my student teaching experience -- the practicum in the classroom -- I had to teach 20 lesson plans in the Omaha language. That was part of my grade, so I feel like I'm already contributing. And whether I'm a tribal

leader or whether I'm a teacher next year, I plan to focus my efforts towards restoring or handling language programs somewhere.

...and the books out there. There are hardly any on the Omaha. I learned a lot of stories about the Omaha. I heard Clifford Wolfe tell one about the monkey. Others from my dad and other elders. There are quite a few that I haven't seen published. So I'd like to do a traditional story telling. Omaha story telling. I'd like to publish my own little book. I think I've got some good stories. Me and my wife are going in on a partner deal on this. This may cause us to get divorced, it may not, but we've decided that we're going to write a book. It's going to be from the Omaha perspective. That's our goal. That would be my way of giving back. The language would fit in a lot. The stories would probably have an English version with the Omaha version.

TRIBAL MEMBER (TM13): I think they're putting more effort into getting these kids taught. Finding ways for them to do all of that, and people that are willing to teach it. Whereas before, nobody wanted to teach it. But now, it seems, everybody wants to get on the bandwagon, so we're having a little more success. Maybe we'll have more and more success as we go along because people are a little more apt to get involved now. Before, it's, "No, they're doing that, let them do that, I don't want to get involved." That was their thinking back then, but now I think everybody wants to get a little of the action, so they're willing to come forward and help, even if they get paid for it.

I think we'll probably have more [people] speaking the language within the next five years. I mean, they won't be fluent, but it will be there. And so, that's what I'm hoping for anyway. I've kind of got to brush up on mine too. I'm getting to the age where I better be able to talk.

Ask them if they're willing to get involved. And if they're willing to teach it. Because they definitely need somebody teaching it. If I think I can say it, I can

talk it. But I don't like to do that because it takes me awhile to get everything together. I can say it right in my mind, but when it comes out, it doesn't quite sound the way it should or it's supposed to. So I don't know if I would. I just haven't said it enough to be comfortable or to be really sure of myself. That's what mine [excuse] would be. I don't speak it enough to be comfortable with it.

I know I can talk. It's just the idea that I haven't -- it's been years since I've even talked it.

HAWATE: My commitment is to preserve as much of it as I possibly can. Even if I have to volunteer. I get phone calls asking me why this and that [in the language]. I'm not the best, but I think I'm still one of the best that's left.

WEHNONA ST. CYR: I think the burden of responsibility for all of the things I'm talking about lies within the community. [In my job] I depend on the schools. It is a good avenue for us to do any kind of education. Primarily I'm talking about health education. But they do have our kids the majority of the day, the majority of the year. The problem is, I think, all of this rests with the community. But this is what I find difficult. The parents don't have the skills to help. Again I go back to the alcoholism. They are not educated themselves. Most of our kids drop out by 8th grade. That's been true for many years.

I think the burden falls on the community which is governed by the tribal council. They need to start. Look at our council. We have people, I know, who can speak. We've got three fluent Omaha speakers. They are Elmer [Blackbird], Doran [Morris], and Clifford [Wolfe]. I would think they could talk a little bit about how important the language is, and how to keep it. I'm not a fluent speaker. I didn't grow up on the reservation. I know it has to be a part of what we are doing. I'm willing to listen to any body's opinion. I'm wide open. How do we keep it alive? I encourage the culture in whatever level I can. I have depended on the school's title IX program to help me with the language

part. We've done little activities like the flag song. We had a goal of wanting everybody to recognize the Omaha flag song when it is sung. We want them to know, the kids that go to the wellness center. That was one of our activities and objectives. When they heard that song, they would know that it was our flag song, they would know what the words meant, and they would know how to act when they heard it. Stand up, uncover their head, and put their hand on their heart, whatever they felt. We wanted them to know what the flag song was. So we used little activities like that, and of course, the language is a big part of that. We've used title IX teachers to do those things. And Ty [Valentine Parker, Jr.], and different ones. But it's been just these little pieces. We haven't attempted to do anything through the wellness center.

VIDA SUE STABLER: How much of the Omaha language is in my home? Right now? Very limited. And it's limited by me being limited. In my home in Walthill, I try to always use what I learn on a daily basis. In this classroom, whatever I learn, I try to take home and use it at home in a real situation, or I'll forget it. Sometimes at night I'll be sitting there and I'll be thinking of what I learned. I'll be trying to regurgitate what I learned that day. Sometimes I'll say, "Oh, I can't remember what that is, I'll have to ask tomorrow." So I'll remember what I don't remember. I teach whenever I can. I try to teach my daughters. Even my *shi'nuda* (dog) learns Omaha. She learns how to sit down, how to jump. I'm trying to teach her how to lay down. I ask her if she's hungry. I ask her if she's full. Little things like that. My young daughter, because I see her more, I teach her that. She's got a real knack for learning quickly.

Alice [Saunsoci, a Culture Center instructor] took the verbs down, and that made me feel kind of funny, because I'm so used to looking up there [on the wall] when I need to remember. So I'd have to say it's limited, but what I do know, I try to use. Because if I don't use it I'll forget it. I try to find ways when I can use it. Or when I can teach kids. I had a birthday not too long ago and the kids asked me how old I was. I wouldn't tell them in English. I just told them in

Omaha. It was cute because they could figure it out. When they heard "*duba*" in there, they could figure out "four", and when they heard the second "*duba*" in there then they were able to break it down. It was good. I thought about how quickly they were able to figure that out. It was because what limited Omaha we are teaching out of this culture center, it was enough for them to break down that number. It's a small thing, but yet it shows you that it can work. Even when you only know little bits and pieces of it, if you can catch it, it can help you start to decipher and break down the longer texts.

Summary: Three respondents indicated that they are actively involved in language maintenance through modeling, although they each qualified their abilities. All respondents indicated a need for involvement in maintenance. Most placed the burden of responsibility elsewhere, pointing to the school, tribal government, and the community at large.

Q4: PERCEIVED ECONOMIC ADVANTAGE TO USING THE OMAHA LANGUAGE

Rationale: Do native language users derive any economic advantage? Should there be any advantage?

AWAKUNI-SWETLAND: Is there any economic advantage to using the Omaha language?

TRIBAL COUNCIL MEMBER (TCM2): There, I say, no. Because most of our economic dealings are with people who don't speak our language. I mean, the language is English and the concepts of doing business are in English form. So I think economically they're two different worlds. One is to deal with somebody that understands what you're trying to do and how it's got to be

done, how businesses are run. I haven't experienced that on our Omaha side with our language, how we do things in that manner.

AWAKUNI-SWETLAND: One of the criticisms that I've received, because I'm working at UNL teaching Omaha language, is that I am, quote, making money off the Omaha. I am exploiting an economic advantage because I can speak a little Omaha.

TRIBAL COUNCIL MEMBER (TCM2): I think people are probably speaking from past experience. You'll hear people say, "They come in here and do studies on us, and they go and they make money on it." That's their perception. Maybe in the past that's the way it was done. I think they even feel that way amongst our own. If you take what we've talked to you about and you've gone and tried to make money off of it. For some reason that may offend them, you know. I've heard that many times. Even on the books of the La Flesche family. I've heard them say, "They weren't really Omaha's but look what they did with what they learned from us." So, it dates back a long ways. Maybe it's somebody's expression of what they feel. We're still getting exposed that way. They want to know about us but they don't want to help us with how things are. They get tough times around here and they just feel that we've helped a lot of people and that help should start returning back to us in some way. I kind of think that's what they mean, you know.

THIRTY YEAR RESIDENT: No, it doesn't help you economically. If you go out into the world and you don't know how to speak English, you're at a disadvantage. No, I don't think there's any advantage. Except maybe at the college if you know how to speak Omaha, then you can teach or at least assist. It would make you unique as a speaker to white people on a cultural experience that you share. If you can say your language, then they value you more as to someone who can't speak your own language. You're valued as a cultural authority.

BARRY WEBSTER: I suppose if a person knew the language he could probably get a job as a coach or teacher. Probably go teach at UNL maybe.

TRIBAL MEMBER (TM13): No. Only if you're going to teach it, I guess. That would be the only time. Other than that, no.

VIDA SUE STABLER: For sure, definitely, if you can speak Omaha -- I mean look, if somebody right now is a speaker of Omaha, chances are I could hire them here at the Culture Center for development. There's an economic advantage.

Summary: Generally the responses were split between two foci. First, there would be no economic advantage to speaking Omaha in the white mainstream economy since all dealings are in English. One person perceived that the very concepts of doing business are in English, but not in Omaha. Impressions from past experiences with non-community researchers extracting Omaha information and profiting at the expense of the community was noted. This pattern could also involve community member researchers, such as the historic works of Francis La Flesche. Conversely, there would be an advantage if a person was seeking to be a teacher in the Omaha language, with the native community specifically cited as the venue for that job by two respondents. One person offered that being a speaker would lend greater cultural authority to a person speaking to white people in contrast to a non-speaker talking about cultural issues.

Q5: PERCEIVED SOCIAL ADVANTAGE TO USING THE OMAHA LANGUAGE

Rationale: Do Omaha speakers have a social advantage in using the language?

VIDA SUE STABLER: I think there's definitely a social advantage, too. People see the fluent speakers, or they tend to go to them because they feel that there is something there that they know because they've been able to retain this. Unfortunately, maybe it's seen as part of that past that we all hunger for in that language. And until we can bring it to that living today language, there is that idea that this is something that may be going away and we don't want it to.

TRIBAL COUNCIL MEMBER (TCM2): I think that it would give an advantage. Especially around a lot of our elders. To speak to them in our language, it does get their attention. It does draw their attention to what you have to say. So I think it would give you an advantage. In my experience it does.

THIRTY YEAR RESIDENT: Oh, of course it does. The social advantage is you're cool. I mean, it's really cool now to speak Omaha language and know how to do it. When the chief introduces me, he says, "This is Ms. So and So. She speaks Omaha better than I do." Hey, that's cool, even though it's not true. It's a compliment. Yeah!

BARRY WEBSTER: I think it's an advantage. I mean, on the funny side of it, if you want to call it that, I could tease a waxe (white person) and he wouldn't know about it. Or if a waxe was at a hand game and he didn't know how to dance, I could say something in Omaha and then he wouldn't know we were talking about him. But I'm not sure if that's what you're looking for.

The other advantages, you know, when I hear, for example, the Crows or the Cheyennes speaking, I always feel like, doggone it, I should know my own

language. So I feel like they've got an advantage, from the language perspective. They know theirs and I don't.

TRIBAL MEMBER (TM12): I think if you know it, I think it's an advantage.

TRIBAL MEMBER (TM13): I'm not sure. Sometimes it does and sometimes it doesn't. If they want you to explain something in public, okay, say like to the elders who are not quite sure with their English. They'll look for someone who can speak the Omaha language and bring them in and have them tell them what they want in English. They'll act as an interpreter, and then they'll tell them what is actually being said. So that's pretty much, I think, about the only time you'd have an advantage. Otherwise, it doesn't matter.

HAWATE: Well it's an advantage, definitely, an advantage. Because for me, I feel proud. I feel good that I am able to speak my language. And I'm sure that a lot of people wished that they could speak the language. Like with the Head Start staff, you know. They ask me words all the time now. Then when I come, I greet them in Indian, they remember. When I leave I tell them "*agthe*" (I'm going home). So they know those words because they hear it every day from me, almost.

VIDA SUE STABLER: Oh, absolutely. I look at the speakers that we have right now who are in the community, presiding over a dinner, a funeral, or whatever. I think that there is someone who is making this decision to call upon that person. Because they can speak and pray in Omaha. Especially if the audience is an older audience. I think that they really like that. I know from being a younger person, and wanting to learn to speak. Anytime there's a speaker, I always tell my girls this too, sometimes you'll hear little rumbles in the audience where people are talking, even though Omaha is being spoken and not during prayer time, but just speaking Omaha, and I always tell my girls to listen to it and see how many words they can catch.

Summary: Everyone agreed that there was a social advantage to using the language within a native community context. It catches the attention of the elders resulting in positive comments. Speakers are chosen to preside at cultural functions (funerals, dinners, etc.) due to their ability to speak and pray in Omaha. It raises one's self esteem, it places one on a par with people from other tribes who have retained their native language, and permits teasing non-speakers (specifically white people)

PERCEIVED POLITICAL ADVANTAGE TO USING THE OMAHA LANGUAGE

Rationale: Do Omaha speakers have a political advantage by using the Omaha language in, for example, getting elected to the tribal council?

AWAKUNI-SWETLAND: Does using the language give someone any political advantage?

TRIBAL COUNCIL MEMBER (TCM2): It could. It could. You don't know how much English a lot of our people understand. I think they see our language as more of a direct statement to whatever this person says. They can say, "Here are my thoughts about what I'd like to see done." So I think it gives them an advantage.

THIRTY YEAR RESIDENT: Yes. I think when tribal council has elections, if you're a traditional Omaha person who knows your language. You are valued more than just a young pup coming off the street who thinks he's smart or somebody coming out of Harvard who doesn't know anything. You're Omaha, but you don't know your language and culture. Even though you may have ten

times the advantages of brains, if you're not related culturally, you're not valued, I think.

BARRY WEBSTER: Oh, yeah. If I was to give a talk -- be able to talk in Omaha -- and then maybe say a prayer, I think a lot of the elders would respect that. They'd say, "That's good, that guy. He's got our language." A lot of the elders know that it's fading out fast. I think you would get a lot of support from the elders.

TRIBAL MEMBER (TM13): No. None that I know of, or I can even think of. I guess it used to at one time, but it doesn't anymore. Because everybody pretty much speaks English. Even if they can't speak very well, they understand. So it doesn't really make any difference.

HAWATE: I think it is an advantage to be able to speak the language. But they don't get people on there [the tribal council or school board] that can really speak the language. It's really an advantage for one of our councilmen to speak it fluently. Of course Elmer [Blackbird] does now.

VIDA SUE STABLER : I think so, yeah. A lot of times you'll hear remarks from people in the community. Especially the older people, and they always talk about how they remember the tribal council talking in Omaha. I even made that comment, because I remember that. Today, I don't know if there's any more than two or three on the council. You'll hear that. Those are not my words, but I've heard those words spoken from other people. I think we would like -- Omaha people in general -- would like to retain their language. There's no doubt about it. There was a survey done here. There was a community-wide gathering of people in our community. I remember taking part in this. It was where you did goal setting and objective setting. I remember this person went to the senior center and everywhere and held these little groupings of

different people. It didn't matter what age they were. The number one thing was culture and language. That was the one thing. It was really quite amazing to see. It happened in little polls, here and there. In the one big poll, we got to see what everybody thought were the most important things we needed to work on our community. I remember language and culture were the number one in all of those polls. I remember looking at that and thinking, well see there, everybody wants this, but what are we doing to actually meet that need?

Summary: Most respondents seemed to interpret this question in more of a “social” vs. “political” light. Native language ability is a positive value in candidates. Omaha usage is considered to be more satisfying to elder constituents. Older people recall when the tribal council conducted business in the language. The desire for fluent tribal council and school board members does not appear to be actualized.

Q7: PERCEIVED RELIGIOUS ADVANTAGE TO USING THE OMAHA LANGUAGE

Rationale: Do Omaha speakers have a religious or spiritual advantage when using the Omaha language?

AWAKUNI-SWETLAND: Do you think the Omaha language, using the Omaha language, gives an individual any sort of spiritual or religious advantage?

TRIBAL COUNCIL MEMBER (TCM2): Well, I think it does. Again you look at a lot of our people who possess staffs [recognized ministers] in the Native American Church. A lot of people rely on their prayers and the way they do

things, and the way they follow their teachings. You notice a lot of our people in those spiritual leadership roles. They're the ones who really continue our language. So, I do think it does have a distinct advantage -- or a feeling -- that God's really listening. They've been taught to say our prayers in our language. They think there's an advantage to that. There is a spiritual feeling about it. This is why we chose to do this, because we wanted prayers to be said this way.

THIRTY YEAR RESIDENT: Well, I think if you could sing all night and pray all night in the Omaha language, you'd be wanted at every peyote meeting there was because maybe you're the one that could do it and the rest of them couldn't. They could learn from you. It makes you valued, I think. But spiritually with God, I don't know. I'm sure he'd like to hear that Omaha language once in a while in your prayers. It's like Happy [Thurman Cook] told that joke, remember? Those two guys -- a black and white guy got killed, and on the way up to heaven, they were arguing about, "Well, what's God? Is he black or is he white? And they got to heaven and St. Peter said, "Wait a minute, He's coming." The door opened and God said, "*Aho k^hage*" ("Hello my friend").

Well, they still do that. In church meetings they will say, "Excuse me while I pray. I ask you to forgive me, but I need to pray in my own language here. That's my language that I know. Excuse me." They still say that if there are white people there. And then afterwards, sometimes they'll tell them what they said [in English], and sometimes they don't. I like the ones that interpret for themselves. "Well, this is what I said." I always say that too. If I say something in Omaha, I always tell somebody what it was I said. So they don't think I'm making fun of them or anything. Even though I am.

BARRY WEBSTER: Right now, it fits. For Omaha language 2 [class] we had to say a prayer in Omaha, and that was our final test. You had to say the whole prayer in Omaha. And I want this to go on record. I'm a member of the

LDS church. So, I'm a Mormon, if you want to call it that. I want to get to a point where I can pray, because sometimes I'm asked to give prayers in there or say the closing prayer of the meeting. I want to be able to say it in Omaha. Right now, I'll address Him sometimes as *Tadiho Wakonda Xube* (Holy Father God). I don't pray a lot in the language, but it's still important to me. I hope to get to that point where all my prayers are in Omaha.

TRIBAL MEMBER (TM13): Yeah, a lot of them would rather hear you use Omaha if you're praying. And then it also comes in handy if you're going to do any kind of ceremony. It's an advantage then because you're going to pronounce a name given, you're going to have to pronounce the Indian names. You have to know what they mean. I think, yeah, that's probably about the only time you'd have an advantage with the Omaha language, is during ceremonies like that.

VIDA SUE STABLER: Well I think that's a hard question for me to answer because I'm not a fluent speaker. It's hard for me to say whether a fluent speaker can have stronger spiritual feelings than maybe I could as a non-fluent speaking Omaha person. Because I tend to think that spiritually -- you have that. My sister, she probably is one person who always says it best to me when I'm talking with her. My sister Didi. She always says that. "Vida Sue," she'll say, "I don't know how we managed to do it but even though..." -- she'll talk from her own experiences -- she'll say, "Even though I've been away from a lot of our culture, it's in me." She said, "It's just in me." The things she'll say to me remind me of things that you would hear elders say to you. About how to get along with people. Or just stay away from them if you don't get along. These teachings still come down to us. You still practice them. Maybe it wasn't even told to you but you just see it innately. Because I see it innately in our kids a lot of times. For example, don't be competitive with your brothers. In our Omaha 2 class, we have three brothers. I never tried to use competition. We had a new person come in and she would try to create a competitive feeling

within that classroom. They would never buy into it because they did not want to have that competition. They wanted to be together. Each of them wanted the other to do fine. I always thought that that was just a real beautiful thing to see. I'm not saying they couldn't be competitive, because I think it could be real competitive with other people. But within that family, within those brothers, maybe with even the bigger picture of the family -- the tribe -- maybe that exists there. That's what I'm talking about in that innate thing. I think it exists with Omaha people.

Summary: Most respondents were clear in their feeling that offering prayers in Omaha was very desirable. It gives one a feeling that God is really listening.

Native American Church ministers who are able to sing and pray in Omaha are sought after. Composing and delivering a prayer in Omaha was a language class final exam. However, when comparing the strength of one's personal spirituality, whether expressed in English or Omaha, two respondents were ambivalent.

Other respondents did not take up the issue.

Q8: OMAHA LANGUAGE AND THE PERCEPTION OF ABILITY TO SERVE THE OMAHA PEOPLE

Rationale: Is Omaha language ability related to ability to serve the Omaha people? Is native language ability related to job performance in tribal government and elsewhere?

AWAKUNI-SWETLAND: I had a question about the relationship between your ability in Omaha language and serving on the Tribal Council, being a program director, or some place where you are serving the people. Is there a relationship between language and the ability to serve?

TRIBAL COUNCIL MEMBER (TCM2): It could serve a useful purpose there. Because again, you're just in contact with all of our people, not just the younger ones, but the older ones. Today we write a lot of things, and we read a lot. I don't think our people, even though they can read, they don't get to practice like we do. We practice our English language. That's all we speak today, so we get better at it. We know new words and how to express this language. I think it was in our [Omaha] language too, that we can do those things. And yet some of our people still... A lot of our elders come in here and they understand these programs a lot better if you are able to explain it to them in our language. It just opens their attention to you. I mean, there's no other way I could describe that than to say -- They give you their attention when you talk that way to them. It's unbelievable, but that's what happens.

TRIBAL MEMBER (TM11): I think that would a good idea [to require Omaha language proficiency in the workplace]. Because that's the only way it's going to work. Because they're not going to do it on their own. People need to tell them, we've got to keep our own Omaha language here. We've got to do something. Go to school for it, or do something about it. Because that's all there is -- just Omaha -- maybe a few non-Indians. I think that would be a good idea. I don't know but, that's the only way. If they can push it that way. They're going to have to go to school to learn the Omaha language.

TRIBAL MEMBER (TM13): I think they should at least know and understand. I mean, they should at least be able to understand and say a few words. At least know what they mean, anyway. And have the ability to say what they mean at times when they can't explain it in English. That would be an advantage to knowing Omaha here on the council or whatever.

AWAKUNI-SWETLAND: To your knowledge, has the health center ever had Omaha language and culture orientation for their employees?

HAWATE: No. And I don't think the director speaks Omaha, herself. That's why I said the directors have to be the ones to really enforce the language. Even the Head Start director. We even tried to teach the staff. When I started there -- when they had their staff meetings -- I asked her to give me a few minutes so I could teach them some Omaha. The staff wants it. But then that just kind of didn't happen after a couple of times. Then I wasn't on the agenda. Vida tried to start at the culture center.

I think we need directors that put it on their agenda. "We've got to learn some language."

AWAKUNI-SWETLAND: What about the other tribal programs?

HAWATE: Yeah, sure. The alcoholism program. It'd be all over, you know. Even the police department. But we need to do something like that, I think, in order to really help preserve the language. In order to really help the program along is for the directors to realize how important our language and our culture is. Try to give some time -- even if it's just a few minutes -- to teach the staff.

WEHNONA ST. CYR: I guess I move the other direction. I see the tide is more the business, now, then it used to be. Where we had a consensus that these were our leaders and at certain times -- like the buffalo hunt -- certain clans, they knew. This is our time to take charge. And we knew exactly what needed to be done. The men had their role. The women had their role. The children had their role. Things were pretty clear cut in the old way. Boundaries were set with the taboos. Confusion and chaos were limited. Because people knew...and that ruled us. Now I don't know if we could go back to that. One, because a lot of the things we used to do are gone. Like buffalo hunting.

One of the office boys came and talked to me. He said, "Grandma, I want to do a constitutional amendment committee. Would you be interested in serving on it?" I said "Well, I'll think about. Tell me, talk to me, tell me what you think." Then he asked me "Now, more than ever we have to move more towards the white man's direction and get people on the council... at least some of the seats need degrees in certain areas. So they understand the money part, the business part, the investment part." Because if you look at our history -- indictments, embezzlement -- I can see why those things occurred. Because we didn't understand the system. The bigger system. And do we need a certain amount of people on there who can do that part? But then I also want... I think we need the traditional part like Elmer [Blackbird], Doran [Morris], and Clifford [Wolfe]. The ones that take care of people. They speak the language.

Summary: The ability to discuss and describe tribal programs to older people unskilled in technical English is desirable. Knowing a few words of Omaha would be helpful in translating things when English fails. One respondent thought it a good idea to require Omaha language in the workplace, believing that individuals would not choose to use the language voluntarily. Another respondent feels that program directors need to put the language and culture on their agenda by providing regular time to teach their employees. One respondent felt that business expertise and knowledge of the mainstream systems were more critical skills for government leaders, but acknowledged the need for tradition-minded leaders to "take care of the people."

Q9: FUTURE OF THE OMAHA LANGUAGE

Rationale: Speculation on the status of Omaha language in the near future. Will there be progress, regression, or stagnation, and why?

AWAKUNI-SWETLAND: I'd like you share some of your thoughts about how the Omaha language fits into our life today, and where you think it will be in five years.

TRIBAL COUNCIL MEMBER (TCM2): There is a place for our language in our future. Whether or not it means a form of identity for ourselves. From my lifetime experience, by not participating in our language, even though I've grown up around it, for some reason it was my choice not to pick it up. It was all around me. I understand a lot of it that I've never even tried to speak. As I've grown older, I think back on all the people that I grew up with and around. I heard it so fluently around here. Now I don't hear that anymore. Or I'll listen to an old tape of some of our relatives speaking. I'll say, "Geez, I don't see that anymore. I don't hear that anymore." Then I look back on myself and say, "geez, it's probably up to me to carry some of this on and yet I chose not to do that." So, in a way I'm saying, "Geez, I don't know what it is that I can do today but maybe there's something I can do to try to preserve all the things that I've experienced in my lifetime." So my thoughts start turning that way. When I go to our doings that we have here, social hours, different celebrations, I pay a lot of attention to when our people are speaking our language. I look back and say, "Geez, that's kind of disappearing." You're used to that so you want to hang on to that. I've always tried to talk quite a bit at the community college. We need to bring our people in here and preserve what we've got here. I put myself on the track that way, thinking maybe there's some way that we can do some things today that we might be able to save what we've got left and preserve it for our children. Even if it's a video. If it's a video of somebody speaking, I think our children can learn in the future and maybe say those same words as they grow up.

Well, if I had my way, the Omaha language would be in a lot better shape then it is today. If I can use my influence in any way to do that, than that's what I'm going to try to do. Maybe try to influence other people to say it's important that

we take care of it now. It's like I described to you, when I worked at the college a few years ago, even those elders that we thought of at that time, to help us preserve this, they are gone. They've left us. So there's an urgency to do something like this.

THIRTY YEAR RESIDENT: It fits at funerals wonderfully. It fits at dinners, at celebrations, at hand games, at cultural things. At school -- at Macy school -- with little children. I saw this article that says if you're going to do immersion just immerse yourself. Make your street signs. Some tribes have all their street signs in their language with an English one on top. Make it be everything. Label it, so that everything they see is English and their language. And then eventually withdraw the English. At first you have to have it so that they know what it is. But then eventually withdraw the English parts and then it will be just common to them. Have them grow up knowing, "Oh, this is this." Okay. We had a lady come. We did an immersion thing in Winnebago language. But she was from Washington. She did her language. We even learned her language in an afternoon without writing down a word because she showed us how to set the table and what they were eating. She put the food on the table and she just kept saying it. And we repeated what she said. We learned it from her. Something we'd never heard of before. But it was an experience in having food on the table, what we were eating, when we were eating it, how we were eating it. That's the immersion part to me. Everything was in that language. No English at all, or hand motions. What is this? You'd say it. And she'd say it in her language, "How do you say this?" Whatever that word was -- we said it. We knew everything on that table by the time she was done. It was an illustration. This is how you teach it. You have an elder person come and be with you for a while in your home and all you do is talk that language together. No English. And be in your kitchen. Have her tell you everything. And then just do it. Or you go live with somebody for a while. Stay with them. Live with them and talk this language with each other. Even though you might not know what they're saying. Eventually it comes to you from hearing it over and over and

over and over. So that's what I want, somebody just to talk to me. I don't want to be the expert. I want to be the learner. I don't know nothing, but I do a good job of pretending. I want somebody who really knows it, just to be with me. Talk to me. Some lady, who I know and love, we'd just be pals and just talk Omaha. That's all we talk. We don't talk English or nothing so that I learn the conversational parts. Even though I don't know the grammar and why I know whether this is right and this isn't. But I don't have anybody. And now I'm in Winnebago.

AWAKUNI-SWETLAND: So why in the last half a dozen years or dozen years or so, why the resurgence -- the revitalization -- the interest in language maintenance? Oh, quit pointing at me.

THIRTY YEAR RESIDENT: Well, I think you and Elizabeth [Stabler] started something good. And I think it put the spark back in people's hearts. It gave them permission, "Oh, man, yeah, secretly inside of me, you know, I really love this language, now I can say it out loud and not be made fun of." And the children say, "Man, I want to know that. Grandpa, teach me that, will you, please?" You know, Grandpa didn't know how to teach it, he just knew how to be it. They had to just catch on as they could. There are no linguists around here who stay here. I mean, they come and "Oh, we're going to observe you and all that." Then they go somewhere else. You've got to just be here, whether you're welcome or not. Eventually you grow on them like a wart. Yeah, and I admire your patience for hanging on. People are not always kind. We do have the people who love us and we have the people who -- you know.

AWAKUNI-SWETLAND: There are those who love us. There are those who tolerate us. And there are those who would show us the door.

THIRTY YEAR RESIDENT: Yeah. Outright think you're a pile of crap, you know.

AWAKUNI-SWETLAND: So where do you think the Omaha language will be in about five years from now or ten years from now?

THIRTY YEAR RESIDENT: If people continue to embrace it and value it and others say to them, "Yes, this is good. Keep going." You know, I think they will. It will never be the way it was. It will always be the second language rather than the first. It may only be conversational phrases and it will never be deep because we don't know how to go deep into it. We don't know how to do it. But, at least, it will be there. John Mangan will have his little [bilingual] books about [Jimmie and] Blackie and whatever. Those are sweet. I read them over in Omaha language at the Walthill School. I read those little books in Omaha in this class, and those ladies said, "My gosh, you know how that -- or you even understand what you said?" "Yeah." "Oh, my." So they did value that. But they weren't teaching it, because they didn't know how to do it themselves, you see?

So, I don't know. Hopefully, it won't die, but probably it will. I hate to say. Unless you keep going and come back and help us and keep helping Vida [Stabler at Omaha Nation Public School] and helping the college. But there's something about white people teaching the Omaha language that just ruffles the feathers. It gets under their skin and their collar -- that he can do this and I can't. It's jealousy. It's not seen as helping. They value Joseph La Flesche, sometimes, but they don't value that white lady, Alice Fletcher [early 20th century ethnologist].

BARRY WEBSTER: Well, ideally now, I don't know if this is the answer you want, but I would like to see our language... I'll use the Crows for example. If they're not interacting with the Anglo or the European-Americans, they don't talk English. I'd like to see it used whenever possible. Just fluent communication back and forth in our language.

AWAKUNI-SWETLAND: Where is the Omaha language going to be in five years?

BARRY WEBSTER: Well, that's going to depend. I haven't decided if I'm going to run for the council yet or not. If I make the council, then I'll have more clout. I will support it. I will look for money so we could have after school programs that deal with our language. Immersion camps. In five years though, at the rate we're going, I know my family will be better off as far as learning more. I kind of see it as a stand still, maybe. I could see it as a stand still. My family could know it, but how does that help everybody else? I'm going to take the time to teach my family. The education that I'm getting has really opened my eyes. I'm proud to be Omaha. I know today we're laughed at, as far as our economic development goes. We're last on the totem pole but I think that's going to change. Somehow we have to find ourselves again. Find out who we were. We have to. Somehow we lost all those good ways that I hear about. We don't teach our kids to respect each other anymore. There's a lot of hatred in this community. A lot of alcoholism. I feel we've got to beat alcoholism first, then we can start making ourselves better. The only way that's going to happen is through a spiritual awakening.

Until people humble themselves, as a child would, we're never going to overcome these things. For example, relative Elsie Clark, she tries her best to get money and do positive things, but that's like a pat on the back. We still feed them to the lion. We put them back in the lion's den, in their homes. Some of the dysfunction, you can't get better that way. I think the tribal council has to make tougher stands against alcoholism. I think tribal leaders have to be more role models.

TRIBAL MEMBER (TM11): Well the only way I could think of is maybe get a dictionary and have the older person... they've got to all work together. The

whole family has got to work together. We've got to learn how to talk our own language. It's going away. It's fading away. We need to start talking our own language, so we're going to start with a dictionary here. And we'll say the words and then afterwards -- we'll say the words and afterwards we can put it in the sentence.

TRIBAL MEMBER (TM12): They've got to want to learn it.

TRIBAL MEMBER (TM11): I think the parents should know how to speak the language. They can use it and eventually their children will go into it. Saying, "Oh they're speaking Omaha now, I've got to learn it. I've got to try to learn the language." Then they can have a group session themselves at home. That's how I can see it.

TRIBAL MEMBER (TM12): The parents have got to know that Omaha language. Know what to say, what each word means, the meaning of it, each word. It's the parents' job. Like her and I, we speak English. We should be talking Omaha, and then these kids if they hear it they might try to talk. That's the only way I think the Omaha can keep their language. Now, the little ones don't hear it and they don't speak it. All the young ones coming up, no wonder. They won't know nothing about the Omaha language by not keeping it, talking it. That's the way I think. The family, the parents should be talking Omaha language around the household. That's the only way the kids learn. We have to have it first before we can give it to the kids.

TRIBAL MEMBER (TM11): It's just like when we lived in Lincoln and my kids were growing up. We sat at a table like this. All of them had a place. If one of them was going in a wrong direction, the only way we could get a hold of him was at the table after everybody gets through eating. We'd sit and talk. Sometimes two hours. "You can't do that. You guys gotta go this way. Act half way decent. This is the road. That's a bad road there. You guys shouldn't be

doing that. Respect people. Treat people the way you want to be treated." Things like that. We'd sit, sometimes we'd go two hours talking. You don't see that anymore. They just let the kids go. The parents go to bingo or wherever they want to go. They let the kids run around Macy. Destructive. I see that.

If the Omaha don't get around to it, the Omaha language is going to go. It's going to go. I'd say people -- like maybe ten years and down from my age -- I'd say maybe about 50 years old, these people understand the language but they're not speaking it. Eventually, it's going to fade away. Okay, how many of the tribal council knows how to talk Omaha?

TRIBAL MEMBER (TM13): We were even considering a thought that they know their language before they even graduate from high school. And that means that these people are going to have to start getting down to the nitty-gritty and start teaching these kids everyday language. How to say the words and what they mean, in sentences and everything. I said that by the time they reach middle school, they should be able to speak in sentences. Maybe even before that. If they're taught when they're small, if they would continue that, teaching at home, I said them little kids could be speaking Omaha by the time they're in first, second grade. And complete sentences. And they would be able to understand each other when they do speak. So that's what we were even thinking about, and I said well, maybe, it might be putting the pressure on that director because she doesn't know how to do anything like that. Right now, it's just like once a day, 20 minutes, 40 minutes. That ain't going to teach you nothing. And so we've kind of let her work it, but now I think we're going to get involved and tell her what we want. Because she's not -- She's learning as she's going along too. And I think a lot of this stuff should have been taught at home. I mean, we work but it's -- Some of these kids don't even understand or can't even speak now, how do we expect them to teach their kids Omaha at home? So we -- I think that's the kind of program that they're going to have to get set up. And I don't especially care for the way it's set up now, but I just

have been letting them pretty much, take care of it on their own. But I think we're going to need -- We may have to step in and tell them what we want.

They keep saying all that stuff is lost. No, it isn't. There are people around that still know. That's why I say it's coming back. We're also getting -- want to get it pretty heavy into the school system. If we do have that -- we can get that done -- then I think we're pretty well on our way to bringing it back because they'll be able to speak.

[Referring to Omaha who do not speak the language or practice the culture] I always feel sorry for them because, in fact, one of them is my friend. She always asks me how to do this, how to do that, why and all this kind of stuff. And I said -- I usually tell her what I know, and she said, "I don't know why they didn't let us learn." And I said, "That was because your grandmother thought that maybe the Omaha's would be no more one day." And I said, "But I think she was kind of before her time," Because I said, "The Omaha language and everything, we are bringing all that back stronger than it was. It's been weak for a long time," I said, "but now it's coming back." And I think I said, "Maybe our -- maybe my grandchildren will be able to speak." Because if we can teach them real intensely down at the school, if they don't get it at home, then they should still be able to pick it up because they've got both men and women down there consulting for the language, how to say the words and everything. So hopefully, I'm hoping anyway, that our -- at least my grandkids will be able to speak even if my own children can't. And they can learn it if they want. All they have to do is go up to the community college. Even though I don't agree with the two teachers that they have there for Omaha [level] One. I think they need to get someone that really knows, speaks the language good, that need to be in there to say all the words correctly. Not put two words together and make a word. And I said, "That's not right." I said, "They need to know." Because I said, "We have a specific word for almost everything that you can think of."

AWAKUNI-SWETLAND: Where do you think the Omaha language will be in five years from today?

TRIBAL MEMBER (TM13): It should be in pretty good shape, I think. If they intensify their teachings. And you hear the little kids say words now, even on the street. Before you never even heard it. I don't think they even knew the words back then. But yeah, I think we'll probably be -- have more speaking the language within the next five years. I mean, they won't be fluent, but it will be there. That's what I'm hoping for anyway. And I've kind of got to brush up on mine too. I'm getting at the age where I better be able to talk.

They were talking about if the parents wanted to learn they could also come in. Now, I don't know how. I think they would probably have to have it after hours. I don't know if they'd want to come in after hours, but then they were trying to figure out how they could get them to come in and also learn the language with their kids so they could practice at home. I don't know how that's going to work. I don't know if they implemented that deal yet or not. But I'm hoping they do pretty soon. Because the sooner they start the better off they are.

We've been wanting a relationship between NICC and Omaha Nation. I'm not sure -- As far as I know, there's nothing yet. I don't think there's any kind of relationship between the school and NICC yet, that I know of. I think, if there was, maybe there can be now. We've got an entirely different staff up there now. I'd like to see more interaction on programs, I mean on studies or whatever is set up up there so that maybe if the kids wanted to -- We were thinking -- I mean, this is what I was thinking, I kind of wanted this and I'm not sure if they would go along with it, but I've talked to the superintendent about it. The kids that are in junior and senior high, I said, let them do their core classes, and maybe take some classes up by NICC, enough to get where they can -- by the time they graduate -- I know it's going to be a heavy load, that's

what I'm thinking now after I thought about it, for the kids. Maybe they don't want to do that. But a junior and senior -- I'd like to start them during the junior year, have them go up there and take classes that they would need towards their associate [degree]. And be within hours of their associate by the time they graduate from high school. I don't know if that can be done. Our kids need to get that education. I was thinking that maybe that way they'd have a head start and it wouldn't take that long for them to get their associate. And they could just get it in general studies. And after they get their associate, get their high school diploma, and right after that, not long after that maybe a semester later, they could get their associate done. Maybe that will encourage them to further their education.

[Referring to modernizing the Omaha language] It sort of becomes a necessity, I believe so. How else are we going to know what we're talking about? Yeah, I think we should. Because we've got to know what we're talking about. And then, of course, some kids are going to learn all the ones we modernize and they won't know some of these other words back here that -- if anything is ever said to them, or ever asked if they know these words, and they won't know. So, yeah, I think it should be. It just comes about pretty much on its own. Somebody says something then it snowballs from there. And everybody zeros in on it and says the same word.

HAWATE: Well, one thing, we're not going to lose it. I always say that we're not going to lose our language. Because I think we almost lost it but realized that, so we're trying to get back to where it'll keep going. Even though, maybe some may not speak it fluently. It's going to still go on such as colors, words and different things. Like my youngest sister now, she's going to speak it fluently. She's a young woman yet. There are a lot of teacher corps [students] that we have down here. They're learning it. They're in turn going to teach the coming student at the local school here. So it's going to keep going. My commitment is to preserve as much of it as I possibly can. Even if I have to

volunteer. I get phone calls asking me why this and that. I'm not the best but I think I'm still one of the best that's left.

I know a lot of the young parents can't talk. They don't understand either. It's our young ones that are taking it home to them. The parents ask, "Well what does that mean?" and like that. So they're learning. But I think in order to get to the young parents, most of them are working for the tribe. Have the directors realize that it's important that we learn our language. Maybe it has to go through the council to make it. I think the directors can make it. Even fifteen minutes -- you can learn a lot in fifteen minutes. You're not going to retain half of that anyway, what I tell you in fifteen minutes anyway. But it's got to be something that's got to be repetitious. Even take it to the casino.

What we need are immersion classes. But we also need money for that. I think I could start a good immersion class, but we need the resources. There's all kinds of grants out there, they say. It's real hard to get [elders to volunteer at teaching language]. I think if we offered them a little salary or a pay or something. I think a lot of our elders think they're going to lose their social security if they do it. I've tried to tell them that they're not.

LENA SPEARS: You know, I've even thought of video taping the people who can talk it. And using pictures. Because it's hard to hear it. They say, "Are they saying -- are they using that? or are they nasaling?" We call it nasaling. "Are they nasaling or what is it?" So we play it over and over. But it would be good to, you know, see somebody talk. That way you can, you know, you can see how then.

So I tease staff all the time about them being visual learners. I got the big chart and I'll use that just to help. Some of them are really illiterate coming in as staff people. If we're going to teach the kids, and we can't get people to come here, let's go find an elder who will let us tape her or him. Then use those tapes.

Count it out for our kids or if we want to talk about cars, have them showing a car. Use a black car, a red car, and learn their colors. That's where we're going now. That's what we're thinking about now. Because we can't get them to come here to us, we're going to probably have to use the video tapes and go to them to learn the colors. To learn the things in our everyday life, like walking to a table to sit down to eat. How do you say that? How do you call people to come eat? How do you say salt? Using the salt. Asking for salt. But we can't use salt and that stuff in the school. But those kinds of things in our everyday life, just those things like that. That's some direction we thought we would go. We're not giving up, but we just have to be creative. Or we just have to go a little further to try to keep it. Keep the language going.

A couple of years back, my baby, she was hooked on Barney [the purple dinosaur television character]. Everything was Barney, Barney, Barney. I had to buy all of his tapes. Then we used to travel to pow-wow so that was one way to keep her quiet was to put Barney on. So she was watching Barney. Then one time we had a birthday party, one of the girls were having a birthday, and everybody was singing happy birthday to her and she said, "Let me sing, let me sing." And she said, "*Mei leia mate*." She was singing in a different language. And I'm like, "What was she doing? What's baby doing?" You know, we were listening. "*Ali guya matee*," and she's just rattling on. And I said, "Well I'll be damn." I said, "She's singing in another language. She's singing happy birthday from just watching Barney." That stuck in my head and I thought, "Wouldn't that be something if we could create a character who just talked nothing but Omaha?" We could. That's where my idea for the video taping came from.

I remember back when [the Omaha children video series] *We are One* came out. Someone said, "How come that's in English?"

[Translating nursery rhymes into Omaha] That was one of the things we talked about. We make our own books. We have the kids make books. And then we said, "Well how about, let's try the spider, Itsie Bitsie Spider?" Because the kids love it so much. How do you say itsie bitsie in Omaha? I said, "We'll figure something out." Let's do that, you know. Get the kids to say those in Omaha.

We've asked for Omaha stories. Are there any stories that we should be telling to the kids at this age? What was handed down? What are our kids supposed to know? Are there any tales or story telling? I know story telling was a big thing. Do you guys know of any stories that we have to start telling to our kids now? And nobody's come up with anything. Last year, we found out that there was a beer-drinking song. We didn't know that. I said, "Ah shoot, we better learn that one. That one will be easy."

WEHNONA ST. CYR: I think [the language] is really important, and get back to it. I'll never be able to speak Omaha fluently, but I'm comfortable where I'm at with my ways. I think that's where people need to be in order to help with their health. Whatever level that happens to be... maybe sun dance, or sweat, or maybe it's just going to hand game. Of course language should be a part of that. If we are going to sweat and we are going to sing those songs, then let's sing them in Omaha. Let's find out what those words mean. Or if you're going to go to a hand game and those songs are sung, you know what to do if it's a giveaway song, or it's for servicemen. We should at least know that much, that's the way I think. We should hang on to at least what we've got. Then that's a foundation that we can build upon. At least that's my belief. And that's what I tell these kids. Whatever you want to do, I think that's good. You make the choice. If you want to learn how to sing, then there is a certain way... like you brought that meat (for this interview). Because you're going to ask me to give you information, that's right, that's the right way to do it. And I think we ought to try.

Maybe we can't go back to do things exactly the way we did, but I think as much as we can we should hang on to what's left. And make it Omaha, if we can. Make it our own, like these sweat lodges songs. I hear them. They are the Sioux songs. When I was married to Redwing's dad, he was Santee. We'd sing those same songs but they would put Omaha words in them. I don't think anyone really knows what our old sweat lodge songs sounded like.

It's the day to day survival (that occupies people's time). When we came together as the four tribes [at a recent conference], we started off talking about health. Then we got off on... all four tribes. Do you know what we thought would make the biggest difference? An economy on the reservation that would provide jobs. Without that, they won't quit being alcoholics .

I had him [Paul Brill, tribal genealogist] come back for Picotte Day and I paid him because I know he doesn't get paid a lot. And he was, "Oh thank you, thank you". And at that time he talked a little bit about his dream. His dream is to have a place. Any Omaha can come, from California or where ever. Maybe they've been adopted out, or they left and their parents died. They just don't know. They could go to a place here on the reservation and they would actually photograph people. If they didn't know the name they would at least have a visual recognition. From there they could go back or forwards. And he wanted it by clans. What a great project! I said "Why don't you come and..." and I guess he did. And the tribe said that it wasn't a priority with their council at that time. But wouldn't that be great? I get calls all the time from people from all over. They're looking for someone or they're trying to find out... I always think the Internet would be a great place to do that. How about we start putting it on the Internet?

That's why I go back to that economy where we could do what we need to do. Upgrade our infrastructure, preserve our heritage, whether it be language or ancestry, or whatever.

TRIBAL COUNCIL MEMBER (TCM1): Speaking about preserving the Omaha language. I think that's where we'd be able to gain. Starting with our Head Start and in our elementary grades. By the time they're in sixth grade, have them receive a certificate if they can say so many sentences by that time. So at the junior high, then there's another level. And then the high school and then the college. That's probably the only way that I see that we're going to preserve our languages. It's becoming more of an educational tool so that we're going to preserve it. If we can get them to understand that it's a preserving process as well as an educational process. It should be something the individual wanting to learn, should have that desire to wanting to learn this language. She must dedicate herself to that learning aspect.

TRIBAL COUNCIL MEMBER (TCM1): Within five years, I believe we probably won't progress any. I don't believe that we'll lose any progress. I think we'll be steady. Right now, if you looked around, there are ones who are pretty much active around here, that I see. They're from age 30 to 60. So, within the next five years, I don't believe that's really going to make a fluctuation. I think that they're beginning to communicate with their grandkids. Trying to share the teachings. I may be wrong, but that's possibly their last opportunity to share with their grandkids, this language. Because I believe that's probably what my grandparents have thought.

VIDA SUE STABLER : The way I envision it, this culture center is for us to develop materials that will not stay here but will move out into the community in ways where it's easy to use. Whether it's singing tapes, play performances. So instead of seeing maybe the same types of winter programming where kids sing Silent Night and some Christmas Carols, I would love to see a *higo*ⁿ (an Omaha bedtime story) performed at that time with some of our kids, you know, narrating. Maybe starting out the *higo*ⁿ in English but then putting in some Omaha words. Another level, a grade or two later, speaking little phrase and

then throwing phrase in. And then somewhere at the high school level, it is all being done in Omaha. It's a process. It's a step process. We have the capabilities of doing that within our schools today. But what we're lacking is the ability -- the know how -- to get those things done. There aren't enough people doing and developing those kinds of things. Naturally, we would like to think that we could just all start talking and talking as much as we wanted, as much the time as we wanted in Omaha. But it's not that way. We have to figure out a way to make our language more useable. Get our kids talking language in the hallways.

For two years now, I've been telling the basketball coach, instead of whatever it is they say -- They always make these running kind of sounds during basketball games -- How hard would it be to teach our coaches and our kids to say the man's form of "Try your best." And the woman's form of "Try your best." How difficult would that be? Not really at all. To start incorporating Omaha in useable ways. How hard would it be to have the menu out in Omaha every day? The cafeteria workers, they have to put that menu together. What if we were able to get a hold of that menu, or that we came down here first before it went to print? And we started to have that menu printed in Omaha? Let the kids struggle through trying to find out what that Omaha print is, so that they can start to see it as a language that is real. Chances are someone there in the room or in that kitchen or in that hallway, somewhere, will know a word that they can start to piece together and hopefully touch something within that child to make them want to learn more.

That motivation -- If it's not going to be in the adults to initiate this, then let's try to plant somewhere in that child so that they'll start to question. "What is this?" Or, "How do you say that?" I see that all the time in the school here. You just put an elder or somebody who can speak with a room full of kids, and you watch what happens. Those kids are going to ask you, "How do you say this? How do you say that? I want to say this." They are just non-stop wanting to

know. They're hungry for it. I see that on a daily basis. Here and in Walthill, I see that. It's really a matter of getting with people, curriculum people who can plan it out and start to develop it. If we can't do it naturally, in a natural environment within our homes, then let's develop things; mentoring programs, apprentice mentoring programs, where you have people, like myself, who are beginning learners. There are passive speakers. There are a lot of passive speakers in our community. What if we were to put them with elders. We only have limited elders, but if we could create those immersion, one week camps, maybe we'll open up or turn on a light in someone's mind to where they would just all of a sudden know this was what they wanted to do. This is what they want to do from here on out. Even though it looks like you're going against the current of English. You could create in those people, or they could somehow realize, that this is something really worth fighting for. The more people the better, working on revitalizing our language. It can be vibrant. It can be used on a daily basis if we have, somewhere, the ability to be able to interact with it.

I still think my best teacher is and always will be my mom. Whenever I'm in Omaha on weekends, it's just so interesting. I might be talking about something and working on a lesson all week with Marcela [Cayou], and then, I'll be darned if I don't go down to Omaha and my mom will say that same word to me. And the minute she says it to me, I know what she's talking about. I get such a good feeling from that, because my mind made the connection. I heard it here [at the culture center] and then I heard it in a useful way with my mom. Because my mom's not sitting in a classroom when she's talking Omaha to me, we're going down Dodge street and she's saying that those cars are driving fast and be careful because it dangerous. Or she likes to go to this restaurant because they have a lot of different food. I'm hearing in a natural way, and that's the way I wished we could all learn -- in that natural format. That will come if we do an apprentice mentoring program. I do believe that's where we need go now with our passive speakers and anybody who is interested in learning Omaha. At the same time we need to figure out a way to

get an immersion school going. The Hawaiians did it with, what, eight students that first year?

Five years from now, we're going to have Omaha One and Two curriculum here. Since Omaha language here at Omaha Nation works with, and collaborates with UNL, I know at that level, we'll have textual types of things developed for Omaha language. We'll also have CD-ROM's in five years. With technology the way it is today, we can actually capture a person saying the phrases to you. You can hear it as many times as you want, and you're not tiring Grandma or Auntie and Uncle by asking them to repeat things over and over. In this school you'll start to see the kids greeting each other. You'll hear the men say, "*Aho*" (Hello) to one another. You'll hear the kids saying, "*Eyoⁿnia*" (How are you?). Maybe you'll hear more people using "*Washkoⁿ*" or the male way of saying to try hard. I think you'll see lunch menus in Omaha. I think you'll see hand games. Instead of saying "hand game," they'll be saying, "*Iⁿut^hiⁿ*" (strike the stone). I think you'll see more words popping up. With those more words, you'll see more phrases somewhere along the line. I'm hopeful. I have to be. There'll be a lot lost, too, in five years. Just based on all the deaths I've seen over the last five years. One day, Grandpa was in here, and he was saying to me, "Do you know that I have seen this many people pass on just within this last year." It was an unbelievable amount. So in five years you can have a lot of elders pass on. I try not to think about it because it makes me sad. You're not supposed to think that way, but how can you not.

Unfortunately, being a planner, you know, it makes you anticipate things to know that something is going to be happening in the future and so you try your best. I think that's why I always have this sense of urgency. In the things we do here -- Just being urgent, feeling urgent, feeling like it's got be done today. Because the people are here today. So that's how I feel.

Wouldn't it just be neat to be able to revitalize [Omaha] to the point where we are speaking [English]? If you didn't want somebody to hear -- I mean the

advantages of Omaha language today with not many speakers around -- people who could speak fluently could talk back and forth and have conversations and not have to worry about people hearing.

Summary: Respondents divided their attention between speculating on the status of the language in the future, and proposing actions that should be taken to revive and encourage Omaha language use. Most, but not all leaders, believe that if action is taken there is a future for the language. There is an urgency attached to this future given the loss suffered by the passing of elderly speakers. Its condition may remain similar to the present or possibly improve depending upon what actions are taken. Suggestions for action included increasing teaching efforts at the K-12 and community college levels. Curriculum materials developed for school use must be distributed throughout the community. Integration of language modeling and teaching for employees of tribal programs, encouraging the parents of students to actively participate in language use, and the need for tribal leaders to serve as language and positive lifestyle role models were additional ideas. Incorporating more technology (computers, videos, CD-ROM) could support the language. Some of the actions would necessitate changing current rules or policies. For example, making Omaha language proficiency a requirement for high school graduation.

Q10: WILLINGNESS TO MODEL THE LANGUAGE

Rationale: Builds on Question 3, Personal Involvement. Is there a willingness to model the language, the extreme level of involvement, in the face of public ridicule for mispronunciations?

AWAKUNI-SWETLAND: How about modeling the language? You understand it, and yet you don't speak much in public. Would you be willing to overcome that embarrassment and model it?

TRIBAL COUNCIL MEMBER (TCM2): If I honestly could do something like that, you know, I would be willing to do that.

TRIBAL COUNCIL MEMBER (TCM2): Yeah, I think I would. You know, I would give it a try. I think somebody's got to do that. That was one of the disagreements that my Aunt Naomi [Gilpin] and another person had with my brother Thurman [Cook]. That he was talking like a woman [at NICC]. That's what they tried to tell him. He was getting his materials from some other people [who] were trying to help him with his teaching of the language. So you know those things happen out there. They were trying to tell him, "The way you're teaching it... you're a man but you're speaking a lot of it like a woman would talk." It's pretty interesting about how they were not scolding him but trying to help him and yet, he kind of took it they were scolding him.

BARRY WEBSTER: Oh, yeah. It's something I've learned, never be afraid to make mistakes. Never be afraid because that's the only way you learn, you know. That's what one of my elders told me.

LENA SPEARS: "I can't say it right, they're going to laugh at me." I mean, as old as some of these people are, they're afraid to be laughed at. They're afraid to be made fun of. And I'm like, "Well, we're all learning it, you know, we're going to make mistakes, guys. I mean it isn't going to do any good to laugh at each other. You know, laugh with me, don't laugh at me. I mean, how do you say it then?" People are real critical and, you know, it just discourages everyone else to even want to try. I just say, "Oh, you're all right. Oh, it's all right. Well, let me say it and you guys can laugh at me." But then we'll figure out the right way to do it. "Okay, how am I supposed to say it?" I put myself on the spot.

VIDA SUE STABLER: That happens to me a lot. When I come back and I'll tell the elders, "Well I was saying this," And it's so interesting because then they

kind of take offense. You know, that this person corrected me because they [the elders] see me as somebody they've taught and they know. There are some things I know how to say because I've heard it now for two years. If I'm corrected on something they know I know, they'll say "Well you know how to say that. What did they say?" So they're going to cast the doubt on that person, not on me. It's always interesting when that happens. Because they'll look at me and they'll say, "What did you say?" And then I'll tell them and they'll go, "That's right." It's kind of interesting to see how they'll take offense at this other person because I've taught you. They take pride, I guess, in the things that we have learned and the things that we have been able to say and say correctly. They're proud of that when we are able to do it. And then when we're not, they don't scold us. They don't. They just encourage us, "Say it like this," or they'll just say it. They won't even say, "Say it like this," they'll just say it, and then we repeat it. And they'll say it again, and we'll repeat it. And each time we repeat it, we work towards saying it like they do until we get there. And then they won't make a big "to do" or throw you a party, they'll just say, "Yeah, that's good." Just like that. They'll give you just enough of that encouragement and that's enough for me. If they nod their head, yeah that's good, that's good enough for me. The elders are in the classrooms all the time with the kids.

It always amazes me, that we have fluent speakers, where both the mom and the dad or the grandma and the grandpa are fluent and they're raising their grandchildren. I know it must take an extraordinary amount of energy to speak all Omaha to that child if the child doesn't understand. My question is this: When that baby is first brought home or into that home, why is it that the fluent speakers don't just speak Omaha and understand and know that the baby will pick that up? For some reason they think that -- Well I don't know what they think. But for some reason they don't speak Omaha. And then they pass up that very opportunistic time for that child to learn language. For that child to learn Omaha. I mean, my gosh, we know it works. We know it works. You

speaking nothing but that language -- if even one parent speaks that language to that child -- wouldn't that child pick that up? Of course. But yet we don't do it. I would just like to know from fluent speakers why, does it just take too much energy? Or is it too difficult to do? Or have they fallen out of the habit? I'm just curious why. Because there are still those families out there. I'm not trying to say anything negative or bad or anything. I'm just wondering. Is there a reason? Because there might be something I'm missing out there. Because it might help me to figure out how to encourage the speakers to speak more. If there's some reason out there that I'm missing that I don't know, maybe I could try to figure out how to battle it.

Summary: Respondents indicated a willingness to try speaking in public. Concerns about speaking Omaha incorrectly, including males speaking with female grammatical forms, were noted. Speaking improperly was cited as the reason for not using the Omaha language. One respondent would like to know why fluent speakers do not speak to their newborn and young children in the home.

Q11: LANGUAGE AND IDENTITY AS AN OMAHA

Rationale: How widespread is the attitude that the ability to speak Omaha somehow reifies a person's identity as a true Omaha?

WEHNONA ST. CYR: And then you get the younger generation. They are looking for something, I think. Looking for something. Looking for something. Maybe that is why they use the alcohol. So if we can fill that longing up with something positive, whether it is singing, dancing or going to sweats. Even Native American Church. I've been to NAC services, but I don't know a whole

lot about it. I've read the history, and like that, how it's ... it's all good. As long as they have a sense of belonging there. It's the best way to do something with their life instead of destructive alcohol and drugs and violence.

THIRTY YEAR RESIDENT: Those white women, I'd say, they were just hateful. Some of them who were there from the time I was there the first time. They were mad or jealous or something, because I was talking Omaha to those kids and i was teaching them their language through alternative education in the classroom. I made worksheets and cards and all sorts of things for them to learn their language. The Indian people who were working at the school would come to me and say, "Well, how do you say this?" "How do you spell that?" That was a compliment, too. Even the superintendent asked me, "Well, what do you -- How do you say these things in the Omaha language?"

I was teacher of alternative education. Every kid that they didn't know what to do with, they threw them in there, like throwing them into the black hole. "Let's get rid of them." And so momma would love them. Oh, we did wonderful things in there and they did lessons. We did culture. We did arts and crafts. We did bead work. We did computers. And then they thought, "Well, you're not teaching them anything. You're having too much fun in there. We are supposed to punish them. Let's beat 'em up." I could not win. Whatever I did wasn't right. But at least, it built their self-esteem. We went through all of their ancestry and genealogy. Who did you come from? Who are your parents and grandparents? What did they do for the tribe? It made them feel good that they weren't -- I hate to say this -- that they weren't just those dirty old Indians. They were really people and they really had a culture and they had wonderful leaders. i said, "Some of you have chiefs on both sides of your family of the Omaha tribe. Be proud. Be happy." And they didn't even know it. We went through the [Omaha] dictionary with them and all the pictures in there. "Well, here's your grandpa. Here's your uncle. Here's these people, you're all related

to." Instead of being a horrible kid, they decided, "Hey, I'm worth something." I don't have to just be nobody and end up in prison. I really am a decent worthwhile human being. It helped them. I had all the ones who didn't fit. And a lot of times, they didn't fit because they were unique. They were beautiful and they didn't fit in this mold. "Come march into here. Sit in this chair. Sit still. Do this work." Because they had other gifts. They had art as their gift. They had music. They were dancers. They were talented and very gifted. But they didn't fit into that mold of Walthill School. And they didn't recognize their uniqueness in any way. So, you know, it's too bad. They had gifts of -- I taught them calligraphy and artwork and I had all kinds of supplies and we just did wonderful things. They really enjoyed it. Every time there was a seasons change, all the stuff they did in the elementary grades, those arts and crafts and decorations, we did them in alternative education because they had never had a chance. They were always bad. So they had a chance. Even guys who were smoking marijuana and stuff were sitting there putting decorations on these little things and making Christmas wreaths and all kinds of beautiful stuff and just having a wonderful time. So they were valued by me, anyway.

I would love those kids and hug them and kiss them. Those other women were just hateful to me. Terrible. I don't know if it was jealousy or if it was just -- I don't know what it was, but they really were horrible and I didn't want to be there anymore. And those kids, when I see them now, they ask, "Why did you go? Why aren't you here anymore?" I was the only one who was really loving and kind. The rest were just, "Sit over there and do this. Get your papers out." It was like they didn't have compassion in their heart. That was my experience at Walthill School.

AWAKUNI-SWETLAND: In your opinion, can a person be Omaha even though they don't understand or speak the Omaha language?

TRIBAL MEMBER (TM13): I don't see how they can be. Either they never had the teachings or they were -- Say, come to think of it, there was such a family. Because this grandmother felt that there was no reason to learn Omaha or to be Indian. In fact, she never let her family come around the Omaha. They stayed all to themselves. So these kids cannot understand, and they don't even speak Omaha. Because she wanted them to be able to function in a white-man's world. That's what she did to them. Now those kids want to know. They're older people, in fact, they're middle-aged now, but they don't know their language. And they don't know the customs. They don't know the traditions or anything, or the values that we have. They don't know any of that. I always feel sorry for them.

HAWATE: Oh yeah, I think so. You just have to believe in our culture. Take part in it. We feel good when a non-Omaha comes in and helps around and takes part. They like that, the Omaha people like that. They accept him. But when a man marries a non-Omaha, that kind of culture still remains. Because they say, "Oh she's an Omaha, she's *Umo'ho' wa?u*" (Omaha woman). Because she married one of our Omaha men. So she's automatically considered *Umo'ho' wa?u*. Our culture, a long time ago, was that when women married out of the tribe, we were supposed to follow the man. But I don't know if that prevails too much now day. I feel that when an Omaha woman marries into a different tribe, they're still accepted [as Omaha], you know.

VIDA SUE STABLER: Yes. I'd have to say yes they can [still be Omaha]. That's because I'm thinking about when I'm walking up these halls and I know a lot of our kids aren't speaking Omaha but if you asked me to identify that child and I don't know that name, and say you were a non-Indian person asking me, I'd say, "Well, this boy here, he belongs to the Omaha tribe, he's an Omaha boy." I would say that. So, I'd have to say that, yes, you can [be an Omaha without the language]. Now you ask an elder that and they might think

differently. But at this point in time I'd have to say, yes, you can be. You can be. Not in the same way those old Omaha up there were. Boy they were something, huh?

TRIBAL MEMBER (TM11): A person can be Omaha if they've got Omaha blood in them. No matter what. No matter if they don't know how to speak their own language, they're Omaha.

Summary: All respondents feel that a person is Omaha even if they are unable to speak the language. Participation in the culture and blood quantum are more important factors. The older custom of the Omaha wife following the identity and traditions of her non-Omaha husband have given way to a more inclusive Omaha identity. Non-Omaha wives are accepted as Omaha. The sense of belonging and participating, while not requiring language ability, is offered as an alternative to alcohol abuse.

Q12: LANGUAGE AND ITS RELATION TO OMAHA VALUES

Rationale: Can people articulate the relationship between Omaha language and Omaha values, i.e., Omaha culture. The two are used interchangeably in most conversations. Can one exist without the other?

AWAKUNI-SWETLAND: How is the Omaha language related to Omaha cultural values and beliefs?

TRIBAL COUNCIL MEMBER (TCM2): Again, all I can do is say that the language was a real part of all these values. I mean there's more meaning to

these values when you say it in our language than you would if you said it in English. When we talk about our relationship, I know a lot of our people that have come in here [the tribal offices], I know most of our relationship. I could say their English name. If I knew their Indian name I would say that. But when you greet them in our language, and the relationship, it seems to open their mind up to at least pay attention to what you have to say. So, when I think of it that way, then I think our language played a vital role in how we did things here. How we talked to people and how we carried out whatever those things were that we were taught to carry out. When I sit down and listen to a lot of our elders talk, they reflect back on all of those things. They enjoy doing that. It gives them some comfort. And they tell you really what the meaning of those things were. You yourself, have got to take yourself out of this year 2000, and go back to the 1940s, the 1930s and really see how life was back then. So it plays a big role here, today. And yet, we're going to lose that. I think we're losing that part of it. But I think we can regain some of it. We can hang on to some of it. That's my hope anyway.

THIRTY YEAR RESIDENT: I think it's getting away. People don't pray anymore. Young people don't pray. I know grandpas who used to say they get up in the morning, standing in their doorway, when the sun is coming up. Just thank you Lord for another day and valued time. That didn't get passed down. Everybody wants to have cars. That's ruining our young people all over the whole, you know that? Materialism instead of spirituality. And spirituality is cut off from us in the schools; you can't have it. You can't talk about it or you're weird. "Let's pray." "Pray, no, you can't do that." We do it at Macy. We always have prayers and we're proud of that fact too. We're a tribal college. You can't tell us we can't pray because that's part of our culture and our heritage. Thank you, we will pray. If you don't want to pray, just keep your eyes open or go in the other room or something. Please respect this part of us here.

We lost our morality. I think alcohol has just destroyed so many good people. And greed. You come to jobs really wanting to do such a good job. Then the power goes to your head and you start thinking, "I'm good and I'm going to go on all these trips. We've got to spend up all this money." Not that they put it in their own pocket, but they use it up. We go and we eat. We always eat. Whatever we do. We go somewhere and we eat. We feed everybody, because we've got money. The whole world seems to be spinning so fast. We've lost track of the Creator and all of that. We can stand in a peyote meeting and all of that, but when we go out, we're still going to McDonald's for lunch. It isn't translated into our real world. I think TV did that to us. It did it to me. I can sit here and look at this thing and not do nothing for a whole evening and just watch junk. It's not even morally straight. My spouse gets mad at me and says, "This is not true. This is not your life. Don't cry over this. This is just a story that somebody made up."

Oh, and then a lady -- her name is Maxine Ida Parker, her name is *Thatadawi'* (Woman of the Thatada Clan). I always call her that. She just loves to hear me say that. She just loves to hear it. She's got a T-shirt with that on it. I just love to say that to her and she loves to hear it said. "That's me. I identify with that word -- with that name." And whoever's Indian name, we call each other by that sometimes. They say, "What's your Indian name?" I say, "*Udo'* *wa?uzhi'gaska*" (Good old woman colored white). "What? Who gave you that name?" I say, "I gave it to myself." It's wrong. I know. And they tell me what it is I am saying and I say, "I know, but this is my own way to describe myself even though it's goofy. And then I put "*to'gaska*" (large and colored white) on the end. "Oh, gee." Too much. Too much.

We always tease and I like it because then it keeps it going and it's like we value this. We can tease each other. Except, sometimes one lady in the group -- she's kind of a lemony girl -- she said, "I don't like to hear you saying those kind of things in my language." And I said, "Well, sorry dear, but that's just how

I am," and so we just go right on. You know, like "this is my language, you can't tease around or play in it," you know. But I do anyway. She's the only one that doesn't like to hear it. And then I said, "Well, can you find me a squaw dress to wear for the graduation?" "Oh, don't say squaw." She said, "No, we don't say that anymore because it's derogatory to us women." So, okay. I said, "All right." You know what I'm saying, can you find me an Omaha dress or whatever.

BARRY WEBSTER: Ideally, I think it's directly linked, directly tied. At least it should be. How can you talk about culture and not language? Does that make sense? How can it be linked? I don't know. I just feel it's the main part of our culture. When you say culture to me, the first thing I'm going to say is our language. I don't know if that makes sense, but I think it's directly tied that way. In order to learn about somebody's culture you should also learn about their language.

TRIBAL MEMBER (TM11): You're better to have the language because as my spouse said, "As long as there are Indians on this earth in reservations, we're going to go on." For example, you brought something in and she thanked you [in the Omaha language]. I heard my dad said it, and my grandpa, that if anybody gives you something, thank them. Even if it's your own brother, thank them.

TRIBAL MEMBER (TM11): As long as there are Omaha living on this earth, I said, "Our Indian ways are always going to be here." I said, "We're going to have to carry on. Our younger ones are going have to carry on." I said, "But it looks like this [Omaha] casino is going towards waxe (white man) ways." To me, the Omaha language is going away. But our Indian ways and our culture ways are still carrying on. As long as there are Indians living on this earth,

they're going to have to carry on. You see a lot of them at our doings like that. A lot of young ones who don't know how to even speak Omaha. But they see what's going on, and they carry on.

TRIBAL MEMBER (TM11): We've done a lot of talking to our kids. Respect people. When people need help, try to help them in some way. Especially the elders, they need help -- help them. Things like that. But I don't know. I don't think there are very many families out there talking to their kids anymore. Everybody goes their way.

TRIBAL MEMBER (TM13): How is it related? That's the only way you can get - - this is my personal thought -- when it's said in Omaha about our values, our traditions, when it's spoken in Omaha you get a clear, concise picture of what they say. Whereas if you try to translate it into English, it just ruins the whole thing. It doesn't give you the specific, precise meaning that the Omaha language gives you on whatever it is that you want to -- you're trying to find out.

I thought of one [example] but it's an action more than words though. It's kind of hard this early [in the morning]. Okay, somebody comes along and you have an object, say like jewelry or maybe even a dress. I don't care what it is. Something that this person thinks is nice, neat and would like to own it. Our tradition, our value, whatever you want to call it, is that you turn around and you present it to them, because they like it. You own it, and so you want to share it and you give it to that person that does like it because you know that they're going to take care of it because they like it. They don't necessarily come out and say, "Oh I want that." They'll say, "Oh, I think that's nice, I wouldn't mind having something like that." Or something, you know, they kind of hint at it but they don't specifically say, "I want that." But that's the meaning that you get, so that's how come you turn around and you give whatever that article or whatever it is to that person. It's kind of like an unspoken -- what do

you want to call it, value, tradition? If I say, "I like your jacket." I'll say, "That's neat, I'd like something like that." You know I like the colors in it and stuff like that or I like the way it's made. But they won't say, "I want it." If you're an Omaha, you know what it means, you should take it off and give it to that person and say, "Here I want you to have it. You take care of it, and it's yours." If somebody said, "I like your plant hanging up there, and I like the hanger that goes with it." Just take it down and give it to them. It's no big loss because you know they like it and they're going to take care of it, so you don't worry about it. That's what I like about our people.

If you're a first-time visitor to a home, and if they're traditional, they are going to give you something for coming to their home. They're thankful that you'd come to their home. This is your first visit so they're going to give you something to remember it by. I've seen a lot of that done when I was young, but I don't think it's even done anymore. I still do it. If they come and see me, then I will -- If I've got something then -- I'll go ahead and give them something. I'll give them a gift. I remember back when I was younger they would just say it in Indian. They would say it in Omaha. That's how you knew that they liked the thing or whatever. But now everybody pretty much speaks English, and they're pretty bold and they'll say, "Oh I like that, why don't you give it to me." But, if you spoke Omaha all the time, you just knew.

HAWATE: Tell them [the students] it's very sacred. I mean, I think of it as sacred. But I also want to leave behind what little I know. Like my grandchildren over here, when I talk I say, "*Sheno*" (enough, finished). Now they say that. Even that little boy [indicating her grandchild sitting nearby]. He is two. Now when it's over he'll say, "*Sheno*".

WEHNONA ST. CYR: I feel the same way about the language. Whatever we can do to keep it. If it's teaching the kids words and having them use it. Even if it's interspersed in English, I feel good. When we had those horses [at a youth

campout], little bittie BJ, he says "Auntie, take me to see *shoⁿges*". I would like that. Maybe that's all he knows, but he knows that *shoⁿge* was horse. So that's what our little camp was about. We put tipis up. We put three up and they talked about this is why we do this. Gene Blackbird helped, and he said, "This is what my dad said," and like that. And then that fourth one the kids put it up. They did a pretty good job. Maybe someone would criticize and say, "Oh they didn't do it..." but that was the best we could do. We had about 20 some kids down there to put up tipi. To me, that was good. I was proud.

So I think that happens to a lot of people who maybe had good things that we used to use. But there was no one to carry it on, to entrust that knowledge to. So it's gone. So that's why I want to hang onto the little things, that I've seen, that I've learned, that I know. I try to pass them on to my kids. That's the job of a parent, is to do that. That's what my dad did for me and for my brothers. His thing was making regalia, participating in the dances, teaching us about him being a warrior, our family history, our lineages. Those are the things that he passed on to us that he felt was important, and I've picked up things over my years that I think are important. I think that -- because of the alcohol -- that parenting, that passing on, didn't occur in a lot of families. And the language.

WEHNONA ST. CYR: The cultural part, yes. I don't have the language part myself. I don't speak it. That's the part I haven't really... although if people, I would encourage it. If I had someone who came in and said, "Would you be open to us working with [health center] residents to gather information, to record the language, or anything." Or, have an Omaha day once a week. Everyone had to talk Indian. Anything. I'd be open to anything like that. But I probably wouldn't be the driving force because I don't speak Omaha. But I certainly respect the language and any efforts to retain it. I would be all for. Any way I could help. But where I'm sitting now, I've made a real conscious effort to educate the non-Indian staff and the non-Omaha staff on bringing in... we've brought in a lot of our cultural things into the building. My focus has

been the residents because this is their home. And I want them to do things that maybe the other community members take for granted. They can just get in their car and go to hand game. So we've had hand games. We've tried to provide them transportation if they want to go to church services. We've had Native American Church come in and run church services here. So I've opened the building to those kinds of activities. Also to interact, bring the children to interact with the elders at whatever level. If they want to sit and draw with them. Or if they want to hear stories, or play bingo, whatever. I've opened that to them. I and the staff need to remember that the residents live here. It's not just an 8 to 4:30 clinic. That we also have a home for our residents here. We need to make it home-like and things available. So I've really opened it up. And a lot of people said they haven't done that for a long time.

On New Year's, I had them burn cedar (as a blessing). We had one of our residents... she was seeing things. So we had a meal and we prayed. So those things I'm really open to. I want this building to be used more for health education. I think that's a part of it, our culture. Educating the non-Indian staff to what our culture is. Encouraging them to become involved in our community. And to let the community come to the residents, whatever they want. If it's not absolutely against the fire code or something like that... we have to worry about those things. But if a resident came and, I've had this happen, they want to have a medicine man come from South Dakota because there is something going on, and the western medicine is treating them, but they want that, too. Or if they want to take grandpa out, and they're going to have healing services for four days. And they need to decrease their medicines here so they're won't be a drug interaction, I'll do that. I wish we had a better facility so we could do more of that. We have one room. The dining room. It's a multipurpose room, so there are some structural limitations. But if we have someone sick, I tell them, let the family come. Make them comfortable. Give them coffee. Give them food. If we have a trauma... we

have structural limitations here. But we try to accommodate whatever needs to be done here. That's my philosophy. Whatever works, let's try to do it. And we have different levels of beliefs here. Some strictly want to go through the clinic and get their bag of meds and they're happy. But some want to use the Native American Church, or try a traditional healing first, and then come to us. Or, if ours doesn't seem to be working, then they'll look for something else. So we have these different levels of belief in regards to healing. And I think a lot of it is here. So if the family or the patient says "I want to try this," I'm going to try to accommodate this, however I possibly can. So when the lady says "I've been seeing things," I'm wondering if maybe we should do something. Deanie Phillips happened to be a resident here. He went down and talked to Rufus [White] and we put a meal together. We did that for her. And she felt better. So you have to be open enough to do that.

That's kind of the direction I'm moving in. We need to have both. If we're too heavy on the traditional side, those seem to be the tribal councils that got in trouble. Because they didn't understand the financial and business side. They ruled more with their heart, than with their head. But then I don't want to get it too cerebral either. I don't want people who are just educated and maybe off the reservation, because then we're going to miss out on those other things that I think are real important. So I guess I'm looking for both. I'm kind of a mixture. We didn't talk about a business committee, but we did talk about how the Cherokees had these divisions. The way we are now, these guys do everything. Anybody can walk in the door. If you stand there long enough you're going to get in. Whether you're talking about money for a softball team, or a death, or a relative that's missing, or a complaint on one of the doctors, or can't get general assistance. They never know what's coming through the doors. They have to deal with everything. Me, I deal with a lot, but it is all health related. But them, they are wide open. I wonder how in the world they get anything done. I'm not kidding. So I know one thing, they need to have some boundaries. That's when I think about the way we used to be. We had

those boundaries and they were clear. You knew what you absolutely couldn't be. You couldn't marry within your clan. There were certain things you couldn't do, or see, or touch, or be around. There are no boundaries now, it seems like. People don't even know their clans and get married to each other. Those boundaries that each clan had, kept us from becoming confused and chaotic. There is a lot of confusion and chaos here now. In the political realm. I try to put systems in place here, so if I leave, the system stays. Because I have just a certain amount of money. But it goes against a lot of the things that I really believe in, sometimes. So that's why I think we have to have both. Kind of a check and balance.

TRIBAL COUNCIL MEMBER (TCM1): I always remember what my grandfather told me. He said, "Don't ruin a good thing that you have at this time. Utilize it and try to get what you can out of it." He says, "Because over there, during that time over there, whenever you stop to deal with your actions, your problems and whatever you're dealing with in life, everyday life." He said, "I might not be there." He said, "I could be a very important tool to you. I could be however you want me to be. I can be that for you here." He said, "But it's up to you." He said, "I've watched and seen you through the high school years and all that." He said. He didn't say abuse, but in a way of words, saying how I've treated myself. He said, "In time to come, down that road, if so happens, God willing, well then, yourself and your friends," he said, "you're going to see that and realize that in a matter of a lifetime." He said, "Because of you conceiving and coming by children, you're going to see something," he said, "that you, yourself, had brought yourself through, or led yourself through." Today, I believe it. I can see that within my children. Those are all words that I believe. I think that they play an important role -- for any individual that has a bond with their father, their grandparent, their grandfather. Because they're sharing these teachings. But at the time, I don't think a lot of our individuals understand the teachings that he's trying to share. The value of those teachings. That's why I say, from that age of 12 years old, they were sharing

all these things with me as I was growing up. But when I came to that certain age, becoming a teenager, I only had one thought. I'm soon going to be able to do what I want to do, be what I want to be. The sad part is, I believed myself. I pushed all those good things aside, all those teachings, because I wanted to be an athlete that everyone's going to know. I really thought I was that good at one point. I was, I could say, a pretty average, fair, athlete in football, baseball, basketball, and track. I lettered in all four of those. But today, I look back after ten years of being out of high school and college and wonder what did that do for me? It didn't do anything for me. It took me from my culture and my tradition. You know, that's the sad part about it, is because of that. I think at that time, if I utilized more of the teachings and keeping those values in mind and how rich I could be at this time with all this tradition and values.

I focused all on athletics and my own desires to try to make those physical abilities take care of me into the future. Not knowing that here, these traditional values, I would benefit more through these. Through the prayers and through all the sacrifices that has to be done to become a real humble individual. To humble one's mind and heart. Today, I feel that [in order to be able] to reach out and help more of our tribal members, that being humbler [is better than] trying to live that fast life. That fast lane: trying to explore -- trying to experience -- all the negative ways of life, as I put it today. The drugs, the alcohol, and all the abusiveness of neglect through your siblings. It took me, like I said, it took me eight years to realize that. After having children. Today, I still haven't really overcome all those types of teachings that I taught myself. Just wanting to experience life and live life the easy, simplest way. Just getting by day by day and pushing that all -- leaving that all -- aside, forgetting about the teachings, forgetting about prayers and the Godfather that prays for you. There myself, being thankful of being able to be 40 years old today. My first four years that my Godfather prayed for me. Prayed for good health for me. From that day to this point I've been in good health. At a young age I had

asthma. It almost took my life. But it was because of the faith and belief of my grandparents, and my father and mother -- with our teachings there, the Native American Church and the services that they had for me. On behalf of our Omaha way of life. The [western] medicine wouldn't really help me and it was really to that point, through those years [Omaha beliefs] took care of me. Those are some of the values that at a young age I was beginning to learn to understand. But then again, coming to that certain point, I forgot the true meaning of those values. It took 15 years to realize I needed to come back and try to preserve some of those teachings that were shared with me. Then, trying to rely on some of the older relatives -- my uncles, my father, and my grandparents. It was very hard on my grandparents' side because, on the male side, my grandparents were both gone. That's where I come to understand that I probably had some of the best teachers that anyone could come by. But because of my foolishness and selfishness not utilizing that important time, I lost out.

I believe that the language and culture, language plays a very important role to the culture. It is because of the language -- the language represents the center of the culture. Within our social gatherings that center, it revolves around the drum, that drum beat. We wouldn't know when to start dancing if our singer didn't start singing these verses. A lot of the Omaha language is in there. That's why I believe that language plays a real important role, because of the healing process that it has. The impression that it brings out within the individuals. And also the individual, themselves, becoming a principal, becoming the main element of the circle. The center revolves around that, as you see that singer sitting in the center facing from the east [facing west]. Usually the person [in charge] always tries to be facing to the east, so that that communication there revolves around there within [the circle], going around within the four directions. It plays a very important element and that's where I believe maybe today we're not really -- I'm kind of getting off track here. Let me get back to the language part. I believe that the language is very important

for the culture. But I also believe that because of today, how things are running, we have contemporary music and pretty much everything is contemporary. Our yearly gathering, you see how the regalia change year by year, generation by generation. We try to stay as close as we can to being traditional, but I don't think today there is an individual here that can really share and really provide those proper traditional ways for the younger generation.

I do believe that there is a way that you could come by those traditions. I believe that, if you strongly feel that you want to learn, it goes by going and making a sacrifice. Sacrificing for the people and for our tradition. I believe I don't think it's just one person. I believe that it has to be a few. Maybe more than a few but I think that if we really want to preserve our tradition, we've got to have those individuals to go and sacrifice and speak out there. Sacrificing -- going to the hill -- praying for all the traditional things. That's the belief that I have. On the other hand, today, you see it's happening. We're trying to stay as close as we can, but we've got to keep in mind, within those traditions are our clanship. Responsibilities are within that clanship.

VIDA SUE STABLER: Is the language related to Omaha cultural values and beliefs? Yeah. It really is. In fact, I probably see that more so now that I'm working on the Omaha One and Two curriculum here at the school, than I did before. I actually remember once hearing an elder say, "We should just teach morals and values. The language is important but that's already going away and we need to start teaching this other." I remember hearing that from a very well known elder. Now as I think back on it, and having had the last two years of being in this culture center with fluent male and female speakers, it's really nice to hear what they're saying. Even though they're saying it in English, the most interesting thing is happening. I really regret that I can't say these same words they do, but they'll say it in Omaha, too. They'll say, "I remember my grandma, I remember my grandfather saying this." Then they'll say this

beautiful, eloquent Omaha phrase. I'm just trying to catch bits and pieces as it's flowing. Then they'll say it in English, and I tell you, it is so succinct and to the point and so well understood by the kids who get to hear that. They may not have caught the Omaha -- but they've caught it. If it weren't for this Omaha language classroom, they may not have had the opportunity to hear that cultural value. Because it was transferred to our Omaha elders in the language. So what's happened, as they're talking to the mostly English speaking students, they're making that translation in a succinct way that is really making an impact on the kids. I'll see them sitting here and they'll just start nodding their head in agreement. Either they've heard that at home or they agree with it. Whatever that nod means, they are agreeing with it. Because of this language class, they want us to learn these things, so they'll tell us.

Summary: The language is viewed as being linked, tied, or directly associated with cultural values. Using the language in the performance of a culturally appropriate act (using Indian names, kin terms, giving or receiving gifts, transmitting knowledge) gives clarity and importance to the act. Language is the center of culture as the drum is the center of ceremony. Language in song and the performance of ceremony is medicinal. There is a feeling by some that the loss of the language goes hand-in-hand with the loss of morality, spirituality, increasing substance abuse, and negative materialism. Traditions that have been lost through time can be regained by sacrificing one's self for the people through ritual fasting and prayer.

This concludes the interview data. In the grounded theory process, it represents the culmination of the second round of field experience. Open coding of the data

has drawn out primary themes and presented them in the summaries following each question. Chapter Four takes these data and assembles them in new ways, identifying central categories. I propose causal conditions, a hypothesis, and suggestions for further inquiry.

lye tʰe shti waowe tʰe: The Language and The Law

During the course of one interview the discussion touched upon two points that linked Omaha language to points of law. The first was the passage of the 1999 Nebraska Legislative Bill 475 regarding the certification of native language teachers. The second was the presentation to me of a draft of a tribal council resolution that identified the language as tribal property. The core text of both pieces of legislation is inserted here for consideration.

LB475, signed into law by the Nebraska Governor on April 28, 1999, deals with a number of Health and Human Services related to Indian tribes. Of interest here is Section 1:

(1) Teaching American Indian languages is essential to the proper education of American Indian children. School districts and postsecondary educational institutions may employ approved American Indian language teachers to teach their native language. For purposes of this section, approved American Indian language teacher means a teacher who has passed the tribe's written and oral approval test.

(2) Approved American Indian language teachers that do not also have a Nebraska teaching certificate shall not teach any subject other than the American Indian language they are approved to teach by the tribe.

(3) Each tribe shall develop both a written and an oral test that must be successfully completed in order to determine that a teacher is approved to teach the tribe's native language. When developing such approval tests, the tribe shall include, but not be limited to, which dialects will be used, whether it will standardize its writing system, and

how the teaching methods will be evaluated in the classroom. The teacher approval tests shall be administered at a community college or state college.

The reasoning behind this law is to encourage school districts to hire native language instructors from the community, who otherwise have no formal teaching certification, and to compensate them in a reasonable manner. Anecdotal information suggests that three community members have approached the tribe and received certification under this law. However, it remains unclear what was included in the actual test. The certified community members were reportedly employed at the Nebraska Indian Community College.

The impetus for the draft proposal tribal resolution derives from the perception by some in the community that outsiders are commandeering the language for their own personal gain. In discussing this concern with the tribal council member (TCM2) who drafted the proposal, it seemed unclear whether the focus was on the use of written Omaha or spoken Omaha. However, I was unable to elicit an example of any form of Omaha that was being exploitatively used. The resolution's author said he was not aware of what impact this resolution might have on legitimate scholars who were currently working on collaborative projects with various tribal members and tribal institutions, as well as future researchers. The core elements of the proposed resolution include the following statements:

Whereas: The Omaha Tribe incorporates under tribal law the following decree: The Omaha language is alive and dynamic, its use and authenticity must be protected as a language system in the twenty-first century, and

Whereas: The Omaha Tribe claims full and complete ownership of the Omaha language and its compliments of words, phrases, language system and future words of the Omaha people, and

Whereas: The Omaha Tribe shall require under this tribal law a copyright symbol of OTN after any use or practice of the Omaha language, and

Whereas: the Omaha Tribe shall require under this tribal law any non-Indian or non-enrolled Indian member to submit in an approved application form permission to use the Omaha language in part or any part thereof, before they use any portion or part of the Omaha language for any purpose.

As of summer 2001, the resolution had not been presented to the council for its consideration. The final chapter will consider the implications of this proposed legislation and LB475 together with the thoughts and feelings shared by the leaders of the Omaha community detailed above. Hanging in the balance are the future prospects of the Omaha language.

Chapter 4

Analysis, Conclusions and Discussion

We have to figure out a way to make our language more useable.
Get our kids talking language in the hallways.
Vida Stabler, 2001

Idadoⁿ abthiⁿ a?: What Do I Have?

Central themes emerging from the interview data point to the destructive effects of alcohol and drug abuse on the Omaha family. The entry point for these substances began with the fur trade and has continued to evolve with the changing interfaces of Omaha-White contact. At some point alcoholism takes on a self-driving, self-perpetuating characteristic. It supports, and is supported by, a weak economy, weak political organization, and limited education. It results in lowered self-esteem, negative health issues, a diminished spirituality, and increased harmful social practices. Critical to our question are the detrimental effects it has on the transmission of cultural knowledge, including language, from one generation to the next.

That the contact with, and interference by, the colonial government and surrounding white population contributes to the current social, economic, and political hardships is a well-worked area of research. All of the major publications related to the Omaha point out aspects of this influence and disruption (Boughter 1998; La Flesche 1963; Fletcher and La Flesche 1911; Mead 1932; Ridington and Hastings 1997; Scherer 1999; Wishart 1994). Most Omaha readily point to the federal government meddling in Omaha culture and society as the cause for many of their current hardships.

As noted earlier, the interviews also revealed a consistent practice of individuals shifting responsibility for the revival and/or maintenance of the Omaha language away from themselves. Every respondent pointed the finger of responsibility towards other individuals or institutions. In only one case did the husband/wife respondents admit their mistake of not speaking more Omaha at home to their adolescent children. One individual was explicit in making the personal decision not to speak Omaha.

Inconsistencies were noted in the three following perceptions: the number of people needed to adequately pass on cultural knowledge, the level of language performance necessary to maintain language viability into the next generation, and the acceptance of poor or diminished oral performance. The first two perceptions require a rationalization of process, while the latter issue requires a complete about-face in the contemporary practice of teasing and open ridicule.

No respondent offered a complete model of the number of persons required to successfully pass on the language into the next generation. In my M.A. research (Awakuni-Swetland 1996), the working presumption was that a single fluent family member in the household was sufficient to impact a child's language acquisition. That presumption was not supported by the data. In the environment of a single family unit living in a non-Omaha urban setting, the work schedule does not permit sufficient husband-wife interaction in the presence of the children. TM11 noted,

My husband wasn't home most of the time. I was home taking care of the kids. He had two jobs. So most of the time we weren't

together except at nights. Where our kids were, when you talked Indian, they weren't there [TM11 2001].

This perception is countered by the claims of one Omaha speaker raising her grandchildren in an off-reservation home with a non-Omaha spouse. During the 1999 Lincoln dinner-forum, she asserted that she was “teaching the language to her grandchildren,” implying that they were learning a sufficient amount of the language to be able to use it.

Several responses indicated that the family environment is critical to the continuity of language and culture. The family was cited as the preferred site of language and culture learning. Alcohol abuse, work schedules, absence of the children due to boarding school attendance, and parental disinterest contribute to the breaking of the communication chain. Other “hard time” causal factors impacting a family’s quality of life were noted, including poverty, racism, health issues, low self-esteem, relocation, and the overall lack of social and educational opportunities. The legacy of this generations-deep process is the perception that parents of the current ONPS students are generally unable, unqualified, or uninterested in modeling or promoting Omaha language at home. There is a perception held by some that the parents and grandparents, aged 30 to 60 years, are starting to speak to their children. There are no data to support or quantify this view.

The reaction, or resolution, to the language problem by most community leaders is to focus the responsibility of teaching Omaha on two institutions: primarily, the Omaha Nation Public School, and secondarily, the Omaha Tribal Council and its various social service programs. Calls for strengthening the

current school program, adding graduation requirements, and incorporating parents-as-learners, top the list of suggestions. What community leaders fail to realize is that the school, as a state institution of mainstream hegemony, has an agenda that does not readily accept divergence from the core colonial curriculum.

On the other hand, the tribal council has its hands full dealing with a mountain of federal and state programs. As noted by Ms. St.Cyr,

These guys do everything. Anybody can walk through the door. They never know what's coming through the door. They have to deal with everything [St. Cyr 2001].

However, their focus, by necessity, is outward-facing in its role as representative and intermediary to the mainstream society. Council members are not elected based solely upon their traditional values and cultural practices. While all members are "Omaha" by definition, not all are fluent speakers, or actively participate in culturally-prescribed social functions.

Several community members felt that at least one tribal council member should be knowledgeable in both language and cultural issues. This reliance upon a single source/person for language maintenance and survival is reminiscent of my M.A. assumption that a single speaker in a home is sufficient to the task of language survival. It suggests that the community will accept six out of seven council members being culturally and linguistically "weak." In this forum, how realistic is it for the council to issue mandates for younger generations to learn and perform Omaha, when the council does not practice the same standards?

There are persistent nostalgic memories of business being conducted entirely in Omaha, by Omaha, in the past. It is repeatedly stated that council members able to speak Omaha can translate technical English jargon into Omaha for the elders. The reality in the community is that in one more generation, there will be no elders who speak Omaha. The need for that function will have vanished as all elders will be English-only speakers. In my experience, I have been called upon to interpret (explain) numerous legal documents to elderly Omaha people. These have included insurance forms, estate planning instructions, probate reports, Bureau of Indian Affairs land lease and easement forms, public utility letters, and similar documents. All of these explanations have been performed to the elders' satisfaction in English. Thus, this experience does not support the community leaders' perception noted above.

There is an attendant perception that Omaha does not contain the language of contemporary business. I am unsure where that opinion originates. Perhaps it stems from the actuality that Omaha has not been modernized ever since early twentieth century technology (e.g., telegraph, kerosene lamps, Model T automobiles). It may be associated with an emerging call for council members to bring mainstream business acumen and higher education credentials to the table. The perception that speaking Omaha gives one more cultural authority apparently does not transfer over to implying that one has business management skills.

Conclusions from the M.A. study (Awakuni-Swetland 1996) suggested that the amount of Omaha language evidenced at that time was insufficient to keep the language viable as a form of communication in the next generation. I am pleased to report that the teaching methods have radically changed for the better since those data were gathered. In a visit to the ONPS Culture Center in September 2003, I witnessed multiple small groups of upper grade students in near-immersion, hands-on, activity-based classes. There was reinforcement of the language through repetition of target questions and responses. Staff made computerized database entries of the material covered after each class. There were male and female elder speakers teaching practical, daily-use materials. Language instruction was coupled with appropriate Omaha social mannerisms, including the use of terms of kinship, greetings and departure phrases, sharing, and the respectful silence while some one else is speaking.

Admittedly in the rough, formative stages, this teaching approach has the potential of producing functioning second language speakers. It needs more of everything: more immersion activities, more hands-on and reality-oriented curriculum, more willing speakers, and increased administrative and community support to flourish. A critical question is will the accumulation of these small pieces of language exposure be “enough” to keep the language robust for future learners?

A concomitant dilemma, as I see it, is what the students will do with their new found language skills. If the students were able to learn enough Omaha to use it as a viable second language, the English-only home environment may not

permit them a venue to practice their language. As the maxim goes, "What we don't use, we lose." Additionally, if there is no reasonable economic, social, or political role in the community for the language, there is less reason to keep it activated as an adult. It will be a hard-earned skill that languishes in later years.

A current social practice is a key player in Omaha language suppression in the community... ridicule. A long-held practice of teasing has been used to regulate social behavior. Generally the teasing is low-key and good-natured, meant to gently prod the wrongdoer into a more acceptable form of behavior. The social *faux pas* becomes the center of a humorous, but instructive, story that is often retold long after the misbehavior has been corrected. Many times the central character will tell the story on himself, generating laughs from his audience. As my Grandma Elizabeth was fond of saying, "If we didn't tease you, it meant we didn't like you." I took that to mean they cared enough for me that they wanted me to conform to appropriate Omaha behavior.

This practice has a deleterious effect when it is used with negative, or malicious, intent. In the case of a recently deceased language instructor, TCM2 noted,

...that he was talking like a woman [at NICC]. That's what they tried to tell him. He was getting his materials from some other people [females, who] were trying to help him with his teaching of the language. So you know those things happen out there. They were trying to tell him, "The way you're teaching it... you're a man but you're speaking a lot of it like a woman would talk." It's pretty interesting about how they were not scolding him but trying to help him and yet, he kind of took it they were scolding him [TCM2 2001].

Over the years I have been subjected to the same criticism because my primary teachers have been females. Perhaps I am a good target for ridicule because of my not being Omaha. This was noted by the Thirty Year Resident who recalled:

We always tease and I like it because then it keeps it going and it's like we value this. We can tease each other. Except, sometimes one lady in the group -- she's kind of a lemony girl -- she said, "I don't like to hear you saying those kind of things in my language." And I said, "Well, sorry dear, but that's just how I am," and so we just go right on. You know, like "this is my language, you can't tease around or play in it," you know. But I do anyway. She's the only one that doesn't like to hear it [Thirty Year Resident 2001].

This story suggests a proprietary view toward Omaha and harkens back to the draft tribal council resolution that would confine the use of Omaha to only enrolled tribal members. This view, like the draft resolution, is restrictive and does not encourage language use.

I have heard numerous anecdotes of school children going home to tell their parents of the new Omaha words they learned in class, only to be berated for their perceived mispronunciation by their non-Omaha speaking parents. Rarely have I heard of parents offering a corrected pronunciation to the child. In her vision of the future state of the Omaha language, Hawate stated that:

Even though, maybe some may not speak it fluently. It's going to still go on such as colors, words and different things. Like my youngest sister now, she's going to speak it fluently. She's a young woman yet. There are a lot of teacher corps [students] that we have down here. They're learning it. They're in turn going to teach the coming student at the local school here [Hawate 2001].

This proposal seems to imply that whatever level of performance is reached will be acceptable. It does not account for the likelihood of public ridicule which these

persons will be subjected to under current social practices. Perhaps it is informed by the environment being consciously fostered at the Omaha Nation Culture Center. Director Vida Stabler noted that:

...When I come back and I'll tell the elders, "Well I was saying this," and it's so interesting because then they kind of take offense ...that this person corrected me because they [the elders] see me as somebody they've taught. ...They'll say, "Well you know how to say that. What did they say?" So they're going to cast the doubt on that person, not on me. ...They'll say, "What did you say?" I'll tell them and they'll go, "That's right." It's kind of interesting to see how they'll take offense at this other person because I've taught you. They take pride... in the things that we have learned and the things that we have been able to say and say correctly. They're proud of that when we are able to do it. And then when we're not, they don't scold us. They don't. They just encourage us, "Say it like this," or they'll just say it. They won't even say, "Say it like this," they'll just say it, and then we repeat it. And they'll say it again, and we'll repeat it. And each time we repeat it, we work towards saying it like they do until we get there. And then they won't make a big "to do" or throw you a party, they'll just say, "Yeah, that's good." Just like that. They'll give you just enough of that encouragement and that's enough for me. If they nod their head, "Yeah, that's good," that's good enough for me [Stabler 2001].

It is this kind of supportive, less critical environment that needs to be promoted throughout the community.

The lack of consensus on the issue of language choice and language action falls out of these data as an unspoken conclusion. As with the preceding issues, it is the interference by mainstream culture that contributes to the difficulty in achieving Omaha consensus. It is further suggested that with the removal of pre-contact, pro-fusion institutions and processes, the Omaha people have returned to an earlier state of contending group and individual ideologies. External influences have helped to create and maintain the environment of an

inadequate economy, substance abuse, dysfunctional families, and the dependency upon others.

***Umoⁿhoⁿ ushkoⁿ t^he eshetoⁿ*: This Concludes the Omaha Work**

In the late 1800s, George Miller recounted a speech in the Omaha language for linguist James Owen Dorsey. It was reportedly a common exhortation being made to the young men by elders of the tribe at that time. The English translation provided by Dorsey reads:

0 ye people, if you ever accomplish anything for yourselves it will be only when you work so hard for yourselves that you pant incessantly thereafter. Do your best! Do not depend on any one else. The Mysterious Power made us all Indians in this country, but all those things which he made for our constant good have disappeared. The entire country is full of white people, so the quadrupeds which had been made by the Mysterious Power for our advantage have been exterminated, they have been shot. In the former days we went about, killing the quadrupeds who had no owners, we governed ourselves, going wherever we pleased, we went about just as men should do. But now it is impossible for us to think any longer about those deeds of the past. Although we are ignorant of the customs of the white people, let us shape our course in that direction. In that case we shall prosper [Dorsey 1890: 628-629].

Shaping that course towards the future would eventually result in the adoption of the accoutrements, values, religion, social organizations, and language of the white majority. Along the way, the Omaha equivalents to most of these things would be set aside. Margaret Mead's description of a "deleted and attenuated culture" still holds today if the comparison is being made to the pre-reservation era. However, a more relativistic perspective is that the Omaha culture remains dynamic, flexible, and unique. It has tenaciously retained many cultural values

and distinct social behaviors in the face of generations of relentless outside pressures. The Omaha have also incorporated many aspects of the mainstream society, both good and bad, and adapted them to fit their community.

Along the way the Omaha language has taken a beating because the culture has been taking a beating. The two are inextricably linked. The majority of the people want to maintain some portions of the culture. Social activities such as the *Hethushka* war dance, hand games, and feasts occur with great frequency and vibrancy, often competing for available dates on the calendar. Religious functions such as the Native American Church meetings, sweat lodge ceremonies, sun dance, traditional funerals, and memorials keep pace. However, in all of these venues, both sacred and secular, the language continues to fade away. Why?

This study has illustrated that a key issue in the question about language choice is the absence of consensus within the Omaha community. There are divergent views on the status of the native language. Some individuals believe Omaha is extinct or moribund.

When that baby is first brought home or into that home, why is it that the fluent speakers don't just speak Omaha and understand and know that the baby will pick that up [Vida Stabler 2001]?

I don't speak it enough to be comfortable with it [TM13 2001].

Nobody wants to learn. They want everybody else to do the work [Barry Webster 2001].

I'd have to say that yes, you can be an Omaha without the language [Vida Stabler 2001]

Others see the language as still being viable as a form of communication or cultural identity.

God is really listening [when we pray in Omaha] [TCM2 2001].

The language represents the center of the culture [TCM 2001].

My commitment is to preserve as much of it as I possibly can, even if I have to volunteer" [Hawate 2001].

How do you say 'itsie bitsie spider' in Omaha [Lena Spears 2001]?

It's really cool now to speak Omaha language and know how to do it [Thirty Year Resident 2001].

There are competing ideas about its value to the functioning of the community, and where the responsibility lies for its survival.

Speaking Omaha will not bring you food. English will [TM14 2001].

I think the burden falls on the community which is governed by the tribal council [Wehnona St.Cyr 2001].

The parents have got to know that Omaha language [TM12 2001].

Have the [tribal program] directors realize that it's important that we learn our language [Hawate 2001].

We're not giving up. We just have to be creative. [Lena Spears 2001].

The whole family has got to work together [TM11 2001]

We should be talking Omaha, and then these kids, if they hear it, they might try to talk [TM12 2001].

In spite of it all, the Omaha language may be doomed to disappear due to the Omaha peoples' innate desire to show respect to the spoken word by not risking a mispronunciation. It is not a new issue. In reporting on the status of English in

the new day schools on the Omaha Reservation in 1871, teacher Theodore T. Gillingham noted that

The greatest obstacle in the way of educating these people is their great reluctance to practice speaking our language even after they understand it. They are timid and sensitive, afraid of using it incorrectly. One thing particularly noted by us is their uniform kindness to each other; we never taught among any class of people where unpleasant differences so seldom occurred (ARCIA 1871:448).

From whichever perspective one views the question, there does not appear to be agreement that is sufficient to mobilize community-wide, effective, lasting change.

There are individuals who are pouring their hearts and souls into reviving the Omaha language, myself included. However, it is my view that we will not have a long-lasting effect because we do not have sufficient involvement of the community, especially the key missing link – the non-speaking parents. Of the students currently attending Omaha Nation Public School it is safe to say that the majority of their parents were born speaking English. The few parents who were born speaking Omaha no longer speak it as their primary home language. The language is effectively silent in all of the homes.

A recurring theme in the interviews with community leaders was the importance of the parents in teaching and modeling the language. This attitude echoes what I heard students telling me in my 1995 study. Unfortunately, the majority of the respondents continued to place the responsibility for teaching the language on someone else's shoulders: the school, the other parents, or the tribal government. Except for those leaders already engaged in teaching the

language, the rest of the respondents did not declare themselves responsible for, or committed to, using the language. This may very well be a continuation of the colonial system of creating dependency upon federal programs for all of the daily needs of the Omaha. Housing, general assistance to impoverished individuals and families, health care, education, economic development, job training, and law enforcement functions are controlled by the federal government. Many of these programs are the result of nation-to-nation treaty relations. However, the entire system has developed which now propagates the attitude that some one else will take care of everything. Therefore, it becomes a natural progression to place the burden of language maintenance on some one else's shoulders. Or, it could mean that the language may not be valuable enough to do anything about it.

From my perspective, interference by the mainstream culture contributes to the difficulty in achieving Omaha consensus on the issue of language choice. It is further suggested that with the removal of pre-contact, pro-fusion institutions and processes, the Omaha people have returned to an earlier state of contending group and individual ideologies. The Omaha had achieved a consensus-driven government in a social environment of competing ideologies. The institutions of that government often melded secular and sacred realms together. That government was disrupted by and continues to be modified by the colonial powers.

I have argued here that the lack of consensus is a reflection of the contemporary Omaha socio-political state in the absence of pre-reservation tribal

institutions. In the past the Omaha experienced a dispersed residence pattern, a family/clan centered decision making process, personal disputes, and saw the emergence special interest groups. Some of these experiences could have been driven by changing subsistence strategies. Others could have been encouraged by factionalism. Examples of the latter included oral history and archaeological evidence of early dispersed villages. At one point a marital dispute reportedly led to a separation of the tribe into two villages. Joseph La Flesche was reported as the leader of a group dubbed the "Young Men's Party" at the time of the signing of the 1854 Treaty. This group was described as being pro-civilization (pro-western culture values) in contrast to the majority of the tribe. When the Omaha took up residence on their newly established reservation lands in 1855, tribal members grouped themselves into three geographic locations. This is in contrast to the immediately previous pattern of coalescence into the single, unified Big Village located on Omaha Creek. Dorsey suggests there was no political division in this tripartite arrangement. However, it seems evident that each "village" site held distinct opinions about the Americanization policies that were being foisted on them. During the allotment years, voices of dissent against the parceling out of communal lands to individuals could be heard. One group of families dubbed "The Council Fire" had to be forcibly rounded-up so they could be assigned their allotments (Swetland 1994).

In spite of these historic divisions, the traditional tribal institutions worked to join the disparate parts into a unified whole. These previously existing tribal institutions, especially the clan system with its structure of required

interdependence, served as the check and balance to most predispositions toward factionalism. The governing Council of Seven was comprised of individuals selected from seven specific clans. Members served at the pleasure of their constituent clan and could be replaced at will. With the membership of the council always being derived from the same supernaturally sanctioned clans, it would suggest a relative stability that could have lent a calming effect to the tribe. Warfare was under the control and supernatural sanctions of the Sacred Tent of War Packs, reducing the repercussions from unsanctioned war parties. Elevation into the society of chiefs was gained through a clearly understood ranking of public good deeds and gift-giving. The secular and sacred realms were interwoven through clan and family reciprocal relationships.

The current government and religious institutions do not produce the same effect as the pre-contact institutions did in terms of building community consensus. Their western model does not require it. Decisions are now made by simple majority rule or executive decree. In 1936, the Omaha voted to accept reorganization and implemented a council-style government elected by popular vote. In many ways, the current council is expected to deal with the same issues, both secular and sacred, as the older council. Unlike the older council, the current council must also deal with a plethora of minutia in its relationship with the federal government and white neighbors. The supernatural sanctions of the tribal pipes are no longer guiding and supporting the council. Other significant changes include councils comprised of multiple members from a single clan, female members, and individuals with no clan affiliation. Following the western

model from which it is derived, the council does not require community consensus prior to making decisions. Community members feel they have little power to initiate action or change.

Anecdotal impressions by some community members are that the council's three-year term rotation has resulted in the creation of two or three "pools" or "groups" who tend to alternate holding office. It is unclear if this is an artifact of the electoral system, or some pre-existing social arrangement. Each group in office is frequently hounded by those out of office, drawing negative public sentiment based upon allegations of nepotism, mismanagement, corruption, or ineptitude. The allegations are often unfounded, but these impressions serve to unnerve the community, alienate the local whites, and generally undermine positive feelings about the council's abilities and intentions. The end result is often a near or complete overturn of council membership at each successive election.

Sacred and secular duties have been separated and compartmentalized following a western model. The Native American Church, a syncretic revivalist religion, strives to position itself as the dominant (in power, if not in practice) religion. The relatively small number of ordained, all-male ministers (roadmen) are emerging by policy and practice as the proffered "legitimate" and preferred officials at most social and sacred gatherings. In effect, the community is undergoing a process of revisionist history in which duties held by medicine bundle keepers, secret society officials, doctoring society members, sweat lodge keepers, and other prominent adults are now being filled by NAC leaders. The

assumption of such roles is supported by personal memories of current elders dating after 1906 when the peyote first arrived on the Omaha reservation. At that time many of the pre-peyote spiritualists began adopting peyote rituals and beliefs. It appears that it is easy for people to remember Grandpa so and so, an early Peyotist, officiating at a dance. It seems harder to recall that Grandpa so and so was also an official of the Shell Society, or a Bear Doctor, at the same time.

We conclude that simply replacing white personnel with native personnel in existing programs and institutions will not automatically result in achieving consensus on critical issues facing the community (including language and culture). The problem resides in the nature and goals of the western model government and social structure. They do not encourage consensus decision-making. This study suggests a shift to programming, processes, and institutions reminiscent of the emerging pre-reservation coalescence that maximize ideals of community-wide fusion, interdependence, and personal action in the face of divergent ideologies.

***Uhe jega wi" gaxagaho!:* Go Make a New Road!**

It is irresponsible of me to point out weaknesses and deficiencies in any program or endeavor without offering some sort of solution. As mentioned earlier, the Omaha Nation Culture Center is interested in both immersion and teacher-apprentice teaching methods. When the topic of native language revival arises, the Pūnana Leo Hawaiian preschool immersion program often comes to the

forefront of discussion due to its emerging success at producing Hawaiian speakers. The Hawaiian example is offered here to the Omaha community to consider, with the stipulation that readers focus on the key issues of where the program energy originates (grassroots up versus government down), the level of commitment and responsibility placed on the parents' shoulders, the integration of mainstream academics, and the laws and practices that strengthen or weaken the goals of the program. A fuller description of the Hawaiian language revival can be found in articles by Warner (2001), *The Movement to Revitalize Hawaiian Language and Culture*, Wilson and Kamanā (2001), "*Mai Loko Mai O Ka 'I'ini: Proceeding from a Dream*", both found in Hinton and Hale (2001), *The Green Book of Language Revitalization in Practice*, and Hartwell (1996), *Nā Mamo: Hawaiian People Today*.

In brief, the Pūnana Leo initiative started in the 1980s. It grew out of the Hawaiian cultural renaissance of the late 1960s and 1970s. Like many indigenous languages and cultures, Hawaiian had been stigmatized and outlawed by the colonial government since the nineteenth century. The Hawaiian cultural revolution energized youth to revive Hawaiian language and traditional dance. By the late 1970s, the University of Hawai'i had responded by developing and offering as many as eleven elementary Hawaiian 101 classes each semester. Surveys in 1978 estimated 2,000 Hawaiian native speakers remained. A constitutional convention the same year designated Hawaiian and

English as the two official languages of the State of Hawai'i. The new constitution mandated the State to promote Hawaiian language, culture, and history (Warner 2001).

By 1982, approximately 150-200 Hawaiian second-language students had graduated from the University of Hawai'i. These college graduates became language educators. However, there were virtually no children being born as first-language users. The realization arose that, if the language was to survive into the next generation, attention needed to be focused on the children. Taking the lead from the New Zealand Māori Kōhanga Reo (immersion preschool), a grassroots group develops the Pūnana Leo "language nest" immersion preschool for ages two through five years.

They are immediately are faced with obstacles. The government does not have provisions to regulate the many foreign language (Chinese, Japanese, etc.) schools in the state. However, since the Hawaiian language is not considered "foreign," it must meet all of the state regulations for schools. This placed an extreme financial burden on the group to meet mandated staffing requirements, space requirements, handicap accessibility, and other building codes. The State required the preschool teachers to be certified in early-childhood education, effectively cutting off all of the fluent Hawaiian elders from being teachers. Additionally, the State declared that language immersion was not a true method of language instruction. Grass root efforts continually pushed to change these conditions. However, by 1993, Pūnana Leo remained the only language school in Hawai'i subject to state regulations. The additional costs resulted in Pūnana Leo

only being able to open six preschools. Meanwhile, in Aotearoa, over 600 Māori Kōhanga Reo preschools had been established.

The Papahana Kaiapuna Hawai'i, or more commonly called, Kula Kaiapuni Hawaiian Immersion Schools grew out of the desire to support the Pūnana Leo preschoolers as they moved into K-1 grades. There was voluntary enrollment. There was a high Native Hawaiian enrollment, but the student body also included non-Hawaiian and non-Pūnana Leo children. All learned the Hawaiian language and culture offered in the immersion program. Through time the Hawaiian Immersion School was extended through the twelfth grade. By 1998, the University of Hawai'i at Mānoa established the first teacher preparation program specifically aimed at preparing Hawaiian Immersion School (HIS) teachers. Descriptions of the teaching methods, objectives, and curriculum, are described in the articles mentioned above.

Some important problems should be mentioned here. Generally the school administrators and staff at the HIS sites are not fluent in Hawaiian. Teachers are routinely hired based upon State criteria which do not include Hawaiian fluency. Many see the Hawaiian approach as compromising the academic goals. Some believe there is social harm in isolating the children away from English and see little value for Hawaiian language in today's world. These and other problems serve to undermine and weaken the goals of Hawaiian language primacy (Warner 2001).

While the Hawaiian language immersion efforts have continued to spread across the state, there are conflicts over many aspects of the program, including

teaching methods, curriculum, amount of English used, and overall control of the program. Hinton (2001:130) notes that serious friction has caused the factionalization of the immersion program at a school in Kaua'i. She warns that, while the large size of the Hawaiian program allows it to weather the split, internal friction in smaller revitalization programs will cause them to fail. Today, "Hawaiian represents the flagship of language recovery, and serves as a model and a symbol of hope to other endangered languages" (Hinton 2001:131).

***Kigthikuwi'xe shti do'bagaho!:* Turn Around and Look at it!**

I believe we can apply many of the principles and approaches of the Pūnana Leo preschool immersion and Kula Kaiapuni Hawaiian immersion schools to the Omaha community. There are many differences between the two communities, but there are also similarities. One distinct advantage for the Omaha is their status as a sovereign land-based nation. The Omaha already have a centralized government while the Native Hawaiians do not. The tribal government could streamline many of the tribal programs, regulations, and practices to support an immersion community. State legislation such as LB475 points in the right direction by permitting the tribe to identify and certify speakers able to teach. LB475 only fails if the tribe chooses to test for fluency for fluency's sake and not test for ability to teach. As of this writing, only three people have been certified under LB475. The socio-political environment that has thus far discouraged the ONPS Culture Center speakers from being certified detracts from the intended goal of this legislation and causes friction between speakers.

On the other hand, if the draft resolution to require the copyright of the Omaha language were enacted, it would only serve to limit the use of the language rather than expand and encourage it. Non-enrolled tribal members and outside researchers would be disinclined to use the language in order to avoid recriminations or bureaucratic red tape.

For the Omaha, the fundamental key to this, or any action, requires the complete commitment of the parents. As in the Hawaiian case, parents committed themselves to learning the language along with their children, and then promised to use it exclusively in the home. The parents formed the grass root groups that raised funds and attended state and local meetings to agitate for change.

As noted earlier by Vida Stabler (2001), the Omaha language must become more useable if it is to survive. It must gain an economic and political presence that will encourage people to value it and use it. Let imaginative speculation launch us into a new way of making language choices. Imagine what might happen if all tribal council candidates were required to be speakers? What if all tribal program directors and their employees were required to be speakers as a condition of employment? What if all school faculty, administrators, and staff had the same requirement? What might happen if all business conducted with tribal members was in the national language? Official business conducted with non-Omaha people could be in English or Omaha, depending upon the decision of the community. Imagine the political and economic advantages of requiring non-Omaha people to either learn the language or hire a local interpreter (job

opportunity!). In all of this it is certain that English language proficiency will not be seriously harmed. Going off-reservation to shop, work, or socialize will continue to expose everyone to the mainstream language. Television, radio, and Internet access will also insert its influence. What it really means is that each community member will now have a true choice in which language they use at any given time. Currently, there is no choice. English is the default language.

Is this a pie in the sky vision? Possibly. It requires the personal commitment of every parent in the community, as well as the tribal leaders, and educators. On the other hand, can you imagine the looks of disbelief you would receive if you told the local Hawaiian boys on the beach in 1969, that 30 years in the future, there would be high school students graduating from a total Hawaiian immersion school experience. Not only that, but those same graduates would already be taking college prep courses. *Auwe!* They would think you had been standing in the sun too long. But it has happened just that way.

It may be that the process of cultural and social evolution for the Omaha is through the long-term, very slow accumulation and acceptance of small changes. The initial, external appearance of assimilation (adoption of land allotment, English, education, citizen's clothes) seemed rapid and complete. However, there has always been an underlying entrenchment of traditional values and practices. This is evidenced by the early dance lodge phenomenon, *Hethushka* Society revival in the 1970s, reassertion of the Mark of Honor values with the creation of the Mark of Honor Youth Lodge, and the Four Hills of Life health program. In contrast to the loss of their lands which remain tangible in their midst

(and thus reclaimable), the loss of the intangible language is a loss more difficult to reverse.

The next step in this study is to develop questions to elicit ideas about ways to motivate the English-only Omaha parents into a groundswell of action. The hesitant speakers must be encouraged to risk the embarrassment of mispronunciation and become active models of the language. The practice of critical ridicule without proper modeling must change. All of the resources in the world will not revive the Omaha language without the personal commitment and participation of the parents together with their children. Tribal leaders must take the lead in building consensus on language issues so that no one is left behind.

During the course of the oral defense of this dissertation (November 2003), the question was posed by a faculty member about the usefulness of having a tribal government-level committee. There has been one or more such committees in the recent past. As far as I can ascertain, only a historic preservation committee is still active. I agree that some type of organization would be a key component for any community-based language and culture revitalization effort.

If we truly believe that the language comes from the heart of the individual, the nation, then the community must act now, using the clan system, *Húthuga*, and other traditional strategies, to assure that in the future there will always be someone rising to speak Omaha.

Umoⁿhoⁿ nikashiⁿga ama, ewithai woⁿgithe wibthahoⁿ. Washkoⁿgaho!
Omaha people, thank you all of my relatives. Be Strong!

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Appendix A: Omaha Tribal Council Letter of Approval

OMAHA TRIBE OF NEBRASKA

P. O. Box 368
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EXECUTIVE OFFICERS

Elmer L. Blackbird, Chairman
Amen C. Shendan, Sr., Vice-Chairman
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Forrest "J.C." Alench

22 June 2000

Mark Awakuni-Swetland
Anthropology/Ethnic Studies
University of Nebraska
Lincoln, NE 68588-0368

Dear Mark:

The Omaha Tribal Council supports your doctoral dissertation study related to the use of Omaha language within the Omaha community. After meeting with you, it is our understanding that you will fulfill the following:

- Comply with Omaha Tribe research protocols regarding protection of human subjects.
- Comply with University of Oklahoma research protocols regarding protection of human subjects.
- Comply with University of Nebraska research protocols regarding protection of human subjects.
- Deliver a copy of the final dissertation, scheduled for completion in 2002, to the Omaha Tribal Council.

With this understanding in mind, the Omaha Tribe of Nebraska supports your dissertation study and encourages Omaha Tribal members to participate in this research.

Sincerely,

Elmer L. Blackbird, Chairman
Omaha Tribe of Nebraska

ELB:els

c: file

Appendix B: Sample Page, BAE Report 27, 1911:111

FLETCHER LA FLESCHE] ENVIRONMENT; RESULTANT INFLUENCES 111

Bitter, Pa.
Taste of nuts, } No^{ne}.
Taste of fat, }
Salt, the article, Ni^{ki}'the (sweet water).

COLORS

White, Çka.
Pale, Ço^a.
Black, Ça'be.
Green, Tu.
Blue, Tu ça'be.
Yellow, Çi.
Red, Zhi'de.
Gray or Brown, Xu'de.

POINTS OF THE COMPASS

North, Uⁿⁱ'atathisho^a (uⁿⁱ, cold; *ata*, there; *thisho^a*, toward)—toward the cold.
East, Miⁿⁱ'atathisho^a (mi, sun; *ni*, it comes; *ata*, there; *thisho^a*, toward)—toward the coming of the sun.
South, Mo^s'shtea'tathisho^a (mo^shte, heat; *ata*, there; *thisho^a*, toward)—toward the heat.
West, Mi'ithcatathisho^a (mi, sun; *ithe*, gone; *ata*, there; *thisho^a*, toward)—toward where the sun has gone.
Up (as when the pipes are pointed upward), Mo^a'xuta (mo^axa, sky; *tu*, *ata*, there).
Down (as when the pipes are pointed downward), To^a'deata (to^ade, earth; *ata*, there).

DIVISIONS OF TIME

January, Ho^a'ga umubthi ike: When the snow drifts into the tents of the Ho^a'ga.
February, Mi'xa agthi ike: The moon when geese come home (come back).
March, Pe'nishka mieta ike: The little frog moon.
April, Mi'o^a'thi^age ike: The moon in which nothing happens.
May, Mi waa' ike: The moon in which they (the tribe) plant.
June, Tenu'gamigauna ike: The buffalo bulls hunt the cows.
July, Tehu'ta^a ike: When the buffalo bellow.
August, U^a'po'huta^a ike: When the elk bellow.
September, Ta'xte na^a'no^axa ike: When the deer paw the earth.
October, Ta'xti kithixa ike: When the deer rut.
November, Ta'xte hebaxo^a ike: When the deer shed the antlers.
December, Waça'be zhi'ga i'da ike: When the little black bears are born.
The Oto and Iowa tribes use the same names for the months except for January, which is called "the raccoon month."

The general name for month was "a moon."

The night, or sleeping time, marked the division of days, so a journey might be spoken of as having taken so many "sleeps." In like manner the year was spoken of as "a winter." The sun indicated the time of day: Sunrise, mi'etho^a'be (mi, sun; *etho^a'be*, to come out); sunset, mi'ethe (mi, sun; *ithe*, gone). A motion toward the zenith meant noon (mi'tho^a mo^a'shi—mi, sun; *tho^a*, round; *mo^a'shi*, on high); midway between the zenith and the west, afternoon; and midway toward the east, forenoon. There were no smaller divisions of time among the Omaha.

Appendix C: UNL/UNPS Pronunciation Guide, 2001.

Pronunciation Guide

The following are the sounds of Umoⁿhoⁿ and their orthographic representation.

Letter	Umo ⁿ ho ⁿ	--	English
a	ská (white)		father
b	biamá (they say)		boy
ch	chéshka (short)		church
ch^h	í ⁿ ch ^h o ⁿ (right now)		church
d	dúba (four)		dog
e	shé (apple)		weight, Las Vegas
g	égo ⁿ (like that)		girl
gh	gháge (cry, weep)		Bach (perhaps voiced)
h	huhú (fish)		high
i	ní (water)		radio
iⁿ	wí ⁿ (one)		mean (without the n)
j	júba (a little bit)		judge
k	ké (turtle)		skate
k^h	ak ^h í (I return home)		key
m	mí (sun)		man
n	nú (man)		no
oⁿ	ó ⁿ ba (day)		yawn (without the n)
p	pá (nose)		spit
p^h	ó ⁿ p ^h o ⁿ (elk)		pot
s	sábe (black)		sun
sh	shé (apple)		ship
t	té (bison)		stop
t^h	a t ^h í (I'm here)		top
th	tháwa (to count)		that
u	tú (blue)		blue
w	wa?ú (woman)		wing
x	xti (real)		Bach (but raspy)
y	íye (word)		yes
z	zí (yellow)		zoo
zh	zhí ⁿ ga (small)		beige
?	t?é (dead)		uh-oh (glottal stop)

Marking stress on the correct syllable is very important in Umóⁿhoⁿ. Moving the accent mark can change the meaning of the word. For example: **bthítube** – “I pinch,” becomes bthitúbe – “I chop,” while **wáthat^he** – “table,” becomes wathát^he – “food.”

Appendix D: Flyer, Lincoln Feast, November 3, 1999

Attention: Lincoln Area Community Members

Are you interested in the Omaha language?

You and your family are invited to discuss how best to develop a series of Omaha language courses at the University of Nebraska.

- We are asking for community input about:
- > course content
 - > cultural prohibitions
 - > appropriate history and culture components
 - > public distribution of course materials
 - > sources of language material
 - > native speaker instructors

Wednesday -- November 3rd
at the Lincoln Indian Center
1100 Military Road

Dinner will be served at 6 pm with the meeting to follow.

Omaha style, so bring your dishes and chairs!

Co-sponsors:
Native American Studies, UN-L
Department of Anthropology, UN-L
Indian Center, Inc.
Awakuni-Swetland Family

For more details call
Mark Awakuni-Swetland, 472-3455

Attention: Omaha Area Community Members

Are you interested in the Omaha language?

You and your family are invited
to discuss how best to develop
a series of Omaha language courses
at the University of Nebraska-Lincoln.



We are asking for community input about:

- >>> course content
- >>> cultural prohibitions
- >>> native speaker instructors
- >>> sources of language material
- >>> public distribution of course materials

Wednesday -- December 29th

St. Pete's Bingo Hall

27th and Leavenworth

Dinner will be served at 7 pm with the meeting to follow.

Parking available across the street south of building.

Omaha style, so bring your dishes and chairs!

Sponsored by:

Native American Studies, UN-L
Department of Anthropology, UN-L
Awakuni-Swetland Family

For more details call:

Mark Awakuni-Swetland, 472-3455 (Lincoln)
or Howard Wolf, 933-6272 (Omaha)

Appendix F: Sample Page, Umóⁿhoⁿ Níkashiⁿga Ukéthiⁿ Uhóⁿ, Common
Omaha Cooking, 2002:76



Néxewéohoⁿ t^hé ithágaxade ágthoⁿ.
At^hóⁿshtethoⁿthoⁿ uthágahi.

Appendix G: Sample Page, Umóⁿhoⁿ Níkashiⁿga Ukéthiⁿ Uhóⁿ, Common
Omaha Cooking With English Subtitles, 2002:76



09. Néxewéohⁿ t^hé ithágaxade ágthoⁿ.
big kettle the lid/to cover it I place it
I put a lid on the kettle.

10. At^hóⁿshtethoⁿthoⁿ uthúagahi.
Occasionally I stir it
I stir it occasionally.