How SIT Students Help to Preserve an Endangered Language

David A. HOUGH*

An active agent in killing languages faster than ever is... the triumphalist proclamation of the “free” market system as The Global System For Ever...[However] if people are forced to shift their languages in order to gain economic benefits of the kind which are in fact bare necessities for basic survival, this is a violation of not only their economic human rights but also their linguistic human rights.


This paper reviews work being done to help preserve Kosraean, a language spoken by about 8,000 people on the island of Kosrae in the Federated States of Micronesia, and an additional 2,000-plus Kosraeans who live off-island—mainly as migrant workers in Guam, Hawaii and the US mainland. The work is part of a three-year dictionary and curriculum development project funded by the Japan Ministry of Education and Science. While the overall project has many facets to it, this paper focuses on a cooperative effort between students at Shonan Institute of Technology (SIT), and students and educators in Kosrae to develop a trilingual children’s picture dictionary in Kosraean, English and Japanese for use in first and second grades in Kosrae.

The paper begins with a personal note about the author’s interest and involvement in endangered languages, and is followed by a brief description of what constitutes an endangered language and how languages become endangered. It then offers arguments to support the contention that Kosraean should be considered endangered. The paper then outlines the overall scope and goals of the project, and follows with a more detailed description of the children’s picture dictionary project itself and how it developed. It ends with a summary of SIT student involvement from a perspective of liberatory pedagogy as a possible way to help preserve Kosraean and critically analyze one’s own culture. Finally, the actual sentences from the children’s picture dictionary appear in Appendix Two for reference. They appear in Kosraean, English and romanized Japanese.

Key words: Kosrae, Micronesia, Federated States of Micronesia (FSM), Kosrae State Department of Education (Kosrae DOE), indigenous peoples, language and culture, endangered languages, language shift (LS), reverse language shift (RLS), Team Project Learning (TPL), liberatory pedagogy.

Introduction—A Personal Story

I have been interested in languages and cultures ever since I was a young child. I think, maybe coming from New York had something to do with it. Even in the early 1950s before I started elementary school, it was possible to listen to radio programs in many different foreign languages in New York City. Also, there were so many different ethnic and cultural groups in the area that one couldn’t even leave home to go shopping without being influenced by the multiculturalism and linguistic diversity of the city.

I guess I saw that as being exotic and maybe that’s what sparked my original interest in language and culture. But in addition to all of the living cultures and languages from immigrant groups that one encountered everyday in New York, there were other languages and cultures that we came into contact with, albeit less directly. I am speaking here of the indigenous languages and cultures of the American Indians of the Northeast Woodlands.

The main way in which we encountered these people was through local place names, such as Manhattan, Canarsee, Gowanus, Hackensack, Jamaica, Massapequa, Nayack, Rockaway, Siwanoy, etc (Grumet, 1981). I thought of these names as interesting and exotic as well, and I wanted to know about the people who gave them to us. What I didn’t realize at the time,
however, was how fragile the languages and cultures of these people really were. For the most part the people were gone. And even where they could be found, their languages had largely been lost.

What Are Endangered Languages? How Do They Become Endangered?

An endangered language is a language that is threatened with extinction. That is, it may cease to exist as a language. After nearly 500 years of European colonization and genocide, the number of indigenous languages in the world today has probably been reduced from around 20,000 to less than 6,000—and most of these 6,000 are in danger of dying within the next century (Crystal, 2000). The majority of these languages are spoken by relatively small populations of less than 50,000 people and frequently by less than 10,000 (Crystal, 2000; Dixon, 1997; Dorian, 1998). Some, however, exceed populations of 100,000 (e.g., Navaho, Yiddish; Fishman, 1999) and even one million (e.g., Quechua, Maya, Nahuatl, Guarani; García, 1999).

Grenoble & Whaley (1998) write, “The fundamental cause for the disappearance of a human language is well known. Speakers abandon their native language where use of that language is no longer advantageous to them.”

While their description is correct in many respects, its wording appears to put the onus of language loss on the part of the speakers of the language, rather than on outside forces. At the extreme level, there are numerous languages, which have been lost because the entire speaking population has been eliminated through war, disease, or genocide, largely due to Euro-American global conquest. Campbell and Muntzel (1989, in Grenoble & Whaley, 1998), cite the Cacapopera, Lenca and Tasmanian languages as such examples. There are numerous others. There are, however, less obvious socioeconomic factors, which cause languages to die, and that are also the direct result of continued capitalist conquest, or globalization (Crawford, 2000; Kouritzin, 1999; Maffi, 2001; Nettle, 2000; Phillipson, 2000; Skutnabb-Kangass, 1999).

An argument can be made that diminishing use of the indigenous language, or language shift (LS), is primarily the result of economic factors where indigenous peoples are deprived of their traditional means of subsistence and forced onto a global economy as low-paid wage laborers working in factories, in natural resource extraction, on plantations as part of multinational agribusiness, or in the service industry. Under such conditions, the use of the mother tongue becomes less viable. Time for traditional economic and cultural activities, which would promote language preservation and growth, is either greatly reduced or non-existent.

Instead, the language of factory line production; the language of seasonal work associated with industrial farm planting, the spraying of pesticides, or the picking of crops based on industrial standards; as well as the service industry language of fast food chains and tourism, all serve to exacerbate LS in favor of the dominant language(s) of economic globalization; English being the most extreme example.

Skutnabb-Kangass (1999) refers to these dominant languages as language killers and states that besides English, which globally is the major killer of languages, others include Chinese, Hindi/Urdu, Spanish, Arabic, Portuguese, Russian, Bengali, Japanese and German.

In addition, educational institutions and international developmental organizations, which attempt to “empower” indigenous peoples to take jobs in these low-paying industries by focusing on entry-level skills through courses taught in the dominant language, further contribute to the problem. Here, both transitional and maintenance bilingual programs appear to be at fault (Crawford, 2000; Dauenhauer & Dauenhauer, 1998; Mühlhäuser, 1990) since they encourage the use of the dominant language as a way of climbing the so-called “ladder of success.” Dorian (1998) writes, “When
a language is socially disfavored, parents often make a conscious or unconscious decision not to transmit the ancestral language to their children.”

Over the past fifteen years, a fair amount of sociolinguistic research has gone into finding ways to reverse LS. This has come to be known as reverse language shift (RLS). Fishman (2001) has attempted a topography of possible stages of RLS. His model, based on the Richter Scale, gives the highest rating (8) to the most endangered languages (See Appendix One). These are languages in which only adults, and mainly senior adults, continue to speak the language. In order to rectify this, he suggests using grandparents in kindergartens and elementary schools to begin retransmitting the language through oral histories and stories. His lowest rating (1) is given to indigenous and other languages, which are the least endangered. He describes these as languages where education, the work sphere, the mass media and governmental operations at higher and nationwide levels continue to use the native language.

Likewise, Bauman (1980, in Dauenhauer and Dauenhauer, 1998) notes six factors that contribute to LS:

1. An age gradient of speakers that terminates in the adult population;
2. The language is not taught to the children at home;
3. The number of speakers declines very rapidly;
4. The entire (speaking) population is bilingual and English is preferred in essentially all situations;
5. The language is inflexible, it no longer adapts to new situations;
6. There is no literacy.

**Is Kosraean an Endangered Language?**

Based on both the Bauman model and the Fishman scale, Kosraean appears fairly stable and possibly not in danger at all. According to the Fishman Scale, for example, Kosraean would be Scale 1, the least endangered. This is because the island has its own radio station which broadcasts primarily in Kosraean, the affairs of government are carried out in Kosraean (although there is heavy borrowing from English for legal terminology), the island does not have a large immigrant population which speaks another language (although there are over a hundred Philippine migrant workers, employed mainly in construction), and the medium of instruction (although not content) in the schools is largely in Kosraean. In addition, Kosraean is still the main mode of communication in the community, as well as in the home.

Nevertheless, many Kosraeans feel that they are faced with a dilemma. First, with such a small population and a limited educational budget, it is difficult to develop and print sufficient educational materials in the Kosraean language to make it a viable alternative to English. At present, the majority of teaching materials are in English. Most of these materials are imported from the US mainland. This presents a problem not only of language, but also of the assimilation of dominant American cultural values.

Adding to this problem is the fact that Kosrae is undergoing a major shift away from fishing and subsistence farming and toward a proletarianized labor force. As a result, traditional communal values are being uprooted, and “factors such as individualism (what is best for me); pragmatism (what works, not what is principle based); and consumerism are having an impact on language and value systems.” (FSM, 2001, p. 20). This leads many Kosraeans (parents in particular)
to expect the educational institutions to place emphasis on English as a means of advancement. Many FSM educators believe this makes Kosraean an endangered language.

Historically, the reasons for this shift are complex. As an island people in Micronesia, Kosraeans first encountered Europeans in the early 19th century. By the 1840s, whaling ships started visiting Kosrae in large numbers. Radical changes began to occur. First, disease brought by Westerners spread through the island, reducing the population from somewhere between 3,000–7,000 at the time of first contact (Hezel, 1989; Lewis, 1967; Ritter, 1978) to around 300 by the 1880s. Second, as population declined, so did the economic, political and societal infrastructure. Eventually, this allowed for the introduction of Christianity, patriarchy (which replaced a matrilineal clan system), private property, and capitalist relations of production.

The 1880s also saw the beginnings of direct colonial rule, first under Spain for 10 years; then following the Spanish-American War, under the Germany for 16 years; then with the outbreak of World War I, under Japan for 30 years; and following the end of World War II, under the United States for 46 years (Hezel, 1995; Peoples, 1985; Segal, 1989). What is more, the legacy of colonialism, and particularly that of American colonialism, is still very much part of the landscape throughout all of Micronesia (Choudry, 2002; Hanlon, 1998; Peoples, 1977).

Hezel (2001) argues that drastic social change in Micronesia over the past fifty years has resulted in a dramatic shift from subsistence fishing and gardening to salaried employment in a cash economy. He makes the argument that this has fragmented the extended family, changed the way land is viewed, revolutionized gender roles, paved the way for an ethics of individualism and consumer fetishism, and resulted in alcoholism, family violence and suicides. In addition, nearly 25% of the FSM population must now live in the US as migrant workers in order to support their extended families back home (FSM, 2001).

Social stratification is another problem. While exact numbers are difficult to come by, there is a developing small elite on Kosrae which is increasingly coming to own more land and resources. Many of these individuals are also politicians and government officials who promote English as a tool for “free market” development and advancement. Similar patterns have emerged among many other indigenous peoples worldwide. Dauenhauer and Dauenhauer (1998), for example, note that among the Tlingit in Souttheast Alaska, “those individuals who have benefited most from corporate employment related to the Alaska Native Claims Settlement Act (ANCSA) are those persons who were raised speaking only English and with European-American cultural values.” These individuals, who also tend to be in public view “hold public office [and] are often accused of co-opting the culture for personal political gain.” (p. 75).

This shift is of great concern to the FSM National Division of Education (FSM, 2001), and the Kosrae State Department of Education (Tolenoa, 2002). The FSM Nationwide Language Conference report warns that changes in social and cultural values have a direct impact on LS, and that “a realignment of values to combat forces such as individualism, pragmatism and materialism is needed to address language shift.” (FSM 2001, p. 20). Following from this, Alister Tolenoa (2002), Chief of Instructional Services for the Kosrae State Department of Education (DOE), in his National Language Conference 2002: Report on Kosrae, states that “it is vital to implement local programs which reflect the needs and concerns listed above.” (p. 3). What follows is a summary of how the Kosrae DOE and SIT are working together to address these problems.

A Brief Sketch of the Overall Project

Given the conditions sighted above, in 1999 the Kosrae DOE requested cooperation in developing educational materials to help preserve and enrich the Kosraean language and culture by using Kosraean as a written language and as the primary medium of instruction in grades K-12 in a way which builds upon traditional Micronesian values (Hough, 2001a). This is in keeping with FSM National Language Policy (NLP) guidelines, which call for the implementation of:

- comprehensive language and culture programs to promote the acquisition of primary language skills in local languages and the understanding and appreciation of the values and customs which make us unique as a people. (FSM Language Policy, p. 3, 1997)

Actual development of Kosraean language and culture educational materials began in August 2001 as a...
cooperative effort between Kosrae DOE and SIT (Hough, 2001b; Hough, 2001c). The first and primary need as outlined in correspondence and discussions with Kosrae DOE was to produce a dictionary on computer database. Within this overall framework, there were a number of other specific requirements that had to be met.

One function of the database was to help standardize the spelling of Kosraean words in accordance with the revised (phonemically based) orthographic system adopted by the DOE in 1973. Here it should be noted that there are actually three orthographic systems in use in Kosrae. The first (often referred to as the old spelling system) was developed in the 19th century by American missionaries involved in translating the bible and other religious texts into Kosraean. These individuals lacked training in linguistics (which was a new science at the time). As a result the old system has many inconsistencies. Nevertheless, it is still widely used in the local church and among many older members of the community. In 1973, a new orthography was developed by linguists at the University of Hawaii working in conjunction with Kosraean educators. While this new spelling system is phonemic (i.e., the letters of the alphabet reflect the phonemes in Kosraean), the actual spellings for Kosraean words have never been fully standardized. Instead, what has happened most frequently is that the two systems have been mixed in a variety of inconsistent ways. This has often been referred to as the mixed system.

In conjunction with developing a standardized spelling of Kosraean words based on the 1973 revised alphabet, the DOE prioritized the need to revise the Kosraean dictionary. Actually, both a dictionary and a grammar of Kosraean (Kee-dong Lee, 1975; Kee-dong Lee, 1976), were produced in the mid 1970s as part of the Pacific Asian Language Institute (PALI) project sponsored by the East-West Center at the University of Hawaii. This was a period when many Pacific islands were achieving independence and funding was available from the US government to write glossaries, dictionaries and grammars of many of the indigenous languages. For the most part, these materials were a great improvement over what had been come before. Nevertheless, they were primarily written by and for linguists and generally failed to take into account the actual educational and cultural needs of the local people.

The Kee-dong Lee dictionary, for example, is essentially an expanded Kosraean-English glossary intended for foreign linguists and aid workers in accessing Kosraean vocabulary. In the back of the dictionary, there is an English-Kosraean finders list, but this is primarily for purposes of cross-reference. In addition, there are numerous mixed spellings and lexical entry errors. Also, the dictionary is far from complete, containing only about 7,500 entries.

In assessing actual Kosraean student and teacher needs, the Kosrae DOE gave first priority to development of a Kosraean language dictionary, where entries, definitions and sample sentences would all be given in Kosraean. The second priority was for an English-Kosraean dictionary to help Kosraean students learning English as a second language. Finally, in keeping with Federated States of Micronesia (FSM) National Language Policy guidelines (FSM, 1997), it is important that dictionaries and grammar workbooks be written for grade appropriate levels. The FSM Report of the Nationwide Language conference: Language Status in the FSM (FSM, 2001) states:

Substantial work is needed for developing grammars and dictionaries in the indigenous languages and also in developing school grammars and dic-

tionaries for appropriate grade levels. There are no dictionaries or grammars totally in native languages. (pp. 20–21)

Based on the above requirements, it was decided that the Kee-dong Lee dictionary should be completely revised and made into two separate dictionaries which could be used from the junior high school through adult level. The first would be an English-Kosraean dictionary to help students learning English as a second language. The second would be a combined Kosraean language dictionary which would also include English translations (that is, it would serve a double purpose as both a Kosraean-Kosraean and a Kosraean-English dictionary). Furthermore, in the process of revision, spellings would be standardized in accordance with the 1973 Kosraean orthography. Finally, an ongoing process would be initiated to increase the number of lexical entries based on all available written materials in Kosraean as well as collected oral histories and areas of indigenous knowledge and culture (e.g., healing practices and plants used in local medicine) (Hough, 2001a).

Given the immense nature of the undertaking—a project which would undoubtedly go beyond the three-year period of the initial Ministry of Education and Science grant, the creation of a database was seen as essential. This would allow for three very important things: (1) First, it would allow for continued additions to the lexical base, editing and revision; (2) it would allow for limited numbers of copies to be printed out and distributed as needed, and (3) it would allow for the dictionary to be put on the internet and made available to Kosraeans living off-island. This last factor was seen as extremely vital in helping to preserve the Kosraean language and culture among immigrant communities in the US.

In order to effectively complete the tasks outlined above, a working group of Kosraean educators and community leaders was established. They began by revising the English-Kosraean finders list and standardizing the Kosraean spellings. That phase of the work is complete and is now being put onto database (for a more complete description of the scope of the main dictionary project, see Hough, 2002; in press).

In addition to the main dictionary project, a number of mini-projects were also envisioned (Hough, 2001d; Tolenoa and Hough, 2002). These included the development of appropriate grade-level dictionaries, grammar workbooks, readers and other curricula intended to help preserve and enrich the Kosraean language and culture. In particular, graded elementary school dictionaries were seen as vital. What follows is a brief summary of the development of a children’s picture dictionary for the first and second grades to be used in the public schools in Kosrae.

The Picture Dictionary Project and How It Was Set Up

The idea for a children’s Kosraean-English-Japanese picture dictionary first came out of conversations and correspondence between Alister Tolenoa, Chief Instructor of Instructional Services, Kosrae State DOE and myself. Funding for the Kosrae fieldwork phase of the project came from Japan Ministry of Education and Science Grant No. 32706-13571023. Costs for design and printing on the Japan side came from SIT, and the Team Project Learning program in the Department of System and Communication Engineering. A children’s picture dictionary was first conceived as one in a series of mini-projects that could be completed in a relatively short period of time, thus allowing for educators and students in Kosrae to reap concrete interim benefits during the actual life of the larger three-year project.

The idea of developing a children’s picture dictionary was also seen as a way to promote interest in reading from an early age, and in so doing also to help in preserving the Kosraean language. In addition, it was felt that such a dictionary would meet with FSM national guidelines which called for developing school grammars and dictionaries for appropriate grade levels.

A key element of the project involved cultural input. As noted earlier, most textbooks currently used in Kosrae schools are commercially published materials imported from the US mainland. Not only do these materials use English as the medium and content of instruction, they are also replete with American cultural values. This type of cultural assimilation—often implicit, sometimes explicit—is seen by the FSM National Division of Education and the Kosrae DOE as a threat to indigenous language preservation and growth (i.e., as a contributing factor to LS). Oftentimes, these materials, even from a very early age, interpret the world for children from an alien cultural perspective. These texts also offer supplementary behaviorally oriented teacher...
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manuals complete with sample lesson plans and diagnostic components which encourage classroom activities that exacerbate American cultural hegemony based on an individualistic, competitive “free” market model.

In order to help counteract this threat to traditional Micronesian values it was felt that the dictionary pictures and sentences should, if possible, place greater emphasis on collectivism, sharing and cooperation. In addition, from a pedagogical perspective, the content should as much as possible take into consideration the everyday experienced real lives of Kosraean children (Elbow, 1986; Vygotsky, 1978, 1986, 1987). In order to accomplish this, it was felt that first and second grade students, for whom the dictionary was intended, should play an active and integral role in its creation. In fact, to every extent possible, it was felt they should be the authors.

The project began with only papers, crayons and candies. First and second graders at Malem and Lelu Elementary Schools (two out of a total of six public elementary schools on the island) participated in the project. During orientation week in late August 2001, just prior to the commencement of the regular school year in September, these students attended a special session where Alister Tolenoa of the DOE explained the idea and purpose behind the project in a very comprehensible and dynamic manner. He then reviewed the revised Kosraean alphabet to ensure that students were familiar with it, and elicited examples of words which begin with each of the letters of the Kosraean alphabet (the revised 1973 orthography includes some “double letters” to represent a single phoneme; these are also classified as single letters or letter sounds in the Kosraean alphabet). He noted that there were a few letters (all vowel sounds) in Kosraean, which are rarely used at the beginning of words, and particularly at the beginning of nouns (e.g., ih, oh, uc). For these, he allowed students to provide examples where the letter appears in intermediate position (e.g., yih:shower; finoh: mountain; su: rope).

Following this, and with the help of teachers, teaching assistants and administrators who were present, Mr. Tolenoa had pieces of paper along with boxes of crayons passed out to each student. He then assigned different letters of the alphabet to the students and asked them to draw a picture of something representing each of their letters. A picture of a house, for example, might represent the letter “I” (lohm). The students were then asked to think up what they considered to be funny or interesting sentences in Kosraean to go along with their pictures (e.g., “A giant is sitting on a tall house”). The students wrote these sentences on a separate piece of paper, which were subsequently collected along with the pictures. After completing the pictures and being given candies (they were also allowed to keep the boxes of crayons), there was a group photo session so that class pictures could also be included in the dictionary. This same procedure was followed at both schools on different days.

The pictures and sentences were then collected, and the material was reviewed by Mr. Tolenoa and myself. There were several cases where the sentences did not fit with the pictures. Given problems of coordination, it was decided not to go back to the schools to have the sentences rewritten. Nevertheless, it was agreed that children rather than adults should be the authors. To resolve this problem, several of Mr. Tolenoa’s children volunteered to rewrite the sentences in question. In addition, they selected the pictures to be included in the dictionary. So as to insure that all students had their drawings included in some way, and to avoid a sense of competition among students, the Tolenoa children suggested that those students whose drawings had not been chosen for the inside alphabet pages should have their pictures used on the front and back covers. After returning to Japan, this suggestion was implemented.

The paper-and-crayon sentences and pictures were then brought back to Japan where eleven SIT students in the Department of System and Communication Engineering worked with the Kosrae DOE to design and produce The Kosrae Picture Dictionary (Kosrae DOE and SIT, 2002; in press), as part of their Team Project Learning (TPL) program. The dictionary is currently being pilot tested by the Kosrae DOE. Following pilot testing, necessary changes will be made before a final edition is printed in time for the 2003 academic year in Kosrae, which starts in September. What follows is a brief description of SIT student involvement.

SIT Student Involvement

Once the materials were collected, they were brought back to Japan where SIT students in the Department of System and Communication Engineering (Syscom) began designing and producing the actual dictionary.

Syscom is a new department at SIT. It was estab-
lished in April of 2001 and is novel in that it is interdisciplinary, combining areas of study in computer and system engineering with language and communication science (including intercultural communication, cultural and linguistic fieldwork, and area studies related to cultural anthropology). Many students in the department wish to become programmers and systems engineers. Their interests include computer graphics, digital entertainment and the design of games and educational software, as well as numerous other types of computer software applications.

The department is also novel in that small-class seminars—usually upper level courses offered only to juniors and seniors at most universities—have been included at the freshman and sophomore levels. These seminars have been named Team Project Learning (TPL) courses and are taught by each of the eight tenured faculty members in the department. Each teacher designs a program based on his area of research and expertise, and works closely with a small group of from about 8–14 students. Six of the teachers have engineering backgrounds while two come out of the humanities. A great deal of consideration was given to the kinds of TPL projects the humanities teachers might best be able to offer.

In the case of the picture dictionary project, it was felt that a TPL program which combined hands-on use of computers with real-world experience in designing educational materials for students from a different culture who are speakers of an endangered language would enable students to broaden their understanding of the world around them. It was also felt that such a project would offer them the opportunity to begin to critically examine their own education and lives from a liberatory perspective (it should be noted that the vast majority of SIT students come from a working class background). Here, the term liberatory comes from Paulo Freire, a Brazilian educator who won international acclaim for linking adult literacy among the poor in his country and around the world to issues of social consciousness (Freire, 1988; Shor & Freire, 1987).

In his work with adult literacy in Brazil in the early 60s, Paulo Freire developed a concept which he called conscientização (often translated as “conscientization”). Brown (1974) writes that for Freire, this is a “process in which people are encouraged to analyze their reality, to become more aware of the constraints on their lives, and to take action to transform their situation. For Freire, education is either liberating or domesticating, teaching people either to be critical and free of constraints or to accept things as they are.” This, then, is a process by which we first struggle to become aware of—and then struggle to overcome—the structural inequalities that are part and parcel of society and the educational institutions that support and help reproduce that society (Hough, 1999).

Here, the project becomes even more than SIT students producing a children’s picture dictionary for speakers of an endangered language (something which by itself is an extremely worthwhile endeavor that students at the undergraduate level rarely have the opportunity to participate in). Viewed from the perspective of liberatory pedagogy, it now also becomes a vehicle which allows us—as teachers and students working together—to critically examine our cultural beliefs, values, mythologies, behaviors, psychologies, etc., in the context of the overall sociohistorical conditions which have framed them. Somehow, such an examination must also strive to enable us to transform those aspects of our cultural selves which are domesticating, marginalizing, stigmatizing, exploitative or otherwise dehumanizing. It must not, to phrase it another way, simply ask us to blindly accept all cultures and cultural values (our own included) as they are. A pedagogy which lacks this social consciousness—this process of conscientização—will produce no understanding at all.

The SIT students started working on the picture dictionary in the fall of 2001 as college freshmen, and completed the first draft in July of 2002 as sophomores. Students involved in the project were: Azusa Ishimori, Masato Nagata, Kuniko Ohshima, Yuugo Ohashi, Kouji Saito, Yukie Saito, Kana Sakurai, Akinori Toyota, Tasihiro Yanai, Shingo Yasuda and Daisuke Yuasa. They were assisted by Kazuhito Tojo, a teaching assistant at Keio University.

They began by first scanning the crayon drawings onto computer. They then used a variety of different desktop publishing and editing software applications to design the cover and inside pages. As noted earlier, drawings not selected for the inside pages were included on the front and back covers. In designing and laying out the inside pages, students took care to maintain the integrity of the original drawings and to ensure that they would reflect the cultural meanings and art of the elementary school artists from Kosrae. This
involved, among other things, a good deal of discussion about the respective values, everyday life experiences and world views of Micronesian and Japanese society. It was through this critical comparison of culture that the beginnings of a liberatory process of conscientização began to emerge.

For example, the drawing of a car with the accompanying sentence “Alik is push starting the car” generated a good deal of critical discussion and reflection. First, it was noted that the word for car in Kosraean is “stosah” and that this is a borrowing from the Japanese word “jidoosha.” This allowed us to look at when cars were introduced to Micronesia, who owned them and what kinds of power relations existed during the period of Japanese colonialism in Micronesia (1914–1945). It also allowed students to look at the life of workers in Japan during the same period and understand that exploitation was internal as well as external. Such discussions were at least partially helpful in dealing with many condescending first world stereotypes which depict third world people as passive people who are incapable of action and resistance on their own without help from technologically superior societies.

Students also wanted to learn about the meaning of “push starting” cars, a concept that they had little experience with. This allowed for discussion about the current situation in Kosrae where used cars are imported from Japan and Korea—many in poor condition. In addition to needing constant maintenance and repair, they quickly become “rust buckets” because of salinity from the surrounding ocean. This again opened the way for conversations about the various stresses and conditions of working class life in both Japan and Micronesia.

In addition to the types of discussions mentioned above, students were also in fairly frequent email contact with Mr. Tolenoa and others from the Kosrae DOE. As pages were prepared, they were sent to Kosrae for examination and editorial suggestions. This allowed for further critical examination and reflection.

One area of early discussion between SIT students and the Kosrae side involved translation. As originally conceived, the children’s picture dictionary was to be monolingual, in Kosraean only. As the project developed, however, the Kosrae DOE asked first for English, and later Japanese translations to be added. Given the expressed purpose of designing materials to help preserve the Kosraean language, some students wondered why English and Japanese were necessary—particularly for material which would be used in the lower grades.

The response from Kosrae was interesting and unexpected. First, Mr. Tolenoa explained that this was in keeping with FSM national language policy to “develop literacy in English and other international languages using the cognitive skills learned in primary language acquisition” (FSM, 1997). True, English is widely used in the schools from elementary school, but Japanese is only taught as a second language at the high school level. Although one could argue that any third language would have some value in encouraging interest in foreign language literacy, this argument was not made. Instead, it was explained that the material could be used by high school students as well.

Students were somewhat surprised by this since they found it hard to imagine older students being interested in materials which were clearly written by and for such a very young audience. It wasn’t until the pilot edition was printed and sent to Kosrae that the answer became evident. Given the fact that most Kosraeans live in large extended families (more than 10 siblings in one family is not uncommon), there is far greater interaction and collective sharing than students in Japan are accustomed to. This, then, became another area of discussion and reflection among the TPL students.

Finally, on a related note, while the material is still being pilot tested in Kosrae, some very valuable and positive feedback has begun to come in. One parent, noting that this is the first full-color textbook to be printed in the Kosraean language explained that this went a long way to creating a positive self image for Kosraeans. Until now, all such materials have been in English. Many library books, for example, are recycled books donated from the mainland US (some with stamps on the inside front covers indicating what school donated them). This, he explained, reinforced the image of English as the language of wealth, opportunity and personal advancement (with Kosraean being the opposite).

Summary

This paper has reviewed collaborative work being done between the Kosrae State Department of Education in the Federated States of Micronesia (FSM) and students and faculty at Shonan Institute of Technol-
ogy. The work is part of a three-year dictionary and curriculum development project funded by the Japan Ministry of Education and Science. While the project has numbers facets to it, this paper has focused on the development of a trilingual children's picture dictionary in Kosraean, English and Japanese for first and second graders in Kosrae.

Kosrae is a small island of approximately 8,000 Micronesians. Current research suggests that Kosraean is an endangered language. Both educators in Kosrae State and national language planners in the FSM wish to develop policies as well as educational materials which will help to foster and enrich indigenous Micronesian languages and cultures. The Kosraean children's picture dictionary is one effort in this direction.

In addition, by including SIT students in the development of the children's picture dictionary, an attempt has been made to introduce a Freirean approach to liberatory pedagogy. Here, students have been encouraged to critically compare Micronesian and Japanese culture, and to examine the structural inequalities that are part and parcel of society and the educational institutions that support and help reproduce that society. It is hoped that this approach may lead to greater social consciousness among Japanese students as well as help to preserve and enrich a Micronesian language and culture.

Appendix One: Stages of Reverse Language Shift

The following is the Fishman Scale read from bottom up:

1. Education, work sphere, mass media and governmental operations at higher and nationwide levels.
2. Local/regional mass media and government services.
3. The local/regional (i.e., non-neighborhood) work sphere, both among Xmen and among Ymen.
4. Public schools for Xish children, offering some instruction via Xish, but substantially under Yish curricular and staffing control.
5. Schools for literacy acquisition, for the old and for the young, and not in lieu of compulsory education.

7. Cultural interaction in Xish primarily involving the community-based older generation.
8. Reconstructing Xish and adult acquisition of XSL.

Appendix Two: The Sentences From The Kosraean Picture Dictionary

A aeskihrim (ice cream)
Alik el sang aeskihrim se Kun el kanglah.
Kun ate the ice cream that Alik gave him.
Kun wa Alik kara moratta aisu kuriimu o tabemashita.

Ac achnpul (apple)
Acnpmul se nwacl Kenye.
Kenye has an apple to eat.
Kenye wa ringo o motteimasu.

Ah ahtro (egg)
Tulen el tu fin ahtro se.
Tulen is standing on an egg.
Tulen wa tamago ni tattemashita.

E es (papaya)
Es se tughngalyac insifac Slue.
A papaya fell on Slue's head.
Papaiya wa Slue no atama ni ochimashita.

I ik (fish)
Sru el mongo ik.
Sru is eating fish.
Sru wa sakana o tabetemashu.

Ih yihyih (shower)
Tulpe el yihyih.
Tulpe is taking a shower.
Tulpe wa shawaa o abitemashu.

O osra (nail)
Osra soko fakihysac niacl Nena.
Nena stepped on a nail.
Nena wa kugi o fumimashita.

Oa oak (canoe, boat)
Oak soko loangyak ke infwacl koht.
A canoe is on the giant's nose.

Oh finohl (mountain)
Kosro soko tu finohl ah.
The dog is on top of the mountain.
Inu wa yama no choujou ni imasu.

Usr (banana)
Sacko el ke mongo usr.
The monkey wants a banana.
Saru wa banana ga hoshii desu.
How SIT Students Help to Preserve an Endangered Language (David A. Hough)

Uc  sucl (rope)
    Sucl usrnguuck soko kuhruhwot kuhruhme.
    The magic rope is dancing.
    Mahou no roupu ga odotteimasu.

Uh  uh pntahun (seesaw)
    Kun el puhtatlac ke uhp acn tahn ac.
    Kun fell off the seesaw.
    Kun wa shiisoo kara ochimashita.

F  fafhah (poi, a sweet taro ball)
    Selpasr el tuk fafhah na luhlahp se.
    Selpasr is pounding a giant poi.
    Selpasr wa ooki na taroimo o koneteimasu.

K  Kacnte (candy)
    Kihsrihk el mongo kacnte.
    The mouse is eating candy.
    Nezumi ga ame o tabeteimasu.

L  lohm (house)
    Koht el muhtah fin lohn fhwlwact se.
    The giant is sitting on the tall house.
    Takai uchi no ue ni kyojin ga suwateimasu.

M  mos (breadfruit)
    Mos se tohkwaclihk inmahngol Maggie.
    The breadfruit fell on Maggie's head.
    Pannomi ga Maggie no atama ni ochite kimashita.

N  ninucl (needle)
    Ninucl soko fakihsyac kahpuhl kosro ngalngucl.
    A needle poked the dog's rear.
    Hari ga imu no oshiri ni sasarimashita.

P  polh (box)
    Kihsrihk el whhklac lhnh polhk se.
    The cat is hiding in a box.
    Neko ga hako no naka ni kakureteimasu.

R  ros (flower)
    Kenye el sang ros se lal pahpah mahtuh.
    Kenye gave grandpa a flower.
    Kenye wa ojiisan ni hana o agemashita.

S  stosah (car)
    Patpat stosah okoac Alik ac.
    Alik is push starting the car.
    Alik wa kuruma o oshigake shiteimasu.

T  tahngwes (a fruit-plucking stick)
    Tahngwes sokol lal Palikina.
    This is Palik's fruit-plucking stick.
    Kore wa Palik no kudamono o toru bou desu.

W  won (bird)
    Won se fokoelyac ahwowo.
    The bird pooped on the baby.
    Tori ga akachan ni fun o shimashita.

Y  yakyu (baseball)
    Tulen el wi yakyu.
    Tulen is playing baseball.
    Tulen wa yakyuu o yatteimasu.

Ng  ngoe (turtle)
    Ngoe se Stoney el srukoyac.
    Stoney caught a turtle.
    Stoney wa kame o tsukamaemashita.

Sr  sra (leaf, leaves)
    Sra sremlah ke kahpuhl koht.
    Some leaves got caught on the giant's butt.
    Kyojin no oshiri ni happa ga tsuketaemashita.

References


FSM Education System (2001). Report of the Nationwide Lan-