

Challenging “Extinction” Through Modern Miami Language Practices
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While American Indian language reclamation efforts are often motivated by a desire to learn and embrace traditional culture, they generally occur within multicultural populations where community members speak the dominant group's language(s), practice its ways, and use contemporary technologies. For this and related reasons, some mixture of the “traditional” and the “modern” is a natural trend and outcome of such efforts. However, indigenous communities are nonetheless confronted with ideologies that their cultures cannot or should not change, especially with respect to language structure and usage patterns. This paper deconstructs this paradox through a case study of Miami language reclamation. An Algonquian language termed “extinct” in the 1960s, Miami started to be learned from written documentation and successfully reincorporated into daily usage in the early 1990s, and now has many second-language speakers who use the language on a regular basis and in a variety of domains. However, the presence and legitimacy of this Miami speech get challenged not just because wider society recognizes only a limited set of language practices—usually framed around a perceived past—as Indian, but also because many still claim that Miami is extinct and hence must not be spoken at all, let alone in modern contexts. I show how Miami people confront these ideologies not only by speaking *myaamia*, but also by extending the language into new patterns of usage that are guided by the contemporary lives and needs of its speakers, all of whom are English-dominant and live within “mainstream” society around the United States, but also strongly identify as Miami. I argue that these outcomes exemplify a legitimate and expected series of practices that reflect how the Miami are a contemporary, multicultural, and increasingly multilingual people.

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