



POMO LANGUAGE STATUS REPORT



Introduction

This report was generated by the results of the Pomo Language Assessment conducted during 2011. The assessment activities were conducted with Pomo tribal community members throughout Sonoma, Mendocino, and Lake Counties. The activities were performed by The California Indian Museum and Cultural Center (CIMCC) in accordance with the Pomo Language Assessment and Documentation project funded by the Administration for Native Americans (ANA).

The purpose of The Pomo Language Assessment and Documentation project is to increase Pomo community knowledge of the status of all the Pomo languages currently in use and develop new resources that can be used to spur language growth. CIMCC worked with the Pomo Language Preservation Committee and Native Youth Language Specialists to conduct an updated needs assessment of the Pomo languages that are currently in use among the Pomo speaking tribes. Upon completion this comprehensive status report was produced.

Concurrently, CIMCC is developing language resources lists for an existing conversational Pomo curriculum to be used to guide documentation activities with identified fluent speakers. Language documentation activities with fluent speakers of the Pomo languages will continue throughout the remainder of the project. The documentation resources will be used to produce online instructional content to be shared with the community.

As we move forward into the 21st Century, tremendous challenges are faced in order to revitalize and preserve Pomo languages. Overcoming generations of past injustices aimed at destroying tribal languages and cultures will continue beyond the experiences of our immediate life times. Elders, who have saved this knowledge, often ask about the language's applicability in today's society. Youth, who are eager to learn, ask: why is the information not readily available? Finding answers and solutions to these questions is a very complex challenge.

Youth must understand that historically Pomo Indian tribal groups have had to overcome genocide and racism, forces that sought to destroy Pomo people, Pomo cultures, and Pomo languages. In the first year of California statehood legislation was passed which allowed U.S. citizens to purchase lands including those lands which were traditionally part of California Indian territory. As a result of the failure of the U.S. senate to ratify treaties with the California tribes, California Indians were left landless. At that time existing Indian tribes dispersed along family groupings to any unoccupied lands that they could find. By 1905, the federal government became aware of the landless status of California Indians, due to state and federal policies, and began to set aside, purchase, and put into trust the parcels of land that California Indians were occupying. Although the California Rancheria Act funded the purchase of parcels for landless California Indians, it also instituted the separation of tribal communities from local communities, having a devastating impact on tribal cultural practices, including the maintenance of tribal languages.

Regardless of these atrocities, California Indians are survivors! California Indian communities are changing; thriving, and Indian youth are learning all that they can to carry Native cultures forward. Today, the renaissance of Native languages must be pursued through a collective effort. While dialects and regional affiliations are distinctive, California Indians need to remember that they must be a source of unity. No Pomo tribal group can pursue preservation in a vacuum. The responsibilities of preservation and revitalization are shared among every community member, commitments must be made to teaching, learning and sharing the wealth of languages and fostering pride in cultural heritage.

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In 2010–2011, the California Indian Museum and Cultural Center conducted a needs assessment to identify the various dialects of the Pomo languages. The goal of CIMCC is to help preserve and foster the Pomo languages. Some of the current challenges that impact revitalization of the Pomo languages include a significantly dwindling number of fluent speakers, old speakers who are not able to teach or are inaccessible to students because of great distances, and a lack of modern documentation oriented towards language revitalization and suitable for Native Learning styles (visual and auditory). The project goal is to develop new resources that can be used by the Pomo communities to spur language growth in the absence of fluent speakers. This survey was the foundation of a project that is leading us to an online dictionary resource and introductory course!

Speaker Identification

Part one of the survey addressed speaker identification and fluency. It asked respondents to gauge their level of speaking or fluency of the Pomo language. Of the respondents who answered the survey 3.3% understood the Pomo language, 33.2% were beginners with limited vocabulary and understanding that was limited in conversation, while 5.1% were intermediate speakers, knowing a great deal of basic vocabulary and able to follow directions, and 2.6% were Native speakers, having spoken it since childhood and understanding most of the vocabulary, cultural reference, and nuances. Finally, 57.3%, the majority of respondents did not speak or understand the Pomo language.



Respondents who stated they understood a Pomo tribal language but did not speak it, stated their Pomo language/dialect and level of understanding. These included the following dialects: Upper Lake Pomo, Kashia, Coastal Central Pomo or Point Area, Stewart’s Point Rancheria, Big Valley Pomo, Pinoleville Pomo, Southern Pomo, Northern Pomo, Eastern Pomo, Northern Pomo Little Lake/Sherwood, Yokayo/Hopland Central Pomo, and Little Noyo River Pomo. Some respondents stated their fluency but did not state which dialect of the Pomo language they understood. For example, some stated their knowledge of understanding such as, “very little,” “limited vocabulary,” “few words,” “none,” “I know the Pomo words for local plants and animals,” and/or “understand certain words such as elders and a hand full of my people.” Overall, most respondents were very limited in or did not speak the Pomo language but many were very interested in learning it if resources were available.

Respondents were asked if they had studied or were currently learning a Pomo/tribal language. 13.4% had studied Pomo in the past, 19.1% were currently learning a Pomo/tribal language, and 67.5% were currently not learning a Pomo/tribal language. Some claim to have taken Pomo language classes but could barely remember it, others can only speak a few words but not carry on conversations, and the majority of the respondents were never taught or they only knew a few words. Some were fortunate to have Native speakers in their life, like their mother, from whom they learned while growing up. For example, one respondent self-reported that her mother

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spoke fluently, and taught her and her siblings how to speak their Pomo language. They are now conversational speakers. Also, some respondents commented that they sung their traditional songs in their Pomo language but could not speak it.

Respondents who said “yes” to “have studied or were currently learning a Pomo/tribal language” responded that they were learning one or more of the following Pomo dialects/languages: Kashia Coastal Pomo, Elem Pomo-Southeastern Pomo, Northern Pomo, Hopland Pomo, Central Pomo, Sherwood/Little Lake Pomo, Southern Pomo, Mountain Pomo, Upper Lake Pomo, Big Valley Pomo, Robinson Rancheria Pomo, Eastern Pomo, and Stewart’s Point Rancheria Pomo. Those who said they were not learning a Pomo language gave reasons including: not having teachers who can teach them, no classes/programs offered in their community, have not had the opportunity to learn it, their ancestors or relatives who were fluent speakers had passed on, disconnected from their tribal community due to current residence location, lack of time/funding for programs/interest, and no resources. Overall, respondents who were not learning a Pomo language reported that this was due to the lack of resources, awareness, and interest in learning the language such as not having Pomo fluent speakers to teach the language, and having no books or classes available for people to teach and learn. Also, the historical colonization legacy of not being allowed to speak their Native language when growing up, meant that some did not want to pass it on to their children because of their traumatic experiences during their youth. Overall, most respondents stated they were no longer learning the Pomo language because of limited resources, teachers, fluent speakers (teachers or family members) having passed away, and time being very limited. Some stated they were interested in learning it to pass it down and keep it alive.

Previous Language Assessments

Part of the survey addressed language preservation programs and resources within the respondents’ tribal groups whether they spoke Pomo or were currently learning the language. The individuals who responded represented 21 different Pomo tribal groups. In response to whether or not their tribal group had conducted a previous language assessment, 13.0% said **yes** and 24.5% said **no**. The majority of respondents, 62.5%, were unsure whether or not an assessment had been conducted. Of those who said that their tribe had conducted an assessment the majority were not sure when it was conducted. Some responded 1-5 years ago, others said 10-11 years ago, and one said it was ongoing.

Fluency in Pomo Language

Respondents were also asked whether or not the number of fluent and passive speakers within their community had been identified. 19.9% of the respondents said that their tribe had identified the number of fluent speakers within their community. 19.1% said that their tribe had not identified the number of fluent speakers, and 61.0% were unsure whether or not the number of fluent speakers had been identified. The respondents who said that fluent speakers had been identified reported between 1 and 900 fluent speakers within their community. One individual self-reported the highest number of fluent speakers at 900, while another self-reported the lowest number of fluent speakers at 1. The majority of respondent’s self-reported between 2 and 10 to 22 fluent speakers within their communities. While varied, these numbers demonstrate a wide range of perspectives regarding the existence and status of the language within each community. The results also demonstrate the various stages and success of tribal preservation programs.

Respondents were also asked if they had identified the number of passive speakers within their community. Passive speakers are characterized as individuals who have knowledge and understanding of the language but

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generally refrain from speaking it. 11.9% of the respondents reported that they had identified the number of passive speakers within the community, 18.1% said that the passive speakers had not been identified and 70.0% said that they were unsure whether or not they had been identified. The respondents who said that passive speakers had been identified reported between 2 and 1000 passive speakers within their community. The majority of the respondents reported having between 2 and 15 passive speakers within their communities. One individual self-reported between 60 and 140 passive speakers within their community, where another individual self-reported having 500 passive speakers in their community. Most of the respondents were unsure or did not know the number of their passive speakers in their community.

Participation and Availability of Language Courses

Respondents were also asked additional questions about participation, availability of language courses in their community, and the lessons or techniques applied to teach the language. 24.6% of the respondents said that they were able to participate in a language course in their community. 65.9% said that they were not able to participate in a language course in their community and 9.4% were not able to participate in a language course outside of their community. 38.4% of the respondents said that their tribe and/or an individual offered a language course in the past. 18.3% said that language courses had not been offered in the past and 43.4% were unsure whether or not they had been offered. The results indicate that many of the communities shared an active interest in teaching the language; however, funding and resources have been obstacles to being able to offer the language courses with regular consistency.

The survey also asked the respondents to describe the lessons or techniques that had been used to teach language within their communities. Some of the respondents indicated they were learning from their family or people who knew the language. Often classes were taught but because of funding problems the classes stopped. Some respondents were unsure about what their tribe offered because they were living somewhere else. Some tribes offered community gatherings to teach basics with Native fluent speakers. Other respondents used tapes, flashcards, dictionaries, workbooks, linguistic websites, games, and CD-ROM's to learn the language. Another respondent used family home teaching, language classes, and ceremonies to learn their language. Many were learning from their elders and other family members. Several of the respondents mentioned the need to create interactive learning environments, so that the material is not presented in a manner that is irrelevant to the community. The respondents also identified the need to focus on the community language learning rather than linguistic preservation and data collection.

Community Challenges

The respondents were asked to identify problems and/or challenges their communities encountered in teaching their Native language. One of the most common challenges shared among the respondents was the lack of funding. Another major challenge mentioned repeatedly was inter-tribal and tribal politics between family members, community members, and teachers. Other obstacles cited include the variations in the way the language is spoken and used (slang, formality, and dialect), the lack of knowledge among community members regarding class availability and accessibility, lack of interest, participation, and commitment by community members, lack of teachers (elders and linguists), lack of elders available to engage in master/apprentice relationships, the availability of teaching methods that address diverse learning styles (auditory and visual learning) and disabilities, lack of methodology or pedagogy to produce Native speakers, need for preservation program to be staffed by community members, and a need for pre-school aged immersion programs.

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The respondents identified other challenges associated with elders and governance. The respondents cited that they faced challenges getting resources from fluent speaking elders within the community. Some elders within the community, who are fluent speakers, lack the opportunity to converse with other fluent speakers because they do not share the same dialect or there is simply no one available to talk to in their native tongue. Others have developed physical limitations that hinder participation or communication. Thus, some fluent speaking elders are disenfranchised from the contemporary maintenance and application of the language within the community. Some older speakers are frustrated and call into question the necessity and usefulness of the language in today's world. They feel that an understanding and practice of the culture, which created the language, is fundamental to understanding. Thus, they do not believe that it will be meaningful to create an English-thinking hybrid of the Pomo language, void of the cultural system of values it should be meant to transmit. Another reason cited for the lack of information sharing between elders and the community is their reluctance to speak the language in a public setting. Many of the elders have experienced trauma or watched a family member become engaged in public scorn or ridicule for their use of the Pomo language. Thus, some elders are unwilling to practice their language in public and have internalized fear and shame. How can children learn, some respondents questioned, if their elders cannot teach them or cannot communicate with adults who do not speak the language?

Respondents also identified a lack of demonstration of language among tribal officials. They cited a lack of opportunity to integrate language in publicly held meetings. The respondents cited the apparent reluctance of community members to attempt to use the language due to fear of criticism for making mistakes. An additional hindrance of the communities' motivation and commitment to learn was that many individuals experienced guilt and regret from not having learned the language from their relatives who have passed. Several respondents noted that public demonstration of the language generated from tribal officials would create a supportive environment for tribal members to overcome these negative feelings.

Benefits to the Community

Respondents were asked whether or not language courses were currently being offered within their community. 22.5% of the respondents replied **yes**, 33.0% replied **no**, and 44.6% were unsure. The respondents who affirmed that language courses were being offered were asked to reflect on the benefits that the courses brought to their communities. Many of the respondents commented that learning their language played an important role in unification. They felt closer to their cultures and strengthened relationships with their elders. One respondent suggested that revitalizing indigenous languages would put forth methodologies to liberate societies from colonization. Also, it would solidify their unique tribal identity and provide tribal people motivation to learn the language. A language class can provide the momentum to motivate language learning, which is one way to revitalize the Pomo language. Teaching the language to tribal youth can improve self esteem and foster leadership and mentors within the community.

Respondents who replied "no" to whether they currently have language courses offered in their community, stated that the benefits of having a course as a means of bringing back their language and increasing knowledge of tradition, culture, and promoting unification and pride. Some respondents stated that it would enhance a sense of belonging and be preserved for future generations. It would also Another respondent mentioned that her community would enjoy communicating in the Pomo language with the elders to keep the language alive.

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Language Preservation Challenges

The respondents were asked to rate the following list of challenges to language preservation and revitalization efforts in terms of whether they agreed or disagreed with the phrase. The respondents were asked whether they strongly disagreed, somewhat disagreed, were neutral, somewhat agreed, or strongly agreed. The following list highlights the highest rated category for each challenge:

- Lack of interest exists among community members (28.6% neutral)
- Lack of interest exists among youth (29.9% somewhat agreed)
- Lack of resources to support consistent programs (33.8% somewhat agreed)
- Lack of funding to support consistent programs (34.7% strongly agreed)*
- Frustration among elders regarding community commitment (35.4% neutral)
- Frustration among students regarding ease of learning and recall (37.4% neutral)
- Lack of opportunity to converse in own language (32.5% strongly agreed)*
- Leadership does not view language preservation as a matter of importance (29.9% neutral)

Respondents strongly agreed on the following as major obstacles/challenges to preserving the Pomo language: 34.7% strongly agreed on the lack of funding to support consistent programs and 32.5% strongly agreed on the lack of opportunity to converse in own language. Also, 29.9% somewhat agreed on the lack of interest exists among youth and 33.8% somewhat agreed on that the lack of resources to support consistent programs. Many respondents were neutral about their feelings on the lack of interest existed among community members (28.6%), frustration among elders regarding community commitment (35.4%), frustration among students regarding ease of learning and recall (37.4%), and finally leadership does not view language preservation as a matter of importance (29.9%). Overall, lack of funding to support consistent programs and the opportunity to speak the language were considered highly as major challenges to language preservation and revitalization.

Respondents were also asked to identify other preservation/revitalization challenges that were not listed on the survey. Some respondents replied having barriers such as, people not getting along because of tribal enrollment issues, problems with alcoholism and drug abuse, insensitive views towards Native people (stereotypes and racism), poverty conditions, and other family disputes. Some respondents have limited technological capacities.

In addition, respondents were asked to identify positive approaches/programs implemented in their community in response to language preservation/revitalization. Some of their responses were: ceremonies, family teaching and learning, an introductory class, community gatherings, after-school programs, language camps, surveys, the implementation of an Elder's Talking Circle, and language conferences. These approaches will allow the development, implementation, and preservation of Native languages. Overall, results showed that this survey, language immersion classes, flashcards, workshops, monthly newsletter, cultural resources, summer camp/programs (like CIMCC programs), and community gatherings are positive approaches for revitalization and preservation efforts. Some people implemented language through food preparation, festivals, and fishing; and others through songs and story comprehension, tribal names and places, and after school learning.

Online Course and Interactive Website Design

In the effort to create a needed resource within the community the respondents were asked whether they felt that a Pomo language online course and interactive website would be a valuable language learning resource to enhance their language preservation efforts. 68.7% of the respondents answered **yes**, 8.7% answered **no** and

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22.5% were unsure. Those respondents that felt a Pomo language online course and interactive website would be a valuable language learning resource to enhance their language preservation efforts were asked to explain their answer and why they thought an online course and interactive website would be a good tool for learning the Pomo language. Respondents commented that this is a great resource for youth since they enjoy this style of learning and are savvy with technology; online courses can be used at the person's convenience with no time constraints, learn from home, and more people can have more access to learn Pomo since there are not very many methods or resources available. Internet will serve as the easiest accessibility to learning a language for people with transportation issues. Overall, an online course provides access for anyone 24/7. The only challenge would be for those who do own a computer but no Internet access. A solution can be to go to a local coffee shop or community library.

An online course and interactive website will encourage their family and community to use the resource for both learning and teaching purposes. They noted that the online course and website would serve as a motivation to learn their own languages as well as those of other bands. Specifically identified uses included words, phrases, pronunciation, sample curricula, self-paced tutorials, online courses, and a collection of resource



materials. An interactive website (like Skype) would be great because interaction between two speakers is important. One respondent stated that the online course/interactive website would be a great asset to the community, something that they would share with their family and generations to come, a great distance-learning tool. One respondent stated, *“Our language is part of our culture and we should have some type of tool to pass on -It is very rare for my generation to speak the language let alone know someone who can.”*

Online Course and Interactive Website Components

Respondents were also asked to rate the following list of the online course and website components in order of their importance. Respondents chose from a scale of No Importance, Somewhat Important, Important, Very Important and Great Importance. The following list shows the highest rated category for each component.

- Online Dictionary 38.2% Great Importance
- Pronunciation Guide 50.6% Great Importance*
- Picture Dictionary 40.6% Great Importance
- Sample Conversations 44.8% Great Importance
- Common Questions and Answers 45.0% Great Importance
- Storytelling 47.7% Great Importance*
- Games 31.9% Great Importance
- Posters 28.0% Great Importance
- Flashcards 40.9% Great Importance

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- Video Lessons 47.7% Great Importance*
- Audio Lessons 52.5% Great Importance*



The highest rated online course and interactive website components were audio lessons, a pronunciation guide, storytelling, and video lessons. The lowest rated component was posters. The respondents were also asked to identify any other components that they felt the online course and interactive website should have, which includes recordings of stories, histories, and maps, introduction of why language preservation is important, starting a network with others, a webcast, group sessions, webinar components, and tests with a completion certificate. One respondent commented to develop a method that would allow people to use Pomo during their daily routines and activities.

Historical Loss of Language

Several outside factors have contributed to the historical loss of language within Pomo communities. The vitality of many indigenous languages was destroyed by federal policies that targeted Native peoples and cultures for extermination. The loss of tribal lands, and genocide of whole communities, disrupted the continuity of Native languages and cultures. During the mid to late 1800s, the federal government sought to “assimilate” Native peoples. Many Indian children were removed from their families and tribes and placed in boarding schools. At the boarding schools the English language was the only language that was allowed to be spoken. Federal officials believed that if they erased tribal languages they would also erase tribal customs, traditions, cultures, and way of life. The government’s efforts continued well into the nineteenth and twentieth centuries and did much to break up traditional family structures and communal living styles.

The California Legislature passed laws, which subjected Indian minors to indentured servitude and prostitution until they were twenty-five to thirty years of age. These state laws were followed by funded militia organizations to kill “rebellious” Indians. The rebellious label became a convenient excuse for militias to slaughter and burn whole villages most often because they wanted their lands or the profits from selling Indian children into slavery. The federal government enacted a Rancheria system that only provided small plots of reservation lands to California tribes. Language cannot be maintained when a community of several hundred is reduced to a handful of acres, the people disband and language is no longer utilized. Federal Boarding Schools were established, and targeted the eradication of tribal culture, religion, and language. In the 1950s, the federal government set forth the Termination acts and the Relocation program. Termination was applied to forty California Indian tribes, essentially erasing their governmental authority and the trust status of their lands. Relocation provided government sponsored job training and housing assistance off reservations in the urban centers of Oakland, San Francisco, and Los Angeles. Hundreds of families were encouraged to move away from their communities and into the city where the government had hoped their cultural distinctiveness would disappear.



Despite these efforts tribal and cultural heritage was not destroyed. The overwhelming ability of Native people to prevail over the forces of genocide and colonialization is a true testament to the Indian community’s strength and character. It goes without saying that damage has been done, but by working together Native peoples can heal and revitalize the wealth of our cultures.

Contemporary Challenges

Today Indian communities face many issues that reach beyond the scope of historical challenges. Time and distances are modern challenges. Economic and educational opportunities often require many tribal members reside outside of their communities. Furthermore, educational and employment opportunities are only available to those who speak English. Thus, the economic and social necessity of tribal languages has diminished.

Today, California Indians cannot be completely divorced from the English language. Since most tribal communities no longer think or communicate in the traditional language, it is difficult to learn and maintain the Pomo language. The meaning and the usefulness of the language are contained in its' nuances. It cannot be learned without its cultural context. Thus, knowledge of traditional practices and cultural heritage are key components of language preservation. They must be integrated into a modern context. The Internet creates an opportunity to share information across time limitations and physical boundaries. However, it also creates many questions related to the protection of cultural integrity, accessibility by non-members of the community, as well as copyright and licensing ownership. We must work through these issues to determine the parameters of sharing language resources in the digital era.



Recommendations

Rebuilding a tribal community of speakers will require commitment and perseverance. The best way to foster the use of language is to utilize it in a daily context. The best way to teach language is the “old way”: spend time with your family using the language. Urge your family members to communicate their needs and everyday activities in the Pomo language, such as, “I’m hungry” or “What’s for dinner?” Language resources such as orthographies, flash cards, phrase books, and others should be created and distributed specifically to community members so that they can be used at home. Play games with your children that reinforce language learning.

In the efforts to create a needed resource within the community the respondents were asked to characterize what resources might assist to their learning the Pomo language. The following list shows the response percentage for each component.

• More Time	44.9%
• DVDs	64.5%
• CDs	59.4%
• Community Classes	65.6%*
• Books	54.0%
• Dictionaries	46.0%
• Podcasts	21.0%
• Online Courses	40.9%
• Community College Courses	27.2%
• Workbooks and CDs	54.7%
• Flash Cards	53.6%

*Majority of the respondents in this survey characterize Community Classes as the major resource to assist with learning the Pomo Language, followed by the use of DVDs and CDs. Some ideas offered were to create a cartoon DVD, pictures with Pomo/English translation, video recordings, an immersion program/school, access to speakers, resources, tribal support, a Pomo language website with English to Pomo translator, and a Rosetta Stone language style type of learning.

Additional Recommendations Include:

- Use daily greetings in conversation
- Teach conversational phrases that link and contextualize cultural history and practices
- Support tribal members in obtaining degrees in linguistics
- Create website and audio tools that provide sound and visual of words being spoken
- Create language immersion opportunities and host immersion events
- Teach people that mistakes are part of learning and not to be afraid to make them
- Teach phrases that are applicable to situations to connect words to real life experiences
- Create games that incorporate the Pomo language
- Foster pride in Pomo identity
- Create tools that are applicable to our daily routines and lifestyles
- Let children organize events around language
- Enact stories with song and dance

Resources

CIMCC is in the ongoing process of developing an online Eastern Pomo Dictionary as a part of our Pomo language resources, which can be found on our Pomo Language Repository page: <http://cimcc.org/epomo/>

The site is ‘intended to demonstrate the use of Pomo language and support local tribal efforts to teach and preserve Pomo language.’ It can be used to look up and listen to Pomo words and their pronunciation and is being continually added to. The site allows this information to be shared for personal use and learning, but full copyrights for materials contained within the website are held by Pomo tribes and other assigned rights holders. This is an example of the use of technology to share language resources and assist in the learning and preservation of the Pomo language.



Language Items
[Media](#)
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Bahtssal: Eastern Pomo Dictionary
 Master Record: Language Item [Export to Excel](#)
[Back to master page](#)

Item: siitaal-pubek
 English: autumn

Table: Media

Search: [Show all](#)
 Exact phrase All words Any word

Media Type	Play	File	Speaker (*)
Audio		Autumn.wav	View

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Those interested in this website and the resources that it contains may also be familiar with or want to explore:

Big Valley Rancheria: Bahtssal Language Teaching and Learning Aids

http://www.big-valley.net/lang_home.htm

Native Languages of the Americas: preserving and promoting American Indian languages

<http://www.native-languages.org/>