

# Endangered Languages

The language I'm speaking to you in is called  
Wôpanâôt8âôt—which means 'the language of the  
Wampanoag'.

The language I'm speaking to you in is called  
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Wampanoag for a long time;

The language I'm speaking to you in is called Wôpanâôt8âôt—which means 'the language of the Wampanoag'. Don't worry, I'm not planning to talk in Wampanoag for a long time; **I just want you to hear what it sounds like.**

# The Wampanoag live in eastern Massachusetts,



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# The Wampanoag live in eastern Massachusetts, in Gay Head, Martha's Vineyard



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The Wampanoag live in eastern Massachusetts, in Gay Head, Martha's Vineyard and Mashpee.



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Some words for animals in English come from  
Wampanoag...



Some words for animals in English come from  
Wampanoag...

like **sukôq**...

Some words for animals in English come from  
Wampanoag...

like **sukôq**...  
 (“skunk”)



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Some words for animals in English come from  
Wampanoag...

like **sukôq**...

(“skunk”)

and **m8s**...

Some words for animals in English come from Wampanoag...

like **sukôq**...

(“skunk”)

and **m8s**...

(“moose”)



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And other words, too, like...

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**mahkusunash** ‘shoes’

And other words, too, like...

**mahkusunash** ‘shoes’ (“moccasins”)

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**mahkusunash** ‘shoes’ (“moccasins”)

and

**ushqâ** ‘young woman’



And other words, too, like...

**mahkusunash** ‘shoes’ (“moccasins”)

and

**ushqâ** ‘young woman’ (“squaw”)

...and many names of places:

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muhs-uhtuq      'Mystic River'  
big    river

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muhs-achuwuhs-ut      ‘Massachusetts’  
big    hill              (locative)



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kuwâs    -ut                    ‘Cohasset’  
pine-tree (locative)

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muhs-achuwuhs-ut      ‘Massachusetts’  
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kuwâs      -ut              ‘Cohasset’  
pine-tree (locative)

...and lots of other places.

For many years there were no speakers of Wampanoag.

For many years there have been no speakers of Wampanoag. But the Wampanoag tribe is reviving their language.



Jessie Little Doe Baird and Nitana Hicks Greendeer both studied at MIT, and are now teaching the language to their fellow Wampanoag.



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Another Wampanoag MIT alum, Tracy Kelley, has created a website for learners of the language.



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The tribe has opened a Wampanoag immersion school for children,



Photo © Mashpee Wampanoag Tribe. All rights reserved. This content is excluded from our Creative Commons license. For more information, see <https://ocw.mit.edu/help/faq-fair-use/>.

The tribe has opened a Wampanoag immersion school for children, at which only Wampanoag is spoken.



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All of the indigenous languages of the US are in some level of danger...

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UNESCO Atlas of the World's Languages in Danger:

*vulnerable*: children speak the language,  
but there's another dominant language

*definitely endangered*: children don't learn the language

*severely endangered*: grandparents speak the language;  
parents may understand it but don't speak it.

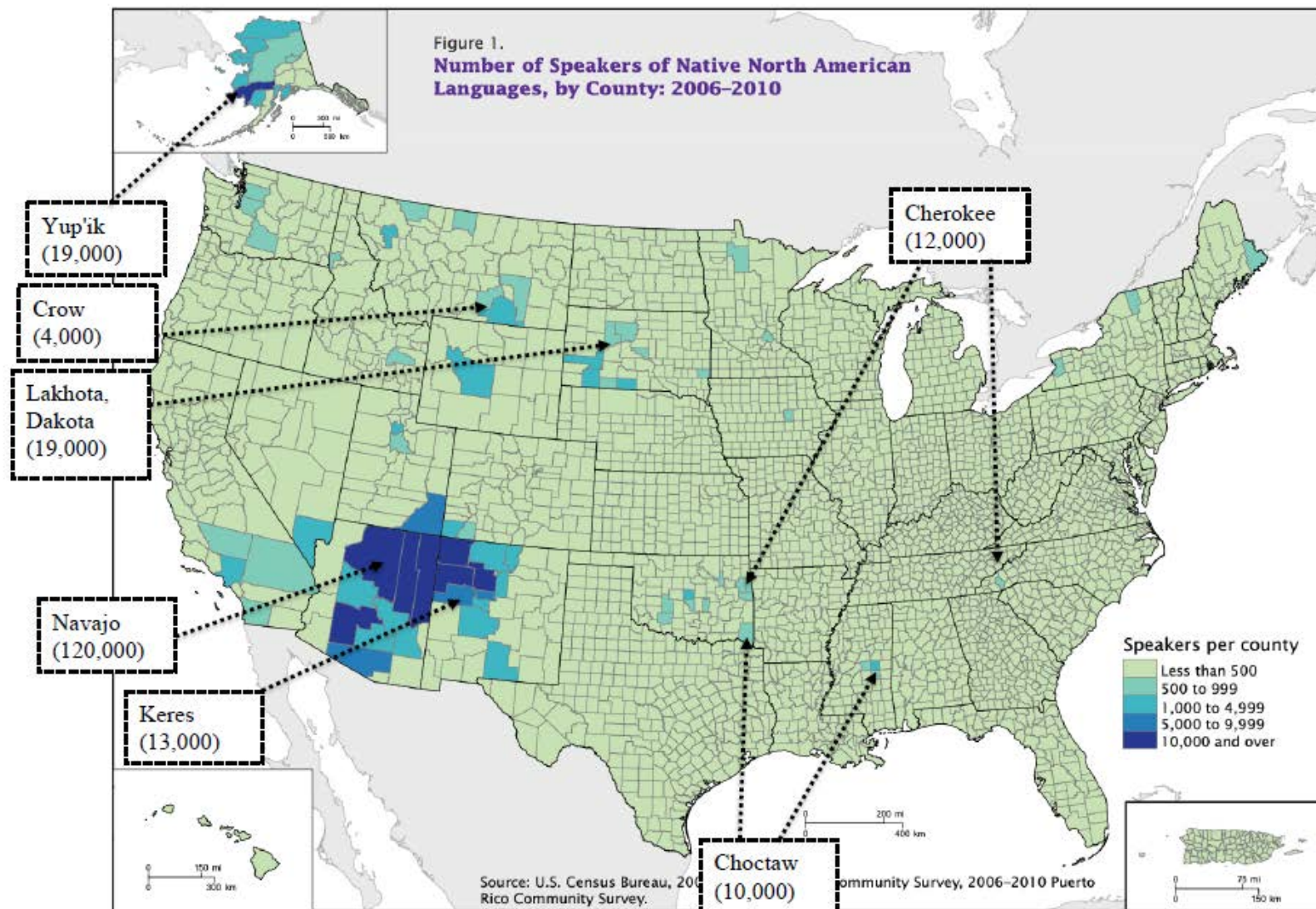
*critically endangered*: youngest speakers are grandparents,  
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All of the indigenous languages of the US are in some level of danger...

UNESCO Atlas of the World's Languages in Danger:

- 11** *vulnerable*: children speak the language,  
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- 75** *critically endangered*: youngest speakers are grandparents,  
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Navajo has the most speakers of these: around 120,000.

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(just for comparison  
(2009-2013 census data)...)

Albanian ~130,000

Malayalam ~140,000

Romanian ~150,000

Laotian ~150,000

Navajo has the most speakers of these: around 120,000 (-170,000).

...but even in Navajo:

in 1980, 93% of Navajos could speak  
in 1990, 84%,  
in 2000, 76%,  
in 2010, 51%...

<https://navajotimes.com/reznews/data-shows-huge-reduction-in-dine-speakers/>

Worldwide: approximately 6,000 languages,  
50-90% of which are expected to be extinct  
by the end of this century.

**(should we care?)**

(one reason to care: )

Hallett et al (2007): suicide rate in indigenous communities in British Columbia correlates with proportion of community that self-identify as speakers of the traditional language.

- in communities where at least half of the members are speakers, youth suicide rates are lower than provincial averages;
- in communities with fewer speakers than this, youth suicide rates are roughly three times provincial averages.

[Hallett, Darcy, Michael Chandler, and Christopher Lalonde. 2007. Aboriginal language knowledge and youth suicide. *Cognitive Development* 22.392-399.]

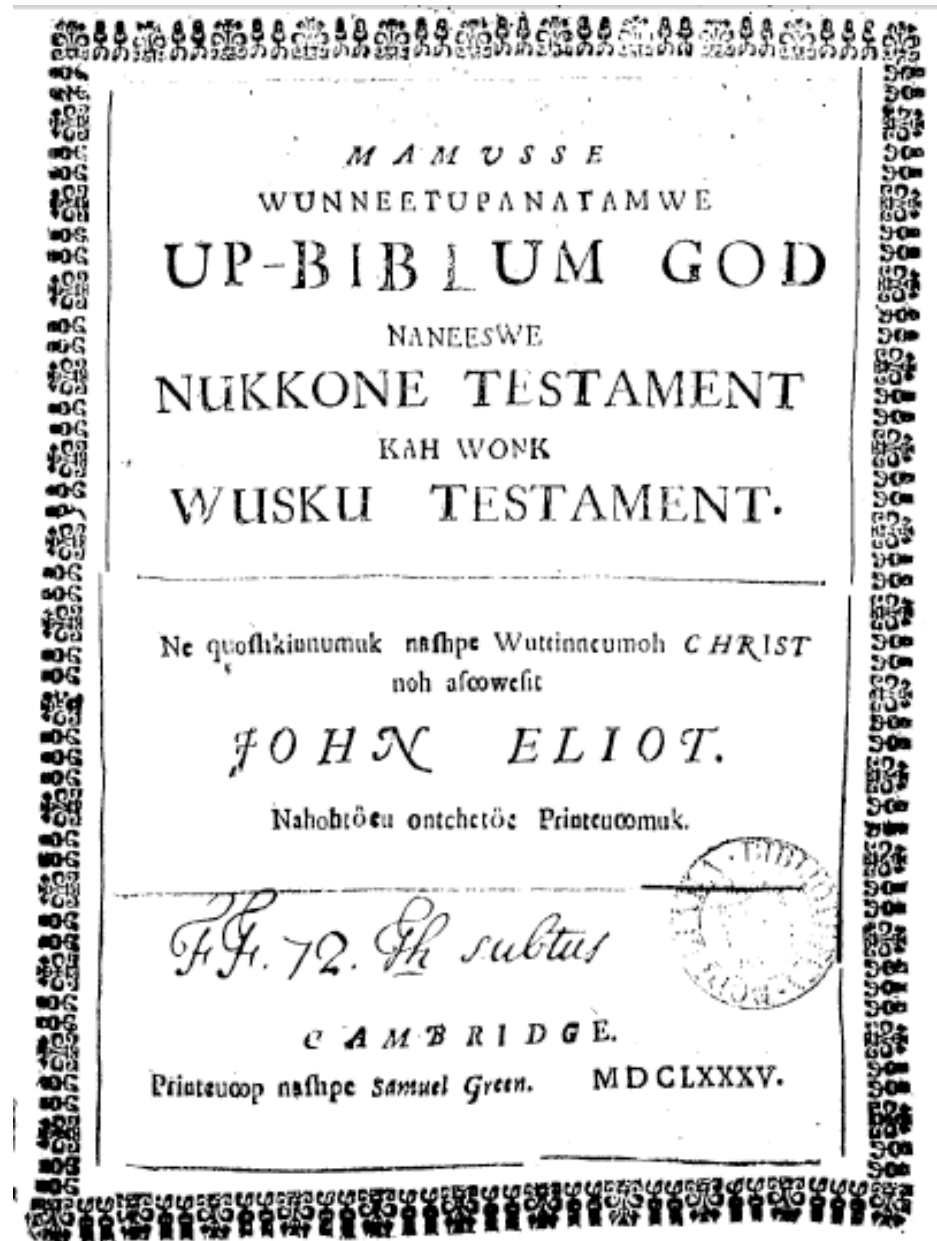
**in our department...**

**MITILI (MIT Indigenous Language Initiative)**

**and in Wampanoag...**

## The Sources

- Eliot Bible (John Eliot, 1663, then 1685)



This image is in the public domain.



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*Exodus 22:18*

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18 ¶ P̄om̄āntamwāheuhkon pawwau.

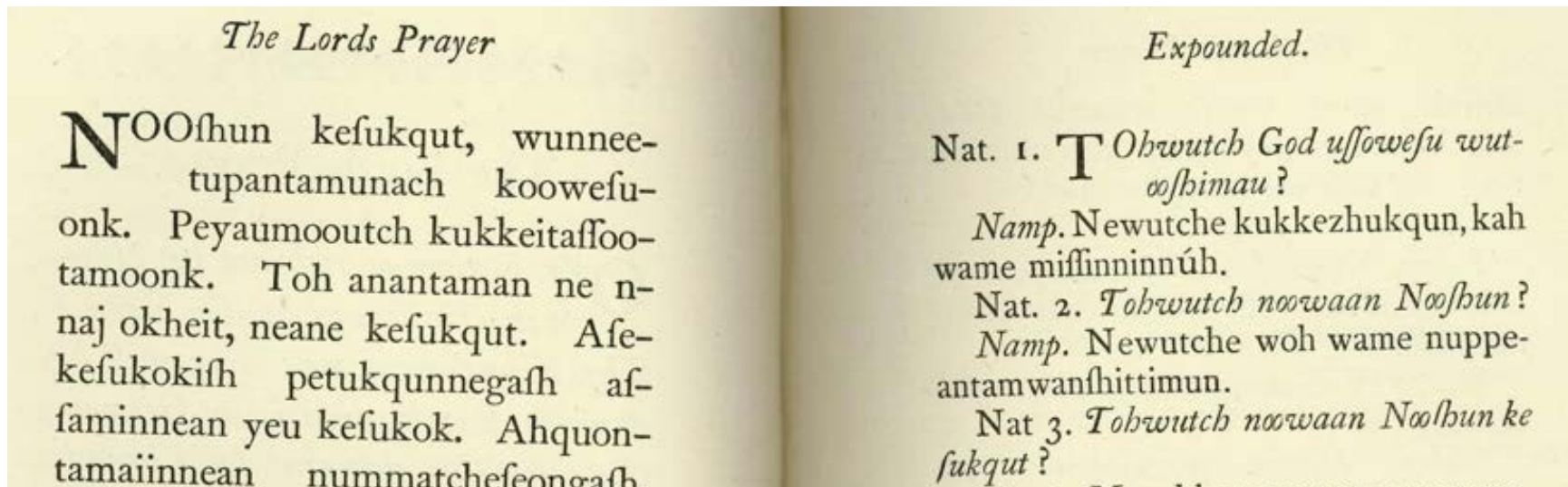
Pumôtamwâheuhkan pawâw.

'Thou shalt not suffer a witch to live'

## The Sources

- Eliot Bible (John Eliot, 1663, then 1685)
- other religious texts

"Why is God called a Father?"

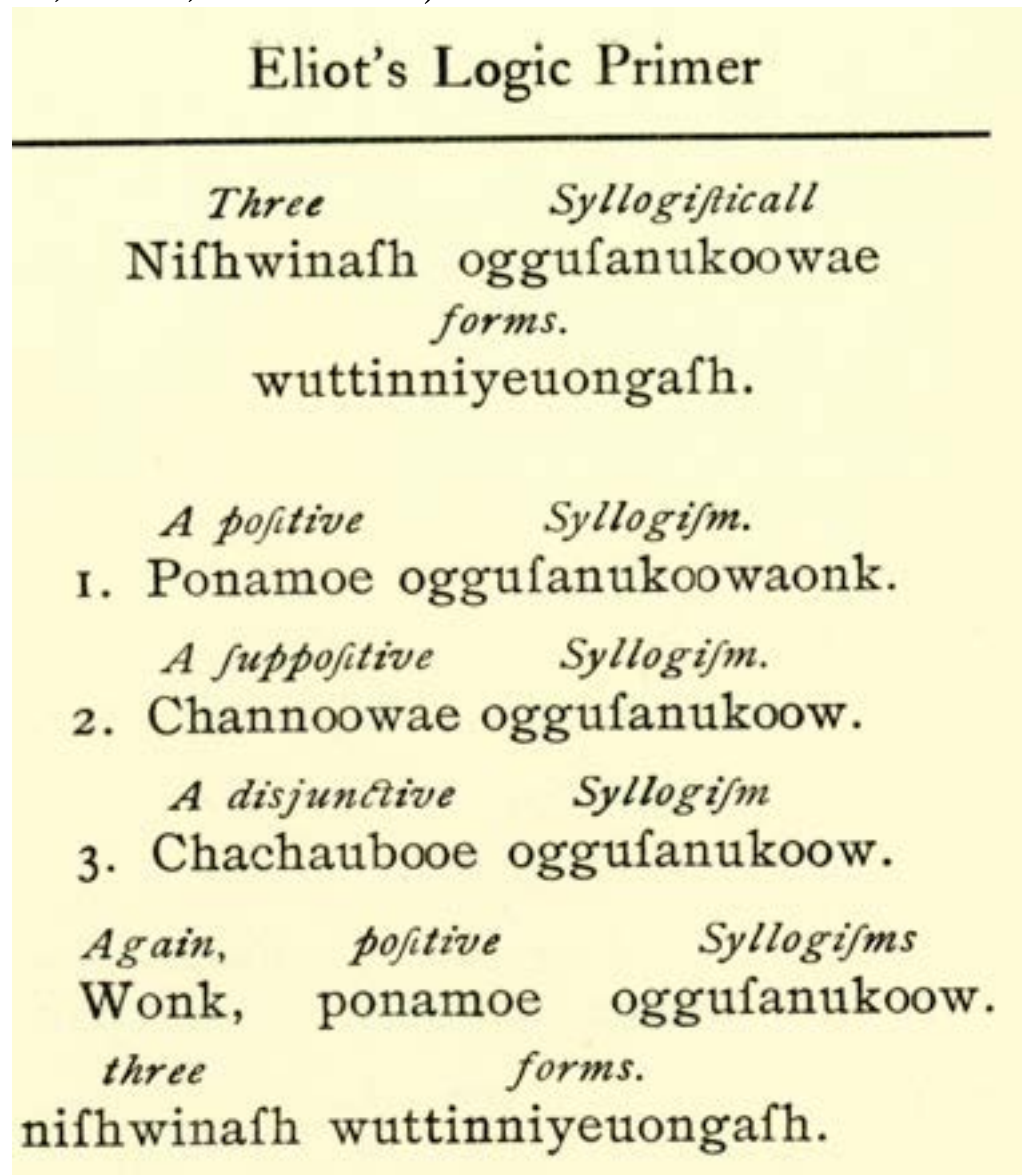


This image is in the public domain.

"Because he created us, and  
all people"

## The Sources

- Eliot Bible (John Eliot, 1663, then 1685)
- other religious texts
- other texts



## The Sources

- Eliot Bible (John Eliot, 1663, then 1685)
- other religious texts
- other texts
- Native Writings

neen david oks nummatummatum Isaak tuhkemen nek wana  
wame neahtau ta pahteatukqussit  
nittinummonmaun Isaak wuttahtau mecheme wana wame  
ummennuwonk pich 8wekon tamm8wotamunnau 688 July 15  
nen devid oks nunnichcheke...

I David Oks have bargained with Isaak Tuhkemen. My house and  
all that I have at Pahteatukqussit  
I convey to Isaak. He owns it forever and all  
his posterity shall enjoy it. 1688, July 15.  
I David Oks, my hand...

## The Sources

- Eliot Bible (John Eliot, 1663, then 1685)
- other religious texts
- other texts
- Native Writings

wunnummohkut yeu nuttinnantammun nenauun kuttummungk  
Indiansog pasue matta pish  
nuttahtoomun uttoh pish appeog weche kuttummungke  
nunnechanunoonog newutche  
moochuke nootamhukqunnannog yeug Englishmansog ut yeu  
nuttajyeuonganunonut...

Truly we think it is this: We poor Indians soon shall not  
have any place to reside, together with our poor children, because  
these Englishmen trouble us very much in this place of ours...

*--petition, Mashpee, June 11, 1752*

## Some puzzles

- how was this language pronounced?

### Delaware

wuláakwe 'yesterday'

láapii 'again'

shkáakwus 'skunk'

moosháandpeew 'he's bald'

wiingáatam 'like (verb)'

<wunnononkou>

<nompe>

<squnck>

<mδsontupau>

<wekontam>

### Wampanoag

wunokeew

nopee

sukoq

mδsotupâw

weekotam

## Some puzzles

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<wunnonkou>

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<squnck>

<m8sontupau>

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wunôkeew

nôpee

sukôq

m8sôtupâw

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Del. aa : Wamp. ô

## Some puzzles

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láapii 'again'

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### Wampanoag

nôpee

mδsôtpâw

weekôtam

Del. aa : Wamp. ô

### Delaware

nbumaham 'I'm paddling'

nangwan 'my heel'

kawiiw 'he sleeps'

<nuppumohham>

<nogquan>

<koueu, kouweu>

### Wampanoag

nupumaham

naqan

kaweew

Del. a : Wamp. a



## **Some puzzles**

- how was this language pronounced?

‘excessively, too much’:

<wussame, wassome, wussome, wussame, wussommе...>

## Some puzzles

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‘excessively, too much’:

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Del. wsaami:

## Some puzzles

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‘excessively, too much’:

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Del. wsaami: Wamp. wusomee

## Some puzzles

- how was this language pronounced?

‘excessively, too much’:

<wussame, wassome, wussome, wussame, wussomme...>

Del. wsaami: Wamp. wusomee

We also think we know where stress goes on this word:

it’s **wuSÔmee** (not **wusôMEE**, **WUsômee**...)

How do we know that?

### Some puzzles

- how was this language pronounced?

1640: first book published in the British colonies in North America is published, here in Cambridge.

The *Bay Psalm Book*: translation of the book of Psalms into English metrical verse.

## Some puzzles

- how was this language pronounced?

Psalm 1:1

### *King James version*

Blessed is the man that walketh not  
in the counsel of the ungodly,  
nor standeth in the way of sinners,  
nor sitteth in the seat of the scornful.

### *Bay Psalm Book*

O Blessed man, that in th' advice  
of wicked doth not walk:  
nor stand in sinner's way, nor sit  
in chair of scornful folk.

## Some puzzles

- how was this language pronounced?

Psalm 23:1-3

### *King James version*

The Lord is my shepherd;  
I shall not want.  
He maketh me to lie down  
in green pastures:  
he leadeth me beside the still waters.  
He restoreth my soul:  
He leadeth me in the paths of righteousness  
for his name's sake.

### *Bay Psalm Book*

The Lord to me a shepherd is,  
want therefore shall not I.  
He in the folds of tender grass  
doth cause me down to lie:  
To waters calm me gently leads  
Restore my soul doth he:  
he doth in paths of righteousness  
for his name's sake lead me.

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*Wampanoag translation:*

Wunanumau missinnin noh matta aonk  
wussuwonganit matchetou,  
asuh matta neepau8k ummáyeuout matcheseaenuog,  
asuh matta ápegk wutappuonganit mamanowontamwaénin.

(he.is.blessed the.person who not goes  
in.his.speech the.evil.one  
or not he.stands in.their.way sinners  
or not he.sits in.his.seat scornful.person)



## Some puzzles

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*Bay Psalm Book*

O Blessed man, that in th'advice  
of wicked doth not walk:  
nor stand in sinner's way, nor sit  
in chair of scornful folk.

*Second Wampanoag translation!*

Michem 8nanumau missin  
nnoh aont matchag  
Matchit wutinnaonganit  
matchit wosketompaog  
Mat neepauouun ummayeu  
matcheseaenuog  
Mat appein wutapuonk  
hahanuenuog.

always he.is.blessed the.person  
who goes never  
evil in.his.speech  
evil men  
not he.stands their.way  
sinners  
not he.sits his.seat  
laughing.people

## **Some puzzles**

- how was this language pronounced?

Sadly, Eliot turns out to have had a lot on his mind besides poetic meter...

## Some puzzles

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...but maybe we can learn something from the Wampanoag metrical psalms, anyway. Consider the Bay Psalm Book again:

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### *Bay Psalm Book*

The Lord to me a shepherd is,  
**want therefore shall not I.**  
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- how was this language pronounced?

Psalm 22:16

For dogs have compassed me: *(King James)*  
the assembly of the wicked have inclosed me:  
they pierced **my hands and my feet.**

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Psalm 22:16

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Newutche anumwog n8weenuhkunk: *(prose translation)*  
matchetowog ummukkinneongan8 n8weenuhkongquog,  
kánittequómwog **nunnutcheash kah nusseetash.** *(...my hands and my feet)*

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Matchit anumwog, mukkinhettit, *(verse translation)*  
nuweenuhkunkquog  
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nag kanittequomwog



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**why'd he change the order?**

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**why'd he change the order?**

nuSEEtash KAH nuNUcheeKASH *better than:*  
\*nuNUcheeKASH kah NUseeTASH

## Some puzzles

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**why'd he change the order?**

**nuSEEtash** KAH nuNUcheeKASH *better than:*

\*nuNUcheeKASH kah **NUseeTASH**

→ stress is on the second syllable in **nuseetash** ‘my feet’

## Some puzzles

- how was this language pronounced?
- how were words formed?

I shall observe to you that the Indian Language delighteth greatly in compounding of words; in which way they frequently make one word out of several, and then one such word will comprehend what in English is four, five or six; but as by this means they often have much in a Little room, so it is also true that this some times makes their words very long, the Rules of their Language calling for it.... For example, These English words, 'We did strongly Love one another', may be but one word in Indian viz, *nummunukkoow&monittimunnônup*: So, 'they strongly loved one another', is in Indian, *munnehk-wamôntoopenek*. These indeed are long words, and well they may considering how much they comprehend in them. However I will give you an Instance of one considerably longer viz: *Nup-pahk-nuh-tô-pe-pe-nau-wut-chut-chuh-quô-ka-neh-cha-e-nin-nu-mun-nô-nok* ... The English of this long word is, 'Our well skilled Looking Glass makers'.

--letter from Experience Mayhew, Chilmark, MA, March 20, 1722

## Some puzzles

- how was this language pronounced?
- how were words formed?

nu-pâhk- nuhtô- peepeenaw-uchuchôhq-ôkan -uhtyâ -eenun -eum -unôn -ak  
1- clear- skill- look.at -reflection -device -make -er -POSS -1PL -AN.PL  
'our very skillful mirror makers'

## Some puzzles

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'our very skillful mirror makers'

ahp- uhqâ-hsum -uw  
on.top head place cloth

nâh- nay8m -uwâ -t  
habitually carry.on.back intrans. 3

akôhs- anak- -uwâ -ôk  
small speak intrans. thing

## Some puzzles

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'our very skillful mirror makers'

ahp- uhqâ-hsum -uw  
on.top head place cloth > **'pillow'**

nâh- nay8m -uwâ -t  
habitually carry.on.back intrans. 3 > **'horse'**

akôhs- anak- -uwâ -ôk  
small speak intrans. thing > **'syllogism'**

## **Some puzzles**

- how was this language pronounced?
- how were words formed?

verbal agreement in 'easy' languages:

I read

she read-**s**



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verbal agreement in Wampanoag is with both the subject and the object...

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**SUBJECT-verb-OBJECT?**

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**SUBJECT-verb-OBJECT?**

**nu-nâw-ô-ak**

'I see them'

**nu-nâw-uq-ak**

'they see me'

## Some puzzles

- how was this language pronounced?
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verbal agreement in 'easy' languages:

I read

she read-s

verbal agreement in Wampanoag is with both the subject and the object...

**SUBJECT-verb-OBJECT?**

**nu-nâw-ô-ak** 'I see them'

1-see-"**DIRECT**"-AN.PL

**nu-nâw-uq-ak** 'they see me'

1-see-"**INVERSE**"-AN.PL

## What's being done?

- textbook, dictionary:

### **pumeetyuwôk(an)**

<sup>\*</sup>pem, <sup>\*</sup>ni:ki-

descendant (NA); descendants (NI); generation (NI)

(GB 154:16-19)

...pish micheme nuttauohkonan uttohsake pomontamwog nenauun & weche wame nunnechanunnoog & nunnechanunnonog wunnechannooah & nuppometuonganunnoog & weche wame uppometuonganooah

...peesh mucheemee nutawâhkônân utôh sâhkee pumôtamwak, neenawun & weechee wâmee nunechônunônak, & nunechônunônak wuneechônuwôah & nupumeetyuwôkanunônak & weechee wâmee upumeetyuwôkanuwôah.

...we shall always use it as long as we live, we together with all our children, and our children's children, and our descendants, and together with all their descendants.

(GB 3:5-7)

nuttunnumauwan pahke namppamut asuh nahtonsahpun wattahket mashnah kah ne wuttahtoun yeu aukke mecheme kah wame pummetuonk mecheme

Nutununumawôn pâhkee Namppamut, âsuh Nahtonsahpun, wâtahkeet Mashnah, kah nee wutahtawun y8 ahkee mucheemee kah wâmee pumeetyuwôk mucheemee.

I give it clearly to Namppamut, or Nahtonsahpun, who lives at Mashnah, and he owns that this land, forever, and all his posterity, forever.

(Psalms 78:6)

Pometuonk paomoouk woh nish oowahtouunaout, nux mukkiog neg woh nekitcheg: onk woh wapeog kah nish wunnahtuhkonaoash en wunnechonoowout.

Pumeetyuwôk pâôm8wuk wah neesh uwâuhteawunâôut, nukees mukayak neek wah neekucheek: ôk wah wâppeeak kah neesh wunnahtuhkônâôash un wuneechônuwôut.

That the generation to come might know them, even the children which should be born; who should arise and declare them to their children:

## **What's being done?**

- textbook, dictionary
- immersion camp

## **What's being done?**

- textbook, dictionary
- immersion camp
- classes for adults and children (run by Jessie and Nitana and their former students)



## **What's being done?**

- textbook, dictionary
- immersion camp
- classes for adults and children (run by Jessie and Nitana and their former students)
- immersion school, classes in a local high school

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