Using mobile apps as a small step toward revitalization
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Mobile applications featuring language—words, phrases, sentences and more—can be used to introduce a dormant language to new audiences. As part of a project to provide access to a corpus of recordings of Northern Pomo, a dormant indigenous language of California, we designed word-learning mobile apps available in iOS and Android. Our purpose in this poster is to provide details about the apps, available for Northern Pomo and also available for Kashaya Pomo, a critically endangered indigenous language of California.

The mobile apps (jano sho:jin—Hearing Northern Pomo Words, and Kashaya cahno—Kashaya words) are available in Android, and the Northern Pomo version is available in both Android and iOS (https://play.google.com/store/apps/details?id=com.northpomo.janoshojin). The Northern Pomo app features 85 words organized in 7 categories (food, nature, places, animals, etc.) The Kashaya app features 113 words organized in 13 categories. A user may begin looking at words in one of these categories, or swiping through all the words across the different categories. Each word, written in an orthography that represents unfamiliar sounds with special characters, is linked to a voice recording of a fluent speaker saying the word. There are also visual illustrations for every word, providing a striking picture of the word as the user listens to the language being spoken. Community members have expressed very positive responses, and have appreciated the child-friendly qualities of the app as well as the experience of hearing the voices of elders.

The Android version also features a word-learning quiz. Our approach provides a gentle reinforcing experience instead of error buzzers. Users may select a quiz that pulls words from a single category. Alternatively, they may also select a quiz that pulls words from all categories. Users are shown three pictures that pertain to three randomly selected words. At the same time, the recording of one of these words is played. The user is prompted to tap the picture that corresponds to the word being said. Selecting any one of the three illustrations, correct or incorrect, will grey out the incorrect responses and trigger a yellow border around the correct answer. Then the recording plays again, to reinforce the link between the image and the word. Community members using the app have expressed appreciation for the lack of error buzzers.

Technical issues to be discussed include the overall layout, the quiz function and the design behind retrieving words for each category along with images and relevant sound files. Other issues include memory management (e.g. image sizes), compatibility with the different screen sizes for Android devices, and the orthographic representation for the Pomo words. Having developed the app for Northern Pomo, and then having found a relatively straightforward way to create a parallel version for Kashaya Pomo, we are happy to discuss use of this open source tool with any conference attendees interested in adopting it for use with their own languages.

(476 words)