Game-Based Methodology for the Study of Intonational Contours in Kwak'wala

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Why play games in language documentation?

- Provides a context for recording interactional, spontaneous use of language in a fun, relaxed atmosphere
- Creates documentation of interactional language between two or more speakers, which is often lacking in archival records of endangered languages and important for the study of intonation (the use of pitch and rhythm in spoken language).
- For analytical and pedagogical purposes, ability to control certain aspects of what is being uttered:
  - Some control over choice of lexical items (e.g. restricted to local wildlife: birds, animals, fish)
  - Some control over sentence type/structure (target: yes/no questions and answers)
  - Some control over information structure (e.g. pictures that are known to both players)

References and inspiration: Caldecott & Koch 2014 (use of Guess Who™ for language documentation purposes), Pederson et al. 1998 ("Men-and-tree" game), Anderson et al. 1991 (Map Task)
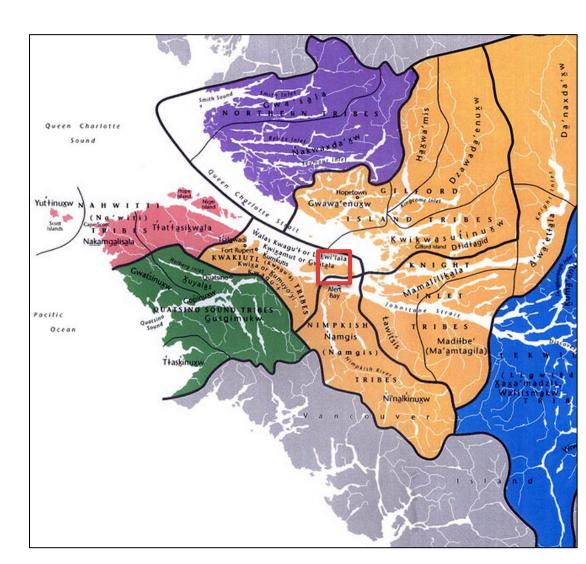
Language Background

Wakashan Languages: Pre-contact
Source: Wikipedia

- Kwak'wala is a Northern Wakashan language spoken in British Columbia, Canada.
- Critically endangered (First Peoples Heritage Language and Culture Council 2014 report):
  - Estimated 165 fluent speakers
  - 2.3% of Kwakwaka'wakw community members consider themselves to be fluent speakers
  - Status and vitality of the Kwak'wala language increasingly fragile
- Recordings discussed here were made in Alert Bay, BC in April-May 2016.

Kwakwaka'wakw Territory
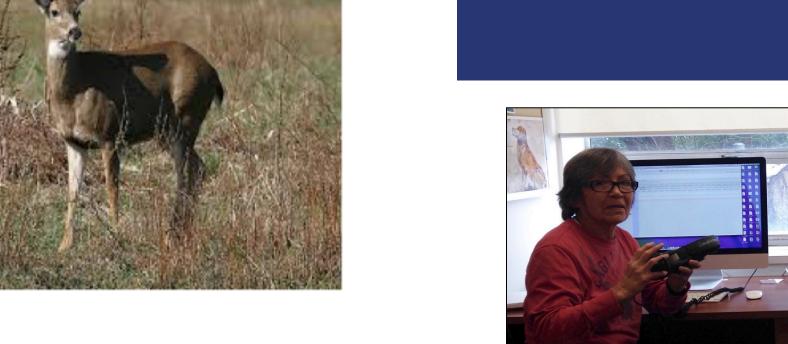Source: U'mista Cultural Centre

Our Game

Player 1: Visible Card Array

Player 2: Chooses one card as secret target for Player 1 to guess

Rules of the Game:

- Two players. Each is given an identical set of 6 cards with pictures of wildlife native to Kwakwaka'wakw territory.
- Player 1 lays all the cards out on the table, so they are visible to both players.
- Player 2 secretly chooses one of the picture cards as the target for Player 1 to guess.
- Player 1 can only ask Yes/No Questions to try to deduce which picture Player 2 has chosen. No WH-Questions!
- Lexical words identifying the name of the animal/bird/fish, e.g. "Is it a deer?", are not allowed except as the final question. If the answer to this question is 'Yes', then Player 1 wins! But, if the answer is 'No', then Player 2 wins!

Sample Game Dialogue

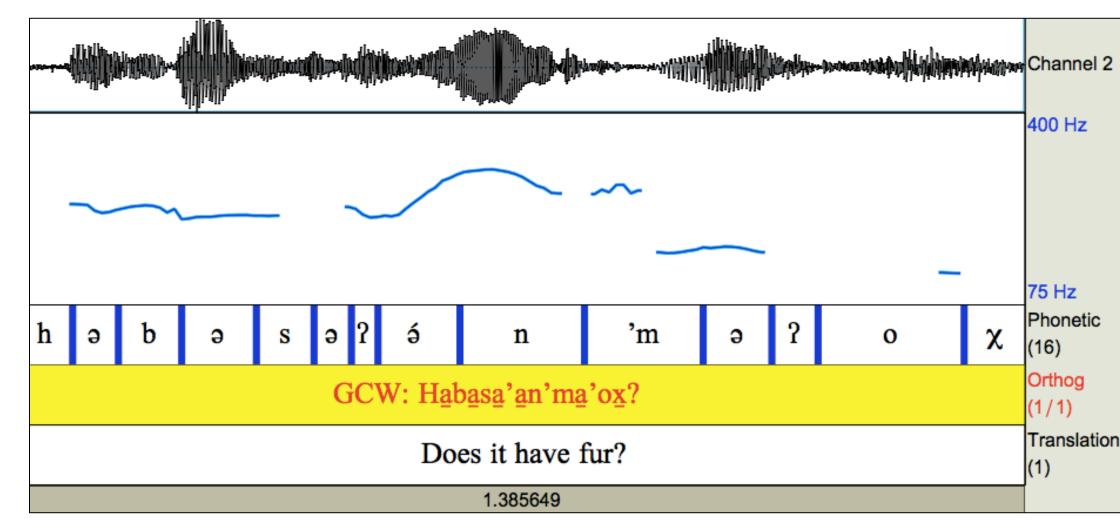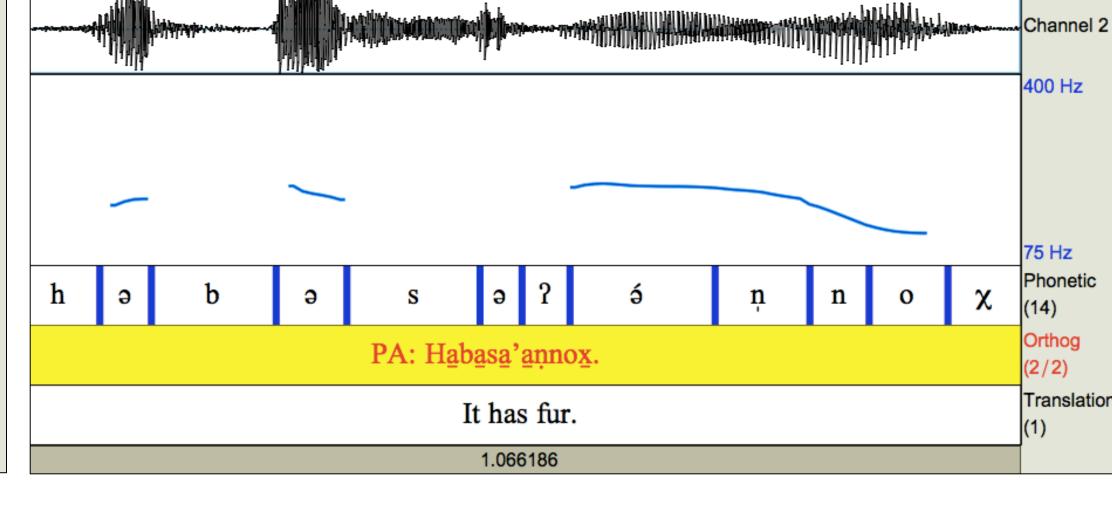|		
PA:	He'mox gukwida 'wap?	*Does it live in water?*
GCW:	K'i.	*No.*
PA:	He gukwilida at'łi?	*Does it live in the woods?*
GCW:	E.	*Yes.*
PA:	Kalam'ma'ox?	*Is it feared?*
GCW:	K'i.	*No.*
PA:	O! Ha'mapman'sax?	*Oh! Do we eat it?*
GCW:	Olak'ala!	*Truly!*
PA:	I'se he'mida giwas?	*Is it a deer?*
GCW:	He'am!	*It is!*

Source of recording: 2016_04_30_GCW&PA_pas&ee_002c
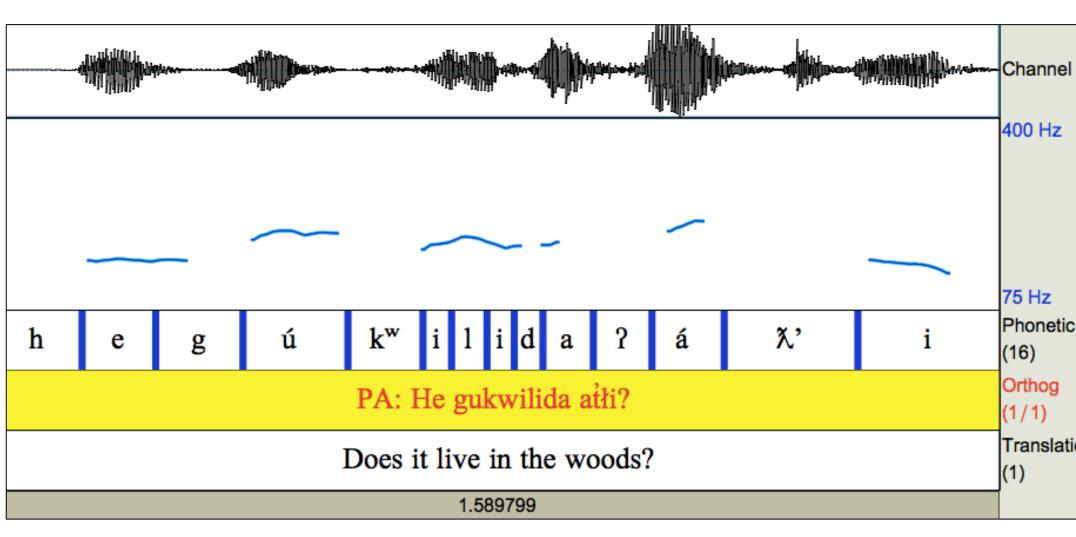
Pauline Alfred and Gloria Cranmer Webster

Intonation in Yes/No Questions

GCW: Habasa'an'ma'ox?
Does it have fur?

PA: Habasa'annox.
It has fur.
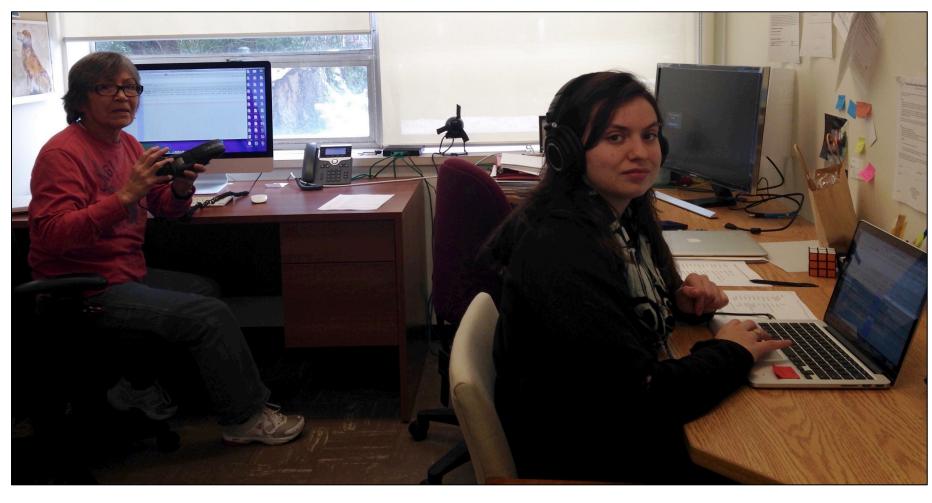

PA: He gukwilida ałłi?
Does it live in the woods?

- Lexical stress: leftmost moraic syllable (full V or əR); stress is associated with a high pitch peak.
- Yes-No Question Intonation: peak on rightmost lexical stress, then pitch fall: no evidence of rising intonation (contra cross-linguistic patterning in many other languages).
- Comparison with declarative sentences in Kwak'wala: also have high pitch peaks on stressed vowels and a fall in pitch at the end of the sentence.

On-going Project Goals

Kwakwaka'wakw researchers at UBC: M. Cranmer & S. Roberts

- **Documentation:** Transcription and preparation of audio and video files for archiving.
- **Community Training**: Kwakwaka'wakw RAs.
- **Linguistic Analysis:** Formal analyses of question and declarative intonation across the 7 speakers.
- **Pedagogical Materials:** Preparation of AV files for curriculum (high school level & UBC FNEL 141, 142).
- **Methodology:** Extension of game methodology to different question-answer types.

References

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