



"Engaged Humanities: preserving and revitalizing endangered languages and cultural heritage"

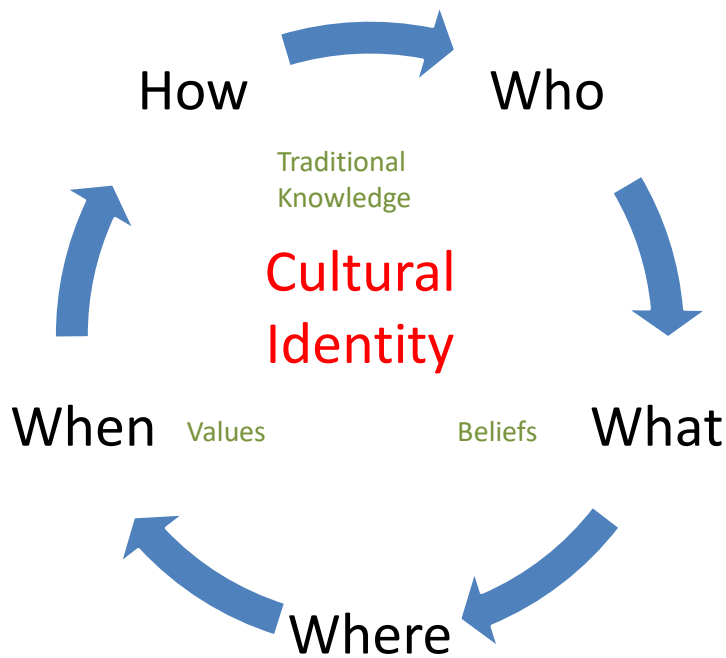
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## Community–based curriculum development in endangered language revitalization: a case study in Tsakonian Greek.

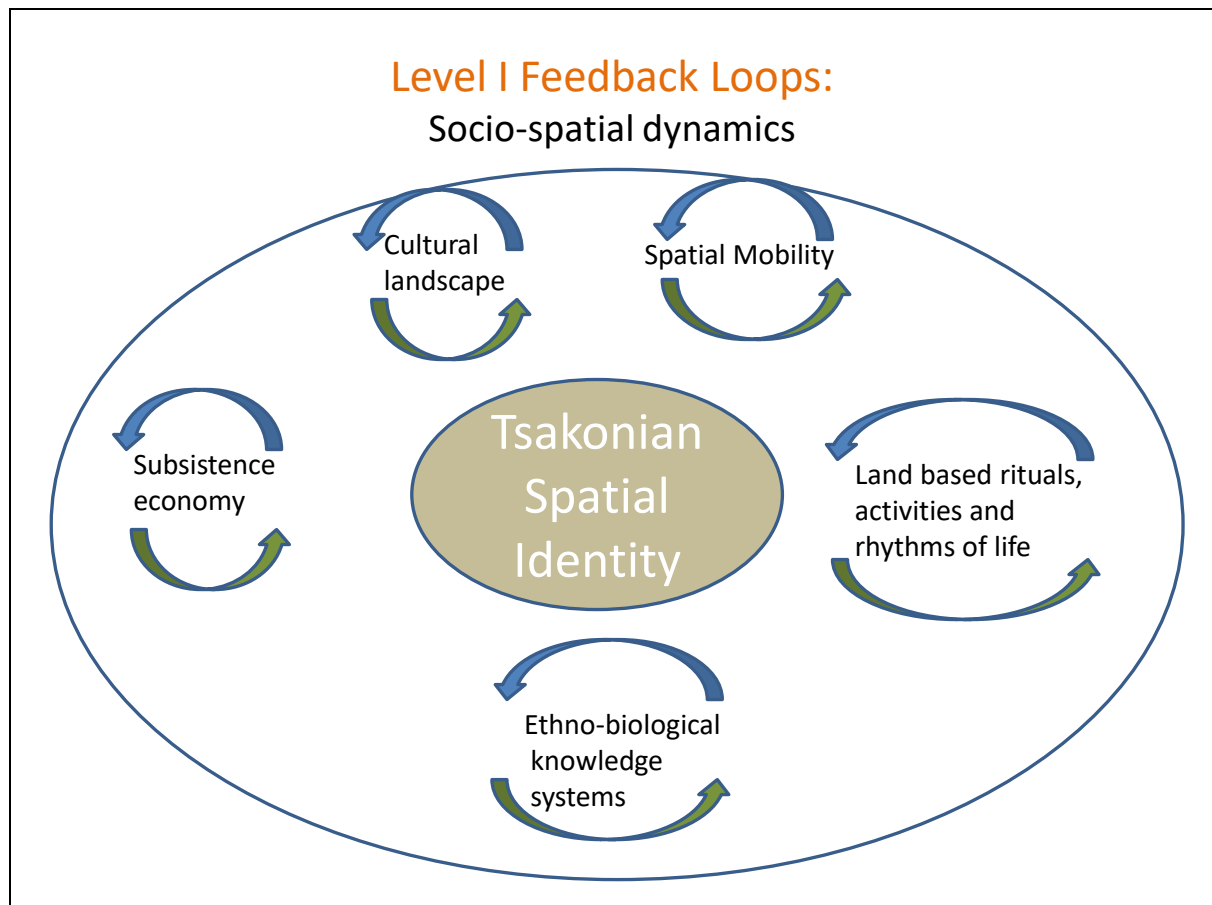
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This presentation provides a model of endangered language documentation with the goal of revitalization. It is argued that the interface between these two complementary but distinct activities can be exploited to develop processes and products needed in sustainable language revitalization. The model proposed uses a systemic approach to community-based curriculum development based on fieldwork being carried out on Tsakonian, a dialect of Ancient Greek in Arcadia, Greece.

## Sustainable Endangered Language Revitalization: A Systemic Approach

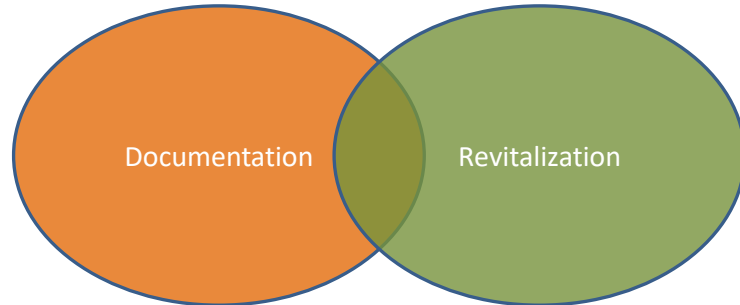


In order to create a sustainable model for language revitalization we need to examine the complex spoken language ecologies which keep non-standardized languages alive. The aim of a systemic approach is to provide a model which is viable and sustainable by examining the whole system in which the language is embedded and not only its parts. The core of any viable system is its identity (Beer, 1966) and of which language is a primary marker. Language is a vehicle of transmission of the values, beliefs and knowledge systems which make up our cultural identity. Therefore, it is vital that endangered language revitalization efforts observe the greater social and cultural framework within which the language is rooted. By examining the socio-spatial dynamics of language use and transmission in the community we can identify who the real stakeholders of the language are and what elements make up their social organization and cohesion. These spheres make up the feedback loops in the community that are to become the basis for curriculum design and development.



In order to channel revitalization efforts that are viable and sustainable we need to identify what the primary activities and interactions of the stakeholders are in the community and where language is used and transmitted 'organically' that is, in its true social context, meaningfully and for a real purpose. Tsakonian is spoken in a small community which has managed to preserve its old way of life characterized by transhumant pastoralism. The Tsakonians have always been self sufficient and autonomous with a strong sense of local pride and identity. This identity is based on their close connection to the land rooted in the cultural landscape; subsistence economy; ethno-biological knowledge systems; land based rituals, activities and rhythms of life; and a history of spatial mobility. These are the recursive social processes and activities that make up the feedback loops we can see here. Today, the Tsakonian language, spoken mainly by the older generation, is a marker of traditional character, authenticity, village roots, and community life. The family is the main socio-spatial sphere in the community in which the older generation plays an important role in the transmission of the language as they are the role models and mentors through whom tradition is passed down. The children are involved in all spheres of community life and are socialized mainly through the family, school, church but also nature with which they are in close contact. These socio-spatial spheres are being dislocated due to the abandonment of the land and changing family dynamics which has led to a whole generation lost in this life chain. Along with this has come the loss of the language due to language shift to Modern Greek which is the official language in Greece.

## Level II Feedback Loops: Documentation-Revitalization Interface

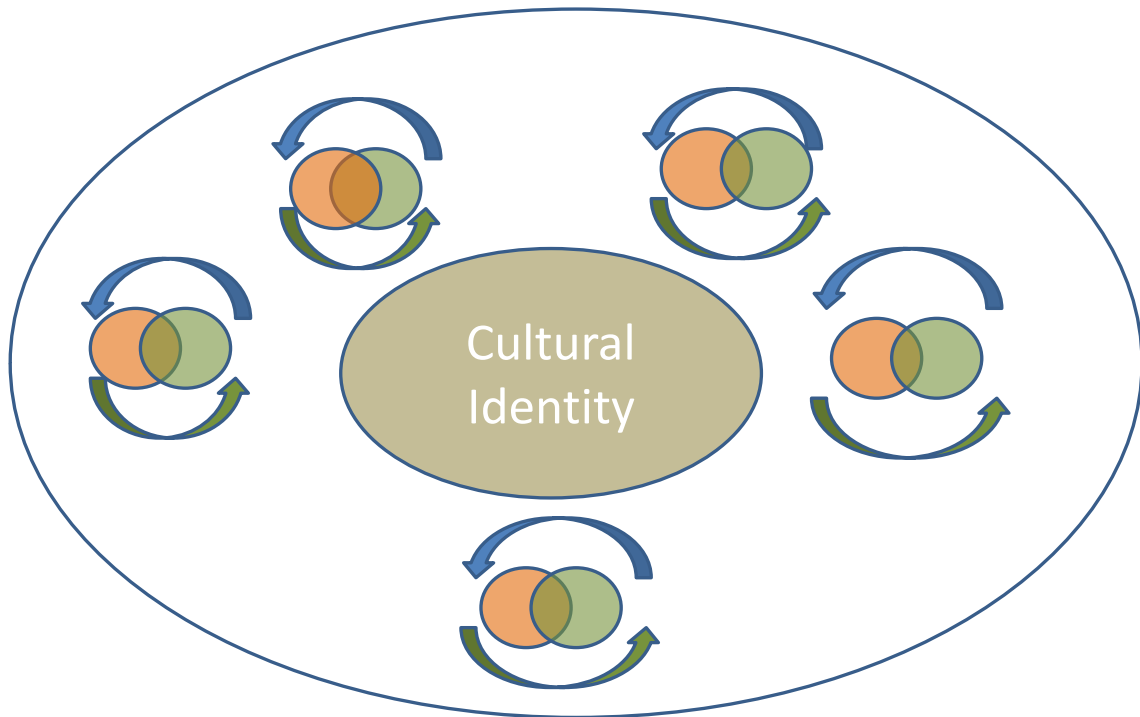


- real purpose for language use
- intergenerational transmission
- co-produced knowledge
- mediated interaction
- built-in dissemination of data
- reinforcement: identity, social cohesion, wellbeing

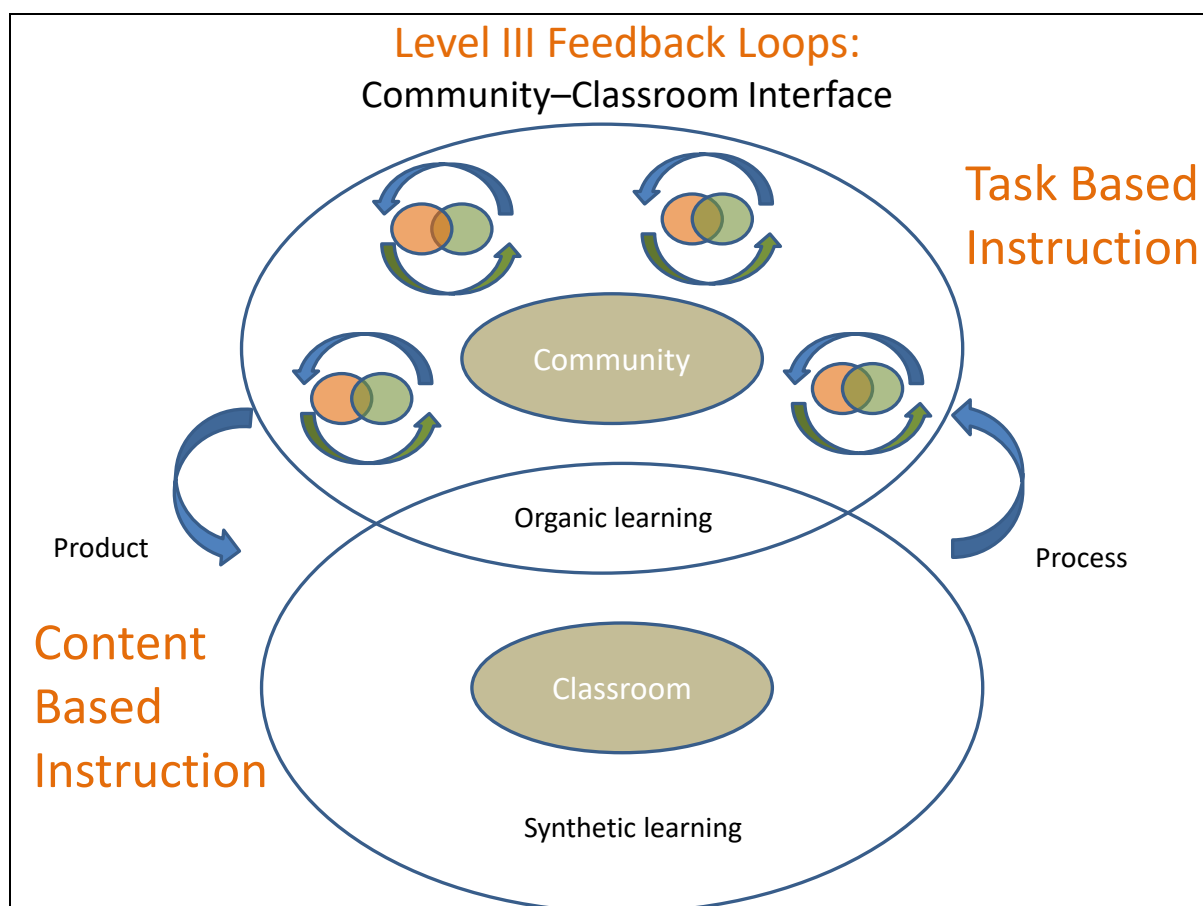
Languages are not viable nor sustainable without a real need and purpose for their use. We also know that learning comes through interaction (Rivers, 1987). Therefore, it is argued that the feedback loops which are generated at the interface between language documentation and revitalization are ideal for endangered language learning. Apart from making a valuable record of the language, the interface between language documentation and revitalization creates a real need to use the language which supports the intergenerational transmission of knowledge, values and beliefs that are being lost. Learning is supported at the interface between these two activities as knowledge is co-produced and shared from the very beginning. Through mediated interaction learning is not only guided by the pre-designed task at hand which is graded at the learner's level and age but also by the more knowledgeable elder who supports the learner to reach higher "zones of proximal development" (Vygotsky, 1978). Moreover, the interface raises awareness of the obligation and social responsibility of the real stakeholders to reclaim their language with the aim of creating life-long learners as they identify themselves with the speakers and the language itself. Community ownership of the processes and products produced from this activity not only reinforces a shared identity which creates solidarity in the community but also makes up the social capital and the resources needed for sustainability.

## Level II feedback loops embedded in LI feedback loops:

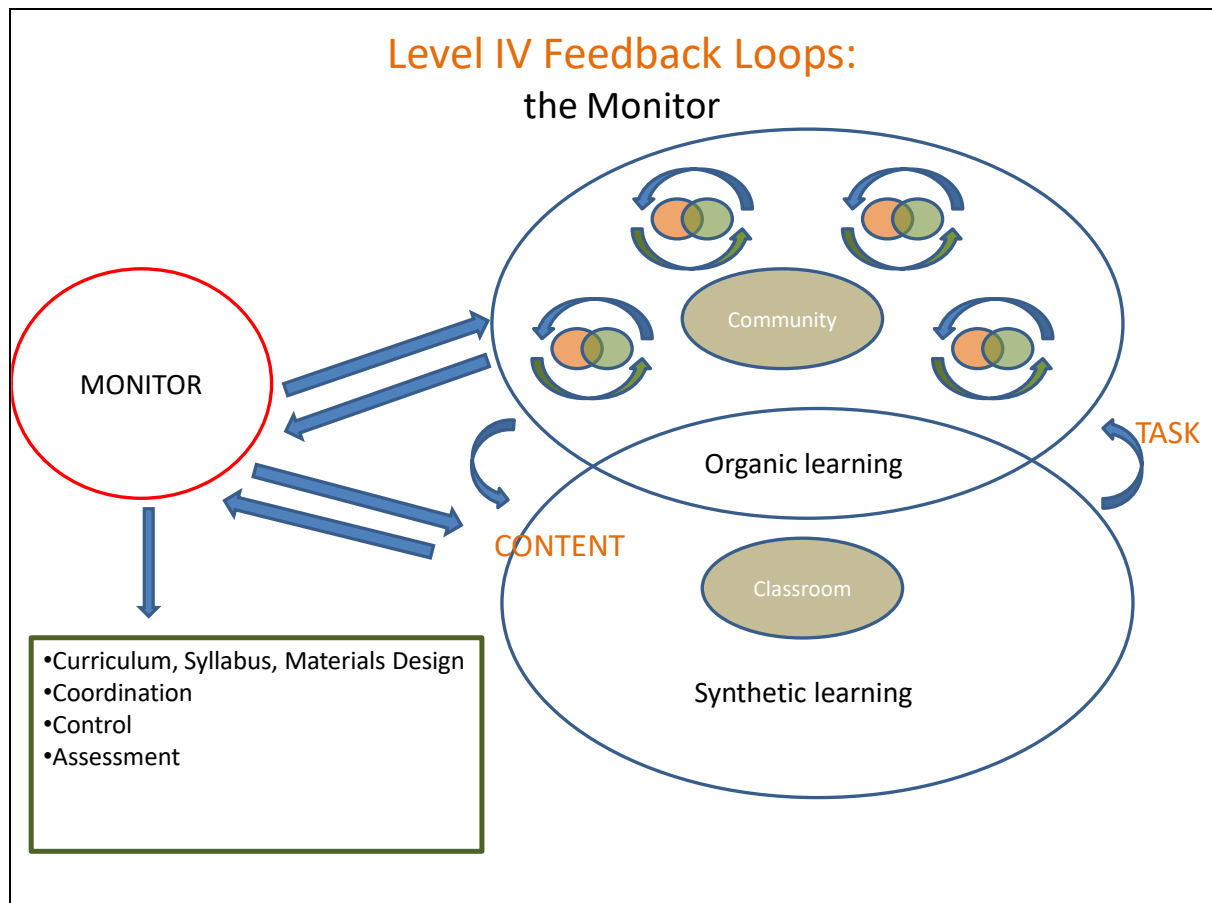
recursivity → viability



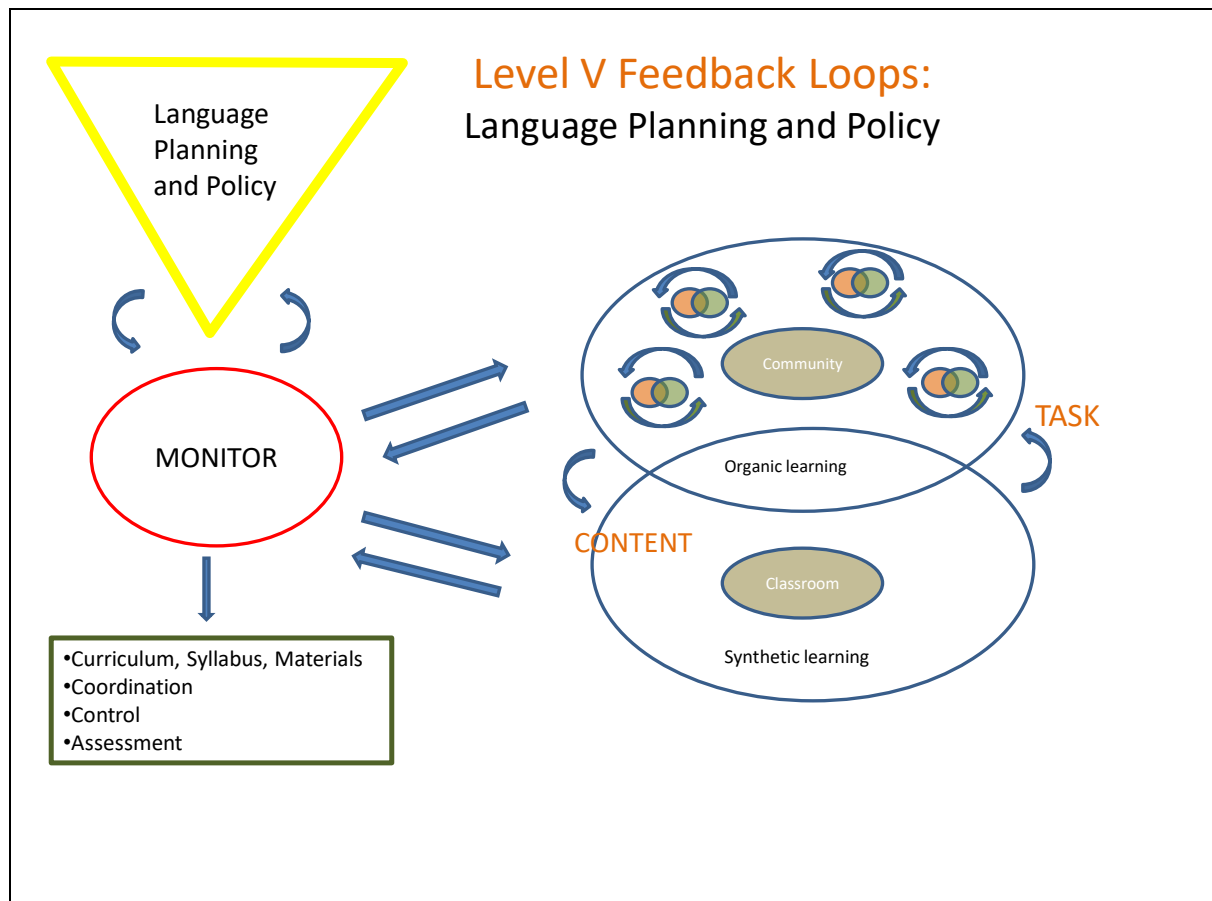
What is important for revitalization efforts to be viable and sustainable is that the feedback loops created at the interface are embedded in recursive social interactions and activities that make up every day community life. Since these recursive activities are rooted at the very identity and survival of the community it is usually also where the language has shown to be resilient. This provides a non-intrusive model for revitalization since the initiative comes from within the community and not from an external source and knowledge that is co-produced, shared, and reinforced in these socio-spatial spheres stands to become legitimate in the eyes of the community and more likely to be adopted.



In this model, second level feedback loops embedded in first level feedback loops in the community are supported by third level feedback loops created at the interface between the community and the classroom. The classroom becomes a third space where learning is scaffolded in order to prepare the learners for the tasks to be completed at the language documentation and revitalization interface within the community. Therefore, the knowledge gained in the classroom is transferred for use in the community and vice versa. At the same time, the data collected is not only a valuable record of the language but a language resource from which authentic materials can be created and adapted for use in the classroom. These processes are guided by second language acquisition research and methodology. This particular model involves task based and content based instruction supported by communicative approaches to language learning and teaching. The aims of synthetic learning in the classroom combined with the insights gained from research into the organic learning in socio-spatial spheres in the community guides curriculum and syllabus design as well as materials development.



The model presented adds a fourth level feedback loop between the 'monitor' and the revitalization activities in the community and the classroom. The monitor can be an individual or group, most likely an applied linguist who can coordinate, control and assess the products and processes at all levels in the model. The monitor implements varying levels of control depending on the community's needs and stage in its learning curve. It is hoped that learning which is highly controlled in the beginning will be eventually internalized and lead to greater levels of autonomy in the community. The goal is for the community to control their own language revitalization efforts in the end and thus ensure language sustainability with minimal external support.



The fifth and highest level feedback loop in our model is the community's language planning and policy with which revitalization efforts should be in line in order to be coherent, cohesive and sustainable. Language planning and policy involves the determination and regulation of the form and function of the language as well as its acquisition (see Kritikos, 2016 for full discussion on language planning and policy for Tsakonian). Data collected through participatory processes such as those discussed in this presentation becomes a special corpus of the language in and of itself leading to an emerging standard. The significance of the model proposed is that there is a shift in discourse from the preservation of a "dying" language to that of the community's engagement in a "living" language which reinforces cultural identity and increases community cohesion and overall wellbeing.





I would like to thank the municipalities of North and South Kynouria in Arcadia, Greece for their consent and support to document and revitalize the Tsakonian language in their communities. I would also like to thank Ms. Milio Kounia for her collaboration in the documentation of the language and development of curriculum and materials for the classroom.

Note: The present model for endangered language revitalization has been partly informed by theories developed in the Viable System Model (Beer, 1966), the Monitor Model (Krashen, 1977), and Socio-cultural Theory (Vygotsky, 1978).

## References

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