



A Universal Translator

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Anita Uqualla (Viejas tribal member), records the Kumeyaay language with her mother, Carnation Brown (Campo Band of Kumeyaay Indians).

Can technology save endangered Native languages? While no product can make such a claim, a handheld machine that can translate spoken English words and phrases into almost any language promises to help stem the erosion of Indian idioms. The Phraselator P2, developed by the same governmental body—DARPA—that launched the Internet and GPS technology, is being marketed by Thornton Media, Inc. of Banning, California, owned and operated by Don Thornton (Cherokee).

It is being warmly embraced in Indian Country, with units already at work among some 30 tribes. Since early 2005, dozens of Native speakers have begun recording their languages onto the high-tech machines. "After I played with it, I cried. This will help save our language," says Jane Dumas, a Kumeyaay elder from California, while Terry Brockie, a Gros Ventre language teacher in Montana, notes, "I have been waiting for such a tool all my life." Says Carlene Bear Chief of Siksika Nation Indian School of Alberta, Canada, "Like our tradition, it orally teaches people who want to learn the language." It can also record stories, prayers and songs.

Thornton acknowledges the irony. "My mother was part of that boarding school era where Indian kids were made to be ashamed to be Indian," he says. "Now we're using U.S. government technology to help revitalize the Native languages that were decimated during that era." Details: www.ndnlanguage.com