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# An account of Lakota verbal affixes in transitive stative verbs<sup>1</sup>

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**Résumé** Il n’y a pas de raison de penser que les langues doivent obéir à des grammaires parfaitement structurées, sans anomalie en ce qui concerne les conjugaisons verbales, le marquage en cas, l’encodage des arguments, etc., et en effet c’est rarement le cas. De plus, il est facile de trouver des langues dont le système verbal manifeste de nombreuses irrégularités et, de ce fait, il semble plausible qu’il puisse aussi y avoir des verbes avec, par exemple, des configurations anormales d’indexation et de référence aux actants. Dans cet article, nous cherchons à mieux comprendre l’origine d’un groupe de verbes peu représentés que l’on appelle “verbes transitifs d’état” en Lakota, une langue Sioux à intransitivité scindée parlée aux États-Unis d’Amérique et au Canada, et qui présente un comportement extrêmement rare en termes de références croisées.

**Abstract** There is no reason to think that languages should present perfectly structured grammars with no anomaly in terms of verbal conjugation, case marking, argument encoding, etc., and in fact they rarely do. What is more, it is not difficult to find languages with verbal systems displaying a high degree of irregularities and, therefore, it seems plausible to assume that there may be verbs with, for example, anomalous cross-referencing patterns as well. This paper aims to shed some light on the origin of a minor group of verbs called “transitive stative verbs” in Lakota, a split-intransitive Siouan language spoken in the USA and Canada, which exhibit an extremely rare behaviour in terms of cross-referencing.

**Mots-clés :** langue Lakota, alignement, intransitif scindé, affixe pronominal, classement linéaire

**Keywords:** Lakota language, alignment, split-intransitive, pronominal affix, linear ordering

## 1 *Introduction*

Considering the morphological complexity of the Lakota language and the importance of verb morphology to the interpretation of the syntax of the examples in this paper, it seems appropriate to include a brief section describing its basic morpho-syntactic characteristics, not

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least those dealing with alignment, before examining the issue of transitive stative verbs in Lakota in detail.

The verb is the most important lexical category in Lakota, since, owing to the mildly synthetic nature of this language, most of the syntactic information of the sentence is contained in the verb, whose structure is extremely complex. Lakota grammar makes a distinction between stative and active verbs, in terms of the presence or absence of control by an agent<sup>2</sup>. Thus, while stative verbs (e.g. *ištĩmÁ*<sup>3</sup> 'sleep', *ičhága* 'grow', *kakížA* 'suffer', *yazáŋ* 'hurt', etc.) describe states or conditions over which we have no control, active verbs (e.g. *mani* 'walk', *wačhí* 'dance', *ya* 'go', *apě* 'look for', etc.) describe actions that are controlled by an agent. Consequently, a great number of adjectives (e.g. *káŋ* 'old', *wašté* 'good', *háŋska* 'tall', *khúžA* 'sick', etc.) and nouns (e.g. *wičhaša* 'man', *wĩŋyaŋ* 'woman', *waákisniyA* 'doctor', *itěhŋčhaŋ* 'chief', etc.) can also function as stative verbs in this language:

(1) Ø- káŋ-pi

3:STA-old- PL

'They are old.'

(2) Ma- wĩŋyaŋ

1SG:STA-woman

'I am a woman.'

As will be described in detail in the next section, this distinction between stative and active verbs affects inflection, mainly expressed in Lakota through affixes, since the form of the pronominal affixes cross-referencing the obligatory participants will be influenced by the type of verb. The inflectional category of person is expressed in Lakota by means of pronominal affixes, which, depending on the verb, may be either prefixes or infixes. In this language there are three persons (first, second, and third) and three numbers (singular, dual, and plural), which will be represented in the glosses as follows: 1SG 'I', 2SG 'you', 3SG 'he/she/it', 1D 'you and I / inclusive', 1PL 'we / exclusive', 2PL 'you', 3PL 'They as individuals / distributive plural', 3PC 'They as group / collective plural'.

## 2 *Lakota verbs and the two series of pronominal affixes*

Traditionally, verbs have been usually classified in terms of their transitivity into three categories: intransitive verbs, (mono)transitive verbs, and ditransitive verbs, according to the number of objects that they require syntactically. Parallely, Lakota verbs fall into several categories and classes, although, for the sake of clarity, they are usually classified, as mentioned above, into only two groups, namely stative verbs and active verbs. These two types of verbs are formally distinguished by the type of personal pronouns they take. On the

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<sup>2</sup> Although the distinction between stative and active verbs is semantically motivated, sometimes this differentiation seems to be triggered by lexical criteria: for example, while *yaŋkÁ* 'sit' and *ečhúŋ* 'do' are stative verbs, *blokáskA* 'hiccup' and *pšá* 'sneeze' are active verbs, contrary to what could be expected.

<sup>3</sup> The fact that some endings appear in uppercase means that they undergo some type of vowel alternation or Ablaut.

one hand, the majority of stative verbs are intransitive and normally present an Object personal affix (i.e. the stative series), which is realized as a bound morpheme within the verb:

1 <sup>st</sup> . person singular	...- <i>ma</i> -...
2 <sup>nd</sup> . person singular	...- <i>ni</i> -...
3 <sup>rd</sup> . person singular	...-∅-...
1 <sup>st</sup> . person dual inclusive	...- <i>uŋ(k)</i> <sup>4</sup> -...
1 <sup>st</sup> . person plural exclusive	...- <i>uŋ(k)</i> -...- <i>pi</i> <sup>5</sup>
2 <sup>nd</sup> . person plural	...- <i>ni</i> --...- <i>pi</i>
3 <sup>rd</sup> . person plural animate <sup>6</sup>	
collective	...- <i>wičha</i> <sup>7</sup> -...
distributive	...-∅-... <i>pi</i>

Table 1 : The Lakota stative pronominal series.

As can be observed, third person singular is not overtly marked and, consequently, this language does not differentiate gender, which implies that the Lakota verb may refer ambiguously to any of the three genders, that is masculine, feminine or neuter:

(3) ∅ - ġópa- he

3SG:ACT-snore-ASP

'He/she/it is snoring.'

<sup>4</sup> In the first person dual and first person plural, a consonant *-k-* is added when the next word begins with a vowel.

<sup>5</sup> Although the plural marker *pi* is usually considered an enclitic, I include it in the two charts containing the pronominal series for practical reasons.

<sup>6</sup> The plural of inanimate arguments is marked by reduplication.

<sup>7</sup> The third person plural affix *wičha* does not appear to have originally behaved as a true agreement marker. The fact that there exists an homonymous term meaning 'human or man' could reflect a case of grammaticalization by which the noun *wičha*, through different stages of development, evolved into a syntactic clitic, which attached to the left edge of many collective verbs cross-referencing a non-specific argument (e.g. *wičháčheya* 'wail', *wičhahAŋ* 'stand', *wičhíyokiphi* 'be happy', *wičhóthi* 'camp', etc.), and finally became a pronominal affix standing for a third person plural animate subject and object marker of the stative series. Similarly, Williamson (1984 : 78) appears to consider *wičha* a clitic and, consequently, a suppletive form for *pi*, since, in broad terms, both clitics, namely, *pi* and *wičha* mark subjects and objects respectively. Thus, while *pi* occurs with all plural animate subjects and first and second person plural animate objects, *wičha* is mostly restricted to third person plural animate objects. Furthermore, the fact that this element occupies a more peripheral position than the other affixes, which it always precedes, could also be evidence of its distinct nature.

On the other hand, the other most important group of Lakota verbs is called active verbs, which can be intransitive, monotransitive or ditransitive. This second group of verbs is more heterogeneous than the first one and can in turn be classified into three different classes<sup>8</sup>: Class 1 (e.g. *slolyA* 'know', *máni* 'walk', *lowáŋ* 'sing', etc.), Class 2 (e.g. *yuhá* 'have', *wanyáŋka* 'see', *yÁ* 'go', etc. ) and Class 3 (e.g. *yanhá* 'sit', *ečhúŋ* 'do', *úŋ* 'use', etc.). As can be observed in the chart below, the only differences between these three classes lie in the first person singular, the second person singular and the second person plural forms. Nevertheless, despite this distinction, all active verbs are formally recognized by the fact that they take a Subject personal affix (i.e. the active series), which is also realized as a bound morpheme within the verbal complex:

1 <sup>st</sup> . person singular	Cl.1/Cl.2/Cl.3 ...-wa / bl / m-...
2 <sup>nd</sup> . person singular	Cl.1/Cl.2/Cl.3 ...-ya / l / n-...
3 <sup>rd</sup> . person singular	...-Ø-...
1 <sup>st</sup> . person dual inclusive	...-uŋ(k) -...
1 <sup>st</sup> . person plural exclusive	...-uŋ(k)-...-pi
2 <sup>nd</sup> . person plural	Cl.1/Cl.2/Cl.3 ...-ya / l / n-...-pi
3 <sup>rd</sup> . person plural animate <sup>9</sup>	
collective	...-a <sup>10</sup> /wičha-...
distributive	...-Ø-...pi

Table 2 : The Lakota active pronominal series.

Therefore, regarding argument encoding in intransitive verbs, Lakota follows a stative-active or split-intransitive alignment system, because its intransitive verbs cross-reference subjects differently. This system is both semantically and lexically motivated, that is, depending on language-specific semantic and lexical criteria, the subject of an intransitive verb in this language is sometimes marked as the subject of a transitive verb (crossreferenced with the active series) and sometimes as a direct object (crossreferenced with the stative series):

<sup>8</sup> In addition, there are some active verbs, such as *eyÁ* 'say', *yúta* 'eat' or *yÁ* 'go', *inyanka* 'run', etc., which present irregular paradigms.

<sup>9</sup> The third person plural inanimate form is never marked overtly in active verbs.

<sup>10</sup> The form *a-* is used to form a collective plural of verbs of movement (for example: *Áya* = 'They all go there.')

(4) Tanjáyŋ m(a) - ištíŋme  
well 1SG:STA-sleep  
'I slept well.'

(5) I - wa - ĥa  
STEM-1SG:ACT-smile  
'I am smiling.'

Sometimes, the same predicate may express two different meanings depending on whether it is considered as a stative verb or an active verb:

(6) Akhé wígni i- bláble  
again hunt INST-2SG:ACT+go (redup)  
'I go hunting.'

(7) Waŋ – chí -yaŋke háŋtaŋhaŋš ečhél i - má - yaye  
STEM-1SG:ACT+2SG:STA-see if properly INST-1SG:STA-go (redup)  
'If I see you, I get well.'

When the verb is monotransitive, it codes two arguments through the presence of two pronominal affixes, which belong to both the stative and active series:

(8) Yuš'íjye<sup>11</sup> - ma - ya - ye  
frightened - 1SG:STA-2SG:ACT-CAUS  
'You frightened me.'

(9) Ečhá- wičha - weči<sup>12</sup> - čuŋ  
STEM-3PL:STA-1SG:ACT+BEN- do  
'I did it for them.'

### 3 *Transitive stative verbs*

Although in most languages stative verbs are intransitive, in Lakota there are a few stative verbs that permit two participants (e.g. *iyéčheča* 'resemble', *ítaŋ* 'be proud of', *ičági* 'hinder', *ičákižA* 'suffer from the lack of something', *íŋskokeča* 'be as large as', *iyókiphi* 'please', *níčA* 'lack', etc.). This group of verbs called 'neutral verbs with two objects' (Boas & Deloria,

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<sup>11</sup> Indeed, the stative verb 'be frightened' is *yuš'íjyayA*. However, when the causative suffix *-yA* is added to this verb, it triggers the reduction of its ending.

<sup>12</sup> *Weči* is a portmanteau form that represents two different morphemes *wa* and *kiči*, which stand for a first person singular agent and the beneficiary of the action.

1941), 'double object verbs' (Williamson, 1979) or 'stative transitive verbs'<sup>13</sup> (Rood & Taylor, 1996), is not only special for having two participants, but also for encoding both of these constituents by means of pronominal affixes of the stative series (i.e. object personal affixes). Typologically speaking, this should be no surprise, given that it is common to find languages that present irregular canonical case marking (e.g. oblique subjects in Icelandic or German). What is rare is not the fact that these verbs present two stative forms, but that, as has always been assumed, the order of these two forms is rigidly fixed regardless of the function that each of the participants has, thereby giving rise to ambiguity, since these verbs express two different meanings simultaneously:

(10) Iye- ni- ma- čheča

INSTR<sup>14</sup>-2SG:STA-1SG:STA-resemble

'I resemble you.' or 'You resemble me.' (Boas & Deloria, 1941 : 77)

(11) I- ni- ma- taŋ

INSTR- 2SG:STA-1SG:STA-proud of

'I am proud of you.' or 'You are proud of me.' (Boas & Deloria, 1941 :77)

As can be observed in (10-11), the order of their two cross-referencing pronominal affixes follows a rigidly fixed order second person + first person and, therefore, this fact also appears to affect the choice of an only linear principle to account for the order of pronominal affix in this language, since these verbs are the only exception to the presumable linear ordering first person + second person.

If, as it has always been done, we assume that this view is correct, then two challenging issues arise: firstly, this considerable number of ambiguities reflects an anomalous cross-referencing system which fails to communicate an intended message in a satisfactory manner; and secondly, it represents the only exception to the ordering principle that seems to determine the linear order of pronominal affixes in this language, namely first person + second person<sup>15</sup>:

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<sup>13</sup> I use the term 'transitive stative verb' because I consider that the distinction between stative and active verbs has predominance over the property of transitivity when it comes to describing Lakota verbs. Regarding the other two terms, I think that both 'neutral verbs with two objects' and 'double object verbs' are rather misleading since they imply that the two arguments of these verbs have the syntactic function of object or the semantic role of patient, which does not appear to be correct.

<sup>14</sup> Cumberland (2005 : 224) classifies for Assiniboine Nakota prefixes such as *-a-*, *-e-*, *-i-*, or *-o-* as locatives with the meanings of 'at/on', 'by means of/with/against/in reference to', and 'in/within' respectively. She also adds that sometimes two different locative prefixes (e.g. *-i-* and *-e-*) may co-occur, being then separated by an epenthetic *-y-* or a glottal stop.

<sup>15</sup> Except for the combination first person singular actor and second person singular or plural patient, both of which are represented by the portmanteau form *chi*, the remaining combinations display the order first person + second person, which appears to have been the original ordering principle. In this sequence of linear order I have not included third person since third person is never overtly marked in this language and, regarding the third person plural marker *wičha*, there is some evidence that appears to show that this element did not behave originally as a true agreement marker (see footnote 6).

(12) The- má- ya- hila

STEM-1SG:STA-2SG:ACT-love

'You love me.'

(13) The- uŋ- ni- hila - pi

STEM-1PL:ACT-2SG:STA-love- PL

'We love you.'

(14) The- uŋ- ya- hila - pi

STEM-1PL:STA-2PL:ACT-love- PL

'You (pl) love us.'

The main problem concerning the analysis of these forms involving transitive stative verbs lies in the fact that there is hardly any evidence of early stages of development in this language and these examples are extremely rare even in older written sources. This language was first put into written form by missionaries around 1840 and it is therefore very difficult to reconstruct its pre-history in order to develop general theories about how and why language changes have occurred. In light of this situation, there is only one (indirect) way to access the language historical development: the comparison with other related languages within the same family, which allows deductions and hypotheses for establishing the relative chronology of development of the morphology. Thus, after consulting native informants speaking closely related and mutually intelligible Sioux languages, such as Sičhángu (Brulé) Lakota, Íyârhe (Stoney) Nakoda, and Sisithuŋwaŋ-Waǰpétuŋwaŋ (Sisseton-Wahpeton) Dakota, I have found out that some speakers consider it archaic but also grammatically correct to alter the order of these pronominal affixes *ni-ma* on the basis of the grammatical function of the arguments corefering with them. In fact, West (2003 : 107) provides us with examples in Assiniboine Nakota that appear to confirm this hypothesis. Thus, the following examples illustrate how it is possible to find occurrences of pronominal affixes that follow the order *ma-ni*:

In Lakota:

(15a) I- ni - ma - štušte ye/yelo

INSTR-2SG:STA-1SG:STA-tired of IF

'I am tired of you.'

(15b) I- ma- ni- štušte ye/yelo

INSTR-1SG:STA-2SG:STA- tired of IF

'You are tired of me.'

In Nakota<sup>16</sup> :

(16a) I – ni - ma - stusta  
INSTR-2SG:STA-1SG:STA-tired of  
'I am tired of you.'

(16b) I- ma- ni- stusta  
INSTR-1SG:STA-2SG:STA- tired of  
'You are tired of me.'

In Dakota :

(17a) I – ni - ma - štušte ye/do  
INSTR-2SG:STA-1SG:STA-tired of IF  
'I am tired of you.'

(17b) I- ma- ni- štušte ye/do  
INSTR-1SG:STA-2SG:STA- tired of IF  
'You are tired of me.'

It seems evident that the forms above mirror an older stage of Lakota. This can be confirmed by the fact that, for other examples of transitive stative verbs, such as *ítaŋ* 'be proud of' or *iyéčheča* 'resemble', my native consultants<sup>17</sup> favour a more modern expression, which involves the use of independent personal pronouns and a causative construction:

(18) Niyé i- ní- ma- taŋ- ye  
you INSTR- 2SG:STA-1SG:STA-proud of - CAUS  
'You are proud of me.'

(19) Niyé iye- ní - ma- čhe<sup>18</sup>- ye  
you INSTR -2SG:STA-1SG:STA- resemble-CAUS  
'You resemble me.'

Following Williamson (1984: 35), I claim that these stative verbs containing two object forms were originally intransitive verbs that became transitive by means of the addition of an oblique argument. This argument is considered oblique because it is preceded by a

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<sup>16</sup> West (2003 : 107) provides these examples in Assiniboine Nakota, which confirm this hypothesis. Yet, unlike her, as will be discussed in more detail below, I argue that the order of the two stative forms is object + subject, rather than subject + object.

<sup>17</sup> Unless indicated, all the examples provided belong to the Lakota dialect.

<sup>18</sup> The presence of the causative suffix *-yA* triggers the phonological reduction of the verbal root.

prepositional prefix, which always triggers objective case and selects a pronominal affix of the stative series. Thus, these transitive stative verbs, like *ištúšta* 'be tired of', *ištéčA* 'be ashamed of' or *iyókiphi* 'be pleased with' can be compared to other transitive active verbs that also require oblique arguments, such as *ikhókiphá* 'be afraid of', *iwányanġka* 'look at sth in regard to / examine', *iwóglakA* 'tell sth about', *anáwizi* 'be jealous of' or *iĥát'A* 'laugh at':

- (20) I-        khó - wiġha - wa - kipĥe  
 INSTR –STEM-3PL:STA-1SG:ACT- be afraid of  
 'I am afraid of them.'

As these transitive uses of both stative and active verbs are either not recognized or regarded as archaic by most speakers today, they could be considered a reflection of a more synthetic period in the evolution of this language. Accordingly, these prefixes, such as *i-* or *a-*, may have lost their original locative or instrumental meaning and have now acquired a new meaning. In the case of the prefix *i-*, although it is believed to have originally meant 'at / against', its modern meanings appear to be those of 'with / on account of / with reference to /with respect to' (Buechel, 1939 : 116; Cumberland, 2005: 224). Thus, formerly, when the language had a more synthetic nature, these locatives and instrumental markers were originally prefixed to the verbal complex bearing their object. Over time, in its development towards a more analytic grammar, Lakota started to make use of adpositions, which behaved like adverbials, since they stood on their own. Subsequently, these adverb-like elements became postpositions when they attracted their objects by taking them out of the verbal complex and inserted them in front of themselves, as can be observed in the following pair of sentences:

- (21a) Ikhiyéla uŋ- ya- thi-pi  
 LOC 1:STA-2SG:ACT-live-PL  
 'You live near us.'
- (21b) Uŋk-ikhiyéla-pi ya- thi  
 1:STA-LOC-PL 2SG:ACT-live  
 'You live near us.'

Example (21a) is believed to be an older form than (21b): this could reflect the evolution of this language from a polysynthetic nature to a more analytic one. An even more ancient feature of this language could have consisted in having the adposition attached to the verbal complex as a prefix, as it seems to be suggested by (20) and (22), examples involving intransitive verbs that require an instrumental or locative prefix respectively:

- (22) A-        čhi        - híŋpaye  
 LOC-1SG:ACT+2SG:STA- fall  
 'I fall on you.' (Boas & Deloria, 1941 : 77)

Therefore, we could argue that forms like *inimataŋ* 'I am proud of you' were originally formed by a prepositional affix along with its object plus the obligatory argument of the non-verbal predicate *atáŋ* 'proud of'. In summary, instead of being transitive stative verbs, they

should be considered intransitive stative verbs with oblique arguments. The problem is that, as both the oblique argument and the argument which is obligatorily subcategorized for by the verb occur in stative form, there is no morphosyntactic distinction today between these two arguments in terms of pronominal series.

Taking this assumption into consideration, we could assume that, formerly, it was also possible to build similar constructions, where the two stative cross-referencing forms involve the third person collective plural form *wičha* and the first person plural form *uŋ(k)*, as illustrated by the following (hypothetical) constructions:

(23) ??? I-        ma        - wičha- štušta

INSTR-1SG:STA-3PC:STA-tired of

‘They are tired of me.’

(24) ??? I-        ni        - uŋ- štušta- pi

INSTR-1SG:STA-1:STA-tired of-PL

‘We are tired of you.’

The only remaining problem would be to account for the fact that there are some stative predicates like *níčA* ‘lack’ that can also function as transitive and therefore they present two stative pronominal affixes, but that, unlike the other transitive stative verbs, they do not present the prefix *i-* attached to the verbal stem. Perhaps we could speculate that formerly these verbs were originally intransitive verbs, which gradually became transitive verbs, at first maybe only accepting inanimate objects, and subsequently accepting animate objects by analogy with the other transitive stative verbs. Consequently, this new obligatory constituent (i.e. the object) had to be expressed by means of a pronominal affix of the stative series.

#### 4 *Conclusion*

The aim of this paper has been to give an account of the two series of pronominal affixes in Lakota, placing special emphasis on the encoding of the two arguments in transitive stative verbs. Although it is not possible to find evidence of earlier stages of this language that allows us to find out what the origin of these verbs was, it seems advisable to take into consideration the examples provided by native speakers of related languages such as Nakota and Dakota and, consequently, not to take it for granted, as it has been done to date, that the order of the cross-referencing pronominal affixes in this minor group of verbs presents a rigidly fixed order second person + first person, which leads to a considerable number of ambiguous meanings. In fact, the acceptance of these new examples in the language would be positive for two main reasons: firstly, it would make the argument encoding system more typologically coherent and consistent, since it is extremely rare to find languages that present a similar situation to that of Lakota where the two cross-referencing forms for the subject and object occur in a fixed order and express two different meanings simultaneously; and secondly, this would demonstrate that there are no transitive stative verbs in this language indeed, because these verbs would be then considered originally intransitive verbs, which incorporated an oblique element into the verbal complex, owing to the fact that this language exhibited a more synthetic grammar than it does nowadays.

If this assumption were true, it would have a much farther-reaching consequence than the mere acceptance of the examples as grammatically correct: the long-standing issue regarding which is the linear order of pronominal affixes that operates in this language would come to an end, since there would be no more exceptions to the ordering principle first person + second person. Therefore, it seems plausible to argue that we can only understand affix order in this language by assuming a diachronical perspective and that, consequently, after discarding the third person plural marker *wičha* as an original pronominal affix, the search for an ordering principle of affixes in this language must be reduced to the one exhibited by the combination between first and second persons, which leads to the order first person + second person. Except for the combination first person singular actor and second person singular or plural patient, both of which are represented by the portmanteau form *čhi*, the remaining combinations display the order first person + second person, which appears to have been the original ordering principle.

I am aware that the evidence offered in this paper is not supportive enough and, consequently, far from being conclusive. For this reason, far more work is required before my hypothesis can be substantiated. Nevertheless, taking into account that this language is highly endangered<sup>19</sup> and given that it is very difficult to find first-language speakers of Lakota with a high level of proficiency, who use the language on a daily basis and even more difficult to find attested evidence in this language, it could be worth considering examples of similar constructions in such related languages as Nakota and Dakota, which are equally endangered.

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<sup>19</sup> Although Lakhota is one of the few Native American languages that still counts its speakers in the thousands, it is still considered to be highly endangered, since it is in a situation where inter-generational transmission has already been interrupted because the parents are not proficient enough to pass on the language

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