Many non-Indians have undertaken the study of the language of the Sioux Indians for various reasons. In the early nineteenth century, missionaries studied and learned the language of the Sioux tribes in Minnesota and Dakota Territories as a necessary prerequisite to their work. In the 1880s, the federal government recognized the need for accurate scientific information about the lives, customs, beliefs, and languages of the Indian tribes inhabiting the Great Plains and the West. Congress, through the Bureau of American Ethnology, commissioned a number of scholars to study these diverse tribes and to publish their findings in a series of bulletins and annual reports. After the 1930s, when English clearly became the dominant language on the reservations, language research became the province of university-trained scholars in field or applied linguistics.

The Siouan language family, as outlined by J. W. Powell in 1891, covered a large territory, with speakers as far east as North Carolina and as far south as Biloxi, Mississippi, as well as west to the Rocky Mountains and north into Canada.1 Sioux tribes

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residing in North and South Dakota speak one of three dialects belonging to the Siouan family. Nakota, or the N dialect, is spoken by the Yankton on the Yankton Reservation and the Yanktonai on the Standing Rock Reservation, the Lower Crow Creek Reservation, and the Fort Totten Reservation. Dakota, or the D dialect, is spoken by the Mdewakantonwan at Flandreau; the Sisseton on the Sisseton and Fort Totten Reservations; and the Wahpeton at Sisseton, Flandreau, and Fort Totten. The L dialect, Lakota, is spoken by the largest group, the Teton, or Western Sioux. The bands of the Teton are the Hunkpapa and the Sihasapa (Blackfoot) at Standing Rock; the Minneconjou, the Sihasapa, the Oohenonpa (Two Kettle), and Sans Arc at Cheyenne River; the Brule and Ogilala at Rosebud; the Brule at Lower Brule Reservation; and the Brule and Ogilala at Pine Ridge. There are only slight differences in pronunciation and vocabulary among the dialects. A Lakota speaker has no difficulty conversing with a Dakota speaker.

There are two major periods in the early study of Dakota/Lakota language though they are closely related and somewhat overlapping. The first studies were the publications of the missionaries to the Santee, or Eastern Sioux. The second group of publications deals mainly with the Teton and was sponsored by the Bureau of American Ethnology.

Missionaries began their work among the Santee living in Minnesota in the 1820s and 1830s. Joseph Renville, of French and Indian descent, established a trading post at Lac qui Parle on the Minnesota River in 1826. As was happening throughout the frontier, the traders were soon followed by the missionaries. In 1834, Samuel Pond and his brother Gideon left their Connecticut village to settle among the Sioux for the purpose of converting them to Christianity. Encountering the Sioux at Prairie de Chien, they began their language study by asking Dakota words for objects. Later, when they settled at Lake Calhoun, they also used the word lists made up by army officers in the area. In 1836, Gideon Pond went to Renville’s post at Lac qui Parle where he met Dr. Thomas Williamson, a physician and Episcopal missionary. A year later, Rev. Stephen Return Riggs joined this "Dakota Mission.” The Pond brothers assisted both Williamson

2. While all of these groups were originally Nakota speakers, the N dialect has now mixed with the D or L dialects in many areas.

and Riggs in learning Dakota. They began by translating hymns and simple Bible stories, but their most ambitious project was the translating of both the New and Old Testament into Dakota. Ella Deloria, daughter of the Episcopal minister Philip Deloria, gives this description of how the work proceeded:

It is a log house, ample and many roomed, for it is the home of the French and Dakota fur trader, Renville, a man of keen intellect, though without any schooling to speak of and without any fluency in English. In a bare room with flickering candlelight he sits hour on hour of an evening after a hard day of manual work. Dr. Riggs and his helpers are across the table from him. They are working on the translations. It is a blessing inestimable for all Dakota missions that Drs. Williamson and Riggs are scholars. One of them reads a verse—in Hebrew, if it is from the Old Testament, or in Greek, if from the New. He ponders its essence, stripped of idiom, and then he gives it in French. Renville, receiving it thus in his father's civilized language, now thinks it through very carefully and at length turns it out again, this time in his mother's primitive tongue. Slowly and patiently he repeats it as often as needed while Dr. Riggs and the others write it down in the Dakota phonetics already devised by the Pond brothers.

Riggs and Williamson worked together for a number of years. Their work on a Dakota grammar was supported in part by the American Board of Commissioners for Foreign Missions and the Historical Society of Minnesota. In 1852, the Smithsonian Institution printed *A Dakota Grammar and Dictionary* as part of its Contributions to Knowledge series. Although the title page noted that the material was “collected by the members of the Dakota Mission” and only edited by Riggs, the Pond brothers felt that they had not been given adequate credit for their part in the contribution. A translation of *Pilgrim's Progress*, entitled *Canteteca*, by Riggs, appeared in 1858. John Williamson, the son of Dr. Thomas Williamson, also worked with the Santee, and his Dakota-English dictionary came out in 1868, with new editions in 1871.

5. Ella Deloria, *Speaking of Indians* (New York: Friendship Press, 1944), p. 103. Deloria further informs us that “parts of the New Testament had been translated by 1840 and it was completed in 1865. The whole Bible was ready by 1879” (p. 102). The American Bible Society in New York published the entire Bible in 1879, under the title *Dakota Wowapi Wakan*, and credited the translation to Williamson and Riggs.
1886, and 1902. In 1890, an expanded version of the 1852 Riggs dictionary was republished as the seventh volume in the Contributions to North American Ethnology series of the Bureau of American Ethnology, a series originally supervised by the U.S. Geographical and Geological Survey of the Rocky Mountain Region. Rigg’s *Dakota Grammar, Texts, and Ethnography* was the ninth and last volume in this series in 1893. Listed as storytellers in this 1893 volume were four Dakota speakers: Michael Renville, the son of Joseph Renville; David Grey Cloud, a
Presbyterian preacher; Walking Elk, a Yankton Dakota; and James Garvie, a teacher at the Nebraska Indian School established by Rev. Alfred Riggs, the son of Stephen Return Riggs. The inclusion of these stories was significant because it marked the first printing of native speakers telling their own stories in their own language rather than Dakota translations of English stories.

There can be no doubt that the dictionaries, grammars, and translations were of great value to the many missions in the Dakotas, and they continued to be used for a number of years. However, the purposes of Riggs and his colleagues were not to preserve the culture and language of the Dakota but to use the language as a vehicle for bringing about the transition to English and non-Indian customs. In the “Ethnography” of his *Dakota Grammar, Texts, and Ethnography*, Riggs wrote:

> Let a well arranged severalty bill be enacted into law, and Indians be guaranteed civil rights as other men, and they will soon cease to be Indians.

> The Indian tribes of our continent may become extinct as such; but if this extinction is brought about by introducing them to civilization and christianity and merging them into our great nation, which is receiving accretions from all others, who will deplore the result? Rather let us labor for it, realizing that if by our efforts they cease to be Indians and become fellow-citizens it will be our glory and joy."

While the above publications were based on missionary work with the Santee, other missionaries also worked among the Lakota, or Teton Sioux. For example, Rev. Eugene Buechel, a native of Germany, began his official ministry at the Holy Rosary Mission on the Pine Ridge Reservation in 1907 under the auspices of the Catholic church. For nearly forty years, he collected Lakota words for a dictionary. In 1939, he published a detailed grammatical study, *A Grammar of Lakota*. His dictionary of Lakota, which is the best source currently available, was published in 1970. Valuable as all of these scholarly works are, they do have limitations in the linguistic study of Dakota/Lakota language. Dr. Franz Boas of Columbia University commented on Buechel's work: "The analysis of Dakota in Buechel's Grammar is based on the theory that every syllable has a meaning. The arrangement is that of an English Grammar with Dakota equivalents. Since much of the material is based on Bible transla-

tions and prayers, many unidiomatic forms occur." 10 The same is true of the Riggs work.

Following the Civil War, the United States government turned its attention to the problems of the western territories. For purposes of treaty-making and administration, the government needed to locate, identify, and classify the various western tribes under some sort of central system. In 1879, Congress authorized the creation of the Bureau of American Ethnology, under the Smithsonian Institution, to undertake this work, which had begun earlier under the U.S. Geographical and Geological Survey of the Rocky Mountain Region in the Department of Interior. Congress further authorized the publication of a series of bulletins and annual reports. The Bureau of American Ethnology ultimately produced 48 volumes in its series of annual reports and 200 bulletins in its series of anthropological papers, in which the topics were "as broad as were contemporary interests in the field of anthropology." 11

One of the first publications of the Bureau of Ethnology was "Indian Linguistic Families of America North of Mexico," compiled by J. W. Powell, in the Seventh Annual Report of the Bureau of American Ethnology, 1885-86. With comparatively few changes, Powell's outline has continued to hold up to scholarly investigations to the present time. James Owen Dorsey's "Study of Siouan Cults" was also published by the bureau in 1894 (Eleventh Annual Report . . . 1889-90). Dorsey had been a missionary to the Ponca Indians in Nebraska from 1871 to 1873. He did comparative studies of the languages of the Ponca, Omaha, Kansa, Winnebago, and Biloxi. Unlike other missionaries, Dorsey adopted an objective approach to language and legends. By his own experience, he discovered a principle that Franz Boas of Columbia University was to stress with his linguistic students; that is, "it is safer to let the Indian tell his own story in his own words than to endeavor to question him in such a manner as to reveal what answers are

desired or expected.” Although Dorsey did not include the Dakota/Lakota texts, he cites as his native informants John Bruyier, a Dakota speaker, and George Bushotter, a Lakota speaker.

James Mooney’s work “The Ghost Dance Religion of the American Indian” appeared in 1896 in the *Fourteenth Annual Report… 1892-93.* In his introduction, Mooney writes, “the main purpose of the work is not linguistic, and as nearly every tribe concerned speaks a different language from all the others, any close linguistic study must be left to the philologist who can afford to devote a year or more to an individual tribe. The only one of these tribes of which the author claims intimate knowledge is the Kiowa.” His Lakota-speaking informants included American Horse, Fire Thunder, and George Sword of Pine Ridge, South Dakota. With the exception of some words and phrases, Mooney does not include the original language texts in his work on the Sioux.

Yet another important study published by the Bureau of Ethnology was Frances Densmore’s *Teton Sioux Music* in 1918. Densmore listed as informants Robert P. Higheagle, a graduate of Hampton, and Mrs. James McLaughlin, the Dakota-speaking wife of Major James McLaughlin at Standing Rock, and many singers from Standing Rock. Densmore recorded the words of the Lakota songs, but most of the text is in English. The many reports and bulletins written for the Bureau of American Ethnology contain a wealth of information about the Sioux. Even though the scholars did not include the original language versions in their publications, most of the manuscripts were preserved in museum collections.

In 1917, the American Museum of Natural History published *The Sun Dance and Other Ceremonies of the Oglala Division of the Teton Dakota* by J. R. Walker. Walker was a physician at the Pine Ridge Agency who became close friends with many of the Lakota religious leaders. Although he consulted many sources,

13. Ibid., pp. 362-63.
Walker relied heavily on the accounts of George Sword. Sword, an Oglala, was the chief of the Indian police at the Pine Ridge Agency in the 1890s and had also been a prominent member of his band before its close contact with the whites. Although he could neither write nor speak English, he wrote pages and pages in old Lakota, using the phonetic forms. Walker wrote of him that he "was a man of marked ability with a philosophical trend far beyond the average Oglala." Much of what is known about the societies, mythology, and religion of the Tetons before white contact is derived from the Sword manuscripts. Unfortunately, the Walker volume also fails to include the entire Lakota texts, giving only words and phrases.

Research in Indian languages entered a new phase in the 1930s under the direction of Franz Boas of Columbia University. In his earlier introduction to the Handbook of American Indian Languages, published in 1911 by the Bureau of American Ethnology as Bulletin 40, Boas had given "a clear statement of fundamental theory and of basic methodological principles which demonstrate the inadequacy of the old methods and point to new paths of research which were to lead to impressive results." Basically, Boas stressed that thorough knowledge of the language was the key to understanding everything else: "we must insist that a command of the language is an indispensable means of obtaining accurate and thorough knowledge, because much information can be gained by listening to conversations of the natives and by taking part in their daily life, which, to the observer who has no command of the language, will remain entirely inaccessible." Boas was conversant in Dakota/Lakota, but he trusted more to the authority of the native speaker than to the linguist working through translation. In 1929, Boas invited Ella Deloria to accept a position as Dakota language researcher in ethnology and linguistics in the Department of Anthropology at Columbia University. It was certainly a logical choice.

Ella Deloria was born in 1888. She was raised at Saint

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17. Ibid., p. 59.
Elizabeth’s Mission on the Standing Rock Reservation where her father, the Reverend Philip Deloria, was the Episcopal priest. She grew up in a large circle of relatives and friends, speaking the Dakota dialect of her parents and the Lakota dialect of the Hunkpapa. The Riggs and Williamson books were her first textbooks. As teachers arrived from the East, she also learned to speak and write in English. She was intelligent, eager to learn, and had a natural faculty for language learning. After completing secondary school at All Saints School in Sioux Falls, Deloria studied at Oberlin College and, finally, at Columbia University (1913-1914). Deloria was trained in linguistic theory, research methods, and phonetics. For nearly twelve years, she worked with Boas. The general arrangement was that she spend half her time on the Sioux reservations, collecting stories and verifying accounts, and the other half in New York, editing and transcribing the manuscripts of Bushotter, Sword, and others.20

Deloria’s abilities differed from those who preceded her in two important ways. Unlike the non-Indian missionaries who learned Dakota/Lakota as adults working through translations, Deloria knew the nuances and subtle shades of meaning accessible only to one who has grown up in the culture. Unlike Sword and other native informants, she was proficient in English as well. The results of her work are two remarkable volumes. Dakota Texts, published in 1932, is a collection of sixty-four tales and legends recorded directly and exactly from Lakota storytellers from Standing Rock, Pine Ridge, and Rosebud. One tale, “The Deer Woman,” is in the Nakota dialect from her father. Deloria included the original text in phonetic transcription, literal translations, and free translations with explanatory grammatical notes. In collaboration with Boas, she produced Dakota Grammar (1941), which is the most complete and detailed grammar available. This grammar describes the language in terms of its own structure and uses categories as they function in Lakota rather than applying the categories as they occur in Latin, German, or English. Ella Deloria continued her research throughout the 1960s, producing numerous magazine articles and other books, but her manuscript for a Lakota-English dictionary remained incomplete at the time of her death in 1971. This manuscript and others are in the Ella Deloria Collection at the University of South Dakota.

During the present decade there has been a revival of interest in language study. Many young Indian college students, desiring to maintain their tribal identity and cultural participation, are seeking to learn the languages of their grandparents. The demand for written texts has resulted in reprints and facsimile reproductions of many of the earlier works. The following bibliography of Dakota/Lakota language studies includes the major works discussed in this essay as well as texts and tales printed in the last decade. It does not, however, include the translations of the Bible or of hymns and other religious material that were published abundantly during the latter half of the last century.

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MANUSCRIPT COLLECTIONS AND GUIDES


STUDIES OF THE SIOUAN LANGUAGE FAMILY

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