

Overview Native Languages of New England

Wampanoag--also known as Massachusett, Pokanoket or Natick--was an [Algonkian](#) language of New England. The language is no longer spoken in Wampanoag communities today, although some Wampanoag people are trying to [revive](#) it

<http://www.native-languages.org/wampanoag.htm>

http://www.wampanoagtribe.net/Pages/Wampanoag_Education/language

Wampanoag Language Reclamation Project

The goal of the Wôpanâak Language Reclamation Project is the reclamation of the Wôpanâak language (also spelled Wampanoag; Wôpanâak is the spelling in the modern orthography). This language was once spoken in eastern Massachusetts, but has had no speakers in over a century. On the other hand, it enjoys a particularly large corpus of texts (including a translation of the [Bible](#) by John Eliot in 1663, the first complete Bible in any language published in this hemisphere, and a number of legal documents, mainly deeds and wills, written by native speakers and recently collected and analyzed by [Kathleen Bragdon and Ives Goddard](#)), and it is a member of the large [Algonquian](#) family of languages, which has been studied by linguists for many decades. The project takes advantage of both of these fortunate circumstances, combining careful study of the available texts with cross-linguistic comparison within the Algonquian family, which allows us to reconstruct the grammar, pronunciation, and vocabulary of the language.

The Wôpanâak Language Reclamation Project began in 1993 as a collaborative project between the tribes of the Wampanoag Nation. MIT became involved in 1996, when [Jessie Littledoe Baird](#), a member of the [Mashpee Wampanoag Tribe](#), began working formally here at MIT with the late [Ken Hale](#), a renowned linguistic scholar with a long history of work with many Native American languages. The project benefited greatly from the work of a number of graduate students, including [Benjamin Bruening](#) and [Andrea Rackowski](#); [Norvin Richards](#) began working on the project in 1999, when he joined the faculty here.

After receiving her Masters degree in linguistics in 2000, Baird returned to Mashpee, and now teaches classes in Wôpanâak in Mashpee and on [Aquinnah](#) at several levels, including an immersion course in which only Wôpanâak is spoken (classes may be attended only by members of the tribe). Nitana Hicks, one of Baird's Wôpanâak students, received her own Master's degree in linguistics here in 2006, and has begun helping with the reclamation work. Baird, Hicks, and Richards continue to work on pedagogical materials for the language, including a dictionary and a textbook.

The dictionary currently contains approximately 8200 words; click [here](#) to see a sample entry.

For more information, contact [Jessie Littledoe Baird](#) or [Norvin Richards](#).