

## **Abraham M. Halpern - Summary of his linguistic research**

Transcribed by J. Gary Fox 7/2014

Halpern is part of the Epstein-Miller-Family Tree on Ancestry.

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From page 53 of:

### **California Indian Languages By Victor Golla**

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In many ways the most productive of the California Linguists of the 1930s was Abraham M. Halpern (1914-1985).

Soon after graduating from Harvard at the precocious age of nineteen, Halpern began graduate work in anthropological linguistics at Berkeley. In 1935-36 in the depths of the Depression - he worked steadily for nearly a year, primarily on Quechan, as part of a State Emergency Relief project designed to teach elders to write their language and record their traditional literature. The following year he began an ambitious project to compile a thorough structural linguistic documentation of each the Pomo languages. By 1937, however, it became clear that he needed further support for his work than Berkeley was able to offer.

He withdrew from the Berkeley program and enrolled as a graduate student of the University of Chicago, where he was able to study under Harry Hoijer, an early student of Sapir (see para 2.9.3). With Chicago's support he returned to work further on Quechan. In 1938 and on Pomo in 1939-40 (Halpern 1964). His dissertation, a grammar of Quechan, completed in 1940 and published in 1946-47, was the first detailed grammar of a Yuman language and set the paradigm for future research on the family (Langdon 1997a).

Halpern's American Indian work - like the work of nearly all of his contemporaries - was interrupted by World War II. He spent the war years devising and supervising a course on Japanese for army and navy officers, and during the immediate postwar years, work as an adviser to the U.S. Occupation forces in Japan.

During the decades that followed, Halpern pursued a career as a research analyst on contemporary Asian affairs for several nongovernmental organizations, most notable the Rand Corporation. After his retirement in 1976, he reestablished his ties both with academic linguistics and with the Quechan tribe and during his remaining years carried out further fieldwork both on Quechan (1978-1981) and Pomo (1982-1984)