#LearnFromHome: Indigenous Language Revitalization in Canada during COVID-19 – Accelerating Online Pedagogies and Language Promotion

Laura Gallant
Supervisor: Dr. Tania Granadillo
Advisor: Dr. Karen Pennesi
January 29, 2021
Outline

1. Context
2. Research Questions
3. Research Methods
4. Preliminary Findings
5. Theoretical Approaches
6. Next Steps
7. Acknowledgments
Pre-COVID Research Plan

• Intended research focus: Oneida language revitalization at a children’s immersion summer camp
• Language revitalization and childhood
• Planned methods: semi-structured interviews and participant observation
March 11, 2020: WHO declared the coronavirus outbreak a pandemic

Lockdown orders

Border closures

Quarantine measures have precluded and complicated many language revitalization activities
Brief Background: Language Revitalization and Language Policy in Canada

• Colonizing practices
• Truth and Reconciliation Commission (2015)
• Indigenous Languages Act (2019)
• Bill C-10 (November 2020)
• Bill C-15 (December 2020)
• Global: UNESCO IYIL (2019) and upcoming International Decade of Indigenous Languages (2022-2032)
Research Questions

• What are some of the challenges and opportunities for Indigenous language revitalization (ILR) efforts in Canada during COVID-19?

• What adaptations and strategies are being created and implemented in place of in-person instruction and learning?

• What roles can Indigenous-directed technologies and the Internet play in the promotion of Indigenous languages?
Research Methods

1. Searching and coding Tweets pertaining to ILR in Canada from March - November 2020
2. Online Survey
3. Non-participant virtual observation
   - Oneida immersion class for adult learners
   - Online, synchronous webinars (on YouTube) with panelists from Canada talking about their experiences with ILR and digital language activism during COVID-19
4. Administrative support for an Indigenous language instructor and course at Western
5. Semi-structured virtual interviews with students of Indigenous language course at Western
Tools for Data Collection and Analysis

• NCapture
• Excel
• NVivo
**Twitter: An Overview of Findings**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>769 Tweets</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>66 Indigenous languages</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>9 language families &amp; 2 language isolates</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Twitter Analytics

Frequencies of Twitter Themes

- Health Promotion
- COVID Affecting Languages
- Online/Distance Classes
- Resource/Art Sharing
- Work/Funding/Training
- Language and Culture
- Innovations
Indigenous Languages in Use on Twitter

• Super-ordinate category in coding: Indigenous language use
  • Indigenous language in use, not just mentioned
  • 45.5% of Tweets included one or more Indigenous languages in use (spoken, written, signed)
Indigenous Languages on Twitter – Examples

Ojibwe is mentioned within an English sentence

Heiltsuk is in use in this Tweet – both written and spoken (pronunciation video attached)
Indigenous Language Use on Twitter
Word of the Day

Endangered Languages Project
@ELProject

Our final #Halloween word of the day! What’s the word for SKELETON 🎃 in your language? (Learn more about Mohawk at [18r.it/kXWZ](https://18r.it/kXWZ), and find more Halloween vocab at [18r.it/3nsx](https://18r.it/3nsx)!

#WordOfTheDay #Mohawk #Kaniñenkeha #IndigenousLanguages #Languages

---

Resource/Art Sharing

Alexander James
@alleyjayz

Ostoshó'oh gekwayēoh 🎃 Q. Sedeñjiakha:’ anyways! 😂. Here’s a preview to my final project for a first year in a Seneca Language immersion program. I had a blast filming with @calebgabrams 🔥 I’ll post a link to the full video on my website.
Health Promotion

Táka' täsalenýát kanuhwaktáhsła' don't spread the disease

yotkáte' ašakewanu' khaše' disinfect tš'i' nuy yotkáte' kénųyę́yę́ wipe and disinfect frequently touched areas
sáha' tat ukha' ok yakonuhwáktanih' especially if someone is sick

yáyak níyohsitáke' ná'tatsyatláte' tatawatu stay 6 ft. apart if possible

6 ft

táka uhka tashenatsákala' don't shake anyone's hand
ocýa níyót tši' tashenahelu' greet same other way

táka kanike' níyohše' tat yahke' sata'kaling don't go anywhere if you are sick

9:25 PM · Apr 9, 2020 · Twitter for iPhone
1 Like

Kci (kitsi) nínxválaxsila - do not be too close together

’Ktsi nínxválaxsila
Don’t be close together.

9:25 AM · Apr 9, 2020 · Twitter for iPhone
1 Like
COVID Affecting Indigenous Languages, Learners, Speakers, Communities

Dr. Gerald Roche
@GiosephRoche

This from a FB group on language rights. There are many communities in the world like this.

“In my own community, language keepers are over 60 years old. If we lose them in this pandemic, it’s going to be devastating to our culture and language.”

— COURTNEY SKYE

6:33 PM · Mar 17, 2020 · Twitter Web App

64 Retweets 6 Quote Tweets 146 Likes

Heiltsuk Council
@HeiltsukCouncil

Elders are our greatest teachers. They are also highly vulnerable to COVID19.

It’s our responsibility to do everything we can to keep them safe. This is an #ActOfLove

This is not the time for visiting Muxwots gotw laukvims - we are one and we are strong! #HeiltsukStrong

6:27 PM · Apr 9, 2020 · Twitter for iPhone

57 Retweets 2 Quote Tweets 107 Likes
Online or Distanced Language Classes/Workshops

Indigenous language work in person may be on hold, but language revitalization is still happening remotely - raising new questions like, "How do you say 'the zoom video call is frozen,' in Nsyilxcən?"

Revitalizing a language, one video call at a time - APTN News
An organization is using technology to continue teaching an Indigenous language online during the COVID-19 pandemic.

Last week, Stoney Nakoda speakers gathered with linguists for a class discussing the sound system of the language and to review the Stoney Nakoda textbook. This week, speakers and linguists are working to transcribe Stoney Nakoda stories. Thanks everyone for your hard work!
Sharing Resources/Art

Word of the day
Siqiniq nipijuq
Si-qi-niq ni-pi-juq
Sunset
(Image: Ooloosie Salla’s Sunlit Sky)
#Inuktitut #Inuit
Listen here:
soundcloud.com/user-817699715...

The launch of three Kanien’kéha (Mohawk language) children’s board books is part of a goal to provide language resources for families to use at home.
#languageinthenews

Startup publisher in Kahnawake launches three Indigenous-language children’s b...
A new publishing house in Kahnawake, on Montreal’s South Shore, is launching three all-Kanien’kéha (Mohawk language) children’s board books, based on ...

11:39 PM - Jul 26, 2020 - Twitter Web App
10 Retweets 16 Likes
Opportunities for Work/Funding/Training

FPCC
@_FPCC

Preserve your language for future generations and start your Language Technology Program application today! LTP combines #FirstVoices and #digitization grants into ONE program! $ Access up to $180,000 for training & technology.💡 Learn more: fpcc.ca/program/LTP

Language Technology Program
Deadline April 5, 2021

2:43 PM - Oct 22, 2020 - Twitter Web App
6 Retweets 1 Quote Tweet 5 Likes

Listuguj Mi’gmaq Gov
@ListugujGov

The Listuguj Mi’gmaq Government is looking for Mi’gmaq language speakers with traditional and contemporary knowledge to take part in our ‘Nnu’sultinej – Let’s Speak Mi’gmaq video project.

Please contact us by Friday, July 17th, 2020.

Call Out For: Mi’gmaq Speakers and Knowledge Keepers!

‘Nnu’sultinej – Let’s Speak Mi’gmaq

We are looking for Mi’gmaq Speakers and Knowledge Keepers who are willing to participate in various upcoming video projects!

Through various video creations, we are working to revitalize, promote and share Mi’gmaq knowledge, language, history, and culture, for our community, those in our web of relations and for the generations to come.

Deadline: July 17, 2020

For more information, please contact:
Erika Marchand: erika.mar and@listuguj.ca
Chad Goodwin: cgoodwin@listuguj.ca
Diane Mitchell: dmitchell@gmail.com
Emma Metallic: emma.metall@listuguj.ca
Listuguj Band Office: 418-788-2136

9:33 AM - Jul 3, 2020 - Twitter Web App
2 Retweets 3 Likes
Language and Culture

"Our language is strong; it has a spirit. Every time we speak our language it's almost as if we're praying—it's very powerful. It's not something to be played with," says 17 year old Cree language and culture advocate, Davis Swindler. #Wichitowin2020 wichitowin.ca

Severn Cullis-Suzuki describes the litany of assaults against the Haida language and how COVID-19 quarantine has granted her family space to reconnect with language and culture.

#language #Haida #Indigenous #Indigenouslanguages #COVID_19 #coronavirus
Extended deadline and we want your video! Different categories for learners and fluent speakers for all Cree people across Turtle Island.

Nehiyawak Language Experience Inc.

PRESENTS

CREE LANGUAGE ONLINE

Talent Show

Live performances in the Zoom Room

@ 6:00pm

FRIDAY JULY 31, 2020

Cree Language Learners and Fluent Speakers Welcome to register.

Cash Prizes

1st - $300
2nd - $200
3rd - $100

Any creative way of demonstrating

Cree language through performance

3 Categories

17 and under
18 and over

FOR MORE INFORMATION ON HOW TO REGISTER GO TO:

www.nehiyawak.org (click on ‘Talent Show’ Free Entry!)
Thematic Analysis of Student Interviews and Webinar Transcripts
“I find ways of knowing and ways of being and ways of doing central to my identity. We now have this collaborated massive prayer that we do Monday nights at nine o'clock p.m. Saskatchewan time and so it doesn't matter where we are on Turtle Island... we all pray at the same time to the nêhiyawêwin language spirit and so I've seen this as a trend happening during COVID especially and praying to the language spirit that our languages flourish, that the language spirit comes back into our homes and our communities” (Rising Voices panelist, July 2020).
“We look for ideas from other First Nations groups in Canada who are in a similar situation as we are in terms of having low numbers of speakers but are very vibrant on social media and also in terms of offering different possibilities over the internet... what potential is there to involve digital activism and alliances with public institutions and other organizations” (Rising Voices panelist, July 2020).

“I'm seeing a lot more daily conversational communication and questions about language on my Facebook feed that I didn't see before COVID” (Rising Voices panelist, July 2020).
“When it first hit and when people had to socially isolate, it was a big hit because almost all strategies were based around getting people together first building community and teaching that way” (Rising Voices panelist, July 2020).

“I think it’s just an extra layer of friction to try and have to set up a Zoom call and then kind of make sure I don’t have any other Zoom calls at the same time and like scheduling and all that stuff, but I think in person it’s a lot easier to just say oh like I’m walking past his building right now and I have a free moment and I should just pop in” (Interview participant, October 2020).
“There’s a video game for Mohawk language learners... it’s a virtual video game so when you’re – I was like this is so cool! I think I would love this even like I wonder if they have one in Ojibwe! ... [there are] Indigenous characters where you walk in and you have to create a name thing and it’s different levels for different styles of learning, right? So I thought well, that’s a really cool thing” (Interview participant, October 2020).

“Acknowledge the language teachers and people who aren’t necessarily used to technology which a lot of our language teachers aren’t and the resilience is amazing within our language teaching and learning communities” (Rising Voices panelist, July 2020).
“What I’m seeing is that we all are following some model of trying to communicate and when that's interrupted we have to scramble, so I'm seeing a lot of stress and tension to the people who have to teach” (Rising Voices panelist, July 2020).

“I think on Zoom you feel a little... I don’t know I think we maybe we’re all a little shyer for some reason. I don’t know. I feel pressured I guess. Like we’re only in class for two hours and we’re trying to get as much content as possible” (Interview participant, October 2020).
“The ability to offer the language over the web has allowed us to touch base with a lot of people from all over the world. A lot of family members who have needed to move to the city or have moved across country... have been able to access the language” (Rising Voices panelist, July 2020).

“I was lost. That was one of the things that I tried to do myself ... my son is not a computer guy. Like he knows what to do on the computer but when I asked him he was like oh sorry mom I don’t know any of that stuff right? So I really have no one to ask” (Interview participant, October 2020).

“Technology can be expensive and not accessible to many” (Rising Voices panelist, July 2020).
“We have now grown and evolved in ways that we wouldn't have and now our reach is so much greater. It really pushed us to say okay this is hard, but how do we support each other? I don't believe we would have done it without this push. In the long run we're going to be able to serve and support so many more people on their language learning journey with better tools to do it” (Rising Voices panelist, July 2020).

“We have had to move from face-to-face language classes to online.... which has been like really successful. We have way more, maybe double, triple the numbers of people wanting to learn Cree... it is because we have to make the time. We're sitting at home and this is an opportunity to sit and learn Cree (Rising Voices panelist, July 2020).
“I’m really missing the tutorial aspect of the university like just coming in and having conversations face-to-face with other people... I attend class, I participate as much as I can... but it’s like that comradery, you know, being able to kind of meet and mingle and discuss with your classmates – that whole portion is missing for sure” (Interview participant, October 2020).

“Technology can never replace our speakers. Our people who have the language... when we're in a face-to-face context, we embody the language. The gathering of people themselves create a mood. They create an energy, a synergy amongst us so technology cannot tap into that and that's what is most missed by myself when in the language context with a gathering of people” (Rising Voices panelist, July 2020).
“Our language speakers have been underpaid for decades. Make it so we can make our livelihoods for language revitalization. Make it so our elders can make a proper living and our language speakers on sharing our language and our knowledge and to stop underfunding Indigenous languages... In Canada, the amount of funding that Indigenous languages get compared to the French language is astronomical” (Rising Voices panelist, July 2020).

“We need language equity and visibility. We need to fight the fight and make sure that Indigenous languages are equal to the ones that get the primary attention... and to maintain that visibility, you know, so keep it [at the] forefront so that people will not forget that our languages are just as important as the mainstream languages that are spoken” (Rising Voices panelist, July 2020).
Theoretical Approaches

• **Emergent vitalities** (Perley 2011)
  • Shifts metaphors of “language death” and “extinction” to “language life” and “vitalities”
  • Online adaptations that have been created throughout the pandemic
• **Social media activism** (Bonilla & Rosa 2015)
  • “With Twitter, [producers] are engaging in a kind of social organization, shared temporality, and representational activism made possible by the platform” (Peterson 2017, 170).
Theory

- **Publics** (Kroskrity & Meek 2017)
- “...Twitter—like other mediated, multiplatform communications tools—becomes a nexus for agency and linguistic vitality as users challenge the tropes of language loss and disengagement from traditional modes so often heard about Indigenous languages, speakers, and writers” (Kroskrity 2009) (179).
Next Steps – Putting Things Together

- COVID-19 bringing existing issues into focus: language advocacy, accessibility, and a reinforced call to support Indigenous languages and their practitioners
- Learning from a distance – changes, challenges, benefits
- Social media as “site” of interaction, sharing, continued revitalization
- Visibility and use of Indigenous languages – Twitter, language policies


Acknowledgments

• Dr. Tania Granadillo
• Dr. Karen Pennesi
• Yawʌ’kó: to Kahnekiyostha, Hubert, Kukwite & staff and students at Twatati who welcomed me in-person and online to observe their classes
• Participants who contributed their experiences by way of survey and interviews
• Faculty and students in the Anthropology department
• Thank you to WGRS, OGS, SSHRC-CGSM and GRAF for funding this research