

# First Nations Languages in Canada: Strategies for Revitalization



Logan, Jim. *Teaching a Drum Song*. Acrylic on Masonite, Bearclaw Gallery, Edmonton.

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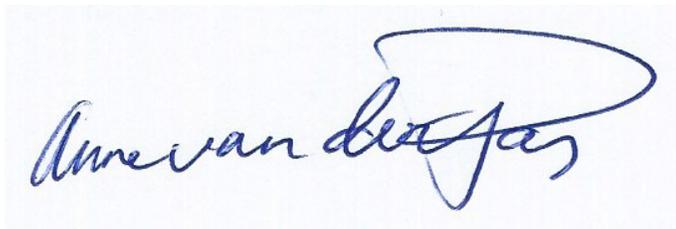
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A handwritten signature in blue ink that reads "Anne van der Pas". The signature is written in a cursive style with a large, sweeping loop at the end of the word "Pas".

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### **Abstract**

All but three of the approximately 60 Indigenous languages still spoken in Canada are under threat of extinction. This is due to the European colonists' displacement of Indigenous communities, later continued by Canadian governmental policies of cultural genocide. In order for these languages to be saved from extinction, they must be revitalized. Many theoretical and practical works on language revitalization have been produced, but conclusions of case study research have largely been community-specific. In this research, a number of case studies of revitalization projects which are similar in setting to the Canadian situation are reviewed and overarching themes which were key to the projects' outcomes are identified. A number of strategies are proposed which implement these themes in a revitalization approach for the Canadian Indigenous context.

**Keywords:** First Nations language revitalization, Indigenous language revitalization, language shift, First Nations, language revitalization strategies, reversing language shift.

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## Introduction

“They tried to take us away. They tried to take our language away. [...] We’re still here. I’m still here.” (Truth and Reconciliation 18-9)

These are the words of Maxine Lacorne, spoken at an event organized by the Canadian Truth and Reconciliation commission in order to give survivors of the residential school system an opportunity to tell their story. They describe the history of the peoples who have inhabited the North American continent for thousands of years, and whose rich and varied cultures and languages have suffered under oppression, violence and marginalization since Europeans’ arrival to that continent. Today, there are more than 1.4 million Aboriginal people living in Canada, but only around 15 percent of these people have an Aboriginal mother tongue (Statistics Canada par. 1). As these statistics indicate, these languages are in trouble. Only the three most spoken tongues, Cree, Inuktitut and Ojibway, are safe from the immediate threat of extinction. If no concerted effort is made to save First nations languages, they will disappear, taking with them the only medium through which Indigenous lifeworlds, ecologies, religions and cultures can be fully expressed. This loss would be catastrophic to First Nations, be a blow to the world’s cultural diversity and would impoverish the sum of human knowledge.

The causes of the language shift which is taking place in First Nations communities began with the European invasion of the North American continent. French, Spanish, English and Dutch colonists sailed to the continent in search of new sources of materials and wealth, and began to settle portions of land, often forcing First Nations people off their lands in the process. The Europeans’ ideology of settler colonialism deemed Indigenous people racially and culturally inferior (Truth and Reconciliation 49), and many attempts to convert First Nations people to

Christianity were made. This process of conversion marked the start of a Eurocentric assault on Indigenous lifeworlds (Welton 113) which would be continued by the Canadian government for decades. European scholars in the 19<sup>th</sup> century concluded that Indigenous languages were primitive and should be eradicated so that First Nations people may be assimilated into Eurocentric society (Harvey 177). This notion was then entrenched in Canadian governmental policy through laws which forced assimilation of First Nations people, and especially through the establishment of the residential school system. For almost a century, Indigenous children were taken from their parents to attend schools operated by Christian churches. The education which the children received in these schools was focused on “break[ing] their link to their culture and identity” (Truth and Reconciliation 3); to achieve this goal, students were harshly punished for speaking Indigenous languages. This system led to massive language loss among First Nations people, and the results are felt to this day. While the residential school system has been abolished, First Nations children are still exposed to an education system in which the majority languages, English and French, are the mediums of education, and nearly all media such as TV and radio are English or French-language. This has further contributed to language shift and led to the situation as it is today, with many First Nations people unable to speak an Indigenous language.

This process of language shift and loss has not gone uncontested, however. Movements aiming to revitalize Indigenous languages began almost 50 years ago (McIvor 1), and since then there have been many works produced on the subject of Indigenous language revitalization, both theoretical and practical. A seminal work in the field is *Reversing Language Shift* by Fishman, in which he presents his Graded Intergenerational Disruption Scale which is widely used to indicate language vitality. Hinton (1997), Tsunoda (2005), Amery (2016) and others have devised

practical methods through which language revitalization can be accomplished, such as the Master-Apprentice method, which couples a fluent speaker with a novice in a language learning team, and the formulaic method, which inserts target language-sentences into L1 speech. Furthermore, many case studies have been conducted which describe language revitalization projects and their outcomes and indicate what factors were beneficial or detrimental to the revitalization of the language in question. However, as these conclusions are often case-specific, it is difficult to apply them to other revitalization projects or indeed the field of language revitalization at large, and broadly applicable revitalization advice based on practical observations is therefore scarce and scattered. In order to contribute to the development of more widely usable guidelines, insights and strategies for language revitalization in Canada, I have formulated the following research question: what language revitalization approach would most contribute to successful Indigenous language revitalization in First Nations communities in Canada?

In order to answer this question, I will first give an outline of the factors which have caused the current status of Indigenous languages in Canada. These include the shift from somewhat friendly interaction between First Nations and early colonists to hostility and forced assimilation as the pace of North American colonization intensified, the policy of residential schooling, and the current cultural hegemony of the English and French languages which contribute to language attrition to this day. Furthermore, I will give information on the status of Canadian Indigenous languages, explaining their current situation and prospects should no action be taken to halt language shift.

In the second chapter, I will give an overview of the literature on the topic of language revitalization. I will touch upon the necessity of language revitalization and why the

revitalization of culture in general is extremely important, discuss the topic of language planning and explain Fishman's seminal Graded Intergenerational Disruption Scale, and give examples of the most widely used language revitalization methods.

In chapter three I will present a critical review of a number of language revitalization projects, one in a Canadian community and others from Africa, South America and Australia. The Indigenous communities in the cases in question all suffer from language shift in the context of a European colonial majority language, and thus their situations closely mirror that of Canadian Indigenous communities. In my review of these cases I will focus on what factors influenced their ultimate success or failure.

In the fourth chapter I will set out the results of my analysis: the themes which I have identified as significant to the outcome of the revitalization projects reviewed in chapter three. I will explain why these themes are significant to language revitalization and how they may be incorporated the planning of a project. Following this, I will give a number of suggestions for the practical implementation of these themes, and what potentials these themes may offer beyond these suggestions. In my conclusion, I will also discuss the limitations of this work and suggest directions for further research.

## **Chapter One: Historical Background and the Current Status of Indigenous Languages in Canada**

For thousands of years, First Nations people have lived in what is now called Canada, in communities with distinct cultures, languages, customs, and belief systems (Gibson 3). Contact with European explorers and the arrival of European settlers to the area in the 1610's changed the interactions between these communities, and their new interaction with the colonial settlers led to both collaboration and conflict. Once settlers began colonizing larger swathes of land and moving further inland to do so, conflicts became greater and more violent, although collaboration between certain First Nations and colonists, such as during the Seven Years' War, did not cease entirely. However, the pace of European colonization did not slow, forcing First Nations communities to either relocate, killing many in the process through disease and violence, or to assimilate. After Canadian confederation, the residential school system was established which institutionalized this process of forced assimilation, and the effects of this cultural genocide are felt until this day.

In this chapter I will explain how the aforementioned events caused language shift in First Nations communities and explain the current status of Canadian Indigenous languages.

### **Early contact**

In the sixteenth century, the territory which is now known as Canada was inhabited by around 60 different Aboriginal groups, who belonged to 12 different language families. Most of these groups subsisted on hunting and fishing, but the Iroquoian-speaking peoples in the South were increasingly becoming reliant on agriculture. (Heidenreich & Wright 10-11)

It was also in the 16<sup>th</sup> century that the first European explorers began to reach North American shores and made contact with the native populations. An example of such contact is the case of Basque fishermen who reached the Gulf of Saint Lawrence around the 1520's. These fishermen spoke the Basque language and the Indigenous groups with which they interacted for trade purposes spoke the Algonquian Mi'kmaq language, but in their interactions the two populations created a pidgin language, a mix of "Basque and two different languages of the Indians" (Bakker 259). This example shows that in early contact between First Nations and European explorers, although not always peaceful nor successful, there was an opportunity for interaction which did not assume linguistic dominance of the European language.

Situations such as the one described above, in which European traders interacted with First Nations peoples almost solely in service of trade, became rarer as time progressed and interaction between Europeans and Indigenous populations intensified to include political alliances in local conflicts. One such alliance was between French colonists led by Samuel de Champlain and a force made up of an Algonquian group, the Huron (Wyandot) and Innu, in their fight against the Mohawk (Abler 155-6). These alliances later shifted in the conflict which followed, the Beaver wars, in which several First Nations groups formed different alliances with the French, Dutch and British in order to gain control of the fur trade, and which continued for most of the 17<sup>th</sup> century (Abler).

These kinds of military and political alliances continued to exist, in different forms, between First Nations and various European colonial powers roughly until the war of 1812, after which the border between the US and Canada was more or less secure and thus having Native allies lost its value in terms of war over land ownership between European nations (Gordon 36).

The principles upon which the European settlers operated, namely those of settler colonialism, however, did not fade along with the alliances. These principles rested upon racist paternalistic assumptions that Europeans carried a burden to ‘civilize’ those who they saw as savages, in this case the native inhabitants of the North American continent (Truth and Reconciliation 49).

### **Colonialist ideology and conversion efforts**

While popular myth dictates that the first North American colonies were established by Europeans in search solely of freedom from religious persecution, in fact the purpose of European colonies, such as those established in North America in the 17<sup>th</sup> century, is to provide the mother country with materials and wealth, as well as a new market in which to sell their goods (Truth and Reconciliation 49). A justification for establishing these colonies and in the process destroying or oppressing the Indigenous peoples who inhabited the areas was sought in the aforementioned perceived racial and cultural superiority of Europeans: “to be civilized was to be Christian” (Truth and Reconciliation 49), and thus the native inhabitants of those areas colonized by Europeans, on account of their non-Christian status, were automatically deemed uncivilized and inferior. Conversion of First Nations people to Christianity was an important aspect of colonial ideology in the Americas, and it replaced traditional Indigenous knowledge systems and worldviews with a Eurocentric worldview (Welton 101-2).

An example of the way in which this conversion took place is the case of the early Jesuit settlements in the St Lawrence Valley, where around 100 Jesuit missionaries attempted to convert the various Algonquian and Iroquoian communities in the valley to Catholicism. The effort met with considerable resistance. At first, missionaries attempted to convert the native

population by taking First Nations children order to provide them with a Christian, Eurocentric education, but this approach failed (Dickason 259), and thus the Jesuits shifted their focus to converting adults (Welton 103). An important aspect of the conversion effort was the Jesuits' instruction in the native languages of the people they were attempting to convert; the missionaries studied Algonquian and Iroquoian languages, which earned them a small measure of respect with the Indigenous peoples (Welton 102). However, this did not mean that the relationship between the Jesuits and the natives was equal, as the former's goal was firmly to "undermin[e] the lifeworld foundations of Indian life." (Welton 102) The Jesuits did indeed succeed at least partly in this goal. Through an "unceasing, persistent, fanatical assault on the Amerindian lifeworld" (Welton 113), they were able to convert many of the First Nations people of the St Lawrence Valley to Catholicism, in the process displacing Indigenous beliefs, practices, worldviews and traditions.

The aforementioned example is indicative of a widespread European colonialist effort to force a Eurocentric worldview upon First Nations people which started soon after first contact was made between Europeans and First Nations people, and has continued, albeit in altered forms, to this day. This effort aimed to "eliminate Aboriginal governments; ignore Aboriginal rights; terminate the Treaties; and, through a process of assimilation, cause Aboriginal peoples to cease to exist as distinct legal, social, cultural, religious, and racial entities in Canada" (Truth and Reconciliation 1).

### **Language in colonialist policy**

As efforts to force a Eurocentric worldview upon First Nations people increased, so did the popularity of the view that in order to achieve such a conversion, the use of Indigenous

languages should be discouraged or even eradicated (Harvey 178). In the first half of the 19<sup>th</sup> century, philologists studied Indigenous North American languages, approaching them as “an assumed mirror and lens of thought” (Harvey 147), and, further supported by the growing popularity of the theory of Social Darwinism, came to the conclusion that these languages were primitive and should be used as minimally as possible in the education of First Nations children (Harvey 177, Truth and Reconciliation 83). That Indigenous languages convey ideas, feelings and worldviews specific and unique to the culture of a particular Indigenous nation was recognized by the Canadian government, which concluded that forcing Eurocentric knowledge and assimilation upon First Nations people and eradicating Indigenous knowledge would necessarily involve the eradication of First Nations languages (Truth and Reconciliation 2). This notion was put into policy shortly after the Confederation of Canada in 1867 with the establishment of the residential school system in 1883.

The residential school system was a pivotal element of Canada’s Aboriginal policy. It was a system of boarding schools, operated through a partnership between the Canadian federal government and a number of Christian church denominations, to which First Nations children were forcibly taken, ostensibly for them to be educated but in reality to “break their link to their culture and identity” (Truth and Reconciliation 2). Around an estimated 150 000 First Nations children were forced to attend a residential school between the school system’s inception until the closure of the last institution in the 1990’s (Truth and Reconciliation 3). As residential schools’ educational goals consisted of assimilation of First Nations children into Eurocentric Canadian society and thus ultimately the achievement of cultural genocide, the educational regime discouraged and often forbade the use of Indigenous languages. Only the use of English (and sometimes French) was encouraged, and institutions’ success in the education of the

students was often measured through their proficiency in English. In reports conveying the situation at their respective institutions, several principals of residential schools boasted of their students' use of English even outside of the classroom, and school inspectors admonished those principals who allowed their students to express themselves in their mother tongue (Truth and Reconciliation 83).

The use of English or French in residential schools was enforced through harsh punishment. Children were slapped, beaten or had their mouths washed with soap for speaking their language, or their hair was cut close to their head as punishment. Many children who were first attending a residential school did not speak any English or French and thus could not follow commands or communicate in the language. However, this was not considered an alleviating circumstance and students were punished for using Indigenous languages even on their first days in school. (Truth and Reconciliation 84-5) Although some residential school students were able to continue using their language in secret, most children suffered partial or complete native language loss, and many children were unable to communicate with their families once they were allowed to return home. Furthermore, a number of parents who had undergone the residential school regime and managed to retain their ability to speak their heritage language were so impacted by the experience that they decided to raise their children speaking English or French, in order to spare them the punishment administered in residential schools to those who spoke an Aboriginal language (Truth and Reconciliation 85).

### **The current status of First Nations languages**

The last residential school was closed in the 1990's, and before that restrictions on First Nations language use in residential schools had already begun to be loosened to the point where

often use of English or French was only required in the classroom and was not mandated between students (Truth and Reconciliation 86). While this means that institutional discouragement of First Nations language use had ended, the continued cultural hegemony of the English and French languages in Canada still remains: the aforementioned languages are the only ones with official federal status, almost all media in Canada is either French or English-language and education is still almost exclusively English or French-language. This means that First Nations people, especially when not residing in areas with a high First Nations population such as reserves, are often forced to employ non-Aboriginal languages in their daily lives, especially during childhood education, where children with an Aboriginal mother tongue may be placed in remedial schooling due to their limited English or French proficiency (Romero-Little et al. 608). Furthermore, many Aboriginal students feel that using or knowing an Aboriginal language is shameful, associating such a language with low status and backwardness (Romero-Little et al. 611), further limiting their use of their heritage language(s).

The impact upon First Nations language survival of federal policy aimed at complete assimilation of First Nations people into mainstream Canadian society and eradication of First Nations identities and cultures which was in place for over a century has been enormous. According to the most recent Canadian Census of Population data, in 2011 around 213,500 people reported an Aboriginal language as their mother tongue (Statistics Canada 1) and 240,815 Aboriginal people had knowledge of an Aboriginal language, out of a total Aboriginal population of around 1,400,700. This means that only 17.2 percent of Aboriginal people have knowledge of an Aboriginal language, a decrease of over ten percent from 1996, when 29.3 percent of Aboriginal people reported knowledge of an Aboriginal language in the Census of Population (Indigenous and Northern Affairs Canada).

Furthermore, 39.4 percent of all those who reported knowledge of an Aboriginal language were speakers of a Cree language (Indigenous and Northern Affairs Canada par 4), making this by far the most reported language, followed by Inuktitut and Ojibway. In fact, the top ten most spoken Aboriginal languages in Canada account for almost 90 percent of those speakers with an Aboriginal language mother tongue (Statistics Canada 2). Yet, even out of these ten most spoken languages only the top three are considered viable enough to be safe from the threat of extinction in the long term. Outside of the top ten, the remaining 50 or so Aboriginal languages spoken in Canada together have only around 20,000 remaining speakers, placing nearly all of them at great risk and making their continued existence uncertain (Norris 3). Already, over the past 100 or so years almost 10 Aboriginal languages which once had a large number of speakers have gone extinct, and a similar number of languages are “on the brink of extinction” (Norris and Jantzen 19).

Another important characteristic of Aboriginal language knowledge in Canada is age of speakers. In the past decades, the average age of those Aboriginal people who reported knowledge of an Aboriginal language has risen (Statistics Canada), indicating that either people are learning an Aboriginal language at a later age than was previously the case, or that Aboriginal language knowledge is decreasingly being passed onto the next generation of Aboriginal children, or both.

All the aforementioned statistics indicate that the current status of various First Nations languages in Canada is precarious, with many languages under immediate threat of extinction and others, while still classified as ‘viable’, also in danger if the current trend of decreasing language use, decreasing language knowledge, decreasing intergenerational transmission and increasing average speaker age continues.

## Chapter Two: Literature Review

As I have illustrated in the previous chapter, the current position of First Nations languages in Canada is characterized by declining speaker numbers and the threat of extinction. However, a growing global language revitalization movement has made stopping and, increasingly, reversing this decline its goal. In the 1970's and 80's, linguists studying minority languages approached the topic mainly from an angle of maintenance- keeping in place the status quo. Only in the 1990's did linguists in the field shift their focus from language maintenance towards the topic of language revitalization (Hinton "Language Revitalization" 45), due to the increasing urgency of the situation.

### **Why revitalize?**

One might ask why these efforts are undertaken, and why languages which are clearly dying should even be 'saved'. There are multiple answers to this: because languages are of scientific interest and value, because "languages contribute to the sum of human knowledge" (Crystal 44), because diversity is necessary, and because languages express identity (Crystal). In the case of Indigenous language revival perhaps the last argument is of the greatest importance. As Cheyenne Richard Littlebear says, "[t]he embeddedness of [...] spirituality is what makes [our language] relevant to us American Indians." (qtd in Tsunoda 135) Indigenous heritage languages are an expression of a particular lifeworld and as such are not a way of transmitting culture but are cultural knowledge in and of themselves (Tsunoda 183).

Indigenous languages are a reflection of a community's way of life, and therefore they contain concepts which indicate culture-specific beliefs and knowledge which are lost when the

language is lost (Yamauchi & Ceppi 13). Indigenous languages provide a group with a shared identity, they explain relationships between people and between people and the environment, they are an integral part of religious and cultural ceremony and without them Indigenous ways of knowing would disappear or become incomplete (Henderson 264). Battiste and Henderson state that “Indigenous knowledge must be understood from an Indigenous perspective using Indigenous language; it cannot be understood from the perspective of Eurocentric knowledge and discourse” (qtd. in White 404); language is thus an integral aspect of Indigenous knowledge, culture and its transmission.

The reason that the preservation of Indigenous cultures, knowledge and worldviews is so important is twofold, as described by Berkes: on the one hand there is the “ethical imperative of conserving cultural diversity” (28) and on the other hand tangible and practical aspects of Indigenous knowledge which are of use for society at large. The ethical reasoning for preserving culture and cultural diversity rests upon the assertion that mankind has a duty to preserve history and cultural heritage. Cultural diversity is “inseparable from respect for human dignity” (Universal Declaration on Cultural Diversity Art. 4), meaning that the preservation of culture is guaranteed as an aspect of a commitment to human rights. Furthermore, preserving Indigenous culture preserves a challenge to hegemonic Western worldviews by providing alternative philosophical viewpoints and considerations (Dedzoe-Dzokoto Plockey 38). The practical aspect of the preservation of Indigenous cultures has to do with the fact that traditional ecological knowledge is critical for effective management of the planet and its ecosystems in the future, and Indigenous knowledge of resource management has many applications in modern sustainability movements (Berkes 29-30, Dedzoe-Dzokoto Plockey 38). For these reasons, Indigenous language revitalization is of critical importance.

### **Defining language revitalization**

Different definitions of the concept of ‘language revitalization’ exist; some linguists take it to be the documentation of a minority language before its last remaining speakers die, while others define it as ensuring that a language does not go extinct by creating new speakers (Hinton “Language Revitalization” 45, Tsunoda 169-70). For many Indigenous activists, the latter definition, sometimes also called ‘reversing language shift’, is the most important as mere documentation only serves to ‘pickle’ a language, i.e. preserve it, and does not directly aid new speakers in learning a language in a community which is dealing with language loss (Hinton “Language Revitalization” 45). For this reason, I will make a clear distinction between language documentation and language revitalization: language documentation, while undeniably of great importance to language revitalization efforts, itself does not constitute language revitalization. Language revitalization, then, I define as “the restoration of vitality to a language that has lost or is losing this attribute” (Spolsky qtd. in Tsunoda 168).

### **Language planning and revitalization**

In planning a revitalization approach, Crystal describes information gathering as the top priority. He poses that firstly, information regarding the number of speakers of the language, but also information regarding the context in which the speakers live, speaker fluency, accuracy and age levels, as well as level of institutionalization must be collected (92). After this information has been gathered, the status of a language can be determined. For this purpose, Fishman’s Graded Intergenerational Disruption Scale can be used. In the GIDS, eight stages of language

vitality are identified. These stages range from 8, “rock bottom” where there are no longer any native speakers of the language living and the second language speakers do not possess full fluency, to stage 1 in which “cultural autonomy is recognized and implemented, even in the upper reaches of education, media and government operations” (Fishman “Reversing Language Shift” 100). Stage 6, the stage in which the language is used in natural daily life within a language community, is described by Fishman as crucial: “if this stage is not satisfied, all else can amount to little more than biding time” (95-6). It is this stage in which intergenerational transmission occurs, as the language is used in the home domain and passed on from parent to child, creating new native speakers.

The GIDS and its expanded version by Lewis and Simons (2010) are widely used. However, there are two main issues regarding the applicability of Fishman’s theory to the Indigenous languages of North America, as identified by Hinton. Firstly, Fishman’s language revitalization experience mostly concerns languages which, while holding a minority status, are the only such language in the relevant country or state, and thus the recipient of all funds and attention set aside for revitalization. This is not at all the case for North American Indigenous languages, with over 50 First Nations language still in existence alone. Secondly, Fishman’s scale places a high emphasis on literacy, again from the viewpoint of European minority languages which often have a long literary tradition. This is not the case for North American Indigenous languages, which all instead have oral traditions and in most cases relatively new literary traditions or even no literary works at all (Hinton “Language Revitalization” 51-2).

Other grading systems beside Fishman’s exist, such as McKay’s three aims model which has as its most ambitious status “continuing use of the language across all generations for communicative purposes” (Tsunoda 175), i.e. the occurrence of intergenerational tradition, and

Bauman's categories of language status with matching language maintenance strategies (Tsunoda 175). However, these have not generally been adopted, and despite the imperfect design of Fishman's theory, as evidenced by Hinton's objections, it is still very influential and useful in considering language revitalization (Hinton "Language Revitalization" 49).

### **Revitalization methods**

Once language status has been determined and information has been gathered, an approach towards achieving revitalization can be selected. For example, a language in an advanced stage of endangerment, e.g. Fishman's eighth stage, could benefit from a revitalization approach such as the Master-Apprentice Language Learning Program or MALLP (Tsunoda 178). The MALLP is a form of immersion learning which couples an Elder, the 'master', who is fluent in the language with a prospective speaker of the language, the 'apprentice'. Together, they perform everyday tasks and cultural rituals, all the while speaking only the target language. If the apprentice is not able to express themselves in the target language, signs are used rather than the majority language, so as to provide a fully immersive learning experience (Hinton "Survival of Endangered Languages" 182). The MALLP is particularly suitable to language situations in which only elder speakers of the language remain because unlike with languages which still have a larger and younger speaking population, in the case of moribund languages financial resources are usually scarce, and the only linguistic resources available are the knowledge of Elders (Hinton "Survival of Endangered Languages" 178).

Another form of immersion learning, which is more suited to a language in GIDS stage 7 is the Language Nest approach (Tsunoda 177). In an stage 7 language situation, like in stage 8, no children speak the language, but unlike in stage 8 there are some adult speakers who are not

elderly. In order to create new speakers of the language, in a Language Nest approach, young children are immersed, ideally multiple days a week, in an environment in which only the target language is used (Hinton “Language Revitalization” 51). As the participants in the language nests are toddlers and infants, they are still in a period of language acquisition and will ideally become native speakers of the target heritage language, either as simultaneous bilinguals (meaning they also acquire the majority language as an L1) or as monolingual speakers of the heritage language. Parents, too, are encouraged to seek instruction in the target language so that the language can be used in the home (Hinton “Language Revitalization” 51). An important outcome of this program is that the students become native speakers of the target language and once they become parents themselves they may teach their children the language as well, creating another generation of native speakers.

A number of similar immersion-based initiatives exist, such as the neighborhood method in which a number of language learners form a geographical community (e.g. a street or neighborhood) in which only the target language is used (Maguire 4-5), or partial immersion education in which students in school are initially taught entirely in the target language, and then gradually are introduced to the second (majority) language until all instruction is given in the majority language (Yamauchi & Seppi 14). However, while immersion methods are generally quite effective methods of language teaching and the only programs able to create native speakers when there is no home use of the language, there are also negative aspects associated with these methods.

First, and perhaps also foremost, there is the issue of resources, both financial and otherwise: immersion programs such as language nests require a significant funding (Greymorning 1997). Secondly, immersion language learning requires an immense commitment,

from adult and child learners, from parents of learners who may also need to receive language training and from teachers (Greymorning 2000, 5). Thirdly, there is still a common belief amongst many people that educating children in a minority heritage language will cause their academic skills to suffer, although this has been proven not to be the case (Yamauchi & Seppi 14), which may lead parents and community leaders alike to be weary of immersion-style programs.

Other programs which can contribute to language revitalization but do not utilize immersion learning include the formulaic method, in which full sentences in the target language are introduced into otherwise majority-language speech, beginning with one-word utterances and progressing towards longer sentences (Tsunoda 210). Another non-immersion program involves offering classes about the target language: children or adult learners are exposed to the heritage language in second language learning environment, with instruction given in the majority language. An issue with this type of language instruction is that it does not provide a setting in which the target language is actually spoken in conversation; it does, however, instill a sense of pride in their language and culture in participants, and helps them achieve limited proficiency in certain domains (Hinton “An Overview” 7). Many other language revitalization methods exist, and most revitalization programs do not use only a single method but rather utilize a combination of methods in accordance with their situation.

### **Chapter Three: Review of Revitalization Cases**

In this chapter I will critically review a number of different language revitalization and revival programs which have either been completed or are ongoing in order to assess what factors have contributed to their success or failure. In addition to a brief description of the language's status and some background on the language community, I will provide an analysis of the methods used to further language revitalization, and the factors which contributed to the eventual outcome of the projects, whether positive or negative. The case studies selected discuss communities which are all suffering from language shift in a context of previous colonial rule, and the majority language or one of the majority languages in the countries where these communities are located are exogenous European languages. The reason why I have selected these criteria is because they also describe the situation of First Nations communities in Canada. Due to the situations' similarities, overarching themes and patterns can be identified in the review of these cases, and applied to some extent to the Canadian context, despite regional varieties which inevitably exist between the different cases. The insights gained can be used to devise strategies through which to implement these themes in the Canadian context.

#### **The case of Kaurna**

Kaurna is an Indigenous language of the Adelaide plains in South Australia. Its last native speaker died in 1926, leaving the language extinct, or as Kaurna people themselves prefer, 'sleeping' (Amery 1). However, a revival effort has been ongoing for almost 30 years now (Amery 295), and the language is currently classified by the Ethnologue as a 'status 9, reawakening' language on the EGIDS scale, meaning that "[t]he ethnic community associated

with a dormant language is working to establish more uses and more users for the language with the results that new L2 speakers are emerging.” (Ethnologue, “Language Status” par 6). This classification is an indicator that the Kaurna language reclamation initiative is producing results in terms of increasing language abilities.

The Kaurna language reclamation initiative was begun in the late 1980’s with the goal of ‘awakening’ the Kaurna language, using historical sources compiled by German missionaries who spoke the language and reported on it in the 19<sup>th</sup> century, and sources which drew from the knowledge of the last native Kaurna speaker, Ivaritji, in the 1920’s (Amery 85). These sources provided base information on the language’s grammar, syntax and lexical terms but Kaurna’s phonology, discourse structure and semantic structure are less clearly deductible from these sources (Amery 27). Thus, in order to attempt to revive the language it first had to be reconstructed, with new lexical items created for concepts which had not been named in sources or had not existed when Kaurna was last used regularly (Amery 158), and pronunciation partly deduced from sources which included phonetic descriptions and from the sounds of the related Nukunu language (Amery 136).

With the language partly reconstructed, language teaching commenced. Several week-long workshops were held in which adults were taught the beginnings of the language, an early childhood education center opened which utilized Kaurna songs, words and expressions in their teachings, the linguistics department of the University of Adelaide offered a Kaurna Language and Language Ecology course and in 1994 a secondary school course teaching Kaurna was established (Amery 180-182). Furthermore, an important aspect of the Kaurna reclamation effort has been use of the naming method mentioned in the previous chapter, with many official names of villages, streets, public buildings and so on changed to Kaurna, leading to raised awareness

and recognition of the language with the general public (Amery 205, Tsunoda 211). Kurna is also used as a tool in the ongoing Australian reconciliation process through the delivery of speeches, songs and other public performances, further raising the profile of the language and increasing usage opportunities (Amery 210).

A particular method developed especially in order to advance Kurna language is the formulaic method which was explained in chapter two. It aims to introduce words and sentences in Kurna into English speech, thus furthering the use of Kurna in everyday speech (Amery 234, Tsunoda 209). The lexical items introduced were initially simple words such as ‘yes’ ‘no’ and ‘goodbye’, and progressed to more complicated expressions such as ‘do you want something to eat?’ (Amery 239). A funeral protocol in Kurna was also developed, so that burials of Kurna people may be conducted entirely in the language (Amery 282).

While it cannot be said that the Kurna language reclamation effort has produced sustained intergenerational transmission of the language, the effort should nonetheless be viewed as a success. A language which was last spoken natively in 1929 was listed by 48 people in the 2011 Australian population survey as a language used in their home (Amery 286), which itself is an increase of over a hundred percent compared to 2001, showing that there is a sustained interest in using Kurna not just in the public but also the private domain. Furthermore, the language’s most fluent speaker, Jack Kanya Buckskin, is now raising his two young children to be bilingual native Kurna speakers (Amery 286), indicating that there is a possibility of sustained intergenerational transmission, albeit for now on a very small scale.

The main reasons for these successes are identified by Amery, who has been deeply involved with the Kurna effort since its inception, as being firstly the concurrent revival of Kurna culture along with the language, secondly the enterprising attitude of those involved in

the early stages of the project, thirdly the Kaurna community's support for the language revival effort, fourthly the community's acceptance of linguists' involvement with the effort, and finally the usefulness of Kaurna as a tool for reconciliation (295-305).

The revival of Kaurna culture along with the language was identified by Amery as perhaps the most important contributing factor to the success of the reclamation effort. In the 1980's the Kaurna community experienced a renewed interest in the revival and rediscovery of traditional practices and other aspects of Kaurna culture which had been forgotten or had been paid little attention to in the previous decades (Amery 295). This revival of interest in culture coincided with the Kaurna language reclamation effort, and the two strengthened each other. There was a recognition among the Kaurna community that the language was an important aspect of and link to their culture: "the Kaurna language is seen as the key to understanding and reclaiming an array of knowledges and cultural practices" (Amery 301). This again showcases the intrinsic connection between language and culture and the importance of the language in retaining, and in this case also regaining, Indigenous lifeworlds, cultural practices, traditions and shared norms and values. A revival of Kaurna culture without a revival of the language would be incomplete. The community's recognition of this fact was of integral importance to the success of the reclamation effort.

Another reason for the Kaurna project's success mentioned by Amery is the enterprising attitude of its participants. While Kaurna community members were consulted from the start of the project, the linguists involved in the revival "did not wait until every problem had been sorted out or until [they] had every Kaurna person enthusiastically behind the undertaking." (Amery 301). Because in this situation the focus on cultural revival was already established, it lent itself to linguistic revival, taking advantage of the project's momentum and commencing

language teaching even when not all materials were yet in place or problems solved ensured that no time or indeed momentum was lost.

The Kaurna reclamation effort was first established by linguists from outside the Kaurna community. This, Amery argues, was another reason for its success, as it provided the project with expertise on how to reconstruct the language from the available historical materials and how to structure the following revival effort (288-9). However, he acknowledges that “[s]uccessful language revival comes from within the language community” (Amery 299) and thus that while the expertise of linguists can aid a revival effort, support from within the language community is what ensures that a revival can have any kind of longevity. This support was found within the Kaurna community, and an alliance of sorts between linguists and prominent members of the Kaurna language community emerged to the point where “acceptable ‘power sharing’ arrangements” (Amery 299) were developed. Linguists’ acceptance that ownership of the language lies with the community is crucial, and Elders of the Indigenous community must be deferred to (Amery 52-3).

Finally, Amery notes that the Kaurna people’s traditional territory covers the Adelaide plains, where the current capital of South Australia lies, providing a “political forum and a purpose for the use of Kaurna within the public domain that otherwise would either not exist or have far less impact.” (Amery 295) Many landmarks, places and institutions around Adelaide originally carried a Kaurna name, and some of these names have been reinstated as their official title, this also being part of the naming method devised by Amery (Amery and Williams 255-6, Tsunoda 211). There is an increasing demand for public Kaurna-language speeches and Kaurna songs as interest in reconciliation and a need to acknowledge the original inhabitants of Adelaide and its surrounding plains grows (Amery 210). This development has also contributed to the

success of the Kaurna reclamation effort as it has increased public interest in, knowledge of and indeed demand for Kaurna language products.

### **The case of Nahuatl**

Estimates of the number of Indigenous languages in Mexico range widely from around 60 to upwards of 200 (Flores Farfán “Keeping the Fire Alive” 191). This discrepancy is partly due to the lack of consensus among both linguists and Indigenous leaders and activists themselves regarding what constitutes a language versus a dialect (Flores Farfán “Keeping the Fire Alive” 191-2). This means that while it is clear that there are a number of varieties of the Nahuatl language (referred to as *Mexicano* by Flores Farfán), some of which are mutually unintelligible, there is no consensus on how many languages the language group consists of exactly. The Mexican National Institute of Indigenous Languages lists 44 Nahuatl languages (Hansen 5) while the Ethnologue lists 28 different varieties (Ethnologue, *Mexico Country Profile*). Some of these languages are classified in the Ethnologue as stage 8 on the GEDS, meaning they are moribund, and others as 5b, developing, meaning they currently stand a good chance of surviving. There are several projects currently in place which aim to revitalize the Nahuatl language and its variants, two of which I will examine in detail.

The first project, named the Balsas River project, described by Flores Farfán as “an innovative model that promotes a participatory methodology using the arts in different media” (“Keeping the Fire Alive” 190), is aimed at revitalizing Nahuatl along the Balsas River in the state of Guerrero. This program, unlike the previously discussed Kaurna initiative, does declare its overarching aim to be the promotion of intergenerational transmission of the language (Flores Farfán “Nahua Alto Balsas” 190), which is in this case a realistic goal because a significant

number of native speakers still exist; some twenty to forty thousand speakers, dispersed over 20 different communities (Flores Farfán “Nahua Alto Balsas” 187). The variety of the Nahuatl language most common in these communities, called Guerrero Nahuatl in the Ethnologue, is classified as status 6a (vigorous) on the GEDS scale, meaning that it is being used for daily communication in these communities.

The Balsas River project uses several methods in order to revitalize the local Nahuatl language, but all are based on the oral Nahuatl tradition, and are deliberately separated from the school environment. The methods used include the distribution of Nahuatl-language books, videos and cassettes, and the hosting of viewings of Nahuatl-language films, after which discussions are held and riddles are told, a traditional Nahuatl pastime (Flores Farfán “Nahua Alto Balsas” 192).

The Balsas River project has been ongoing for over ten years, and has produced some promising results, not just among the recipients of the materials created but also among those who contribute to the creation of the material. For example, two Nahuatl young adults who were quasi-speakers of the language, having passive knowledge of Nahuatl, were approached to voice a video produced by the project. Through their work on the media materials for the project, they gained active competency in the Nahuatl language and now use it to communicate with their parents and grandparents, restoring intergenerational transmission on a personal level. (Flores Farfán “Nahua Alto Balsas” 189) Furthermore, many children who participate in the project’s workshops and receive materials are enthusiastic in their participation, and the language team reported receiving many requests for further Nahuatl-language materials (Flores Farfán “Keeping the Fire Alive” 200).

Flores Farfán states that the success of the Balsas River revitalization project is mainly to do with its avoidance of the official Mexican school system, which he identifies as being actively harmful to Indigenous students' language abilities. Mexican schools, he poses, serve to diminish Indigenous language use even if they offer such a language as a subject, because materials are of nationalistic nature, such as translations of the Mexican national anthem, instead of teaching students about Indigenous cultural heritage ("Nahua Alto Balsas" 198-9).

This sentiment concerning the Mexican school system is shared by Sandoval Arenas in his description of Nahuatl revitalization efforts in the High Mountains of Veracruz. In this area, which has a Nahuatl language population of 250 000 with many children still proficient in Nahuatl, the language is decreasingly being used as a means of communication in everyday life (Sandoval Arenas 68). This is occurring despite seemingly successful efforts by Indigenous activists to promote Indigenous language rights over the past two decades; Indigenous autonomy is now recognized by the Mexican state in its constitution, and in 2003 the approval of the Statute on Linguistic Rights of Indigenous Peoples awarded Indigenous languages the same status as Spanish in all territories where they were spoken. These developments have led to the creation of 'intercultural' schools and higher education institution which purport to place both Indigenous languages and Spanish on the same level of importance (Sandoval Arenas 69).

However, these 'intercultural' schools, as Flores Farfán stated, do not teach Indigenous languages in a manner which leads to increased use of the language. Sandoval Arenas (2017) describes schools where Nahuatl-speaking students used Spanish in their interactions while playing because they had been told by Spanish-speaking teachers to do so, as the teachers could not understand Nahuatl (71). Furthermore, classes on the Nahuatl language and culture were not

taught by Nahuatl speakers and thus the Nahuatl language was entirely absent from these ‘intercultural’ schools.

Sandoval Arenas states that the reason the use of Nahuatl in the High Mountains of Veracruz is declining is that many Nahua have internalized the idea that Indigenous languages are inferior to the Spanish majority language (72). Nahuatl use is associated with the domain of agriculture, tradition and family while Spanish is the language of public and social life (Sandoval Arenas 71-2), Nahuatl children often never receive any formal education in the language and thus do not possess the lexicon and language register to use the language beyond the domain of the home (Sandoval Arenas 73-4). Sandoval Arenas names these conditions as the reasons for the declining Nahuatl language use in these communities, despite two decades of Indigenous activism aimed at language revitalization.

Renewed revitalization methods are currently being adopted in Nahuatl communities, however: an official writing system has been created, a local bilingual Spanish-Nahuatl language magazine has been set up and a local university now teaches courses on Nahuatl in the language, immersion style, so that an academic register in the language may be developed and thus the internalized inferiority associated with speaking Nahuatl may be decreased or removed.

### **The case of Gumbaynggirr**

Like Kaurna, Gumbaynggirr is an Indigenous Australian language whose last native speaker passed away before any revitalization or revival efforts were initiated. The last native Gumbaynggirr speaker, Harry ‘Tiger’ Buchanan, died in 1980, but some of his language knowledge was recorded by Eades, who concluded that the future of Gumbaynggirr was bleak and no new speakers would arise (Walsh 252). However, in the 1980’s a movement spearheaded

by Gumbaynggirr community Elders arose, with as its aim the reclamation and revitalization their language. This movement was assisted by the non-Indigenous Steven Morelli, who was a trained teacher and also underwent linguistic education in order to better aid the revitalization effort. From sources such as the sketch grammar compiled by Eades and other materials including audio recordings, several language teaching materials were created, such as a dictionary and student workbooks for several different levels of Gumbaynggirr speakers. Adult education classes were established which used these materials, as well as primary and high school classes at local schools.

The results of this program have been promising: there are now a number of proficient speakers of Gumbaynggirr (according to the Ethnologue, there were 42 speakers recorded in the 2006 census), and the teaching programs continue to be met with enthusiasm (Walsh 254). The Ethnologue classifies Gumbaynggirr as a status 6b language despite its small speaker number, as “young adult speakers are now passing the language on to their children” (Ethnologue, “Kumbaingar” par 7). Although not a stable situation as the future of Gumbaynggirr is dependent still on the amount of funding available, the increased interest and participation of community members and many other factors, the current prospects for Gumbaynggirr are positive.

Walsh mentions the following reasons for the success of Gumbaynggirr revival: a focus on self-respect and self-empowerment, Indigenous control, the recognition that being a language speaker does not make one a language teacher, the assistance of those with professional expertise, adequate funding and finally sustained commitment from Gumbaynggirr Elders (254-7).

Self-respect and self-empowerment are emphasized in the revitalization program, particularly in the manifesto published by the Gumbaynggirr in 1991. The manifesto concluded that “we Goories are our culture” (Walsh 255) and that while Gumbaynggirr culture has been attacked and invaded and this trauma needs to be acknowledged and discussed, retaining Gumbaynggirr culture is the medium through which the community can “cope with the society around [them], [and] to stand strong in [their] identity and share this identity with [their] kids” (Walsh 255). Thus, through the retention and revitalization of the culture, and with it the revitalization of the language which is inextricably tied to culture, Gumbaynggirr identity is maintained and strengthened, an important goal for the community.

The Gumbaynggirr revitalization project, while aided greatly by the non-native linguist Steven Morelli, is wholly under Indigenous control. This, Walsh points out, is another reason for the success of the project (255). The Gumbaynggirr project does support language classes given at non-Indigenous educational institutions, but explicitly denotes these as a ‘back-up’, and not as “the first place where culture is taught” (Walsh 255).

The third and fourth aspects of the revitalization project which Walsh notes as reasons for its success are interrelated, namely the acceptance that being a language speaker does not inherently or necessarily qualify a person to teach the language, and that professional expertise is necessary (255-6). While intergenerational transmission creates new language speakers without the need for language teachers, once this type of transmission no longer occurs in a community there will be need for those who have teaching skills in order to accurately and effectively teach the language to others. This is also the point where professional expertise is needed. In order to plan for language revitalization, both linguistic and educational expertise is necessary, as a

suitable method or combination of methods for revival must be selected, linguistic material or other literature must be interpreted and adapted, and teaching materials must be created.

Funding for the Gumbaynggirr language revitalization project was achieved through a number of different avenues, such as through several government agencies but also through the religious foundation to which Steven Morelli belonged (Walsh 256). Most importantly, however, this funding was controlled by the community. Walsh notes that funding and materials should be under community control and steps need to be taken to ensure that there is no conflict within the community regarding the allocation of these funds.

Finally, in the Gumbaynggirr language revitalization case, the impetus behind the project came from the community's Elders, and it is these Elders' sustained commitment to it which ensured Indigenous control, a top-down approach and encouraged young Indigenous people to participate (Walsh 256-7).

### **The cases of Shiyeyi (Yeyi) and Ikalanga (Kalanga) in Botswana**

Currently, there are 26 languages spoken in Botswana. Two of these are exogenous with European roots, namely the official language of Botswana, English, and Afrikaans. One, Tswana (Setswana), is an Indigenous language with national status, meaning it is a language of instruction in official education, an alternative language used in government and a language used in the media (Alimi 49). The remaining 23 Indigenous languages are "relegated to local or tribal use" (Alimi 49), with even their use in the home domain and the immediate community to which they have been relegated decreasing, partly due to the intrusion of Tswana in those domains (Alimi 49).

The main reason for this promotion of Tswana to a national language is due to the state of Botswana's desire for national cohesion, and its view of multilingualism as being incompatible with this desire (Alimi 55). This view, which equates nationhood with a standard language, has led to the adoption of the colonial language, English, as the official language, with only one Indigenous language receiving national status. This has led to a rejection of multilingualism, the aforementioned relegation of Indigenous language use, apart from Tswana, to the home and immediate community, and to a rejection of Indigenous language use, apart from Tswana, in the educational system.

Measures are being taken by several ethnic cultural groups, however, in order to maintain and revitalize a number of Indigenous languages in Botswana. Two of these efforts are described by Alimi, namely the Kamanakao Association's (KA) project to revitalize the Shiyeyi (Yeyi) language of northern Botswana, and the Society for the Promotion of Ikalanga Language's (SPIL) project to maintain and revitalize Ikalanga (Kalanga). Both projects share a goal of revitalizing both Indigenous culture and language (Alimi 60-5).

The KA has as its explicit goal the revitalization of culture and language of Wayeyi, and in this focus on three aspects of language planning: language, literacy and cultural development (Alimi 61). The language aspect of their revitalization program aimed to create a Shiyeyi orthography, grammar and a dictionary, and to increase the community's Shiyeyi literacy. Planning workshops commenced in which it was decided by community members that the language materials should focus on Wayeyi cultural practices and tradition, and on skills such as numeracy which focused on everyday use (Alimi 61). Following the planning workshop, literacy workshops commenced, and in addition to increasing Shiyeyi literacy among the community, these workshops served to train a further eight members in professionally writing Shiyeyi

language materials (Alimi 61-2). During these workshops, a survey was taken to record the participants' language attitudes. Its results show that there is a "keen interest [within] the community in seeing intergenerational revival and sustenance of Shiyeyi." (Alimi 61) This also ties in to the third section of the KA's project, which concerns cultural development. It aims to "restore people's sense of pride, self-esteem and self-worth" (Alimi 62) through the celebration of Wayeyi culture at festivals, with poetry readings, songs, dance and other cultural expressions.

The Ikalanga language revitalization project organized by SPIL has similar goals to the aforementioned Shiyeyi revival project, and also utilizes some of the same methods as the KA. An Ikalanga orthography, too, was created for the purpose of language revitalization, although in this case an orthography already existed but was deemed unsuitable for the Ikalanga spoken in Botswana, as it was created for the variant of the language which is spoken in Zimbabwe (Alimi 63). SPIL, like KA, before commencing any further revitalization efforts held a planning workshop, in which the community set the aims and content of the to be established program. Once goals were set, further revitalization efforts began, with adult education workshops focused on writing, reading and numeracy skills commencing. These workshops were deliberately given in the winter and spring, when agricultural demands were lower and thus more community members were able to participate (Alimi 63). SPIL, like KA, also organizes cultural festivals, and in 2012 dedicated the events to the theme of "Mother Tongue Instruction and Inclusive Education" (Alimi 64).

Both KA and SPIL have seen success with their revitalization approaches, with community interest in revitalizing their respective languages at a high level and Shiyeyi and Ikalanga literacy improving. Furthermore, Alimi speaks of a 'cultural renaissance' taking place in Botswana which is "altering the linguistic landscape in favour of multiculturalism" (67), an

important step towards the recognition of Indigenous language rights. One reason for these efforts' relative successes can be found in their respect for the community's language wishes and needs; both efforts extensively consulted the language community on their views. Furthermore, much like in all the previously discussed revitalization efforts, there was a clear link between the revitalization of language and of culture, and both were clearly addressed in the KA and SPIL projects, within the language materials created and through cultural festivals. Another reason for the projects' successes is that they did not depend on the national education system in order to revitalize the language, instead giving workshops directly to the community without the intervention of majority language-controlled educational institutions. In fact, the KA and SPIL organizations are working towards changing the educational institutions themselves by having local Indigenous languages be recognized as significant in the educational domain, and establishing schools in which local Indigenous languages are the language of instruction (Alimi 67).

### **The case of Kaska in Canada**

Kaska is classified in the Ethnologue as a status 7 language, meaning that while there are still speakers of the language among the younger generation, intergenerational transmission is no longer occurring (Ethnologue, "Kaska" par 6). In response to the language shift which has been taking place in the Kaska community, several methods of language revitalization have been adopted, such as the teaching of Kaska as a school subject, the recognition of 'traditional use areas' where Kaska is deliberately used, centers where young Liard First Nations (LFN) children come into contact with Kaska speakers and community assemblies where the opportunity to listen to Kaska speech is available (Meek 28). However, despite these revitalization efforts,

Meek notes that children and novice learners do not use the language to communicate among themselves or indeed with Elders (37).

The reason for this failure in revitalizing Kaska, Meek poses, is a reconceptualization of Kaska language use as “a progression through social statuses” (24) instead of a feature of everyday life. That the revaluation of the Kaska language has led to this reconceptualization is due to three developments, as identified by Meek: the use of Kaska only in conversations between Elders and between older adults, the reinforcement of LFN Elders as the authorities on Kaska use, and the significance of the concept of respect in Kaska culture.

Firstly, Meek notes that while children are exposed to Kaska in the home, this mostly takes the form of overheard conversations between adults, and directions or commands given to them (28). When Elders use the Kaska language to communicate with a person whose social status is below their own, even if they are fluent in Kaska (e.g. a Kaska language instructor), the Kaska utterances are coupled with English translations (Meek 29). This practice denotes that the Elders expect their interlocutors, because of their lower social status, to have a lower linguistic competence, and conversely a Kaska-only interaction denotes that the interlocutors are of equal status (Meeks 29). This connotation of Kaska-only conversation with equal status prohibits children and novice learners of the language from communicating in Kaska with competent speakers in, and thus their exposure to Kaska increases only their passive competence.

The second development which contributed to the reconceptualization of Kaska is the reinforcement of Kaska Elders as being the authorities and experts on Kaska language and its use. As education of LFN children is no longer controlled by the community’s Elders but rather by the Canadian state, “[E]lders’ domains of authority have diminished from covering all realms of knowledge to exclusively covering practices considered “Kaska traditions.”” (Meek 30) This

means that while previously the specialized knowledge of Elders included knowledge of healthcare, weather predictions, game predictions and general education, the definition of specialized knowledge has now shifted to include language knowledge (Meek 30-1). Hereby, Elders become the authorities on Kaska language use, and it is no longer considered general knowledge, thus further discouraging intergenerational transmission.

The third contributing factor to the reconceptualization of Kaska is the emphasis which is placed on the concept of ‘respect’ within the Kaska culture. This concept of *dene á’ nezen* applies to the entire ecosystem, demanding respect for plants, animals, water, and people, especially Elders (Meek 31). Respect is shown to people by being silent and listening to them, and this applies especially to interactions between children and adults (Meek 31-2). This discourse of ‘respect’ is articulated in stories told by Elders to children in which they describe how they themselves behaved respectfully when they were children (Meeks 33). Again children are deprived of opportunities to speak the language because it would signify disrespect to speak to an Elder or teacher in Kaska unless in answer to a question, and again only the passive linguistic competence of the children is given the chance to improve.

The three aforementioned characteristics of Kaska language socialization in the Liard River First Nation have led to a situation in which children associate speaking the Kaska language with age and the status which comes with age. This is exemplified by the observation of a LFN child who was shown a graphic charting Kaska fluency by age: “you start speaking Kaska as you get older” (Meek 34). This reconceptualization of Kaska language use has prohibited children from acquiring active proficiency in the language, and thus has been detrimental to the Kaska language revitalization effort.

### **Other cases considered**

Several case studies beside the ones described above fit the criteria set for this analysis, namely that they must be a project aimed at revitalizing an endangered Indigenous language in an area with a history of colonial rule and a European-origin majority language.

One such case is that of Suba, a Kenyan language which, like many of the 55 other Indigenous Kenyan languages not given official status, is endangered (Obiero 249). A project to revitalize the Suba language was initiated by the Kenyan government and supported by several non-governmental organizations, as well as the Suba community. Suba classes were established at a primary school level, cultural festivals were organized and a Suba-language radio station was established (Obiero 252). In an article written some 13 years after the project's initiation, Obiero reports that the initiative is not producing any progress in terms of language revitalization (236). However, data from 2009 shows that there has been an increase of around 10 000 speakers from 1994 figures (Ethnologue, "Suba" par 3), and furthermore the Ethnologue notes that "revitalization efforts have been very effective" ("Suba" par 9), a positive sentiment echoed by wa Mberia (142) and Trudell (412) although they did not provide full descriptions of the project. Due to these conflicting statements, I did not include this case in my analysis, as the verity of any results could not be assured.

Another case which fit the analysis criteria was that of Zapotec, an Indigenous Mexican macrolanguage of which many varieties are endangered. A number of studies discuss Zapotec revitalization, such as Falconi's article on a transborder Zapotec community (2013) and Porrás-Kim's work on Zapotec whistling tones (2016), but the information on the results of these revitalization efforts were scant and not usable for extensive analysis. Similarly, the revitalization project concerning the South African Indigenous language N|u fit the analysis

criteria, and a wide range of N|u-language teaching materials can be retrieved, yet insufficient information on the results which this revitalization project has yielded is available, and thus analysis is not possible.

## **Chapter Four: Overarching Themes and Strategies for Implementation**

### **Domains of knowledge and power sharing arrangements**

An overarching theme which can be identified from the cases discussed in chapter 3 is that of power divisions and the need for the deliberate and fair distribution of power.

Historically, Elders were those who held specialized knowledge regarding topics such as ceremony, hunting, agriculture, history, tradition, storytelling, religion and so on in Indigenous communities. In this situation, all knowledge regarding the language lay with the community as language was not a specialized domain but rather a function of culture. However, language shift has caused this linguistic knowledge to be separated from cultural knowledge and largely lost within the community, and instead linguists, who are often non-community members, now hold the expertise on the Indigenous language which is necessary to effectively design a revitalization program. Through this expertise, linguists hold a considerable amount of power over what the eventual form and trajectory of the revitalization project will be. This means that there need to be “acceptable power sharing arrangements” (Amery 299) put in place to ensure that no discord emerges.

Elders and community members not only comprise the envisioned speaker population, but are also the ones whose traditions and history are embedded in the language. They will be the ones using the language in their daily lives, in their public life and private life. It is important, then, that their needs regarding the language and its revitalization are the guiding lines in the design and implementation of a language program. Linguistic expertise may dictate that a certain method of revitalization would be of most use to the program, but should the community object to this method, it would not be feasible to use it. Example of this can be found in the projects

previously discussed: the Nahuatl Balsas River project uses community input in deciding what materials they will produce (Flores Farfán “Keeping the Fire Alive” 200), the Shiyeyi project held planning workshops in which the community members could express their wishes regarding the revitalization (Alimi 61) and so on.

In the case of Kaurna, an interesting development regarding these power sharing arrangements can be observed: Kaurna “is developing a life of its own” (Amery 298), meaning that while input from linguists initially guided almost all language use within the community, it was now being used spontaneously and neologisms were being created by community members themselves. This changes the power dynamics of the situation; Kaurna language knowledge is returning to community ownership, and the divide between the linguistic and cultural domains is fading. This development shows that while in the early stages of planning a revitalization project it is crucial to establish power sharing arrangements, as the language knowledge and use among the community grows, power and ownership of linguistic knowledge must be returned to the community and the divide between cultural and linguistic domains must disappear, thus eliminating a power imbalance and returning to the situation as it existed before language shift occurred.

### **Simultaneous cultural revitalization**

A central characteristic of successful cases of language revitalization is an accompanying revitalization of culture. As previously explained, there is an intrinsic link between language and culture; Indigenous languages reflect the worldviews and ecological knowledge of a community. Thus, when the language is again spoken, these worldviews will emerge and strengthen with it.

Many traditions and (religious) ceremonies cannot be fully carried out without the language, but if the language is revitalized they can again be restored to their previous state. The revitalization of these aspects of culture which are closely linked to the language should thus be encouraged and enabled. Many of the projects reviewed did so: Kurna fire ceremonies were held, and dance and singing groups were established (Amery 296), and cultural festivals were held both by the Wayeyi and Kalanga (Alimi 62, 64).

Encouraging the revitalization of culture along with language can also be a positive factor in establishing a suitable power division as discussed above. This is because the cultural and historical knowledge, unlike linguistic knowledge, largely still lies with the Indigenous community and its Elders. Thus, their expertise on the topics of cultural revitalization is necessary in order to initiate and plan cultural revitalization, and this will in turn contribute to the balancing of power within the revitalization project at large.

### **Encouragement of literacy**

The encouragement of literacy in the Indigenous language is crucial to the success of Indigenous language revitalization projects, as it enables the language to be used as a regular medium of communication in everyday modern life. Therefore, the encouragement of literacy was an important aspect in all cases reviewed in the previous chapter. The revitalized languages all had orthographies; the Kurna community recently adopted an improved spelling system and in the case of both Shiyeyi and Ikalanga orthographies were created by the revitalization projects' teams, and these were introduced to the community in literacy workshops. In the Kaska community, the language is taught as a school subject and literacy workshops are given.

If literacy in the Indigenous language is high, the use of the language is not limited to oral domains such as interpersonal communication and public speaking, but also includes domains such as the print media, which can serve to connect Indigenous communities and improve self-image (Burrows 267), social media which allows (young) Indigenous people to present their Indigenous identity and control the representation of their community (Rice et al. 10) and online correspondence in written form such as emails. Although traditionally these domains did not play a large role in Indigenous societies, they are an integral part of modern life. If the use of the Indigenous language in these domains is not possible, the language cannot be reinstated as a medium of regular communication. As use of the language in everyday life is the very basis of intergenerational transmission, literacy is thus crucial to the sustained revitalization of a language. Moreover, improving literacy means providing access to official domains such as law and formal education in the language. These domains are key to the institutionalization and revaluing of a language, two themes which will be discussed below.

### **Institutionalization of the language**

The institutionalization of the Indigenous language is crucial to its revitalization: for a language to be reinstated to its original use in society it must be used in all facets of society. Historically, the Indigenous language was the medium used to communicate in all societal domains and thus institutionalized, although the institutions in which it was utilized were of a different nature than those of modern Western society. Institutionalization entails the use of the language in education and especially in higher education, in forms of (local) government, in public speeches and events, in the naming of institutions, places and landmarks and so on. For this (re-)institutionalization to take place, language literacy must be developed, and additionally

to enable the language's use in education, an academic register must be available. In the case of Nahuatl, the language was being taught in schools but not used as a medium of education. To amend this, a program has been set up which promotes the development of such a register through e.g. the establishment of guidelines and by encouraging Nahuatl-language thesis defense (Sandoval Arenas 78). In the case of Kaurna, the development of a formal register has been taking place through the performance of public speeches. Furthermore, the Kaurna reclamation program has seen a great enthusiasm for its naming project, which (re)establishes Kaurna names for places, organizations and institutions. This project leads to increased visibility of the language among the greater public, but also reinstates the language as the medium in which naming takes place.

Thus, when the language is institutionalized, it is legitimized as a medium of civil society. Its use in both formal and informal, academic and practical contexts is enabled and encouraged, thereby giving those who speak the language "greater access to the public realm" (May 161).

### **Revaluing of the language**

The theme of language revaluation is closely linked to that of institutionalization, as both relate to how the language is perceived. If the Indigenous language is institutionalized, it is reinstated in the domains in which its use was lost, such as education and (local) government. However, for the language to be successfully revitalized it must be revalued not only in terms of its use in formal and academic contexts, but also in the community members' perceptions of the language. The development of internalized notions of language inferiority was noted in the case of Nahuatl-speaking children by Sandoval Arenas (72), by Alimi in both the described language

communities in Botswana (67) and by Meek in the Kaska language community (31). In situations where the minority language has been devalued and is perceived as inferior to the majority language, parents often choose not to transmit the language to their children out of fear it will inhibit their upward socio-economic mobility (Darquennes 65). This notion inhibits intergenerational transmission and furthermore inhibits novice learners of the language in their use of the language: they may use the language only in the specific context of language learning as they are not convinced of the applicability of the language outside of those contexts.

Ways in which the perceived inferiority of the language was combated in the various reviewed projects ranged from cultural festivals which aimed to “restore people’s sense of pride, self-esteem and self-worth” (Alimi 62), to the use naming and renaming community members following traditional Kaurna naming practices (Amery 208-9). However, care must be taken to ensure that the revaluing of the language is combined with its increased use in daily life, lest the language’s revaluation lead to the reconceptualization of its use as an indicator of status, as was the case with Kaska.

## **Discussion**

An enormous number of different revitalization approaches which incorporate the above themes can be devised, and so the two which I suggest only offer an example of what can be done. Of course, all situations have their limitations and possibilities, and the implementation of these themes differ across situations. Therefore, the needs of the community involved in the project should be surveyed before any planning begins, and variables such as location, funding, average age of the community members, level of institutional support and indeed community support should be taken into account to arrive at the most suitable strategy.

### **Traditional teaching program**

A language revitalization strategy which incorporates the identified overarching themes is a program of traditional teaching. In this model, which is aimed at students who have already developed some competency in an L1 and not intended to create native speakers, a number of hours or even days a week Eurocentric educational models are eschewed in classrooms and instead Indigenous knowledge-based teaching takes place. This would ideally involve moving beyond the classroom into nature where teaching through observation and imitation can occur, as these are traditional Indigenous forms of learning (Castagno and Brayboy 956). As Demmert notes, “when local knowledge plays a dominant role in instruction (usually in combination with use of the Native language), improvements are seen in various performance and attainment measures.” (qtd. in Castagno and Brayboy 956) Therefore, in order to attain the best results these classes should concern topics which are part of this community’s Indigenous knowledge, and be held entirely in the target language to provide an immersion environment. In order to support the development of literacy and grammatical knowledge in the language, this immersive program should be supported by language classes which use written materials, although these classes should still incorporate Indigenous cultural values and norms. Furthermore, the information or skills which the students have learned during the traditional teaching portion of the program should also be incorporated into these more literacy-focused classes, for example through an essay writing assignment on a traditional skill or aspect of knowledge. In the traditional teaching classes, examination would not be writing-based but, in accordance with the traditional teaching methods, would be either oral or practical (i.e. the skill which was taught is demonstrated). For this type of program to be established, teachers must either be familiar with traditional learning

methods or receive training in them, and have a clear understanding of the Indigenous values and norms in addition to being proficient in the language. Therefore, if possible Elders should provide or contribute to faculty training, as Elders are the community's authorities on Indigenous knowledge.

The described program of traditional teaching removes the artificial divide which has been created between Indigenous linguistic and cultural knowledge; it does not directly teach the language but rather uses the language as a medium of transferring Indigenous knowledge. This minimizes the issue of power sharing, as the expertise of community members is crucial to the success of this program. Furthermore, the incorporation of Indigenous knowledge into this program ensures that cultural revitalization occurs simultaneously: as well as increasing their language competency, students will gain knowledge on various aspects of Indigenous culture.

By utilizing traditional Indigenous teaching methods, as well as allowing oral or practical examination, Indigenous knowledge is placed in the same regard as western teaching and examination methods. This not only complements the students' learning styles (Castagno and Brayboy 953), but also signals to them that Indigenous knowledge and methods are not inferior to Eurocentric knowledge and methods, contributing to positive language attitudes in students and parents, and thus the revaluation of the language. Furthermore, the use of the Indigenous language in education, as is the case in the proposed strategy, will contribute to the institutionalization of the Indigenous language. By utilizing the language not just in language classes but also to teach a number of other subjects and to conduct examinations, it is legitimized as a medium of communication in public, official spheres.

### **Social media platform**

Another strategy which utilizes the above insights is the establishment of an Indigenous-language social media platform. As previously noted, the usage of social media by Indigenous youth can have a positive impact on their self-esteem and inspire pride in their culture and identity (Rice et al. 10). While some of these Indigenous social media users may already produce Indigenous-language postings, the interface of the website is in the majority language. Creating an Indigenous-language platform would offer in some sense an ‘online immersion environment’ where the language is used in all communications, both postings by the users and in the interface of the website. Such a platform would contribute to the expansion of the language beyond the oral domain, allowing it to serve as a medium of written communication and contributing to the reinstatement of the language in all facets of society. Additionally, exposure to a large amount of written language material will improve Indigenous language literacy among learners, especially increasing their active competence through their production of postings. It will also allow novice language learners to become more comfortable with using the language outside the educational context.

Furthermore, an Indigenous-language social media platform can provide a link between community members who may be disconnected from many aspects of their culture due to their urban environment, and those who still reside within the community. This link is beneficial to the revitalization of culture as it provides Indigenous people with greater and easier access to those with cultural knowledge. In terms of power divisions, this platform would allow for community members to exert a great deal of control over the content of the language program, as they are the ones producing postings. Because of this control, there is little need for the establishment of power sharing arrangements beyond the initial design of the website interface,

where community members' opinions on the phrasings used and their needs in terms of website functionality should be consulted.

### **Other strategies**

The above suggestions are only two out of an enormous number of strategies which could be devised when using the identified overarching themes as guidelines. Communities which are small and close geographically may not find much use in an Indigenous social media platform, but they can still guide their revitalization effort through the themes of literacy, institutionalization, revaluation, power sharing and cultural revitalization. The community could work towards language revitalization, for example, by using the language in public speeches, or in schools, or in theater, or even take small steps such giving their children an Indigenous name, thereby revaluing the language. Other communities may not yet have reached a stage where there is enough material or knowledge within the community to use the language in traditional teaching methods, so they may focus on creating an orthography and language learning materials, utilizing outsiders' linguistic expertise but establishing clear power sharing relationships which guide this process.

Apart from the specific implementation strategies mentioned above, a more general implementation protocol can be derived from the identified themes, which I will describe here. When planning a revitalization project, the linguistic knowledge and expertise of those involved in the undertaking should be surveyed. Power divisions must be clearly articulated, and a way must be devised to share this power which is acceptable to all, ensuring Indigenous control and input in the project is safeguarded at all times. Then, the community's language attitudes should be surveyed. Should they be very negative, the project's initial focus should be placed on

revaluing the language in the community so that members will want to participate in the language project. Should attitudes be neutral or positive, language revaluation will be of lesser importance, as members will be open to participating in the project. The language literacy of the community should be reviewed. If literacy is low, it should be increased through workshops and classes, but also through increased exposure to the written language, for example by using the language in community newspapers, posters or leaflets. Revitalization efforts should also survey what institutions are open to participating in the project; if a band council is receptive to the project perhaps the language could be used in some the proceedings, if a school within the community approves perhaps they could employ a speaker of the Indigenous language to organize extracurricular activities in the language etc. As the language's vitality grows, so does the importance of its institutionalization and it should become a main goal once speaker numbers have recovered somewhat. Finally, stock should be taken of the cultural events taking place within the community. If there are none, cultural events in the language must be organized, and if these events are already established, it must be considered whether they could be done (partially) in the language. This not only revitalizes culture but also improves language attitudes by inspiring pride in Indigenous heritage and culture. Ultimately, the overarching goal of the program should be to remove artificial divides between the Indigenous language and the culture and return to a state in which language is a function of culture, as was historically the case.

## Conclusion

In this thesis, I have explained the mechanisms through which Indigenous communities in Canada have become subject to large-scale language shift from Indigenous languages towards the English and French majority languages. Justified by their ideology of settler colonialism, European invaders drove Indigenous communities from their lands, while European missionaries attempted to convert them to Christianity. After the confederation of Canada, a policy of forced assimilation was implemented by the government, enforced through laws which aimed to “cause Aboriginal peoples to cease to exist as distinct legal, social, cultural, religious, and racial entities in Canada” (Truth and Reconciliation 1). The residential school system, especially, played a large role in this cultural genocide. It has taken its toll on First Nations languages, which are almost all under threat of extinction.

The extinction of Indigenous languages in Canada would be a loss not just of language but also of Indigenous knowledge at large, as Indigenous worldviews and understanding of ecology are encoded in Indigenous languages. Language and culture were not separated historically, as language was a function of culture, and a loss of the one is also a (partial) loss of the other. Preserving these languages and the cultural, ecological and historical knowledge tied to them is mankind’s ethical duty.

Many works have been produced on the subject of language revitalization since the 1970’s, both theoretical considerations such as Fishman’s (2006) GIDS scale and subsequent works, Crystal’s (2000) work on language revival, and practical works such as Hinton’s many case studies have contributed to the field. However, conclusions on effectiveness have almost always been limited to single case studies. This means that it is difficult to apply insights gained

from these case studies to language revitalization programs which do not share the local context of the community which the case study concerns. Therefore, I have reviewed a number of different revitalization cases in order to identify overarching themes which were key to the success of these projects, so as to be able to offer general guidelines and strategies to improve the effectiveness of revitalization projects.

The reviewed cases were selected on the basis that they must concern language revitalization efforts in an Indigenous community which is experiencing language shift in a situation with a European colonial tongue as the majority language. These criteria were chosen because they closely reflect the situation of Canadian Indigenous communities, and examining results obtained in similar situations allowed me to extrapolate common themes in these findings to the Canadian context. In my analysis of the cases I considered the status of the language, the speaker number, the method(s) and materials used to achieve revitalization and the level and type of support and funding the project received both from institutions and the community itself, as well as other relevant factors.

Through my analysis I identified five overarching themes which played a significant role in the cases reviewed: domains of knowledge and power sharing arrangements; simultaneous cultural revitalization; encouragement of literacy; institutionalization of the language; and revaluing of the language. While the implementation of these themes can take many forms, the traditional teaching method and the social media platform method are two practical strategies which incorporate the aforementioned insights into a program of revitalization. The traditional teaching method which I champion combines Indigenous knowledge-based learning with a language immersion environment. It encourages the revitalization of culture, and because of the intrinsic need for Indigenous knowledge in the program, input from community members is

crucial and therefore the possibility of power imbalances is diminished. Through traditional teaching, the language is used as a medium of instruction in the educational system, contributing to its institutionalization. The social media platform method increases community members' exposure to written material, and also gives them opportunities to produce written language. Because postings are produced by community members, linguists' control over the project's trajectory is minimal. The platform would also allow community members who live away from the community to connect with their culture and heritage, thus contributing to cultural revitalization. The general protocol for implementing the five themes in a revitalization approach offers more broad advice on how to implement these themes, such as by organizing cultural events and providing literacy workshops.

Of course every Indigenous community is unique and therefore has unique needs. In some communities which wish to revitalize their language, one of the themes which I have identified may not feature heavily or at all, such as when there are no community-external linguists involved in the project. Furthermore, while I have attempted to review cases which were closely matched in situation, some of these cases may have features with salient differences which I have overlooked. In addition to this, the sample of cases which I have reviewed is relatively small, due to both space constraints and the relative lack of studies which examine in detail language revitalization processes outside of European minority languages as opposed to language shift processes. An analysis of a larger number of cases could yield more specific and extensive results. However, the current research despite its limitations has provided valuable insights into the themes which contribute to successful, sustainable revitalization.

Ultimately, the revitalization Indigenous languages should be not just be a goal for First Nations and their leaders but for the entire country of Canada and indeed the world. These

languages are an integral part of the wealth of human knowledge, and they are an integral part of communities' cultures and histories. Were they to disappear, so would an aspect of the Indigenous knowledge which has existed and evolved for thousands of years; mankind has an ethical duty to ensure that this will not take place. Through this research, I have contributed insights as to how the crucial revitalization of these languages might best take shape, namely by incorporating the themes of power sharing arrangements, simultaneous cultural revitalization, encouragement of literacy, institutionalization of the language and revaluing of the language. I believe that if a concerted effort is made, controlled by Indigenous communities themselves and supported by academic and governmental institutions, the future of Canadian First Nations languages is bright. After all, as Indigenous Canadian Maxine Lacorne has said of her community: "We're still here." (Truth and Reconciliation 19)

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