

# Language Activism through Digital Arts

**KAYLENE J. BIG KNIFE, CHIPPEWA CREE TRIBE, UNIVERSITY OF MONTANA - MISSOULA**

Language activism involves the energetic pursuit of preserving and promoting linguistic diversity. As a language activist, I use my digital art skills to participate in language documentation and revitalization. In this presentation, I share my experience with language activities and highlight projects that involved my digital art skills.

## **ABSTRACT:**

Language activism involves the energetic pursuit of preserving and promoting linguistic diversity. As a language activist, I work at the individual level as opposed to leading an event or project. I am a member of the Chippewa Cree Tribe of the Rocky Boy Indian Reservation in northcentral Montana, and I'm currently in my senior year at the University of Montana – Missoula. Both at home and at the university, I use my digital art skills to participate in language documentation and revitalization. In this presentation, I share my experience with language activities and highlight projects that involved my digital art skills.

My interest in art and computers started from a young age, because I was the kid immersed in comics and videogames. What could I do to create in that realm, that level? With my desire to hone my digital art skills, I went through formal training in Interactive Graphic Design at the Institute of American Indian Arts in Santa Fe, New Mexico. After returning to my community in 2013, I saw the need for digital language documentation. One of my first projects was designing culturally relevant charts to explain the Cree's way of being as well as health awareness messages on t-shirts and banners. Later, I designed a revamped Cree syllabary chart in which I freely distributed to all my fellow tribal members. In my most recent project, I am tasked with illustrating and designing the layout of a book written entirely in Cree syllabics.

Being a language activist and an artist simultaneously allows me to engage in language revitalization efforts for not only my community but other communities as well. Upon graduating from the university, I plan to return home and further use my skillset to continue involved in language activism.

# Mapping Our Community

## **HARTWELL FRANCIS & SARAH MARTIN CHEROKEE LANGUAGE IMMERSION ACADEMY**

We map our community. We develop exercises to teach mapping and map vocabulary. We work from classroom to school level and on to community and national levels. We build on identifying significant classroom and home sites to community and national sites. We align our work with state standards throughout.

### **ABSTRACT:**

We work in Cherokee language from classroom out, mapping our community, our state, our region, and the nation. We develop classroom mapping exercises to teach the concept of mapping and to teach map vocabulary. From pictures of furniture and space in our classrooms, we develop Cherokee language vocabulary exercises. We abstract from real furniture, space, and pictures to a two-dimensional map of the classroom, with critical map concepts like direction and key features included. We work from there to the school level, mapping the school and indicating significant cultural features of the school. Our school is the location of one of the first business ventures of the Eastern Band and its bricks were laid by important Eastern Band members. It is full of art and sculpture of deep cultural significance. We map the halls and grounds and create a key for different features. We include information about the people at the school to reaffirm community connections. The maps we make of the classroom and the school become the basis for different types of map reading and searching exercises. The maps are also the basis for student exercises in mapping. Our students map their rooms and their homes and present and discuss their maps in Cherokee language. We expand outward from school and home and use satellite technology, tourist information, and interviews to develop a community map with profound cultural information. We enlist our students and their families in developing and refining a community map. The local community map provides the foundation for study of community history and for documentation of community knowledge. Based on our maps of school, home, and community, we continue to state, region, and nation. We align our work with state standards for social studies but we emphasize the Cherokee language and experience.

# Concerns of Urban Parents for Language Learning

**ILENE RYAN, IRENE TSOSIE, JAMES JONES, LOUISE LOCKARD**

Puente de Hozho, a magnet school in Flagstaff, Arizona serves urban Navajo families in a Reservation border town. The teachers will discuss their role as agents of language revitalization with a generation of parents who are non-speakers of Dine. This effort takes a school, a handful of teachers and dedicated administrators to do the impossible.

**ABSTRACT:**

Puente de Hozho is a magnet elementary school in Flagstaff, Arizona. It serves the Navajo border towns and urban Navajo families. Students K-5 are learning to read, write, & speak Dine in an effort to revitalize their language. The teachers have a tremendous responsibility to cultivate the language and culture in the classrooms as opposed to learning it in the home. The teachers have become the agents of the language amidst a generation of parents that are mostly non-speakers of Dine. The undertaking takes a school, a handful of teachers, & dedicated administrators harmoniously do the impossible and be possibility thinkers to further the efforts of rejuvenating a fading language.

# The Complexity of Simple Things: Cross-Disciplinary Collaboration for Teaching Colors in Menominee

**JOEY AWANOHOPIY, RON CORN, MENOMINEE LANGUAGE AND CULTURE  
COMMISSION;**

**MONICA MACAULAY, RITA MACDONALD UNIVERSITY OF WISCONSIN-MADISON**

We demonstrate the benefits of collaboration among Native language instructors, a descriptive linguist, and an applied linguist. Topics discussed: the balance between immersion and explicit instruction; when to introduce explicit instruction; form-based versus function-based instruction, methods to build teacher trainees' meta-linguistic understanding in service of rapid acquisition.

## **ABSTRACT:**

This paper demonstrates the benefits of cross-disciplinary collaboration for a deceptively simple task: teaching colors in Menominee. We--a descriptive/theoretical linguist with expertise in Menominee and an applied linguist with expertise in second language acquisition-- joined forces with Menominee language instructors to support teacher trainees who are, themselves, learning Menominee through immersion supported by explicit instruction.

Menominee color terminology is surprisingly complex: Two systems are closed and partially overlap, and a third is theoretically open, providing an additional way to express colors. There are five pre-nouns, bound particles which compound with nouns; seven verbs; and a construction for describing an object's color by saying it looks like some other object (e.g. 'looks like grape' is 'purple').

The trainee program began as pure immersion, with no explicit grammatical instruction. This was gradually added after several months. Informal assessment revealed that many trainees assumed that all color terms function parallel to English adjectives (a category not found in Menominee), combining terms from the three systems without distinguishing syntactic differences. We set aside here the important issue of language change under conditions of loss of fluent speakers; in this case, the directors of the language program want the original system to be preserved and taught—and needed it to be taught rapidly, since trainees would soon be placed in Pre-K immersion settings, where color terms naturally form part of a curriculum and everyday conversation.

Previous efforts to teach color terms via structure were not successful. We developed and piloted an alternative approach based on several foundational principles in second language

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acquisition. Our results suggest that the trainees have significant meta-linguistic awareness that can be leveraged in service of rapid acquisition, which prompts our discussion of balancing immersion with explicit instruction and suggests the benefits of collaboration to support new pedagogical approaches.

# Speaking Like Our Ancestors: An exploration of learners' word melody in Blackfoot

**NAATOSI FISH, KAYLENE BIG KNIFE, CAROLINE ALLEN, MIZUKI MIYASHITA**

In this project, we examine how Blackfoot language learners' pronunciation differs from native Blackfoot speakers' in terms of pitch contour or word melody. We discuss the potential reasons for these differences and how the results can help develop effective techniques for teaching and learning Blackfoot.

## **ABSTRACT**

In our presentation, we would like to share our research project about how Blackfoot language learners may pronounce words differently than native Blackfoot speakers. Most heritage learners of Blackfoot are speakers of English. When one learns a word in Blackfoot, they often focus only on the sequence of sounds and may not be paying attention to the pitch contour (or word melody). Instead, learners may use the prosodic system of English, their first language. To show this, we are recording Blackfoot language learners pronouncing Blackfoot words. The recorded samples will be linguistically analyzed to identify how native English speakers' pronunciation differs from native Blackfoot speakers. In our presentation, we will talk about the results and discuss the potential reasons for these differences and how the results can be used to develop effective techniques for teaching and learning Blackfoot. This study is significant in two ways. First, it contributes to the field of second language acquisition. To our knowledge, there are no solid studies relating to second language acquisition in Blackfoot. Second, this study contributes to Blackfoot language revitalization efforts. While many revitalization activities are oriented toward children, many learners of Blackfoot are heritage learners who are young adults or older. If our study shows English-speaking Blackfoot learners have difficulty pronouncing Blackfoot words with native-like pitch contours, then this information can be used to help teachers develop effective teaching methods so that learners can sound more like native speakers.

# Cultural Knowledge Transmission and Metaphysical Learning Interactions in Indigenous Language Revitalization and Research

**T'LAT'ŁAKUŁ PATRICIA ROSBOROUGH**

This presentation features the alternating voices of Kwakwaka'wakw scholar, T'lat'łakul Patricia Rosborough, and Nuuchahnulth scholar, chuutsqa Layla Rorick, who discuss the role of Indigenous research and interaction with the spiritual and metaphysical realm in contributing to the intact preservation of cultural knowledge within the field of Indigenous language revitalization.

## **ABSTRACT**

This presentation stems from our recently published co-authored article: Following in the footsteps of the wolf: connecting scholarly minds to ancestors in Indigenous language revitalization in *AlterNative: An International Journal of Indigenous Peoples*, online at [10.1177 /1177180116689031](https://doi.org/10.1177/1177180116689031) T'lat'łakul and chuutsqa apply an Indigenous relational approach to their language revitalization research by introducing each other in relation to their respective families, their communities, and their place-based connections. Drawing on their respective experiences as Indigenous people, scholars, language activists, and Kwak'wala (Kwakwaka'wakw/Kwakiutl language) and h̓i̓h̓i̓šk̓w̓ii̓?at̓h̓a (Hesquiaht dialect of the Nuuchahnulth/Nootka language) adult language learners and teachers, they explore the relationship of spirituality and the supernatural to language revitalization. The presenters use a narrative approach to highlight the long-term effects of metaphysical interaction on learning, as well as acknowledging its role in Indigenous research as a foundational and continuous part of Indigenous search for knowledge. Kwak'wala and h̓i̓h̓i̓šk̓w̓ii̓?at̓h̓a are two of the 34 First Nations languages from the lands now called British Columbia, Canada. The first language speakers of Kwak'wala and nuučaanul are elderly and community members feel urgency for effective approaches to language recovery. This situation is not unique to Kwak'wala and nuučaanul. According to the Report on the Status of B.C. First Nations Languages 2014, all of the Indigenous languages of BC are critically endangered. Within language revitalization work, it is important that we consider not just how to retain the language (i.e. teach and learn it more effectively) but that we also retain the worldview and understandings within the language. The authors of this paper discuss examples of how grasping the literal meanings and metaphors embedded in Kwak'wala and h̓i̓h̓i̓šk̓w̓ii̓?at̓h̓a words and place names, leads to deeper understandings of Kwakwaka'wakw and Nuuchahnulth worldview and appreciation of the beauty of the languages.