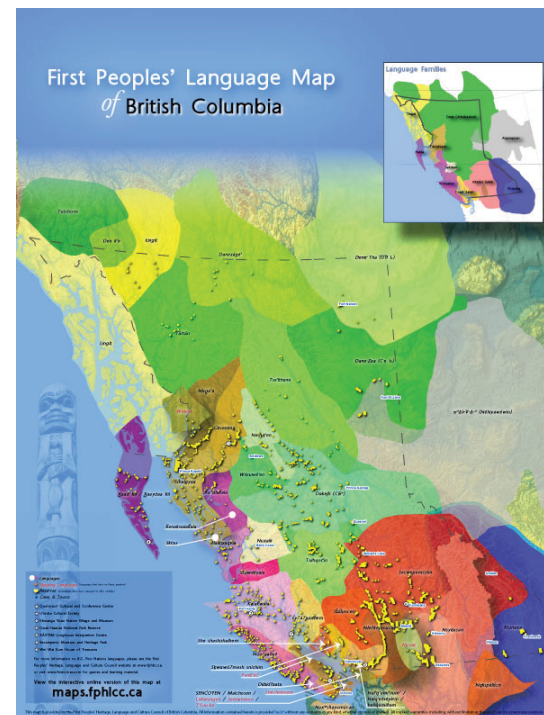



FIRST PEOPLES' CULTURAL COUNCIL

Language Revitalization Fact Sheets



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*What does
it mean to
be fluent?*

*What's the difference between
a language and a dialect?*

*How different are the First Nations
languages in B.C.?*

*Why are there
different ways
to spell in my
language?*

***To answer these common questions and more,
we have developed a series of one-page fact sheets on
various topics in Indigenous language revitalization.***

The fact sheets share information for community language champions as well as others who are interested, and they include links to other resources for those who want to learn more.



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Language Diversity in B.C.

What is language diversity?

There are roughly 6,000 to 7,000 languages spoken in the world today. Language diversity is directly connected to cultural and ecological diversity. Indigenous people recognize an essential connection between language and land. Regions with varied geography and high ecological diversity also have high language diversity.

B.C. is unique in Canada for its Indigenous language diversity. In 2007 B.C. was recognized by *National Geographic* as a language hot spot. There are 7 Indigenous language families and 34 languages in B.C., representing 60% of the First Nations languages in Canada.

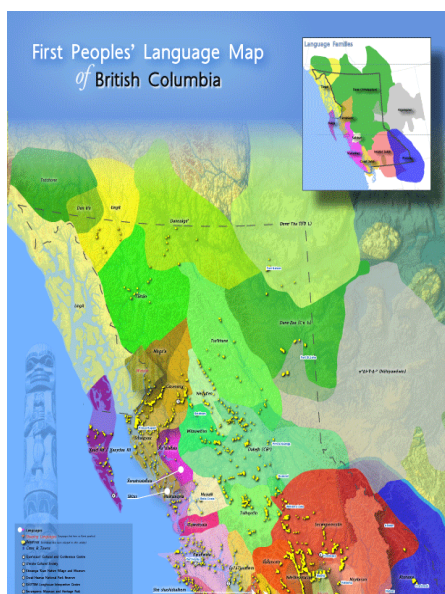
Why is language diversity important?

The Index of Linguistic Diversity indicates an alarming decline in the world's language diversity over the past 35 years.¹ The decrease in the number of first language speakers of Indigenous languages shows that many languages are no longer being passed on to future generations.

Language diversity in B.C. is under threat because the process of language transmission in First Nations communities was forcibly interrupted by colonization and residential schools. This is concerning because language is more than just a means of communication.

“Language is one of the most tangible symbols of culture and group identity. It is not only a means of communication, but a link which connects people with their past and grounds their social, emotional and spiritual vitality. . . . When these languages vanish, they take with them unique ways of looking at the world, explaining the unknown and making sense of life.”

- Canada's First Peoples website (2007)



First Peoples' Language Map of B.C.

LANGUAGE FAMILIES

A language family is a group of languages that are related through descent from a common “ancestor” language. There are 7 language families that make up First Nations languages in B.C.

1. Algonquian
2. Dene or Na-Dene (Athabaskan-Eyak-Tlingit)
3. Ktunaxa (language isolate)
4. Salishan
5. Tsimshianic
6. Wakashan
7. Xaad Kil/Xaayda Kil (language isolate)

¹Harmon, D. & Loh, J. (2010). The Index of Linguistic Diversity: A new quantitative measure of trends in the status of the world's languages. *Language Documentation & Conservation*, 4, 97-151.

Language is essential to identity and transmits values, spiritual and traditional practices, and history across generations.

First Nations languages are part of Canada's unique cultural heritage, but more importantly, they are the rightful heritage of First Nations people. Language, culture and identity form an inseparable bond that directly affects the health and well-being of a people. Knowing and being able to speak one's heritage language is a human right.

Language diversity allows us to see the world through more than one lens. Indigenous languages have linguistic structures and systems that are different from other languages. They provide insights into the different ways that humans think, interact and use language.

How can we support language diversity?

The high diversity of First Nations languages in B.C. presents challenges for language revitalization because of limited funding and resources. It is important that we work together and share tools and resources across all languages.

Community policies are needed to protect First Nations languages within homes, communities and schools. Each community must take control of its own language advocacy and establish its language as an official language within the community. Collaboration among communities, despite language and/or dialect differences, will help share resources and information.

Language diversity is sometimes mistakenly seen as a barrier to human communication, but diversity offers multiple ways of being in the world and can provide unique and creative solutions to world issues. Language diversity is a strength to be celebrated and protected.

KEY TERMS

- **Language hotspot:** a geographical region with a high level of linguistic diversity.
- **Language shift:** occurs when people shift from speaking their heritage language to another language, resulting in fewer speakers of the heritage language.
- **Linguistic diversity:** a range of variations in human languages.
- **Mother tongue:** an individual's first language or languages learned at birth.
- **Language dialect:** one or more varieties of a language that can vary in pronunciation, word and sentence structure, and meaning.



Our Living Languages exhibit at the Royal BC Museum

WHERE CAN I LEARN MORE?

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Terralingua: Unity in Biocultural Diversity. www.terralingua.org



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Language Dialects

What is a dialect?

The term *dialect* refers to the variations in pronunciation (accent), vocabulary and sometimes grammar of a single language. For example, the English that we hear around us is the Canadian English dialect. It sounds a bit different from American English, and very different from British English or Australian English. However, because we can understand and communicate with people from the United States, England and Australia, we consider these variations (Canadian, American, British and Australian) to be dialects of English.



Our Living Languages exhibit at the Royal BC Museum

One dialect is not better than another. Most differences between dialects of the same language follow a pattern and are easily predictable. An example of this is regular sound change, such as when an “l” sound in one dialect is pronounced as an “r” sound in another dialect. The patterns associated with these changes can be learned, allowing for speakers to switch back and forth between dialects quite easily. When differences are so great that speakers can’t understand each other, we consider these dialects to be separate languages.

Why do dialects matter?

Just as language is an expression of our identity and culture, so are individual dialects. Language dialects help provide speakers with a sense of common community and shared identity. Your dialect identifies the particular region you are from and the unique aspects of the culture and heritage in that region. Dialects also link us back to our grandparents, great-grandparents and ancestors. As a result, we often feel protective of our dialect.

While we want to maintain the distinctions that express our unique heritage, over-protectiveness can get in the way of language revitalization.

“When I was a child, our people spoke many languages and used all the dialects. They didn’t argue about which one was better than the other.”

- Dr. Lorna Williams, Lil’wat Nation

Because of the shortage of funding and resources for language revitalization, communities and speakers of the same language can work together, even if they have different dialects.

What are the challenges?

Focusing on dialect differences can lead to a divide between language speakers when we should be creating unity and equality within a shared language. Attachments to a dialect can be positive for short-term language revival but harmful to the language in the long term.

All dialects of Indigenous languages in B.C. are threatened. We need to consider what efforts will be most successful in revitalizing *all* Indigenous languages and the dialects within each language. Accepting all varieties of your language will allow you to share

resources and work together so that you can achieve more in your language revitalization efforts. We shouldn't ignore language variations, but we can avoid looking at language variation in terms of which is the "right" way to say something. Mutual support is needed to revitalize and maintain Indigenous languages in B.C. for future generations. This support will provide advantages for communication between regions, creating opportunities to use the language and share resources.

What can I do?

Learn about other dialects of your language. What is different? What is the same? If possible, learn the patterns of change between the dialects so you can switch between them.

Encourage people to be aware and supportive of language dialect differences. This will help create a shared understanding of the language that is inclusive of all its dialects.

EXAMPLES OF DIALECT DIFFERENCE

Sound differences	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Tom[a]to / Tom[ah]to • A[sh]phalt / A[s]phalt
Vocabulary differences	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Garbage / Trash • Bathroom / Restroom
Grammar differences	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • I have told you once already / I done told you once • You must read this / Read this you must

Communities should aim for an environment in which all dialects of the language may be used and respected, and all speakers are proud of the dialect they speak. When we understand that every dialect has value, our efforts for language revitalization are strengthened.

Avoid saying, "that's wrong" or "we don't say it that way" and instead simply acknowledge that someone is using a different dialect from yours. Supporting *all* First Nations languages in B.C. and respecting their diversity will increase the success of language revitalization efforts.

KEY TERMS

- **Language:** a form of human communication (spoken or written) consisting of the use of words in a structured and predictable way.
- **Dialect:** a variety of a language that is developed from the same ancestral language and is understood by people who speak other dialects within the same language.

WHERE CAN I LEARN MORE?

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Writing Systems

What are writing systems?

The main way that people communicate is through spoken language (or through signing for signed languages). Some languages also have writing systems, but many do not. In fact, according to Ethnologue only 3,866 out of 7,099 languages have a developed writing system.¹ As long as a language is actively spoken by members of a community, it can remain strong, whether or not it has a writing system.

In B.C., no First Nations language had a fully developed writing system until after colonization. Most writing systems for First Nations languages in B.C. were developed by priests, anthropologists or linguists who visited the communities.



Our Living Languages exhibit at the Royal BC Museum

The SENĆOTEN alphabet is an example of a writing system developed by a First Nations community member. Dave Elliott, a fluent speaker and language champion from the WJOLEEP First Nation, created a writing system for SENĆOTEN that represents the unique sounds found in the language. This writing system is used for the language today and has played an integral role in SENĆOTEN language revitalization efforts.

In B.C., there are three main types of writing systems. *Alphabetical systems* use letters to represent sounds. Writing systems that use the English alphabet must use combinations of letters to represent sounds that are not found in English, such as [ɬ] for the breathy 'l' sound. *Phonetic systems* incorporate phonetic symbols from the International or North American Phonetic Alphabets to represent sounds that are not covered by the English alphabet, such as the symbol ɬ to represent the breathy 'l' sound. *Syllabic systems* use a symbol to represent a whole syllable of a word rather than just a sound.

KEY TERMS

- **International Phonetic Alphabet (IPA):** a system in which a symbol represents every sound in a language. It is based on the principle of one symbol = one sound.
- **North American Phonetic Alphabet (NAPA):** a system developed for the transcription of Indigenous languages of the Americas and for languages of Europe. It is based on the principle of one symbol = one sound. It shares many symbols with the IPA.
- **Writing system standardization:** the process of choosing one writing system to represent a language.

Each system has advantages and disadvantages. Alphabetical systems that are similar to English are generally easier to learn, and are simple to type on computers and phones. Systems using phonetic symbols, like the International Phonetic Alphabet (IPA) and the North American Phonetic Alphabet (NAPA) have the advantage of using one symbol to represent one sound.

¹ Simons, G.F. & Fennig, C.D. (Eds.). 2017. Ethnologue: Languages of the world, Twentieth edition. Dallas, TX: SIL International. <http://www.ethnologue.com>

Why do they matter?

A lack of agreement about writing systems is one of the biggest challenges faced by communities trying to revitalize their languages. Many First Nations languages in B.C. have multiple writing systems and there is not always consensus on which one to use. Multiple writing systems for the same language can make it difficult to get work done. Dictionaries, curricula and other resources that use different systems cannot be easily shared, and communities that share a language may be duplicating resources needlessly.

What can I do?

If there are multiple writing systems in use for your language, standardizing your writing system is one of the best things you can do to improve language revitalization efforts for your language. Having one writing system will ensure that all resources that are created can be shared among all communities that use the language, without the time, cost and effort needed to translate them into another system. Bring together Elders, teachers, learners and all interested community members to come to an agreement about which writing system you will use (see our fact sheet on New Words & Language Adaptation for examples of community standardization projects).

KEY POINTS

- Having multiple writing systems for the same language can stand in the way of efficient language revitalization. It can prevent the sharing of resources and can be confusing for learners.
- Some revitalization efforts focus mainly on reading and writing, but people must also learn to speak. Speaking and understanding your language will keep it strong.
- People may be strongly attached to one system or another and may resist change. Remember that writing systems are fairly new additions to the long history of First Nations languages. However, choosing one system will help your language in the long run.

You may want to survey all resources for your language and choose the system that is already widely used.

Although reading and writing are valuable skills, having people actively **speaking** and **understanding** your language will keep it strong. Developing proficient speakers should be the focus of language revitalization efforts. Think about children: they learn to speak and understand their first language several years before they are taught to read and write. Even adults learn to read and write after the basics of speaking and understanding are mastered. These skills can be taught simultaneously as long as oral proficiency is prioritized.

If you are a teacher, ensure that your students learn to speak and understand the language, not just

read and write. If you are a learner, value speaking over writing.

Communication is about being able to have a simple everyday conversation in your language!

FPCC is often asked which kind of writing system is better. There is no straightforward answer to this question. There are advantages and disadvantages to every system. While we do not want to tell you which system to use, we do strongly recommend that you choose one standard writing system. We understand that choosing one system will be disappointing to those who use another system, and it will require a period of adjustment for those who have to learn a new system. But you can take pride in the fact that by choosing one system, you have made it easier for all future language learners!

WHERE CAN I LEARN MORE?

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Department of Linguistics. (n.d.).
eNunciate. Retrieved from <http://enunciate.arts.ubc.ca/>



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New Words & Language Adaptation¹

Why do languages adapt?

All languages need words and expressions for talking about experiences and objects in daily life. As daily life changes, languages adapt by creating new words. Newly created words or expressions in a language are known as *neologisms*.

All languages are highly creative and have ways to create new words and adapt existing words when the need arises. For example, languages such as English and French have had to create new words and expressions to describe developments in technology and lifestyles that didn't exist historically. Consider words needed for the workplace, going to the grocery store, writing an email or paying a credit card bill. New words for technology



Photo by Jo-Ann Rich for FirstVoices

include *computer*, *cellphone*, and the *Internet*. Developing new words is an important part of language revitalization as it means that the language remains useful to the people who speak it.

Why is creating new words for First Nations languages important?

Before European contact, First Nations interacted with one another and shared words or developed new words for items and ideas. This natural process of language adaptation was interrupted by colonization and residential schools.

This interruption has created gaps in First Nations languages, leaving many languages without words to describe common parts of twenty-first century life. Luckily, there are many ways to change this!

“Revitalizing any language requires modernizing the vocabulary, publishing a standard writing system, and developing methods to incorporate new words into the language.”

- Mohawk Language Standardisation Project (1993)

WHAT ARE THE ISSUES & CHALLENGES?

1. Should First Nations languages be used to discuss twenty-first century life? Your community might decide that your language should only be used to discuss traditional activities and cultural objects.
2. Keep in mind that a language is more likely to be revitalized successfully if it can be used in all areas of life. Even before European contact, First Nations were interacting and sharing words, and developing words for new items and ideas. If we don't create new words in our languages, speakers may find it quicker and easier to just use the English word, potentially leading to further language loss.
3. If your community wants to create new words, the next challenge is understanding how new words are developed and building consensus around who will create them. FPCC's Language Revitalization Planning Program can help your community organize a group of fluent speakers to be responsible for developing new words.

¹ FPCC would like to thank Sarah Kell for providing the research and examples to inform this fact sheet.

What can I do?

There are several ways to create new words in your language.

1. New words can be built using word parts that already exist in your language.
2. You can describe or “talk around” new items or concepts by using descriptions of what the item or concept looks like, or the action it does.
3. You can revive an old word from Elders’ memories or early records. It is important to remain true to the integrity and nature of the traditional language. Adapting new words or concepts from what already exists helps to support this.
4. Borrowing a word from another language is a common process. Some communities prefer to create new words rather than borrow words, but borrowing happens naturally whenever two or more languages are in contact. Many B.C. First Nations languages already have words that were borrowed from French through Chinook Jargon, the trade language

COMMUNITY PROJECT EXAMPLES

PROJECT NAME	DESCRIPTION
The Mohawk Language Standardization Project (1993) https://kanienkeha.net/the-mohawk-language-standardisation-project/	The process of standardization and establishing community consensus
Updating the Sauk Lexicon: Strategies and implications for Language Revitalization https://tinyurl.com/ych5nxtpt	Methods of vocabulary expansion in the Sauk language
‘Navalish’: The Shifting World of the Navajo Language https://tinyurl.com/ycrn6ygg	Navajo’s verb-based language structure and experiences with language shift

spoken in the Pacific Northwest in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries. It is up to your community to decide whether to borrow words and, if so, from what language(s). The Indigenous Sami people decided that when they need to borrow a word, they will first try to borrow from a related language. If that language doesn’t have the word either, then they will look to English.

When borrowing a word into your language, remember to adapt it to your language’s sound system. If there are sounds in a borrowed word that do not exist in your language, you can replace them with the closest sounds in your language.

TECHNOLOGY & LIFESTYLE LANGUAGE DEVELOPMENT

Developing language for technology and lifestyle changes means creating words for things that don’t exist in traditional languages. Some examples are going to the grocery store, going to the doctor’s office or the dentist, and paying your credit card bill.

Words for technology include computer, cell phone, the internet, and other modern devices. Developing new words is an important part of language revitalization as it means that the language can be used to discuss modern concepts.

WHERE CAN I LEARN MORE?

Baloy, N.J.K. (2011). “We can’t feel our language”: Making places in the city for Aboriginal language revitalization. *American Indian Quarterly*, 35 (4), 515-548.

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Hukari, T.E., & Peter, R.M. (1995). *The Cowichan dictionary of the Hul’q’umi’num’ dialect of the Coast Salish People*. Duncan, BC: Cowichan Tribes.

Ignace, M.B. (1998). *Handbook for Aboriginal language program planning in British Columbia*. North Vancouver, BC: First Nations Education Steering Committee.

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Language Immersion

What is immersion?

Language immersion is a method of teaching and learning a new language in which people learn *in* the language, not just *about* the language. In First Nations language immersion, no English is used in the classroom or immersion environment. All content, such as math, science, or language arts, is taught using the First Nations language. Immersion creates a natural process for language acquisition, much in the way we learn our first language.

An example of an immersion program is a Language Nest, which immerses young children in their First Nations language. Mentor-Apprentice programs pair adults—one who speaks the language fluently (the mentor), and one who is learning (the apprentice) in situations

in which they only speak the First Nations language. Language immersion ideally begins in early childhood and continues throughout the education years.

Why is it important?

Immersion is the most effective way to learn a language as it creates a natural learning environment similar to how we learn our first language. Language immersion creates a meaningful environment where language is used purposefully.

Functional communication means learners use the language for practical purposes rather than just

“Immersion means simply doing everything in the language, from brushing our teeth to eating, from playing to praying — all the time.”

- Yamamoto & Yamamoto (2004)

reciting words and phrases. This natural learning environment helps learners to develop the communication skills to become fluent speakers. Learning *about* language does not create fluency, but learning *in* the language provides

RECOMMENDATIONS FOR INDIGENOUS IMMERSION PROGRAMS¹

- Get support from the community, the school board and school administration.
- Make plans to create qualified language teachers with training in immersion teaching. Developing partnerships with local universities will help support these plans and put them into action.
- Develop learning resources that focus on language use for practical purposes.
- Access current research and gather knowledge that will support your immersion program. It is also important to share your experiences and best practices with other communities.
- Create opportunities for language use outside of school by showcasing the language at community events. Develop adult language classes to support language use in the home.
- Make plans to expand your immersion programs and recruit younger language speakers to keep momentum going.

¹Adapted from Tompkins, J., Orr, A.M., Clark R., Pirie, D., Sock, S., & Paul-Gould, S. (2011). *Best practices and challenges in Mi'kmaq and Maliseet/Wolastoqi language immersion*. Retrieved from <http://www.apcnc.ca/images/uploads/FinalReport-BestPracticesandChallengesinMikmaqandMaliseet-WolastoqiLanguageImmersionProgramsFinal.pdf>



Tsilhqot'in Language Nest

real and authentic communication situations. Language immersion is the best approach for learners of all ages — early childhood, youth and adult.

Offering immersion programs in schools is the first step to breaking the cycle of language disruption. Children can become proficient in their First Nations language and develop cultural awareness. Immersion programs help reverse the trend of language loss and are an important part of language revitalization efforts. Embracing immersion programming reflects community commitment to building strong First Nations identities among children.

What can I do?

Early childhood is the ideal time for language learning and full immersion is the most effective strategy for language revitalization. You will need proficient adult speakers to teach the language to children. If your community does not have enough speakers, you will need to start training adults in the

RECIPE FOR IMMERSION: THE KEY INGREDIENTS²

Vision: Community belief in the possibilities of immersion.

Leadership: School and community leadership that fosters the commitment to actively pursue this vision.

Resourcefulness: Working as a team to plan for the future and recognizing that everyone plays a role and has something important to offer.

Connection: Creating enthusiasm and passion for the language and reconnecting the community, history, culture and language.

²Adapted from Michel, K. (2012). *Trickster's path to language transformation: Stories of Secwepemc immersion from Chief Atahm School*. (Doctoral Dissertation). University of British Columbia, Vancouver, B.C.

language using adult immersion methods such as the Mentor-Apprentice model.

Children attending immersion programs need the opportunity to speak the language outside of school, so it is crucial that the language is spoken at home and in the community. Program leaders may need to reassure parents that learning the First Nations language will not interfere with their children's ability to continue learning and speaking English. For more information on the benefits of speaking more than one language, see our Bilingual Families fact sheet.

KEY TERMS

- **Immersion:** a method of language instruction that uses the language being taught as the only language of instruction. No English is used.
- **Language Nest:** a language program for preschool children in which they are immersed in their First Nations language.
- **Mentor-Apprentice:** one language mentor and one language apprentice spend time in immersion together in a natural setting to gain or increase language proficiency.

WHERE CAN I LEARN MORE?

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Language Fluency

What is fluency?

What makes someone a fluent speaker of a language? In this time when many First Nations people are learning their languages as adults, understanding what makes a fluent speaker is an important question. There is often confusion when talking about fluency because definitions of what it means to be a fluent speaker vary between individuals, communities and contexts.

Language fluency generally refers to a person's ability to use the language to communicate clearly with others. A fluent speaker can use the language to speak with ease on a variety of topics and to discuss

abstract or complex ideas, without using English or other aids like pictures or props. It is possible to be a fluent speaker without knowing all the words of a language. In fact, most fluent speakers of English do not know all the words in the English language. Fluency is not defined by knowledge of vocabulary alone, but by the ability to use the language correctly, effectively and creatively, and in the appropriate way according to the situation. Everyone is fluent in at least one language: typically our first language (mother tongue) that we learned and used from infancy.

It is common in most parts of the world for people to be fluent in two or more languages. This is known as bilingualism or multilingualism.

Only in North America is monolingualism (being fluent in only one language) considered normal. While a person may be fluent in more than one language, it does not mean that they learned both of those languages from birth. This shows that there are two different ways to be fluent: as a first language speaker or as a second language speaker. A first language speaker is someone who learned the language from birth. Because children learn languages much more quickly and effectively than adults, we can usually speak our first language better than any other language. In First Nations communities today, first language speakers of Indigenous languages are usually Elders.



Splatsin Kikiya7as FirstVoices Training,
Photo by Aaron Leon

KEY TERMS

Fluent speaker: a fluent speaker is someone who speaks and understands the language well enough to be able to communicate in the language without use of English. A fluent speaker is able to use the language in a variety of situations and knows the vocabulary appropriate to specific contexts or topics. Fluent speakers can also use the language in culturally appropriate ways according to the particular situation where the language is spoken.

First language speaker / Mother tongue speaker: someone who speaks the language he or she learned as a child at home and continues to speak it.

Second language speaker: someone who has learned or is learning a language after early childhood in addition to his or her first language.

Proficiency: the ability to correctly and effectively use a language in a variety of situations, including knowledge of words, sounds, sentence order, meanings and cultural context.

However, it is possible for people to learn their First Nations languages as second languages (whether they learn them as a child or an adult) and still achieve language fluency. We tend to think of this kind of fluency as proficiency. A proficient speaker is able to comfortably and effectively use the language for a variety of topics and situations, without necessarily knowing all of the language.

Why does it matter?

Language fluency is the primary way that we assess the status of a language. A healthy and stable language has many fluent speakers who speak and use the language in all areas of life. By counting the number of fluent First Nations language speakers, we can show what has been lost through colonialism and residential schools. This is important for holding the government accountable for the wrongs of the past. We can also use fluency to help track the progress and success of our revitalization efforts. Successful revitalization

initiatives should result in the creation of new fluent speakers. As the number of fluent speakers begins to increase, we can see that our efforts are having an effect.

What about reading and writing?

All First Nations languages in Canada were traditionally oral languages, passed on from generation to generation. Following contact and colonial influences, First Nations languages now have writing systems so that it is possible to express the languages in written form. Many people believe that reading and writing are important factors in defining fluency. However, while reading and writing are valuable skills, we must remember that all children are typically considered to be fluent speakers of their first language long before they learn to read and write. Therefore, it is not necessary to read and write to be considered a fluent speaker of a language.

What can I do?

Have a discussion with your community and determine your views, values and beliefs around language fluency. Think about how you have defined fluency so far: What are the benefits of this definition? Does it support your efforts in teaching and revitalizing the language? This discussion should identify a common system to assess fluency. Communities should create a definition of fluency that is supportive of learners and acts as an encouraging mechanism to sustain and maintain the language in future generations. Overall, the definition of fluency should not be too narrow because it can potentially limit the resources available to support the language, such as limiting the number of speakers who can teach the language. To learn more about assessing language fluency, see our Second Language Proficiency Assessment Models fact sheet.

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Second Language Proficiency Assessment Models

Language proficiency assessment is an important part of language learning and revitalization. It helps us know how well we are developing our language skills and if our teaching and learning methods are effective. This fact sheet summarizes a few different models used for assessing language fluency.

American Council on the Teaching of Foreign Languages (ACTFL)

The ACTFL proficiency guidelines are used for evaluating *functional language ability*. This means they describe language abilities in terms of speaking, writing, listening and reading in everyday, real-world situations. The guidelines include five levels from beginner to advanced and describe tasks that speakers can manage at each level.

Canadian Language Benchmarks (CLB)

The CLB were designed for English as a Second Language (ESL) and are recognized as the official Canadian standard for describing, measuring and recognizing the proficiency of adult English language learners. The CLB focus on functional language use and are designed to reflect the experiences of language learners in everyday communication. The benchmarks include descriptive

statements about levels of language ability along a continuum.

First Nations Language Benchmarks (FNLB)

Dr. Jack Miller produced *A Language Teacher's Guide to Assessing First Nations Language Proficiency* (2013) for his doctoral research. He created the FNLB to be practical, culturally appropriate and user-friendly. The FNLB are influenced by other assessment models but are mostly adapted from the CLB 2000.

Assessments of language competency and proficiency are based on social interactions, following and giving instructions, and information sharing. Dr. Michele

Johnson adapted Miller's model of the FNLB based upon the abilities of First Nations language learners using the Paul Creek method for language learning.

NETOLNEW: 'One mind; one people'

The NETOLNEW Language Learning Assessment Tool was developed for Indigenous adult language learners to help them understand their language learning and to keep track of their progress. The tool assesses general language skills rather than grammar and vocabulary and is meant to reflect what speakers can do in the language.

WHERE CAN I FIND MORE INFORMATION?

American Council on the Teaching of Foreign Languages (ACTFL)
www.actfl.org

ACTFL Proficiency Guidelines 2012
www.actfl.org/publications/guidelines-and-manuals/actfl-proficiency-guidelines-2012

Canadian Language Benchmarks (CLB)
www.language.ca

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First Nations Language Benchmarks (FNLB) by Dr. Jack Miller
www.interiorsalish.com/languageassessment.html

First Nations Language Benchmarks (FNLB) adapted by Dr. Michele Johnson
http://www.fpcc.ca/files/PDF/Language/MAP/FNLB_Johnson_2013.pdf

NETOLNEW: 'One mind; one people'
www.uvic.ca/research/partner/home/currentprojects/language-assessment-tool/index.php

NETOLNEW focuses on assessing speaking and understanding the language and asks speakers to describe their language abilities based on a scale of definitions provided.

Stages of Second Language Proficiency

As a quick reference, we summarize below the most common descriptions of the stages of second language proficiency. The three stages are Beginner, Intermediate and Advanced. Each stage has three levels — Low, Mid and High — that indicate the speaker's progression within each stage. The time that it takes to progress between each level and stage will vary depending on the learners and their exposure to and practice with the language.

Beginner Proficiency

Low Beginner speakers have limited vocabulary and difficulties with pronunciation, restricting communication. Speakers can respond to basic questions about simple information, use single words or memorized sentences, and rely heavily on gestures and actions to communicate.

Mid Beginner speakers can use short (two to five) word sentences, ask and answer simple content questions (who, what, when, where), use memorized introductions and phrases, and use basic present/past tense.

High Beginner speakers can participate in short routine conversations about familiar topics, communicate basic needs, talk about things in the past and present, and have enough vocabulary for basic communication.

Intermediate Proficiency

Low Intermediate speakers can participate more fully in certain social situations. They can participate — with effort — in routine social conversations about topics such as weather or food, communicate simple information on the phone, and use connective words (but, then, and, because). They still speak with hesitation and pauses.

Mid Intermediate speakers can communicate comfortably in most daily situations with fluent speakers, problem solve and make decisions in certain situations, and talk about the present, past and future.

High Intermediate speakers can confidently participate in daily conversations with fluent speakers and provide descriptions and opinions on most topics. Communication is less restricted

and fluent speakers can more easily understand the speakers.

Advanced Proficiency

Low Advanced speakers can communicate accurately and effectively in most educational and social contexts. Speakers can incorporate humour into their conversations, engage in debates, and discuss abstract topics like the future and politics.

Mid Advanced speakers can participate in meetings and interviews using complex academic language, and can lead meetings and manage interactions in small, familiar groups. Grammar and pronunciation errors no longer affect communication.

High Advanced speakers can lead large, formal group discussions on complex topics and can speak accurately in a specialized field of study.



Graduated Mentor-Apprentice Teams from FPCC



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Bilingual Families

What does it mean to be bilingual?

Bilingualism is the ability to speak and understand two languages. Speaking more than one language is normal for most people around the world. Before residential schools, it was common for First Nations people to speak several languages — their own language and the languages of neighbouring nations.

Why does being bilingual matter for First Nations in B.C.?

Language holds knowledge about history, science, traditions and culture. Speaking and understanding your language connects you to your

culture, history, spirituality and community. Raising your children to speak their language will help give them a healthy identity.

It is possible to learn to speak another language at any age, but language learning is easiest and most effective in early childhood. Myths about being bilingual often keep First Nations parents from exposing their children to their language, such as the idea that speaking only one language is better, or that children will experience language delays when learning more than one language. However, research has proven many advantages to bilingualism. Learning your First Nations language supports a healthy

“Recent research has repeatedly demonstrated that having two or more languages will help children’s academic and social success throughout their lifetime.”

- First Peoples’ Cultural Council (2014)

identity by teaching the cultural worldviews and beliefs that are connected to the language. Moreover, it will raise the status of the language and show that it is a valued and important part of a community’s cultural identity.



Witsuwit'en language apprentice and family

MYTHS & FACTS ABOUT BILINGUALISM

Myth: *Speaking only one language is better.*

Fact: Being bilingual actually helps the brain and often leads to more advanced communication and social skills.

Myth: *Children become confused when learning and speaking two languages at once.*

Fact: Research shows that bilingual children can distinguish between their two languages and show no confusion.

Myth: *When children use two languages in the same sentence, it is a sign that they are confused.*

Fact: The use of two languages in the same sentence (called “code switching”) is a sign of skill in both languages.

Myth: *Learning two languages causes language delays.*

Fact: Research suggests that monolingual and bilingual children develop their language skills at similar times.

Increasing the number of language speakers will create more opportunities for language use within the community and ensure that the language will be passed on to future generations.

What can I do?

Raising young children to be First Nations language speakers is crucial for language revitalization efforts to be successful. If parents and caregivers are proficient in speaking their language, it is important that they speak the language to their children. Don't be afraid to begin learning your language or to use it if you know it! If you are a parent, look for language programs for your child and begin using the language that you know with your family in the home.

Look for community language classes or support your own language learning through immersion programs, such as the FPCC's Mentor-Apprentice program. Expose your children to

BILINGUALISM: WHAT THE RESEARCH SHOWS

- Many children around the world learn two or more languages and grow up speaking both languages proficiently.
- Bilingual children have more highly developed language skills.
- Bilingual children often show an improvement in memory and problem solving.
- Learning two or more languages does not cause language disorders or delays, and with consistent exposure to and interaction in both languages, bilingual children will excel at both languages.
- Parents do not need to be fluent speakers to raise a bilingual child!

the language as much as possible by using the language in everyday activities. This includes using the language at home, visiting family members who speak the language, and attending community events and ceremonies where the language is spoken. Do not let myths about bilingualism keep you and your children from learning your First Nations language!

KEY TERMS

- **Bilingual:** the ability to speak two languages.
- **Monolingual:** the ability to speak only one language.
- **Mentor-Apprentice:** one language mentor and one language apprentice spend time in immersion together in a natural setting to gain or increase language proficiency.

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Language in the Home

Introduction

All living languages are typically passed on by parents, family members and/or caregivers speaking the language to children in the home. This natural process is known as *intergenerational language transmission*. The health of a language depends on it being passed on naturally to children in the home.

The residential school system directly attacked this process by removing children from the home and preventing natural language transmission. As a result, most First Nations languages in B.C. are not being passed on in the home, though this is starting to change with parents who participate in programs like Mentor-Apprentice and make an effort to speak the language



Qaqaualas Language Nest

at home with their children. The use of First Nations languages by families within the home represents one of the biggest challenges to language revitalization, but only a return to First Nations language use in the home will ensure the full revitalization of these languages.

Why should First Nations languages be spoken in the home?

Language learning needs to occur in the home so children have the opportunity to learn the language in a natural way and at an age when language learning is easiest (under five years old).

“A crucial element affecting the long-term viability of a language is simply how many people speak it at home. The language that is most often spoken in the home is more likely to become the mother tongue of the next generation.”

- Mary Jane Norris (2009)

HOW TO BRING LANGUAGE INTO YOUR HOME

- Label household items with vocabulary, phrases and actions associated with each item (for example: in the bathroom, post notes that translate words like “tap” and “sink” and practical phrases like “I am washing my hands”).
- Learn basic phrases in your language that you use every day. Make a list, record a proficient speaker saying them, practice them, and use them.
- Invite a fluent speaker to your home on a regular basis for language time.
- Create time for family language learning using tools such as FirstVoices.
- Speak the language *to* and *with* your children, not *at* them.
- Create rituals in the language, such as getting ready for bed or setting the dinner table.
- Have fun and be patient with yourself! Stay committed to learning the language; it will get easier with practice.

It is also important for First Nations children to identify with their language and culture. Even if children are learning the language at school or through community language programs, they will not maintain proficiency if the language is not used in their everyday lives. Creating opportunities for children to learn and use their heritage language in the home will strengthen the language, culture, identity, and wellness of First Nations communities.

What can you do to bring language into your home?

The more children are exposed to the language at home, the more likely they are to actively use it. Even if you are not fluent in your language, you should consider using what you know at home with your children. Don't worry about being a second language speaker because your children will still be able to learn the language from you. Increase language use in the home by creating family language plans

ACTIVITIES TO DO IN YOUR LANGUAGE

- **Play games:** Try playing UNO or bingo in your language.
- **Reading or storytelling:** If you do not have books in your language, cover up the English in picture books and talk about the pictures in your language.
- **Traditional arts, crafts and skills:** Try berry picking, beading, or carving.
- **Music:** Learn to sing traditional songs or make your own songs.
- **Cooking and eating:** Talk about food, how it tastes and how to cook.
- **Chores:** Wash dishes, clean the house, do laundry, and other chores.
- **Go outside:** Be active with sports and outdoor activities on the land.

that set goals and make language learning a fun activity for the whole family. Include community-based language programs if they are available.

Use your language as often as possible. Being consistent will increase your comfort with speaking your language in different situations. Once you have mastered one area of language use, such as cooking, then you can move on to the next!

KEY TERMS

- **Intergenerational language transmission:** the natural process of passing on language by speaking it to children.
- **Family language plan:** a specific plan for language use that determines the who, how, when and where of language use in the home.
- **Community-based language programs:** programs offered in the community that provide language learning opportunities.
- **Second language speaker:** an individual who has learned or is learning another language in addition to the first language he or she learned in childhood.

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First Nations Languages and Health

What is the connection between language and health?

Language has a vital role in the mental, physical and emotional health of First Nations communities in B.C. Language connects us to our culture, history, spirituality and land, which are the foundations of personal and community wellness.

One study found that language plays a key role in lower youth suicide rates (Chandler & Lalonde, 1998). Another study found a connection between language maintenance and lower rates of diabetes in some First Nations communities (Grier et. al, 2014). A third study pointed to the profound role of language in resiliency (Christian et. al, 2015). *Resilience* is the ability to remain strong in the face of overwhelming challenges. Connections to tradition, language and culture can build resilience and support healing from a history of cultural and linguistic repression and loss.

Aside from direct impacts on health, language also supports increased academic success. For example, a study on a Mi'kmaq language program showed that students in the immersion program had greater

academic success than students in an English program (Tompkins & Orr, 2011). Studies on the Nawahi Immersion School in Hawaii have shown that the school has averaged a 100% high school graduation rate and an 80% college attendance rate since its first senior class graduated in 1999 (Wilson & Kamana, 2006; Wilson, 2012). These findings are significant because academic success helps people get better jobs and more economic benefits. Increased income in turn contributes to better health.

Why is the connection important?

Not only do our languages tie us to our history, spirituality, culture and the land, they also are a source of knowledge about our health and well-being. The forced loss of First Nations languages caused the loss of traditional knowledge that had kept communities well for centuries (Baldwin, Whalen & Moss, 2016).

Language is a critical part of the

"Throughout the world, Indigenous languages are being lost, and with them, an essential part of Indigenous identity. Language revitalisation can be seen, therefore, as a health promotion strategy."

- King, Smith & Gracey (2009)

cultural values and beliefs that are essential to the emotional well-being and mental health of a community. King, Smith & Gracey (2009) highlight the important link between language revitalization and Indigenous health and well-being, especially because language is strongly connected to spirituality, which plays an essential role in Indigenous people's health.



Preparing salmon, Photo by Candice Simon

What can I do?

Promote traditional land use and lifestyles in the community

Language supports traditional land use and lifestyles. Our ancestors knew how to live healthy lives on this land, and much of their knowledge is embedded in our languages. By learning our languages and being on the land, we can reconnect to our traditional healthy lifestyles.

Develop community language programs for all ages

Language programs ideally should start at a young age. Young children learn new languages faster and easier than adults. Early learning sets children on a path of strong cultural connection. But although early learning is ideal, it is important that

everyone in the community have opportunities to learn the language.

Language programs are a way of bringing the community together, to improve the unity and health of the community. There are many “silent speakers” of First Nations languages, people who can understand the language but don’t speak it due to trauma from residential school or other reasons. Special programs can be developed to support silent speakers to begin speaking the language again.

Support First Nations identity in the community through language and culture

Our languages teach us who we are and how to live well in this world.

Language and culture provide healing and build strong identities as First Nations people.

Community-based programs that provide cultural opportunities and pass on language and traditional knowledge will help build positive identities and resilience for community members of all ages.



Aboriginal Arts Development Awards recipient Tara Willard, photo by Candice Simon

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