



Question and Answer Summary

Dákwänje zhq kúnje - I will only speak our language

with Khásha and Shänch'ea

November 26, 2024

Note: The following answers were translated live from Dän k'e to English during the webinar by Shänch'ea

Q: I'm curious now that you've been speaking only your language for about 8 months or so. How are your kids doing in terms of interacting with you in the language at home?

So, my daughter she's learning the language with me, and she speaks with me. But my younger son Cash, sometimes I speak English with him. And then my older son, he understands good, but we don't always speak the language together. And so, hugs and back rubs with love, and writing on paper, sometimes.

Q: You said there are only 10 elders who speak your language? Are you able to use it with others in the community much?

There's dän näkwäkyel and there's past dän näkwäkyel, and I could speak with my friends that understand the language like Sha'ala and Shäkwälita. We have some young speakers who also took a program to understand, and so there are some young speakers that I could speak with as well.

Q: How long has Shänch'ea been learning? She's doing an amazing job translating.

I had a native language teacher throughout all my school years - so, elementary all the way through to high school. Then after that, when I finished high school a year later, was when I applied and was a part of the dän näkwäkyel program. That was two years - I started that in 2021 and then completed in 2023. When a

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new cohort came in with the *dän näkwäkhyl*, I started working with them partially through their first year in March. We took a break for the summer, and then I started working with them again when they started up in September.

But yeah, a long time! I had it in school and so I got a lot of basics and vocabulary and stuff like that. Then, even when my current language teacher retired, we had a new speaker come in. She was younger, and she actually developed the *dän näkwäkhyl* program with *Khásha*. She came in, and she was working with linguistics, so I got phonetics and stuff like that.

A participant shares some of her story and shares her gratitude for *Khásha*, *Shānch'ea* and this session.

Your story is a true story. Sometimes, it can be difficult only speaking our language with all English and white people around. But our ancestors, they always help us. When you're speaking or when you're praying, it's not your hands, it's your ancestors' hands that you're praying with and that you're working with for the kids.

Q: I love how different languages have totally different ways of capturing & expressing the world. What's an idea, word or distinction that exists in your language that doesn't exist in English, that you have learned & found really fascinating, beautiful or useful?

There's an expression for when there's two trees knocked over, two windfallen trees, and then you must step over the fallen trees safely. It's something you say to people, kind of like saying to take care. *Shāwnithän* - it means "step over windfall safely," but you say that to somebody when they're going somewhere and it's just like telling them to take care or be safe in their travels.

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Q: When I hear you speak, you sound like a very calm person, and it seems like you take the time to think about what you're going to say before you say it. I find in English, it's really easy to just say anything. I'm wondering if you had to really work on slowing down so you could speak your language and if that has affected you in other ways.

When I first started speaking only my language and immersion, it was difficult for me because it was summertime, and so I wasn't working with my *dän näkwäkyel* regularly in the program. So, I'd just be really quiet all day. With English you could just say whatever you want. He [Khásha] said he was talking with his foot in his mouth with English. You could just say whatever, but not with *Dän k'e*. However, now with *Shānch'ea*, I'll just speak what I'm thinking, and she understands and so that's good.

A participant shared how she notice when she speaks even just a little with her children, the kids pick it up. She expressed appreciation for and inspiration from Khásha and Shānch'ea for their story, and on how “it’s good to just speak, not translate, use new gestures and just speak.”

Khásha responds by saying English is like a crow and it's greedy. “My brain's weak, and so if I speak a little bit of English with my family, I could go all day just speaking English with my family. So that's why I say no, and I only speak my language - because English is greedy.”

Q: I missed earlier but the guy you say on Youtube, Zalmai Zahir, was he a speaker of an Indigenous language in B.C. or somewhere else?

He has a YouTube channel if you look him up online.

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=wdOrEHS6tRU>

<https://www.puyalluptriballanguage.org/ptlp/zalmai.php>

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Q: I so admire this decision you have made to immerse yourself fully in the language for this whole time. Do you have any memories of times when you had to create new words/language to get by in speaking in everyday life? Have any of these new utterances caught on with other speakers?

He forgets right now. He can't think of a word for an example, but he does that a lot - making new words. One thing he says is, if you don't have the vocabulary, just use other words similar that you do know, just trying to piece that together. Then, the other speaker can try to figure out what you're trying to say by using other familiar vocabulary in place of what you don't know.

OK, if my spirit is feeling weak, I won't really speak a lot of language. But if my spirit is feeling strong, like I'll speak a lot with everyone else, and right now, my spirit is strong.

Q: How long did it take you to break the cycle of falling back into English when you first started speaking only your language? Very inspiring listening to you both speak today.

When I first started speaking only the language, I would only speak Dákwänje, but when I would wake up in the morning and say good morning to my wife, I'd forget and speak English and be like, "I forgot," but now that doesn't happen.

Q: I'm curious if you ever do some explicit teaching about the language to your wife and children. Do you ever say in English "This is what this means" or do you hope that they learn more through immersion style?

I am almost always speaking Dän k'e. If needed, I'll write on the paper for them, or if I forgot paper, then I'll speak English with them. But using English to learn the language doesn't work. Using English to teach isn't the best; you don't really learn.

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Q: Aside from writing notes, what have been some tools you have used to make yourself understood by those who might know some of the language but are not fully proficient yet?

"I speak with my body. I speak with my hands."

Oh, so he's doing some ASL symbols. He's learning some sign language, different sign languages.

He's happy. He'll go like this. *[two thumbs up sign]*

Oh yeah, he speaks with his eyes and then speaks with his lips as well.

Q: Your dedication and unfailing efforts are so important for your language and will ripple on for the next generations. Do you have any specific plans to celebrate your milestones?

He doesn't, but that's a really good idea.

I love you. I care for you, chuutsqa.