

*Language Vitality & Sustainability:
The North American Context
Congreso Internacional de Lenguas en Riesgo*

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25 February 2020

The North American Context



<https://commons.wikimedia.org/w/index.php?curid=7072024>

Example: Connections across Arctic Indigenous Communities



compiled by:
W.K. Dalrymple, Norwegian Polar Institute
P. Schweitzer, University of Alaska Fairbanks

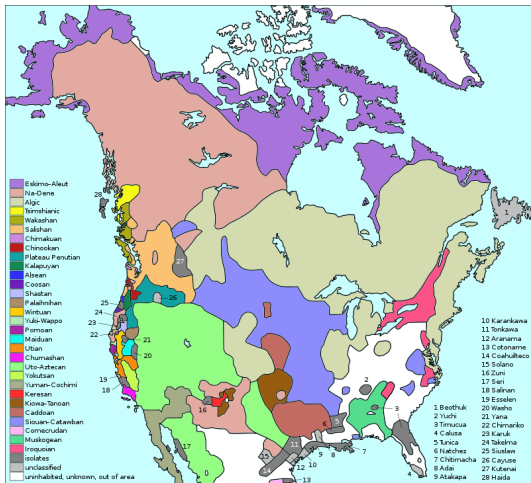
Arctic peoples subdivided according to language families

- Indo-European family
- Germanic branch
- Uralic family
- Isolated languages (Ketic and Yukagir)
- Eskimo-Aleut family

- Arctic circle
- Arctic boundary according to AMAP
- Arctic boundary according to AHDR

Notes:

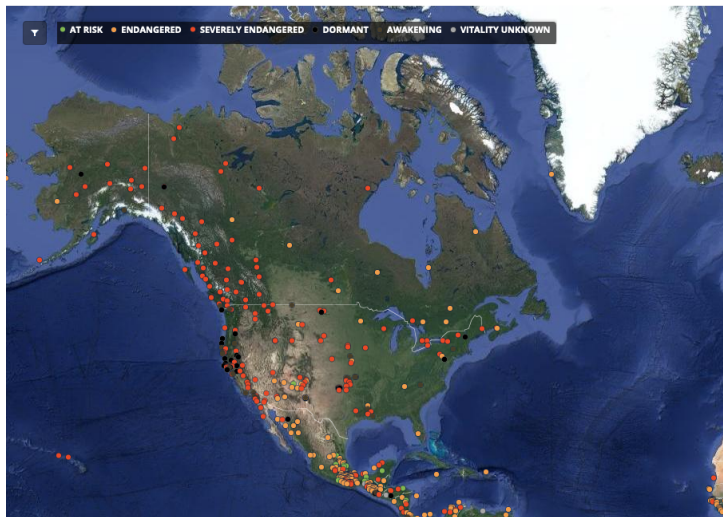
Pre-Contact Indigenous Languages of North America



Based on map of *Native Languages and Language Families of North America* Ives Goddard (1999);

<https://commons.wikimedia.org/w/index.php?curid=79354230>

Endangered Languages of North America



<http://www.endangeredlanguages.com/>

Vitality, Resilience & Sustainability in North America

New Discourse, New Rhetoric

- Discourses of endangerment, language loss have been replaced
- Focus on vitality, resilience & sustainability

Surge in Language Work

Increase in language work & in Indigenous linguistics

Reclamation & Empowerment

- Moving beyond colonial history & taking control

Motivations & Results

- Language work is not always about language
- Building community, improving well-being

Rethinking of names & labels

- old: language death, extinction, linguistic genocide
- now: language vitality, sustainability, resilience
- revitalization vs. reclamation

Rethinking of some biases & ideologies

- Old: linguist = external linguist; now there is recognition of linguists who are community members
- Old: the linguist collects data & leaves to write lofty articles **and** the linguist is the only one qualified to do it; now there is a sense of a commitment to giving back to the community
- Old: the linguist knows best; now the lone-wolf model has been replaced by more collaborative approaches

Indigenous-led Language Vitality Efforts, a sample:

- 1 Natives4Linguistics
- 2 Indigenous-led vitality efforts
- 3 Networking & sharing best practices

Natives4Linguistics

- Identifying, centering, integrating, and sharing Indigenous needs and values about language into linguistic science -

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About Natives4Linguistics

About the Project:

The primary objective of the Expanding Linguistic Science by Broadening Native American Participation project (also known as Natives4Linguistics or N4L) is to improve the field of Linguistics by broadening the participation of Native American within Linguistics by 1) directly bringing Native Americans to the Linguistic Society of America annual meetings, and 2) by developing and promoting strategies to better integrate Native American needs and values about language into linguistic science.

<https://natives4linguistics.wordpress.com/>

- Native Americans are underrepresented in Linguistics
 - ▶ Of 2420 Linguistics Ph.D. recipients in US (2004-2014), only **eight** were American Indian/Alaska Native (National Science Foundation, 2017).
 - ▶ Given the increasing focus on Native American languages within Linguistics, particularly Documentary Linguistics, the underrepresentation of Native Americans in Linguistics is of special concern.

- Differing views between many Native Americans and linguists regarding:
 - ▶ how *language* is defined.
 - ▶ how language should be studied.
 - ▶ what counts as worthy scholarship.
 - ▶ best practices for working with sovereign Indigenous nations.
 - ▶ the Western research framework that is applied to the study of Native American languages by many linguists.

Broader Impacts:

One of the project's goal is to expand the intellectual scope of Linguistics in a way that creates a better environment for Native Americans (and others) to participate in it, rather than to simply educate Native Americans about the field and its tools as they currently exist.

The hope is that many of the community scholars who participate in this Project will be empowered to pursue more training in Linguistics, with the recognition that their ideas can contribute to the field.

One of the founders is linguist Wesley Leonard, who is Myaamia:

The case of Myaamia

- Myaamia people originally lived in what is today Indiana
- They were forcibly relocated from their homelands
- The last fluent speaker of Myaamia died in the 1960s
- Then Daryl Baldwin decided to reclaim his language
- He found papers belonging to his grandfather in Myaamia



The Myaamia Story

- There were no dictionaries, textbooks, or sound recordings
- Baldwin received an MA in Linguistics from the University of Montana in 1999
- Baldwin worked with David Costa, a Berkeley grad student doing archival work on Myaamia; Costa found records from 17th & 18th centuries



- today: easily 500 people using the language at some level
- Julie Olds (cultural resources officer): bringing back the language has brought a new kind of strength to the Myaamia people.

**“None of us can remember it being like this, ever,” she says.
“And so we have a healing that began with the return of
language, and it’s given us back our life”**



- Sustainable Development Working Group (SDWG) of the Arctic Council endorsed the project under the name:

Assessing, Monitoring & Promoting Arctic Indigenous Languages

- Initial symposium held in Ottawa in 2012 to launch the project



Indigenous-led Language Vitality Efforts

This project prioritized three areas of development:

- 1 Assessment metrics
- 2 Language policies
- 3 Language acquisition (education and training)



- **Ottawa Symposium 2014**
- Call for active engagement of communities in language vitality **and**
- close collaboration with policy makers & international organizations
- urgent need for teacher training, better pedagogical materials & methods

- Master-Apprentice Program (developed by Leanne Hinton in California, has spread all over the world)
- Youth-Elder Workshops
 - ▶ bring together older (often more fluent & conservative) speakers with younger people to work against barriers & biases
- Silent Speakers: Facing Psychological Barriers
- Language Youth Ambassadors: *Speak to me!*
- WAYK: Where are your keys?



Puju (from Greenland) & Pavel Sulyandziga (from Siberia)

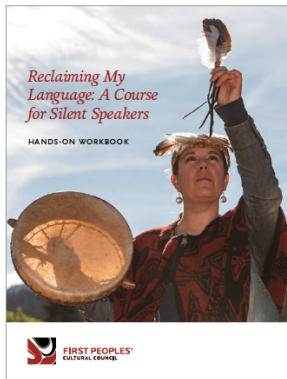
Silent Speakers: Facing Psychological Barriers

- Jane Juuso: workshops help people overcome fear of speaking
- developed for Sámi language revitalization, adopted in Canada

ACKNOWLEDGING SAMI SCHOLAR JANE JUUSO

In 2017, we developed the Silent Speaker workbook — *Reclaiming My Language: A Course for Silent Speakers* — for B.C. program participants.

Jane Juuso developed the model for the Silent Speaker program to assist the silent speakers of the Indigenous Sami language in Norway and Sweden. We are extremely grateful to her for sharing her course material and providing feedback on our first pilot program in 2016. We would also like to thank the participants of the first two pilot courses held with the Okanagan Indian Band (2016) and the Splatstin Tsm7aksált'n Society (2017).



Language Ambassadors: Speak Sámi to Me

- Program began with Sámi in Norway
- Young people volunteer to create spaces where the language is used, using social media
- People make a commitment to using the language
- Adapted by Gwich'in in Canada



#SpeakGwichinToMe: Using social media to reclaim language



Social media campaign launched by 23-year-old Jacey Firth-Hagen

CBC Radio · Posted: Jan 22, 2016 1:48 PM ET | Last Updated: September 2, 2016



- Language vitality is an indicator of other social issues; a language under stress often goes hand-in-hand with other signs of distress
- Outsider/external linguists working in Indigenous communities are necessarily activists, and need to be mindful of this
- Outsider linguists unavoidably change the social dynamic when they work with speakers or members of a group whose language is under pressure
- Language activism isn't necessarily about language

STRESS FACTORS:

- Historical trauma
 - ▶ Colonization
 - ▶ Boarding or residential schools; children forcibly taken from parents
 - ▶ World War II
- Climate change
- Migrations
- Urbanization
- Health & well-being

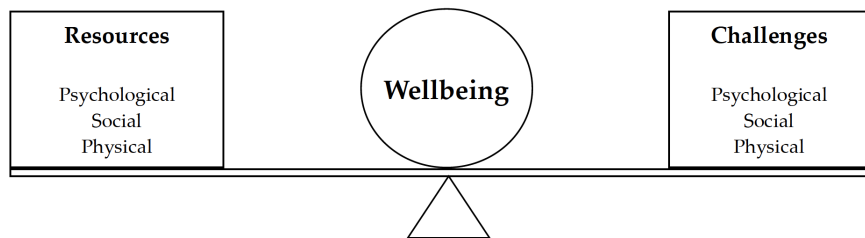
Source: Arctic Social Science Indicators

Research in North America (especially Canada) & elsewhere shows the importance of access to your language for health & physical well-being

- Connections between language & improved mental health:
 - ▶ lower alcohol and drug usage
 - ▶ lower suicide rates

- Connections between language usage and improved physical health:
 - ▶ lower diabetes rates
 - ▶ lower blood pressure
 - ▶ lower heart disease

A working model of well-being



from Dodge et al. (2012: 230)

well-being: a balance point between an individual's resource pool & the challenges faced

The role of language & language work includes:

- building community
- taking control
- reclaiming identity
- and possibly about creating new speakers

Discussion points

Context

The importance of local context

Community

We need deeper thinking about the nature of communities

Connections

We need to continue to learn from one another and build best practices

Linguist

A linguist working in an Indigenous language context is not, cannot be, a neutral actor, a passive observer

Collaboration

How do we forge deep, meaningful collaborations? Can we really engage in co-production of knowledge?

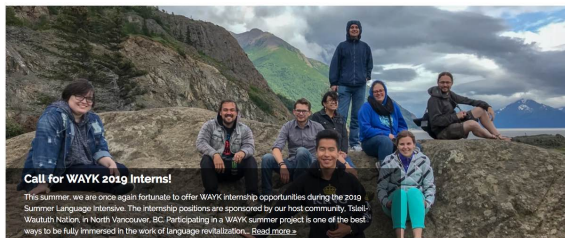
Thank you! Qujanaq!



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WHERE ARE YOUR KEYS

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Call for WAYK 2019 Interns!

This summer, we are once again fortunate to offer WAYK internship opportunities during the 2019 Summer Language Intensive. The internship positions are sponsored by our host community, Tsleil-Waututh Nation, in North Vancouver, BC. Participating in a WAYK summer project is one of the best ways to be fully immersed in the work of language revitalization... [Read more >](#)

LATEST



MEET THE 2019 SUMMER LANGUAGE INTENSIVE TEAM

June 24, 2019

We are delighted to welcome 4 new team members to the 2019 Summer Language Intensive in North Vancouver, British Columbia.



WHAT MAKES YOU FULL?

June 10, 2019

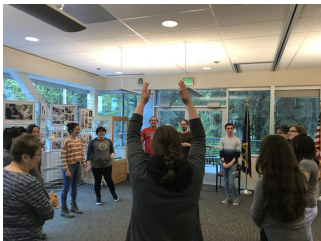
The "What makes you full?" activity is invaluable for a group that will be working closely for a period of time. Past intern Robyn introduced it to Evan and Susanna, and they introduced it to this year's visiting team, who are here on St. Paul Island for the summer of 2017. What do we mean.



WHY NON-INDIGENOUS ALASKANS NEED TO CARE ABOUT INDIGENOUS LANGUAGES

April 15, 2019

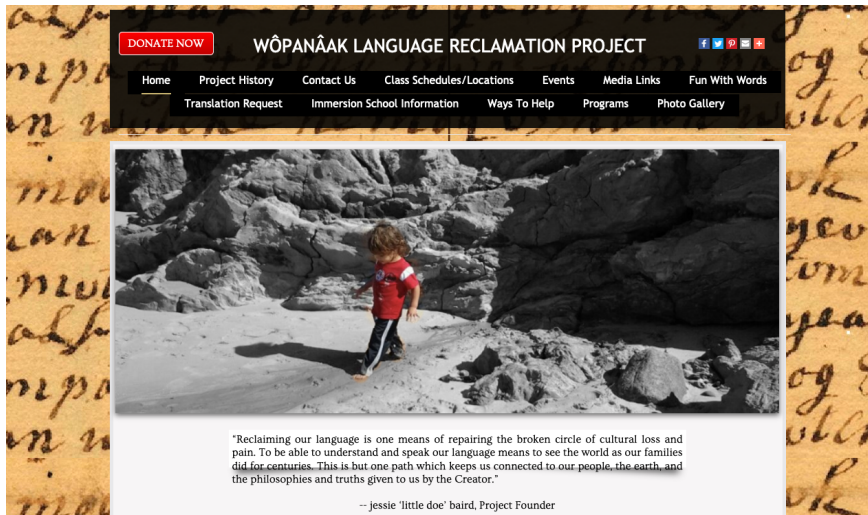
Where are Your Keys?



- Summers = best time to mount a big language project in a community.
- For a community to get the most out of a big project, we need people to be engaged with language every day, essentially on a full-time basis.
- Planning these projects for the summer helps us get more people involved.

<https://whereareyourkeys.org/>


Wôpanâak (Wampanoag) in Massachusetts



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WÔPANÂAK LANGUAGE RECLAMATION PROJECT

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"Reclaiming our language is one means of repairing the broken circle of cultural loss and pain. To be able to understand and speak our language means to see the world as our families did for centuries. This is but one path which keeps us connected to our people, the earth, and the philosophies and truths given to us by the Creator."

-- jessie 'little doe' baird, Project Founder

<http://www.wlrp.org//>