

Exploring Language Loss and Identity: Aboriginal Perspectives

Alexandra M.V. van den Elsen

LINCOM Studies in Native American Linguistics

full text research
abstracts of all titles
monthly updates

LINCOM webshop
www.lincom-europa.com

Exploring Language Loss and Identity: Aboriginal Perspectives

Alexandra M. V. van den Elsen

2013
LINCOM EUROPA

Published by LINCOM GmbH 2013.

LINCOM GmbH
Hansjakobstr. 127a
D-81825 Muenchen

LINCOM.EUROPA@t-online.de
www.lincom.eu

Webshop: www.lincom-shop.eu

All rights reserved, including the rights of translation into any foreign language. No part of this book may be reproduced in any way without the permission of the publisher.

Printed in E.C.
Printed on chlorine-free paper

Die Deutsche Bibliothek - CIP Cataloguing-in-Publication-Data

A catalogue record for this publication is available from Die Deutsche Bibliothek (<http://www.ddb.de>)

Maps, p. 68-69: Courtesy SIL International.

Cree Syllabary, p. 70: Harvey, Christopher. retrieved update: 2008. *Cree Syllabarium*. http://www.languagegeek.com/algon/cree/cre_syllabarium.html

CONTENTS

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS	3
INTRODUCTION	4
PART I	7
CHAPTER 1: CURRENT STATUS	9
DEGREES OF ENDANGERMENT.....	9
ABORIGINAL LANGUAGES OF CANADA.....	11
ABORIGINAL LANGUAGES OF BRITISH COLUMBIA.....	15
CHAPTER 2: LOSS AND REVITALIZATION	19
LANGUAGE LOSS.....	19
LANGUAGE LOSS IN CANADA.....	20
LANGUAGE REVITALIZATION.....	22
LITERACY.....	23
CHAPTER 3: LANGUAGE AND IDENTITY	30
WHY REVITALIZATION?.....	30
IDENTITY AND LANGUAGE.....	32
ABORIGINAL IDENTITY AND LANGUAGE LOSS.....	34
PART II	37
CHAPTER 4: PEOPLE, LANGUAGES, AND CITY	39
METHODS AND PARTICIPANTS.....	39
CREE AND KWAK'WALA: AN INTRODUCTION.....	41
URBAN ABORIGINAL PEOPLE.....	42
CHAPTER 5: 'SPEAKING YOUR LANGUAGE': PAST, PRESENT AND FUTURE	47
PAST: DISRUPTED LANGUAGE USE.....	47
PRESENT: THE STRUGGLE TO SPEAK.....	53
FUTURE: MAINTAINING, REVITALIZING AND RESHAPING.....	53
CHAPTER 6: LANGUAGE AS A SENSE OF BELONGING	58
EXPRESSING THE WORLD AROUND YOU.....	58
LANGUAGE AS MARKER OF IDENTITY.....	59
LIVING CULTURE THROUGH LANGUAGE.....	62
CONCLUSIONS	65
APPENDIX A: ABORIGINAL LANGUAGES IN CANADA	68
APPENDIX B: CREE SYLLABARY	70
APPENDIX C: INTERVIEW QUESTIONS	67
BIBLIOGRAPHY	72

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

This thesis would not have been possible without the willingness of the speakers and learners of Cree and Kwak'wala to share their stories and experiences. The Kwak'wala participants: Chief Robert Joseph, Patricia Rosborough, Brody Naknakim, Rupert Richardson and Norman Charlie. I thank you all for your willingness to share. Gilakasla! The Cree participants: Philip and Betty Gladue, Darlene Willier, Barry Potts and Jenny Anderson. Thank you for sharing your stories. Ay-hay!

I would also like to thank Patricia Shaw at UBC for her help with getting started with my research and for making it possible for me to conduct the interviews during my stay in Vancouver. Also I would like to thank both her and Willem Adelaar for the supervision of my thesis.

Finally I would like to thank my family and friends, whom I have been bothering with my thoughts and ideas during the months of writing my thesis. I know you are even more relieved than I am that my thesis is finally finished. Bedankt allemaal.

INTRODUCTION

In 2008 I was fortunate enough to be able to spend a year as an exchange student at the University of British Columbia in Vancouver B.C., Canada. During my stay in Vancouver I was in the position to get a first hand impression of many issues that concern Aboriginal peoples in Canada today. It soon became clear that many of these issues are little known among the non-Aboriginal population. Few people turned out to be aware of the fact that Aboriginal languages are still spoken in Canada today. Awareness of the critical situations many of these languages find themselves in, and of the importance of these languages to the identity of many First Nations communities is in many cases still lacking. This thesis will explore issues of language loss and identity from Aboriginal viewpoints. During the end of my stay in Canada I conducted ten interviews with speakers and learners of two Aboriginal languages. One large and viable language: Cree. The other, a smaller severely endangered language: Kwak'wala. The interview questions related to language use, loss and revitalization as well as to the importance of language to an Aboriginal identity. The aim is to let the stories and experiences shared in these interviews speak for themselves as much as possible. In order to achieve that, this thesis is divided into two parts.

Part one will give an overview of recent literature and developments in language loss and revitalization. It will also take a look at the link between language and identity. Chapter one will give an overview of the current status of Aboriginal languages in Canada in general and in British Columbia more specifically. Chapter two will continue by discussing how languages get 'lost' and what possibilities there are to counter that loss. The final chapter in part one will look at language and Aboriginal identity in situations of language loss.

Part one will form the background to the stories shared in the second part of this thesis. This enables the interviews to stand out as an oral account. However, chapter four will first introduce the participants to the interviews, the languages at hand and the largest group of Aboriginal people in Canada today: urban Aboriginal peoples. Chapters four and five tell the stories of the

participants to the interviews by revisiting issues of loss, revitalization and identity as discussed in chapters two and three.