



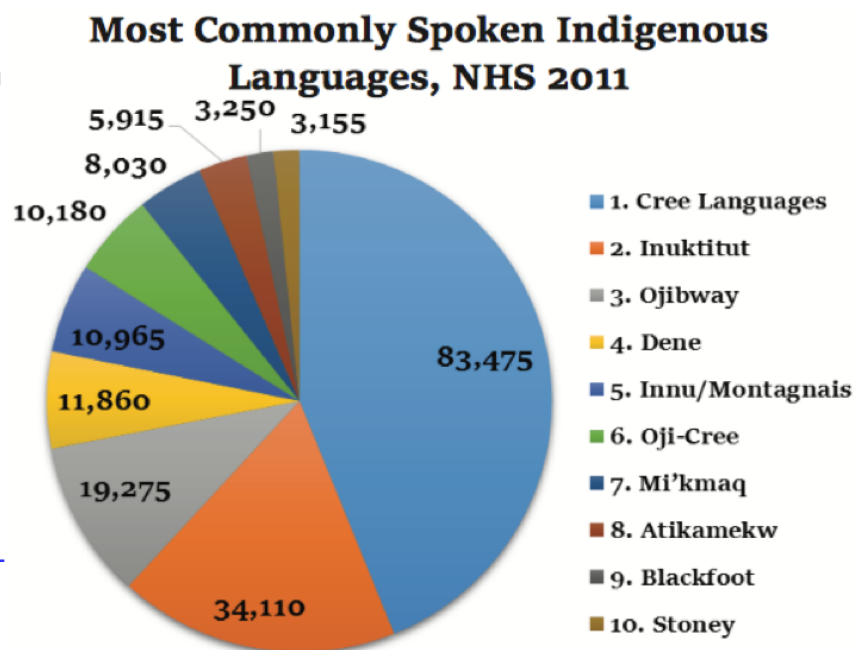
MODULE 10 Notes

Indigenous Languages

“With the destruction of our languages we lose a critical connection to our cultures, our world-views and the lived-experiences of our ancestors. Our languages hold the keys to the rebuilding of our Indigenous Nations, to healing the damages of colonialism, and to re-establishing our Indigenous legal orders and jurisdiction to our lands, territories and resources.” - Kukpi7 Judy Wilson, Secretary-Treasurer of the Union of BC Indian Chiefs

The state of Indigenous languages in Canada

There is a rich diversity of Indigenous languages spoken today. This is particularly true for British Columbia, which is home to more than half of approximately 60 different Indigenous languages in Canada. The chart to the right shows the most commonly spoken Indigenous languages in Canada, as of the 2011 census ([https://www.itk.ca/wp-](https://www.itk.ca/wp-content/uploads/2017/06/TableauFiP_EN.pdf)



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Statistics also suggest that there may be lower likelihood for Indigenous people living in urban environments to have access to lessons and conversations in their Indigenous language(s).

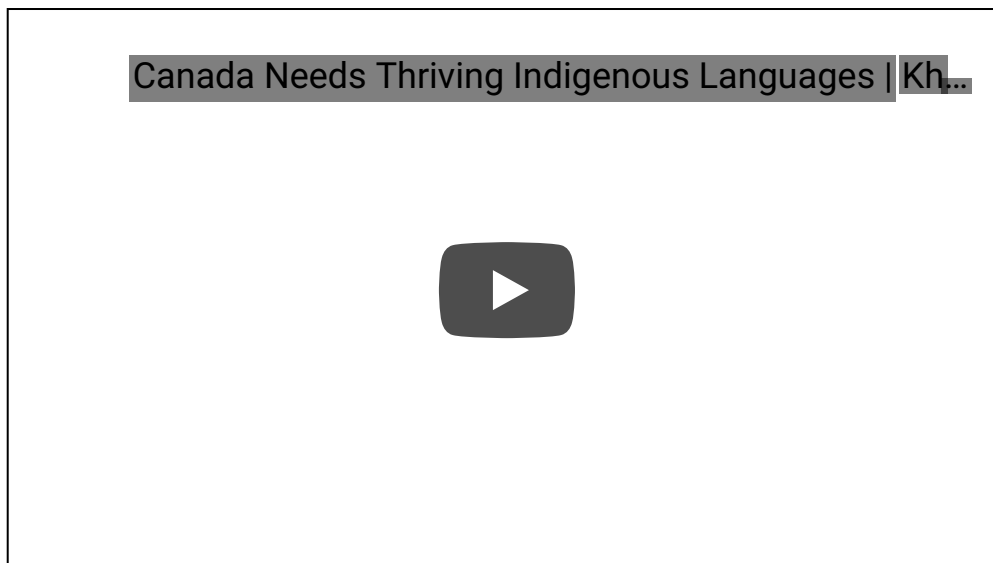
There are a lot of young language learners in across Turtle Island. The 2011 census indicated that 82.8% of First Nations youth on reserve reported having at least some knowledge of a First Nations language and around 63% of Inuit are able to have conversation in Inuktitut. However, Michif (one of the main languages of the Métis) is considered to be a critically endangered language. These same 2011 stats have shown

that the average age was over 50 for those that spoke Michif as their first language. However, looking at the Métis in Winnipeg, Cree, Dene and Ojibway are also spoken.

No Indigenous languages in Canada are considered to be “safe.” They all fall within four categories of endangerment, according to UNESCO (United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization):

- Vulnerable/unsafe: 23 Indigenous languages
- Definitely endangered: 5 Indigenous languages
- Severely endangered: 27 Indigenous languages
- Critically endangered: 35 Indigenous languages

However, the number of language learners is on the rise, as well as increasing awareness of the importance of language revitalization. **Listen to Khelsilem TI'akwasikān Sxwchālten, Squamish language speaker and educator, speak about the importance of language revitalization:**



Language and health

Language is connected to resilience and healing. Research at UVic—a project called *NETOL EW* “one mind, one people”—has shown that Indigenous language learning can support Indigenous peoples’ sense of self, belonging, and confidence.

Language is connected to holistic wellness. According to 2011 census data, 70 percent of First Nations youth on reserve who reported having “excellent” First Nations language skills also reported high levels of life balance (physical, mental, emotional, and spiritual well-being), compared to 45 percent of those who had “poor” First Nations language skills.

Language is also strongly connected to spirituality, which plays an important role in Indigenous health. Elder Roberta Price has said, “Part of our healing is coming back to our language, coming back to our songs, and coming to our ceremonies, and that heals a

lot of people" (see full article here: <https://www.cbc.ca/news/indigenous/indigenous-language-health-care-workers-1.4660009>)

Language also contextualizes Indigenous health, as we saw in our chapter for this week. Madeline Dion Stout writes, "I use the Cree language to describe our experiences, realities, and aspirations because it provides a ready and relevant window into our society and health" (p. 63).

Language is a protective factor for holistic health as studies in Indigenous health have found a connection to culture and language buffer against health problems that disproportionately affect Indigenous people, like HIV, diabetes, mental health issues, and suicide.

Language also helps to break down barriers to health care by creating more welcoming environments in healthcare for Indigenous patients—this can mean that people are more likely to return for follow up care.

Language revitalization

While the importance of Indigenous languages and language revitalization have long been recognized, the 2015 Truth and Reconciliation Commission Calls To Action further assert the need for supportive measures:

"14. We call upon the federal government to enact an Aboriginal Languages Act that incorporates the following principles: (i) Aboriginal languages are a fundamental and valued element of Canadian culture and society and there is an urgency to preserve them. (ii) Aboriginal language rights are reinforced by the Treaties. (iii) The federal government has a responsibility to provide sufficient funds for Aboriginal-language revitalization and preservation. (iv) The preservation, revitalization, and strengthening of Aboriginal languages and cultures are best managed by Aboriginal people and communities. (v) Funding for Aboriginal language initiatives must reflect the diversity of Aboriginal languages."

On June 21, 2019, Bill C-91, An Act Respecting Indigenous Languages, was passed. This legislation aims to recognize Indigenous language rights; support the efforts of Indigenous Peoples to reclaim, revitalize, strengthen and maintain Indigenous languages; establish long-term, funding for Indigenous languages; and advance the implementation of UNDRIP with respect to Indigenous languages.

There are also amazing language revitalization programs occurring in communities. The First Peoples' Cultural Council has the Mentor-Apprentice program, which aims to support Indigenous language revitalization in B.C. in partnership with First Nations communities. The program pairs adult language learners with fluent language speakers (mentors) where they spoke the language while doing daily activities together (300 hours over 1 year).

"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)

There are also online opportunities for language learning. **Please explore the First Voices website, linked on the main page for Module 10.**

“Our youth are inspiring all of us with their creativity and use of technology in their drive to find new ways to communicate with others using their ancestral languages.” – Terry Teegee, BC Assembly of First Nations

Identity

Our identity is made up of the things that make us who we are. Identity is complex and it can change over time! From an Indigenous perspective, culture and identity are inseparable. Culture is embedded into all parts of life.

First Nations, Inuit and Métis peoples have ways of identifying themselves, but are also controlled by the ways that the government defines them as Indigenous people. **Thinking back to our past class discussions, what are some of the ways that the government has influenced Indigenous identity?**

It always connects back to colonialism: The removal of Indigenous children from their families and communities vis-à-vis the Indian Residential School System, Indian Hospitals, the child welfare system, etc. Colonialism has challenged, and in many cases broken processes of passing on culture, language, and identity. Given that identity is such an important aspect of Indigenous cultures, it's no wonder that colonialism has and continues to be so detrimental!

Cultural identity is really important for holistic wellness. It can contribute to a sense of healing from trauma; it is linked with community connected, belonging, and social purpose; and it is associated with pride and self-esteem. Cultural identity is also known as a protective factor for mental health, as the National Collaborating Centre for Aboriginal Health (2016) has noted that, "having a strong sense of identity, including cultural and linguistic pride, has been shown to positively influence mental health outcomes for Aboriginal youth" (p. 5).

Please watch the short video below on the complexities of identity for Indigenous people:

Understanding Aboriginal Identity



Reclaiming and decolonizing our identities

Indigenous people today, are also re-learning and decolonizing our own perceptions of self and others. We are taking back our own definitions of identity and community.

As a whole, Indigenous perspectives around identity are more holistic and strengths-based than the ways that government has defined who is (and is not) a Status Indian.

And of course, we all carry our own identities: something that we explored as part of the Self-Location assignment. As you found out, self-location can help us to understand and share who we are and where we come from, recognize the territory that we live and work on, and acknowledge that humbly and genuinely. Métis scholar, Dr. Kim Anderson (2000), also writes that "Identity is tied into the questions 'What is it that you have to do?' and 'What is it that you are capable of doing?'" (p. 229).

Colonization has continually challenged the very essence of Indigenous nations and communities – the impacts of the many negative paradigms, policies, and assimilation strategies of Eurocentric thought have damaged Indigenous communities... but we have not been silenced! Anderson (2000) further shares that "identity recovery for our people inevitably involves the reclaiming of tradition, the picking up of those things that were left scattered along the path of colonization" (p. 157). Through reclaiming ceremonies, philosophies, teachings, and relationships with the land, Indigenous people are using powerful strategies to ensure that their voices are heard.



***nolan
@gayNDNweirdo

when Lizzo says 'i just took a DNA test turns out i'm 100% that bitch' she rejects colonial race theorem & blood quantum. by asserting herself as 'that bitch' she undermines racialization, thus defying the settler-state's need to categorize & determine autonomy for its subjects

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4,189 Retweets 23.4K Likes

With humour, I share @gayNDNweirdo's critical analysis of Lizzo's lyrics to Truth Hurts (right). Messages shared through social media can be incredible affirmations to identity, belonging, and wellness!

References and Resources

Anderson, K. (2000). *A Recognition of Being: Reconstructing Native Womanhood*. Toronto, ON: Summach.

Jenni, B., Anisman, A., McIvor, O., & Jacobs, P. (2017). An exploration of the effects of mentor-apprentice programs on mentors' and apprentices' wellbeing. *International Journal of Indigenous Health*, 12(2), pp. 25-42.

National Collaborating Centre for Aboriginal Health. (2016). *Culture and language as social determinants of First Nations, Inuit, and Métis health*. <https://www.ccsa-nccah.ca/docs/determinants/FS-CultureLanguage-SDOH-FNMI-EN.pdf>