8 ni-nohtī-nīhithaw-masinahikan: Writing in Indigenous Languages at Canadian Universities

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Abstract/masinahikanis

English occupies a central place in academic writing. Through course assignments, theses, and dissertations, graduate students are socialized into academic traditions of English language knowledge dissemination. In recent years, however, some Indigenous graduate students studying in Canadian universities have resisted this status quo. In this bilingual chapter (nīhithawīwin and English), we contrast the experiences and reflections of an Indigenous doctoral student (Andrea Custer) and an Indigenous graduate supervisor (Belinda Daniels) with the results of a comparative study (conducted by Andrea Sterzuk, Rubina Khanam, and Russ Fayant), examining graduate-thesis language policy in Canadian universities. Andrea Sterzuk, Rubina, and Russ's study of graduate thesis policy suggests that English and French are overwhelmingly the only languages permitted for thesis writing, and discourses of authority and surveillance permeate thesis guideline documents. Yet, the study also suggests that space for Indigenous

students to write theses in Indigenous languages can be structurally created through flexible policy. Andrea Custer sees English writing as something she needs to master, so she can give back to her community through her studies. From her perspective as supervisor, Belinda reflects on the importance and challenges of creating an environment where students can complete their thesis writing in Indigenous languages. Ultimately, our chapter argues that failure to do so contributes to the marginalization of Indigenous worldviews and of academic contributions on Canadian campuses.

ī-kiskinawahamahcik ta-isi-nihtā-āpacihtācik ikwa ta-isi-kaskihocik ākathāsīmowin kiskīthitamowin ta-mīthācik kotaka itiniwa. māka anohcihkī, ātiht itiniw kihci-kiskin-wahamātowi-okiskinwahamākanak kā-ayamihcikīcik kānatahk kihci-kiskinawahamātowinihk namwāc awasimī omisi ī-isi-nitawīthihtahkwāw. ikwāni ati-mīscociwīhtāwak ōma itasiwīwin. ōmōta masinahikīwinisihk kā-nīhitha-wastīk ikwa kā-ākathāsīwastīk, nikanawāpahtīnān tānisi kā-kī-pī-isi-pimimitisahahkwāw opimātisiwiniwāwa ikwa kā-isi-māmitonīthihtahkwāw asinīskāwiskwīw kihci-ok-iskinawahamākan Andrea Custer ikwa paskwāwiskwīw okiskinawahamākīw Belinda Daniels ikwa asici tānisi kā-kī-isi-miskahkwāw otatoskīwiniwāwa (Andrea Sterzuk, Rubina Khanam ikwa Russ Fayant kā-kī-atoskātahkwāw) ī-kanawāpahtahkwāw kihci-kiskinawahamātowi-pīkiskwīwin tāpwīhtamowin pikwītī kānatahk kihci-kiskinawahamātowin-ihk. Andrea Sterzuk, Rubina ikwa Russ kī-wāpahtamwak ōmītho ōta kānatahk kihci-kiskinawahamātowinihk masin-ahikīwina ikwa nisitawinamwak nayīstaw ākathāsīmowin ikwa wīmistikōsīmowin poko ī-pakitinikātīki īyakoni ta-āpacihcikātīki ispī masinahikītwāwi kihci-kiskinwa-hamātowi-okiskinwahamākanak. āhkāmi-māmiskōcikātīwa okimāwahiwīwin ikwa nākatawāpahtamiwin ōhīta masinahikīwina. ikwa mīna nisitawīthihcikātīw ta-kī-taw-inamākātīthiki itiniwi-pīkiskwīna ta-kī-masinahikākīcik kihci-kiskinwahamātowi-okiskinwahamākanak. itīthihtam māna Andrea Custer, ākathāsīmowi-masinahikīwin poko ta-nakacihtāt kāwi ta-wīcihāt otitinīma ikwa kisowāhikow kā-mīkwā-itasiwāniwithik ikwa nohtī-nīhithawasinahikīw. ikwa okiskinwahamākīwa, Belindawa wītha māmitonīthītam ithikohk ī-kistīthicikātīk ikwa ī-āthimahk ka-tawinamahcik kihci-kiskinwahamātowi-okiskinwahamākanak ta-kīsihtācik otatoskīwiniwāwa itiniwi- pīkiskwīna ta-āpacihtāniwiki.

ōta masinahikīwinisihk kā-kī-masinahamahk nititwānān
īkā ka-tawinamahtihtwāwi kihci-kiskinwahamātowi-ok-
iskinwahamākanak kiyāpic namwāc kistīthicikātīwa
itiniwi-kiskīthihtamowina ikwa mīkiwina kānatahk misiwītī
kihci-kiskinawahamātowinihk.

nayīstaw māna ī-āpacihcikātīk ākathāsīmowin kihci-kiskinawa-
hamātowin masinahikīwinihk. okiskinawahamākanak nanātohk māna
poko ta-masinahikīcik kihci-kiskinawahamātowinihk

In Anglophone Canadian universities, the English language occupies a central place in academic writing. Pennycook and Makoni (2020) note, "[e]ducation is a realm in which languages are regulated and determined: Whether as a colonial vernacular policy, a government modernization project, or a neo-lib-eral paradigm of choice, the result in schools is always a particular mode of language governance" (p. 87). This project of language regulation leaves little to no space for any languages other than English. Plurilingual students face multiple challenges that greatly impact their ability to draw on their full lin-guistic repertoires and knowledge. Graduate students are socialized into the academic tradition of knowledge dissemination in English through course assignment expectations, journal articles, and eventually graduate theses and dissertations. In recent years, however, some Indigenous graduate students studying in Canadian universities have resisted this status quo through the preparation of multilingual texts. In 2009, Fred Metallic, a history student at York University, wrote his Ph.D. dissertation in Mi'kmaq and garnered media attention for producing the first Canadian dissertation ever written in an Indigenous language (Bosenberg, 2009). Just a few years later, a similar request made by Patrick Stewart, a Ph.D. student in architecture, to write his dissertation in Nisga'a was denied at the University of British Columbia (Hutchinson, 2015). This denial ultimately led to the student's decision to write the thesis in English using non-standard punctuation (Marker, 2019). What these two instances of resistance by Indigenous scholars suggest is that the use of Indigenous languages for graduate theses is a rather recent and contested phenomenon, and the policies that govern the language of graduate thesis writing at Canadian universities likely differ widely. These examples also sug-gest that universities can serve as spaces of resistance for Indigenous scholars.

We understand multilingualism not only as the use of different languages but also the use of multiple writing systems, which are often rendered invisible by the alphabet of the dominant English language of Canadian educational language policies. Across our group of five co-authors, for example, we use or have used multiple languages, including American Sign Language, Anishinaabemowin, Arabic, Bangla, English, French, Japanese, Korean, Michif, nīhithawīin/nēhiyawēwin/Cree, Spanish, Ukrainian, and Urdu. Across these languages, we have also used multiple writing systems, including abjads, abugidas, alphabets, and syllabaries. Most of the time, we use (or have used) these languages in listening and speaking but we also use them in our personal reading and writing (texting and social media) and academic reading and writing (books, theses, academic blogs, and journal articles). What we know from our attempts to use our plurilingual repertoires in scholarly writing is that it is not a straightforward experience. While English (and to a lesser degree, French) opportunities are common in Canada, using other languages in scholarly knowledge mobilization can be difficult, contested, and regulated by those in positions of authority.

Elsewhere (Daniels et al., 2021; Khanam et al., 2021, Sterzuk & Fayant, 2016), we have explored "the practices, theories, and views of multilingualism held by communities on the periphery" (Khanam et al., 2021, p. 171). Prior to European contact, Indigenous societies in the territory colonially known as Canada had a high degree of diversity, and interrelated economies often necessitated the learning and use of multiple languages (Iseke, 2013). Multiple literacy practices were also employed. Belinda has written about the history of Indigenous languages and print literacy practices, explaining that these "writing practices include petroglyphs, petrographs, wampum belts, hide paintings and syllabics" (Daniels-Fiss, 2008, p. 237). While nīhithawīwin and nēhiyawēwin, the two Cree language varieties included in this chapter, are most commonly written today using Standard Roman Orthography (SRO), these languages have also had another writing system—Cree Syllabics. Western history suggests that this system was created by a religious missionary, but Cree history describes this writing system as a "gift from the spirit world" to an "Old One in the early 1880s" (Daniels-Fiss, 2008, p. 238). The existence of Indigenous writing systems in Canada spans several centuries but their widespread use in western educational settings for the purposes of communicating ideas has not been extensive. Huaman and Brayboy (2017) explain, "[h]istorically, policymakers external to Indigenous communities shaped what education at all levels has become for Indigenous people—formalized systems almost completely foreign to the Indigenous environment, cultural practices, and languages" (p. 6).

For Canadian graduate students, the choice of language for theses is largely determined by the thesis guidelines, which serve as a type of language-in-education policy. As normal or expected as the central role of English in higher education might seem, this linguistic dominance is constructed and, thus, can be changed by challenging euro-centric "patterns of organization," which continue to sustain hierarchies in higher learning (Pennycook & Makoni, 2020). In other settings, there are examples to examine in terms of pathways to address issues surrounding the university language policy and practices (Doiz et al., 2013; Lasagabaster, 2015). Space for Indigenous students to write their theses in Indigenous languages can be structurally created (Stewart, 2018, 2019), but to introduce thesis guidelines that support this, we must first have a better understanding of what practices and policies are in place in Canadian universities and also their impact on Indigenous professors and graduate students.

Locating Ourselves

Locating ourselves is an Indigenous "way of ensuring that those who study, write, and participate in knowledge creation are accountable for their own positionality" (Absolon & Willett, 2005, p. 97). awa nīkan omasinahikīw, Andrea Custer, asinīskāwiskwīw wapāwikoscikanihk ohcīw ikwa ka-ākathāsīmowin Pelican Narrows isithikātīw. okāwīmaw, wīwiw, otānisimaw, omisimaw, owahkōmakinimaw ikwa Peter Balantyne Cree Nation kā-otakisot. Andrea nīkan opīkiskwīwin nīhithawīwin ikwa kiskinanawahamākosiw ka-isi-wīcihtāsot ka-ohpinahk itniwi-pīkiskwina kihci-kiskinawahamāotowikamikohk University of Victoria. nēhiyawēwin mīkwāc kiskinawahamākīw ikwa nīkanīskam Indigenous Languages nītī First Nations University of Canada. Next, Andrea Sterzuk is a white settler professor of language education at the University of Regina. She is a second language learner of multiple languages including nēhiyawēwin. Kakiyosēw (Belinda Daniels) nitisiyihkāson, nēhiyaw ōma niya, pakitwāhkan sāhkihikan ohci niya, māka mīna niwīkin mēkwāc Victoria, British Columbia. niya ohkomimāw, niya okāwīmāw, niya okāwīsimāw, ēkwa niya omīsimāw māka mīna onīkānēw wīci-atoskēwin ta-pimācihtāyāhk nēhiyaw pīkiskwēwin. Rubina Khanam is Bangladeshi, holds a Ph.D. in Education and works as an instructor in teacher education at the University of Regina. Russell Fayant is a Michif/Metis descended from prairie buffalo hunters. He teaches for SUNTEP Regina, an Indigenous teacher education program, is a Ph.D. student, and is currently engaged in the reclaiming of his traditional language, Michif.

Graduate Thesis Language Policy in Canadian Universities

In this section, we provide an overview of results from a comparative study of graduate thesis policies in Canadian universities. Our study was guided by the following research question: What is *explicitly* and what is *implicitly* mentioned in the analyzed documents in relation to English, French, Indigenous languages, and other societal languages? For our study, we reviewed all Canadian university graduate thesis guidelines available online (52 Anglophone and 16 Francophone). We first worked deductively by examining the selected documents for the keywords related to our research question and theoretical framework. Our specific keywords (or categories, following Mayring, 2000) were references to languages (English, French, Indigenous languages, and other societal languages) and also references to language varieties (Canadian, American, or British English/spelling). This process allowed us to identify relevant themes in connection to language as well as to focus on what is explicitly named in connection to language. We also implemented an inductive analysis, particularly when looking for absences of these categories. For the purpose of this chapter, we focus our discussion on Anglophone universities in Canada.

Table 8.1. Graduate Thesis Language Policy: Anglophone Universities in Canada

Policy statements regarding language	Number of universities (out of 52)
No language mentioned	26
Explicitly or implicitly English	11
Explicitly English or French	6
English, French, & Indigenous Language in North America	1
English, French, Spanish, & other languages (not specified)	3
English, French, & other languages (not specified)	2
English, French, & language unit languages	3

In Table 8.1, we see that English operates as the de facto, implicit, or explicit language of graduate thesis writing in 37 universities according to the 52 sets of guidelines we reviewed in total. At these 37 universities, no mechanism or pathway is named for the option to write in any language besides English. Next, in six universities, the named languages are either English or French. In the remaining nine universities, we see the use of other languages positioned as something that is possible but must be regulated. Throughout the

guidelines of those nine universities, recurring phrases such as the requirement of "approval" or "permission" by those in positions of authority (supervisors, deans, supervisory committees, and department chairs) point to non-English languages as something that must be judged before being determined suitable for scholarly writing. Discourses of authority and surveillance permeate these thesis guideline documents. As an outlier of sorts, the doctoral requirements from York University name Indigenous languages as languages that can be used for graduate theses. In these guidelines, students must have "confirmation" from the student's program area that "relevant supervision and sufficient support for the completion of such written work can be provided" (Faculty of Graduate Studies, 2024)

Overwhelmingly, English operates as the language of graduate theses for Anglophone universities. There is only one instance where Indigenous languages are explicitly mentioned as languages used for the writing of graduate theses. In most instances, languages other than English or French can only be used as exceptions and with approval by those in positions of authority. The discourses these guidelines produce (and, in turn, the discourses that produce these guidelines) are that academic knowledge should be communicated through the medium of English. In the reflections that follow, we see parallels between the discourses that shape these guideline documents and the experiences of Andrea and Belinda.

Reflections from Andrea Custer

nitathimīhikon māna ākathāsīmowin. ispihk māna kā-pīkiskwīyān, kā-ayamītāyān ahpō kā-masinahikiyān ākathāsīmowin. kinwīsk ninōcītān ka-mamitonīthītamān kiko ākathasīmo-masinahikana kā-nohtī-apacītāyān, tapiskōc apoko māna ī-kakīpātisiyān nititīthītīn. ikwa mīna kinwīsīs ninōcītān ka-nistohtamān tānisi awiyak kā-itwīt ahpō tānisi kā-nohtī-itwīyān. iyako kā-wanihikoyān īkā kwayask māna kā-kī-nisitohtamān tānisi itniwak kā-it-wīcik kā-ispākīmocik. ninīcīpahokon iyako māna. māka ninistohtīn nīswayak ōki ākathāsīmowin ikwa nīthawīwin apoko ka-nakacītāyān kā-wīcihitāsoyān.

aspin nīwo ohci kā-kī-itahtopiponiyān kā-kī-māci-kiskinawahamākosiyān ta-isi-kiskīthītamān ākathāsīmowin. ta-isi-masinahāmān, ta-isi-ayamītāyān ikwa ta-isi-pīkiskwīyān. mwayī ōma, mōtha nikī-ohci ākathāsīmon mitonāwākāc. nikī-nīhithawān apoko. namwāc mīna nikī-ohci nītā masinahin nipīkiskwīwin, mitoni pātimā iyako kā-kī-kiskinawahāmakosiyān. nīmita-naw-nīwosāp patimā kā-ki-tahtwāskīwiniyān kā-kī-ati-māci-ayamīcikiyān ikwa ka-masinahikīyān nīhithawīwin. kwayask ōma athiman ka-masināhāmān paskwāwi-nēhiyawēwin kā-kī-kiskinawahāmākosiyān kwayask ikwa iyako

apoko ī-apacītāyān askāw kawīcihikoyān. kinwīsk mīna ninōcītān ka-nīhithaw māsinahikiyān athisk mōtha kīkwāy kakī-wīcihokoyān māhti tānita kā-pa-tasinahikiyān ikwa asici īkā mitoni cīskwa ī-nīhtā-masinahikiyān. māskoc nakī-nakacītātay kīspin nīwo itahtopiponiyān ī-kī-kiskinawahāmākoyān ōma ta-isi-nakacītāyān. kīspin ī-kī-kiskinawahāmākoyān kayās ohci ōma nīhithaw masinahikīwin āsāy itikwī mistahi nakī-kīsi-masinahitāy, māka kinwīsk ninōcītān. kīkāc āpihtāw tipahikan mōtha wītha niyānan cipahikanisa kīspin ī-kī-ākathasīsināhikiyān. niwīsakitīhinikon māna nīstaw kā-wāpātamān ākathāsīmowin pikowītī ī-masinahikātīk ikwa ī-pihtākwak māka ninīhithaw pīkiskwīwin namwāc ī-nōkāk. ōtī nīkān nitakāwātīn kahkithaw awāsisak ka-nīhtā-masinahikicik, ka-nīhtā-ayamītācik ikwa ka-nīhta-pīkiskwīcik onīhithawīwinīk isi ikwa ka-wīcītācik. kā-apacītācik pikwītī

ōma kā-ayamihcikiyān kihci-kiskinawahamātowikamikohk, kā-kak-wī-kiskinawamākosiyān kihci-masinahikīwin, mōtha itawinikātīw nipīkiskwīwin ka-wīcihwikoyān. mōtha itwawinikātīw nipīkiskwīwin ahpō nītha kā-isi-nīhithawīyān, ayi apoko ōma kā-kī-kakwī-kwīski-pimātisīwīkaw-iyān. kā-wīcihāsoyān ka-nistawinikācikātīhiki ikwa ka-kīsītāyān anima kiskinwahamākosiwin, apoko ka-nakatamān nīnīhithāwin athisk apoko ka-masinahikiyān kotak pīkiskwīwin, mōtha witha nītha nipīkiskwīwin. ninisitohtīn anima ka-wīcihitāyān itiniwi-pīkiskwīwina, apoko ohcitaw ka-nakacihtāyān akathāsīmowi-kihci-masinahikīwin. omisi kā-itohtamān, michit kīkwāy nititohtīn ka-sākohtāyān. tāpiskōc, nistam kā-mīthikawiyān atoskīwina, nīkan nitayamihtān ikwa ninistohtīn aniki kiskinwahamākīwina kā-mithikowākaw nitōkiskinawahamākīmak. nawāc awasimī ka-nis-itohtamān ikwa miscahīs itwīwina ka-kiskīthītamān, nikanawāpātīn itwīwasinahikana ikwa ispihk niwīskasinahīn nīhithawīwin isi ka-kīcināhoyān kwayask ī-nistohtamān. nitayamīhtān mīna nanātohk masinahikana kīkwaya ohci kā-nohtī-kiskīthītamān. īwako ōma kā-wīcihokoyān ka-nisitohtamān pīkiskwīna īta kā-atoskiyān. ikwa mīna, kwayask nikanawāpātīn kā-isi-ma-sinahīkīcik itiniwak kā-nakacītācik nawāc. kīspin nitakahkīthītīn atītht masinahikana, ni-kakwī-naspitōtawāwak kā-isi-masinahikīcik, māka mina nitāpacihtān nipīkiskwīwin ikwa asici kākī-pī-isi-wāpāhtamān nipimatisiwin. kisik ōma kā-isi-kiskinawahamāskosiyān, nimāh-masinahikīsin māna piko kīkway ohci tāpiskōc kā-kī-isi-ohpikiyān, nipīkiskwīwin, niwāhkomākanak, pīkiskwīwin kā-ohpinikātīk, kā-kiskinawahāmākosiyān ikwa kā-itatoskīyān. ka-nakacītāyān nīhithaw masinahikīwin, nikī-otinīn nikotwāsik kiskin-wahamākosiwina nayīstaw nīhithaw masinahikīwin ikwa nīhithawīwin kā-isi-kanawāpahcikātīk, mitoni nikī-ati-kīsihtān masinahikanis māka namwāc nisitawinākātīw. iwako ōma kā-kī-itākamisiyān nikī-wīcihi-kon ka-nihta-ayamīhtāyān ikwa ka-nihtā-masinahāmān nīhithawīwin.

ay-mīna nikī-ati-nihta-kiskinawahamākān ikwa asici, mamātāwipathin ōma, nikī-wīcihikon ka-maskawīmakāk nitākathāsīmowin.

ati-nīkān, ni-nohtī-kiskinawahamāskosin Denesuline ikwa Spanish pīkiskwīna. ka-kaskihtāyān ōki, nika-otinīn ōki pīkiskwīwina ikwa nika-kocihtān nīkānihk. athisk nītha ī-kiskinawahamākīyān pīkiskwīn, ninisitohtīn mistahi āpacihcikana ī-takwāki kā-āpacihcikātīhiki kā-nohtī-kiskinawahamākosit piyak ahpo kotaka pīskwiwin ikwa nika-apacihtān ōma ka-wīcihkoyān.

nipikiskwīwin ōma i-kīmithakawisiyān. nikihci-āniskocāpānak, niwākōhmākanak, ikwa ikotī kā-kī-opikīyān kā-ohcipathik. mistahi tāpwītamowina ikwa kiskīthītamowina ikota astīw nipīkiskwīnihk kayās ochi ikwa kākikī i-pimi-mithikawisiyāhk, namwāc mitoni wīkāc ākathāsīmowin kakī-ohci-nistōtīn ōki. mitoni mīna nimamicin ī-nihtā-nīhithaw masinahikīyān. kā-ākathāsinahikīyān ōma māna, mōtha mitoni nipasikonikon, mōtha mitoni ōma nītha asiniyskāwiskwīw nitithītīn. ta-masinahikīyān nipikiskwīwin nikistīthimison, nikistīthītīn īta kā-ohciyān ikwa nītha ohci nikihci-āniskocāpanak, niwākōhmākanak, ikota kākī-opikīyān ikwa nicawāsimisak. ōtī nīkān nitakāwātīn kahkithaw awāsisak ka-nīhtā-masinahikīcik, ka-nīhtā-ayamītācik ikwa ka-nīhta-pīkiskwīcik onīhithawīwinīk isi ikwa ka-wīcītācik. kā-apacītācik pikwītī, ayik mīna kihci-kiskinawahamākātowikamikwa.

I have a hard time with English. When I speak, read, or write in English I run into a few issues. It also takes me a long time to think of the right words in English; as a result, the ability to express myself might come out as inane. In addition, it takes me longer to process what is being said and what it is I need to say. This has hindered my ability to participate in discussions where advanced vocabulary is used. My self-esteem has been impacted, and I feel that I do not belong in the world of academia. However, I understand that I need to master both English and Cree to help.

I was four years old when I began learning how to really know English: how to write, how to read, and how to speak. Before this, I spoke no English; I only spoke Cree. I did not know how to write in my own language, and I did not learn to do so until much later. I was 44 years old when I began to learn how to read and write Cree. It is difficult and, for help, I sometimes have to refer to the language variety in which I learned how to write Cree, the Plains Cree dialect. It also takes me a long time to write in Rock Cree because there is no spell check to help me know when I am making mistakes, and I also don't know how to write perfectly just yet. I would have been good at it if I had learned how to use the language when I was four. If I had been taught long ago, I would have been able to write more content, but this takes me a long time to write. Over a half hour compared to five minutes of English writing. It hurts my heart when I see and hear English everywhere, and my language is not present.

In my post-secondary journey, furthering my education through graduate studies does not allow for my language to walk with me. There has been no space made for my language or myself, only a version of me that is assimilated. For my contributions to be recognized and to acquire that graduate degree, I am asked to leave who I am behind by writing in a language that is not my own. Yet, I have recognized that to advocate for Indigenous languages, it is important to develop my English academic writing. To do this, I have used several strategies to overcome some challenges. For example, when I am presented with new assignments, I begin by reading and understanding the instructions and guidelines provided by my instructors. To improve my comprehension and vocabulary, I will often look to dictionaries and a thesaurus and then I translate into Cree so that I can be sure of my understanding. I also read relevant journal articles and books related to the topics of my interest. This allows me to better understand the jargon of the field. In addition, I pay close attention to the writing styles used by more knowledgeable authors. If one resonates with me, I try to infuse that writing style into my own work while, at the same time, incorporating my language into my writing as well as my own experiences. In addition to these academic pursuits, I maintain my own blog, where I write about many topics including my upbringing, my language, my family, language revitalization, and educational and professional experiences.

To develop my Cree literacy skills, I took six courses that focused on Cree literacy and Cree linguistics, eventually obtaining an unofficial Cree minor. This pursuit was instrumental in helping me develop my Cree reading and writing skills. The added benefits were that my ability to teach progressed, and, strangely, this course of study also helped strengthen my English skills. Moving forward, I would like to learn about the Denesuline and Spanish languages. To achieve these goals, I plan to enroll in language classes and practice regularly in the future. As a language educator myself, I understand various resources that can be utilized for learning a second or additional language, and I intend to use this to my advantage.

Society needs to know that my language is a gift from the Creator. It comes from my ancestors, from my family, and my community. My language represents a myriad of beliefs and knowledge passed down from generation to generation that can never be fully represented in English. I also feel an immense sense of pride when I can write in my own language. When I write English, I don't feel fully represented in who I am as an asiniyskāwiskwīw. To write in my own language is to honor who I am and where I come from and that I belong to the ancestors, family, community, and my own children. In the future, I hope that all children will be able to write, read, and speak the

language—and that they'll have an easier time. I hope that they will use it everywhere, including post-secondary institutions.

Reflections From kakiyosēw (Belinda) Daniels

apisīs ninisitohtātin ātiht nēhiyawēwina kāpīkiskēyān māka nikocihtān kapipiskwēyān nēhiyawēwin māka namōya kwayask mistahi nipipiskwān māka nikocihtān tāpitaw tahto kīsikāw. nimamihcisin ēkwa ē-kī mōsihtāyān maskawisēwin. (For my nēhiyaw brothers and sisters).

As an assistant professor of Indigenous language revitalization at the University of Victoria, my investment in Indigenous languages has broadened from someone with a personal interest to someone with agency and responsibility. I am at a place and a position to discuss the importance of Indigenous languages and academic writing and to share what it means to me, and to other original inhabitants of this land. The knowledge and experience that I hold at an institutional level gives me great satisfaction because my work in Indigenous language revitalization is recognized as a new field of scholarship (McIvor, 2020). I sit with others who have the same invested interest, the same questions, including how can we support our living languages and how can we lift them up for everyone to see and understand that they are useful, valid, and life-giving? Increasingly, I also recognize a safe space for this dialogue in other academic areas related to language learning and teaching. It is exciting; there is purpose in my life and it motivates me to work with love for and with Indigenous languages. This shift is a collective action. This undertaking of revitalizing and reclaiming languages is full of radicalness, resistance, and reclamation. As a collective within my university department, we are practicing self-determination.

The idea of writing and publishing in Cree may not be widespread, but we do have academic examples to look to. One person who comes to mind is Dr. Edward Ahenakew. He is one of the first Cree language activists who published in academic forums. Dr. Ahenakew could speak and understand English and Cree as well as read and write both languages using two writing systems, the Roman alphabet for English and Cree as well as Cree Syllabics for Cree. He not only promoted literacy (using Roman orthography as well as syllabics) but specifically preserved Cree âtayôhkêwina, or sacred stories (Ahenakew, 1929). These stories are part of what many refer to as the Cree oral tradition. Ahenakew's âtayôhkêwina came to him from Chief Thunderchild (Peyesiw Awasis) of the Thunderchild First Nation (Conn, 2018). Some of Ahenakew's other work and research included creating an Anglican bible in Cree and writing hymns in Cree. Then there is Dr. Freda Ahenakew, who

wrote *Cree Language Structures: A Cree Approach* (1987), among other publications. Freda's book is important to me because it analyzes and categorizes the Cree language and illustrates the differences between speaking and reading Cree. I learned a lot from these language heroes. Writing for academic purposes in one's ancestral language can be done, no matter how small or unsupported that language may be. Because of the interest in nēhiyawēwin, the circulation process for this writing is widespread across Canada. Cree is the largest language group, and the beneficiaries are intergenerational, whether they are new learners in the home or in school, or teachers and scholars alike. Writing in an Indigenous language inspires others to do this work for multiple reasons.

Reading and writing in our original languages is an act of resistance and, at the same time, a natural instinct, which I support. I encourage my graduate students to write in their ancestral language. I applaud it. One student comes to mind. This student writes in both English and in Sḵwx̱wú7mesh (Squamish). This is not my language, but I feel proud, and my student is empowered. This student translates in both languages. I feel this opens the gates to change in colonial Canadian institutions. Why wouldn't writing in Indigenous languages be accepted, normalized, and considered natural, particularly when exploring, researching, and reclaiming Indigenous languages? After all, this is what scholarship teaches us: to go beyond the boundaries, and to unlearn, learn, share, and create new knowledges.

I also know from experience, however, the other end of the spectrum when it comes to accepting Indigenous languages, Indigenous students, and Indigenous knowledges in university settings. Normalizing Indigenous languages in universities would be ideal; yet, a discomfort remains, where settlers create difficulty in moving forward in this way of indigeneity. From personal experience as a new professor and in my own graduate experiences, I can say that it is expected that we/Indigenous scholars write and speak in a specific colonial way. At times, I have felt that those working for the institution carried a racially biased, white supremacist mentality that was cloaked in statements about my English language writing. Whether conscious or unconscious, these practices were discriminatory. Now, in my role as a faculty member at the University of Victoria, I feel that I am fortunate. In my department of Indigenous education, writing in our languages is acceptable. Because of this, our departmental practices help to guard against graduate students feeling inadequate or inferior to others. This is important for unlimited reasons: for instance, expressing oneself in one's ancestral language fosters a sense of connection and provides a mentoring of sorts for others to follow and to do the same. Expressing ourselves in our languages can inspire others to reclaim

and relearn their languages for generations to come. This language resurgence is also tied to nationhood. Languages carry a rootedness to the land that non-Indigenous people do not have. A challenge to normalizing the use of Indigenous languages in graduate student writing is that of the colonial mindset which does not recognize other knowledges, values, and experiences. Another challenge is the issues of written language standardization. From my perspective, the benefits outweigh any challenge this creates. I'll use the example of Cree to illustrate my point. The standardization of the Plains 'y' variety of nēhiyawēwin is beneficial because this language group can then draw on the same dictionaries and the same spelling system. There are, of course, some tensions around regional differences and varieties of the Cree language but, for the most part, the lexicon of the language remains the same and the language varieties within Saskatchewan and the western prairie provinces are mutually intelligible. Writing in Indigenous languages in higher education is possible and has multiple benefits. My question, then, is do institutions of higher education really want to change? What are these places for if not to grow, expand, and regenerate new knowledges from other languages?

Conclusion

In recent years, Canadian universities have made efforts to increase the enrollment of Indigenous students as a means of diversifying knowledges, closing gaps in economic and social outcomes, and engaging a broader process of reconciliation (Gaudry & Lorenz, 2018). For generations, policies of enfranchisement, marginalization, and exclusion ensured not only a general lack of access to higher learning, but simultaneously a lack of inclusion of Indigenous epistemologies. This erasure of Indigenous knowledge continues to be replicated in policies that force Indigenous academics to read, think, and write within a dominant knowledge system that often does not value metaphoric thinking or a sense of spiritual connectedness inherent in Indigenous epistemologies. These trends toward academic monolingualism place speakers and other languages in vulnerable positions. The challenge, then, is to find ways to reverse this process in academic writing. Ultimately, Indigenous knowledges expressed in Indigenous languages benefit the communities in which the knowledge is generated.

The failure to nurture Indigenous languages as languages of academic writing contributes to the marginalization of Indigenous worldviews and academic contributions on Canadian campuses (Hart, 2010; Sterzuk & Fayant, 2016). We maintain that university policy should include planning for Indigenous languages in all facets of higher education, including

graduate thesis writing. Beyond affecting this generation of graduate students, planning for graduate thesis writing in Indigenous languages has the potential to influence the next generation of academics working in Indigenous programs. In a broader sense, a rethinking of academic language policy provides researchers—and universities —with the opportunity to respond to the Truth and Reconciliation (TRC) calls to action (TRC, 2015) in a meaningful way, one that respects not just Indigenous ideas but also the languages and worldviews from which those ideas are formed. This chapter, then, is an invitation to Canadian universities to deliberately make space for the use of Indigenous languages in higher education—including graduate thesis writing. Planning for Indigenous languages in higher education has the potential to change the way we think about knowledge, expertise, and the very nature of Canadian universities.

nipakosīthimonān ka-mamitonīthītakaw kāhkithaw kihci-kiski-nawahamātowikamikwa tānisi kā-isi-ohpinakaw ahpo tānisi kiyāpic kā-isi-kāhsīnākaw ikwa kā-isi-wīpinākaw itiniwi-pīkiskwīna ikwa kiskithītamowina.

We implore all universities to consider how they lift up or continue to erase and disregard Indigenous languages and knowledges.

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