



# The role of linguistics in community-based language documentation: Bottleneck or bootstrap?

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The Canadian Indigenous Languages and Literacy Development Institute (CILLDI) is developing a *Community Linguist Handbook* tied to its existing Community Linguist Certificate program. The Handbook and its accompanying website will allow students to build a portfolio of their language through a graded series of exercises, beginning with individual sounds and moving through words and phrases, then on to full texts.

Topic area: *Training in documentation methods – beyond the university*

Keywords: *training, revitalization, documentation, resources*

## THE COMMUNITY LINGUIST CERTIFICATE

### History

The Community Linguist Certificate is a provincially-recognized certificate administered through CILLDI and awarded by the Faculty of Arts at the University of Alberta. The certificate was founded in 2007. The program was designed to meet the growing need for Indigenous communities to have their own trained experts who can lead community-based language documentation and revitalization projects.

### Goals

The goals of the CLC program are to:

- develop a cadre of linguistically-trained community-based Indigenous language workers and activists
- encourage some speakers to consider further training in linguistics
- provide models of University-Community collaboration
- give U of A students a chance to meet with, learn from and develop relationships with CLC students

### Student Population

The typical CLC student is a fluent speaker of a Canadian Indigenous language. Most are working as classroom language teachers in their communities, or are involved in other language and culture projects through their Band. Some have previous University experience, but for many this is their first exposure to post-secondary education.

### Structure of the Certificate Program

The program encompasses a six-course sequence. Students typically take two courses each summer, completing their certificate over three summers. The typical CLC class has around a dozen students, speaking 4 or 5 different languages.

#### Year One

Linguistics 111: *Introduction to Linguistics for Indigenous Language Revitalization*  
Linguistics 211: *Phonetics of Indigenous Languages*

#### Year Two

Linguistics 212: *Morphosyntax of Indigenous Languages*  
Linguistics 213: *Sentence and Discourse Patterns of Indigenous Languages*

#### Year Three

Inter-D 311: *Language Policy & Planning for Indigenous Language Communities*  
Inter-D 318: *Technologies for Endangered Language Documentation*

### Scope of the Training

The training covers the following areas:

- the basics of linguistic analysis at all levels
- the special properties of Indigenous languages
- best practices in language representation
- exposure to language documentation techniques
- community language advocacy and activism

### The CLC Philosophy

The CLC courses also aim to impart to students a shared set of beliefs and practices about languages and community language work. These include:

- A language is a living thing – like all living things, they grow and change over time
- Variation is normal and beautiful
- Oral language is primary – written language is an imperfect reflection at best
- No one speaker, or linguist, or speaker-linguist can know everything about a language
- Don't translate words, translate meanings
- Speaking a language and teaching a language are two very different things
- Languages aren't literal – metaphors and idioms are an essential part of any language
- Languages are often vague – you can't really understand a form without knowing its context
- Languages aren't always regular – but the irregular parts are just as important, maybe even more so
- A language is so much more than a list of words, a set of verb paradigms or a collection of stories
- Every analysis is a work in progress – never be afraid to consider more data, rethink and revise

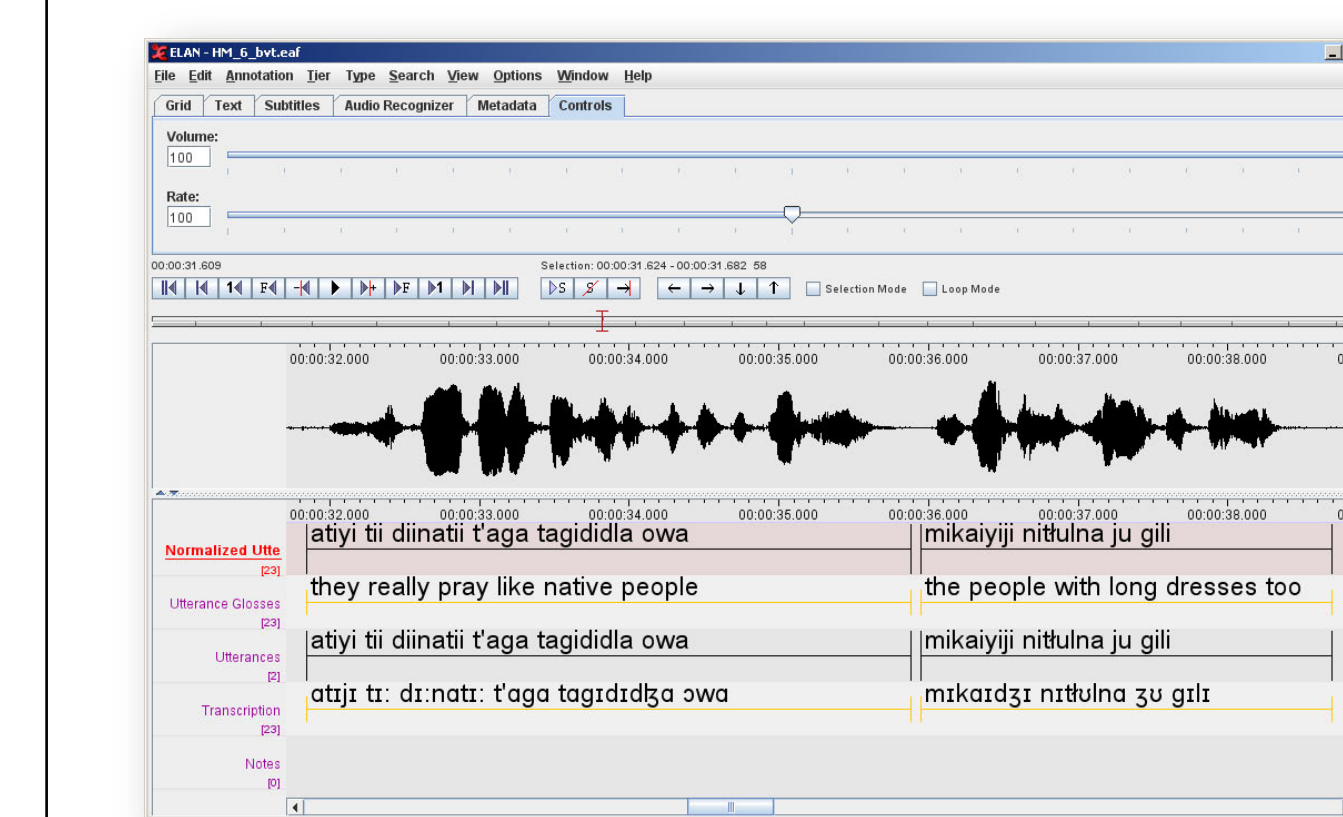
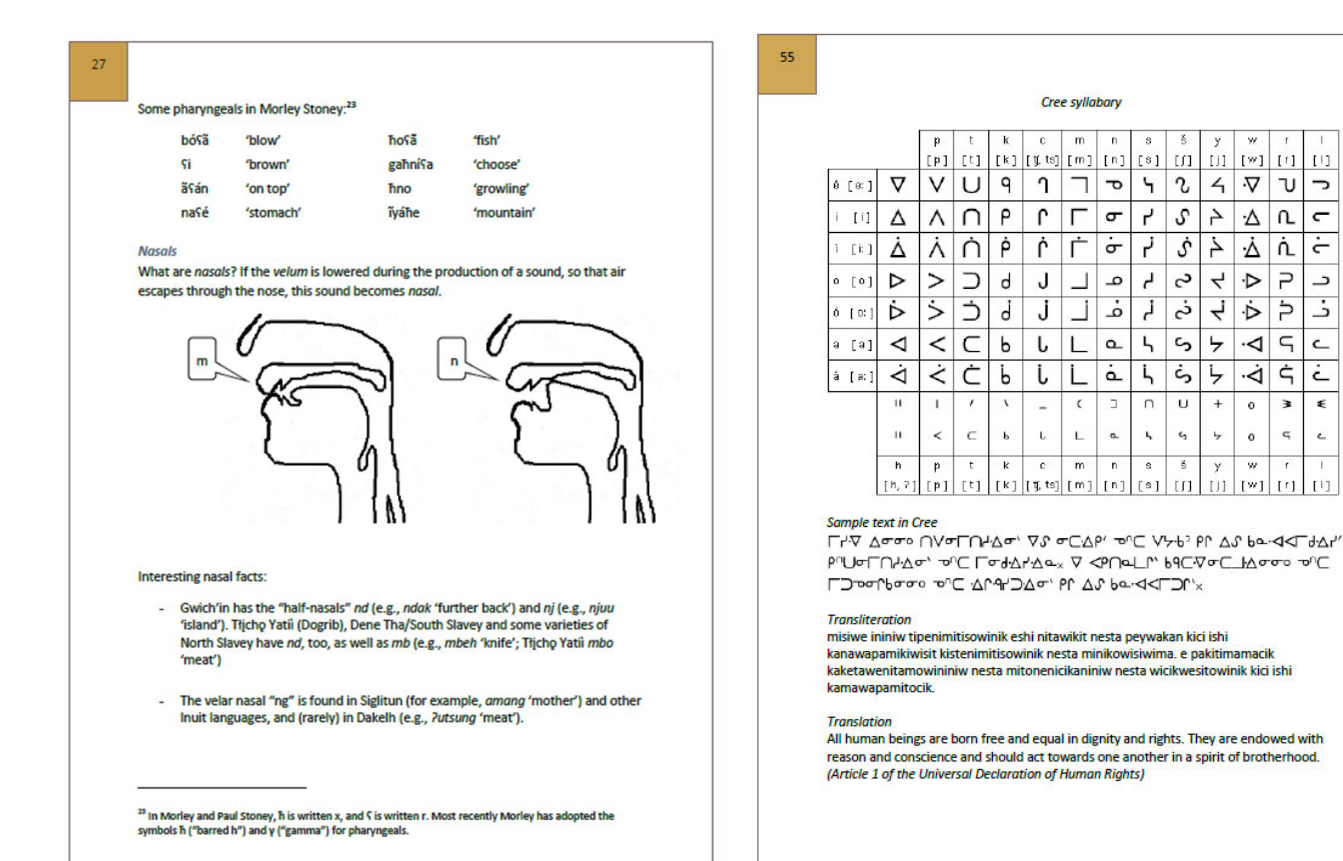
This is summed up in our motto:

**Protect, Preserve, Promote, Practice and Pass On Your Language**

## THE CLC COURSES: TOPICS AND ACTIVITIES

### LING 111 – Introduction to Linguistic Analysis for Indigenous Language Revitalization

- demystifying linguistics
- looking at language like a linguist does
- exploring Indigenous languages and language families across Canada
- practicing basic linguistic discovery procedures
- learning to compare and contrast your language with other Indigenous languages as well as English



### LING 211 – Phonetics of Indigenous Languages

- learning the basics of articulatory phonetics
- practicing using the IPA for the sounds in your language, and knowing why that's important
- understanding the differences between a transcription and standard orthography
- gaining hands-on practice with digital recording equipment and editing sound files

### LING 212 – Morphosyntax of Indigenous Languages

- identifying word-formation processes
- parsing and glossing components of words
- exploring metaphor, metonymy and other figurative meaning systems
- developing strategies for coining new words
- understanding the relationship between language structure and dictionary formats

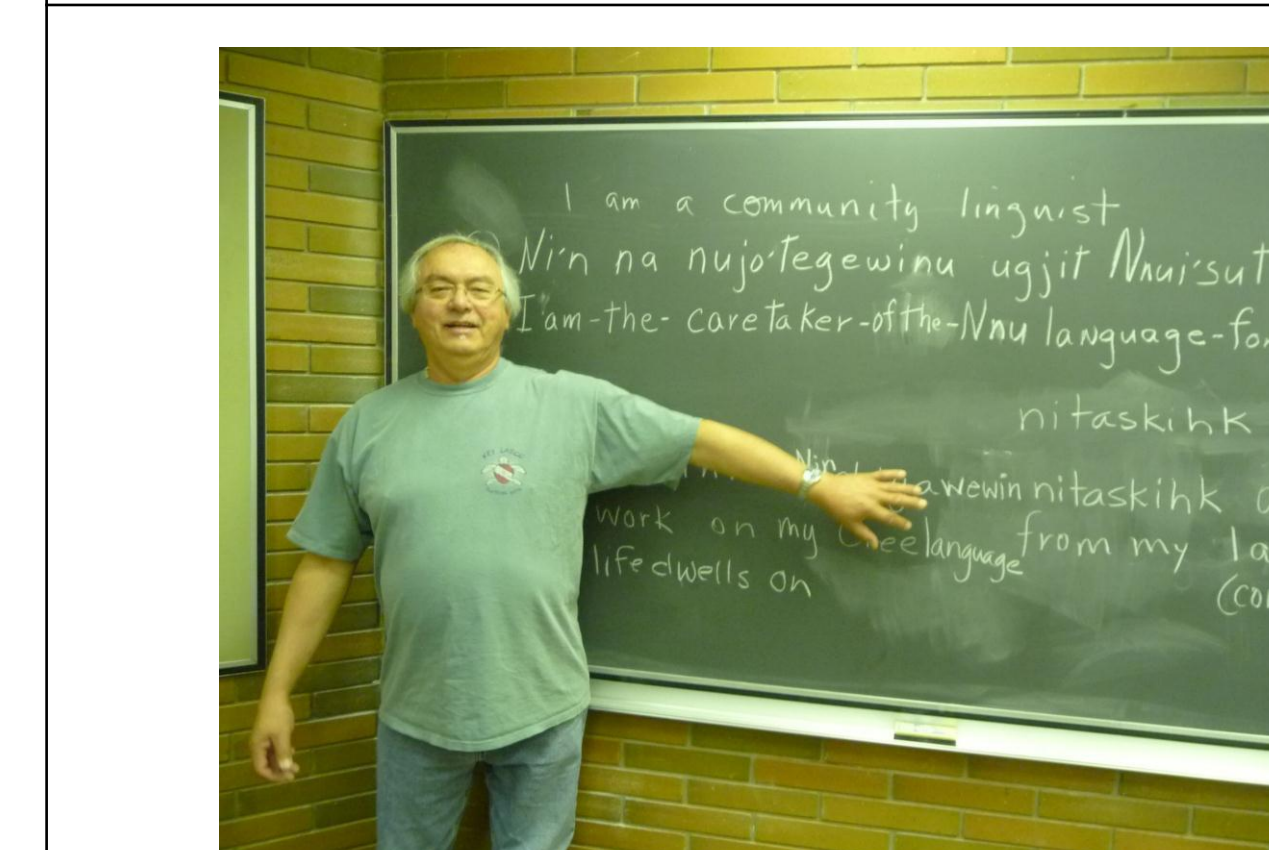


### LING 213 – Sentence and Discourse Patterns of Indigenous Languages

- discovering basic phrase and sentence patterns
- analyzing grammatical marking across sentence types: statements, commands, questions, etc.
- understanding strategies for linking sentences and larger units in a text
- exploring different traditional and contemporary genres of narratives and conversation

### INT-D 311 – Language Policy and Planning for Indigenous Language Communities

- articulating the cost of language loss
- discussing ethical issues surrounding language and other Indigenous knowledge systems
- identifying necessary components and structure of successful local language projects
- finding funding opportunities and practice with grant-writing
- gaining skills for language advocacy in the community and beyond, through both old and new media



### INT-D 318 – Technologies for Endangered Language Documentation

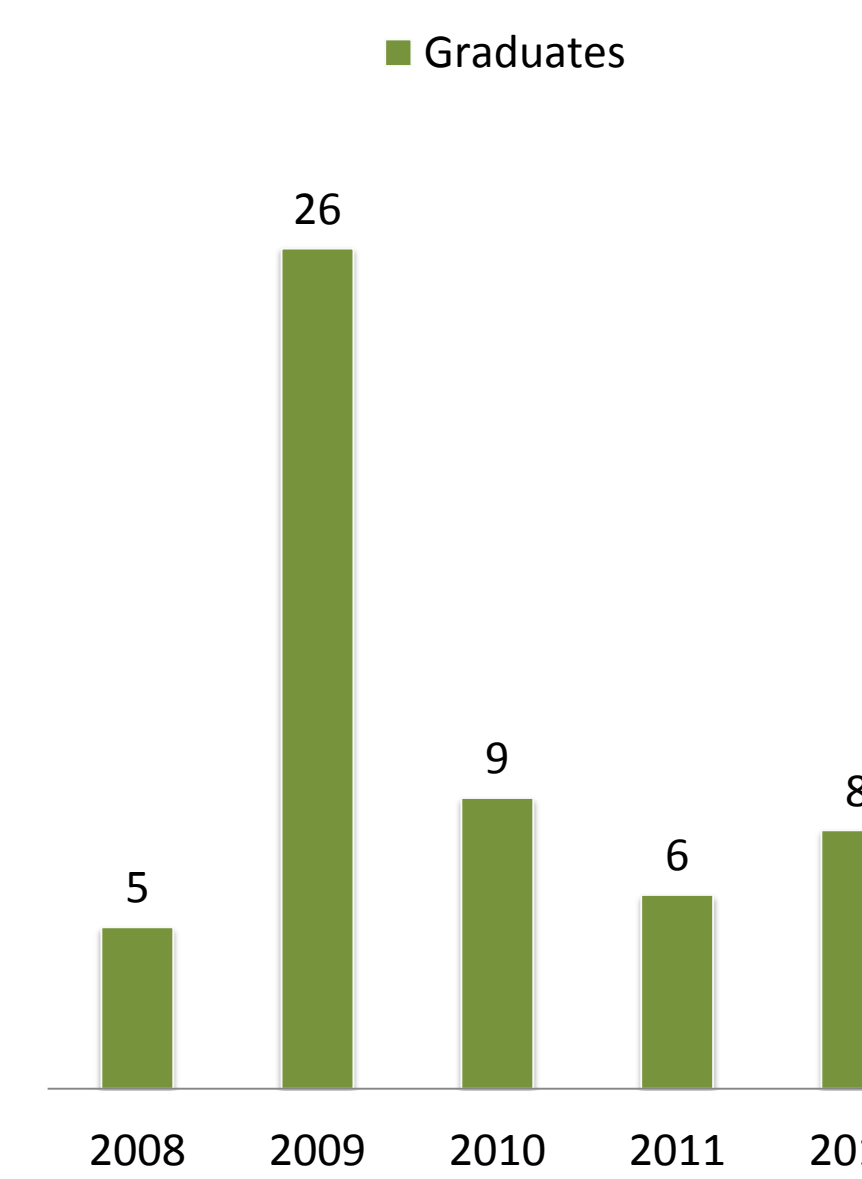
- hands-on training with digital video and audio recording equipment and editing software
- curation and preservation of documentation
- understanding the benefits and limitations of technology in language documentation
- integrating products of language documentation with practical aims of language revitalization

## THE PRESENT AND THE FUTURE OF THE CLC

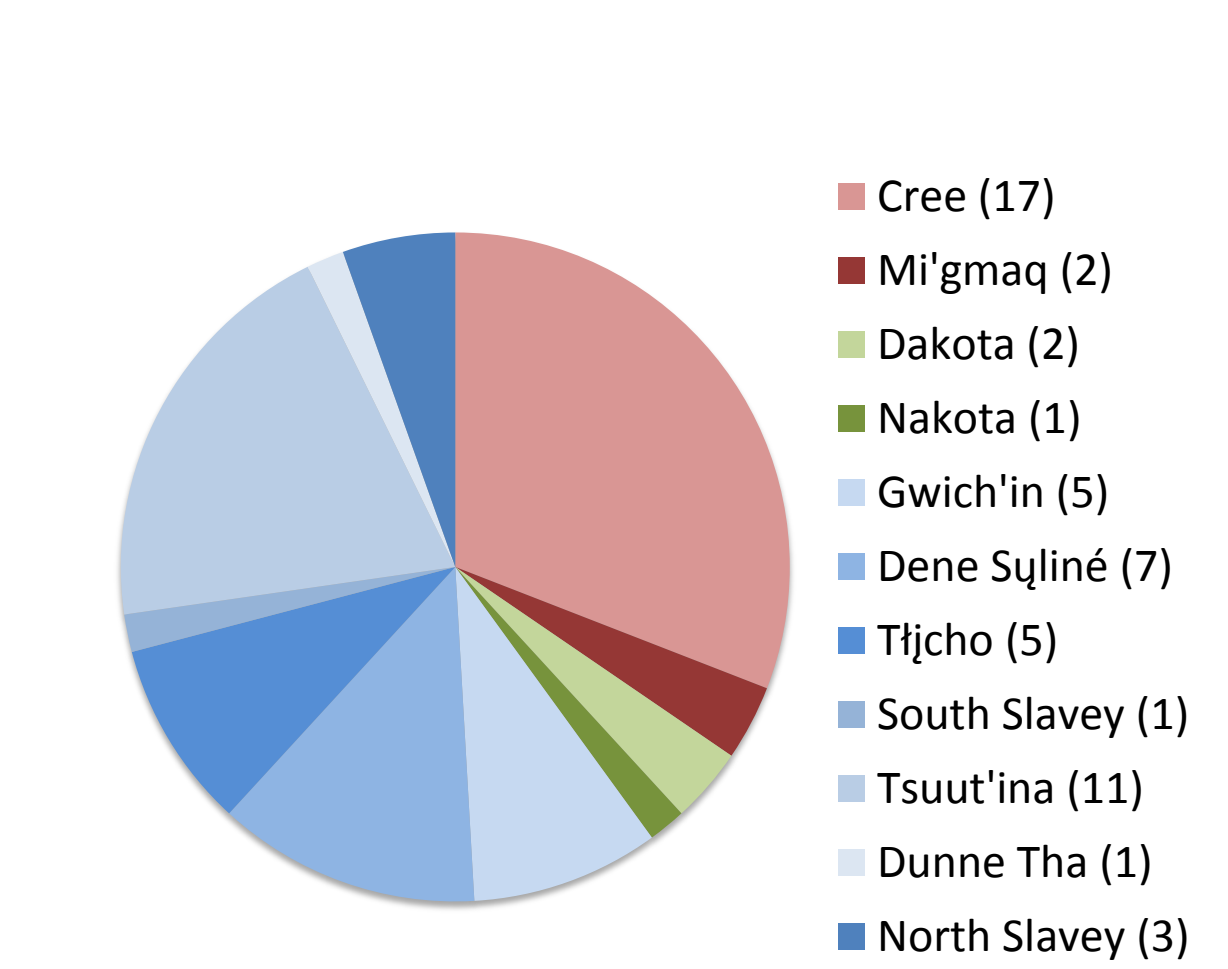
### Our Graduates

To date, 54 students speaking 11 different languages have earned their Community Linguist Certificate.

CLC Graduates by Year



CLC Graduates by Language



### What Our Graduates Have to Say



"Wish I could do this every summer for the rest of my life!"

"This is my third summer and every summer has been a great experience. It is three weeks of stress, but it's *good* stress."

"My experience at CILLDI is always excellent. I become inspired and my vision becomes clearer. I seem to get strength and determination every time I come. I wish I could feel this all the time, especially at work!"

"I think I've taken just about all the courses, so we need more."

### The Next Steps

Beyond the core CLC courses, CILLDI continues to develop more courses that offer targeted training in advanced topics in community linguistics. These include:

- Building a Community Dictionary Cover-to-Cover
- Community Language Archiving
- Online Tools for Language Revitalization
- Comparative Algonquian, Athabaskan and Siouan Linguistics

These courses build directly on the skills that CLC graduates have already developed, and prepare them to undertake more comprehensive language documentation and revitalization projects.

### Community-Based Delivery

Although most delivery of CLC courses continues to happen at the annual CILLDI Summer School each July in Edmonton, we are continuing to expand possibilities for year-round community-based delivery. In 2009, CILLDI delivered all six CLC courses at the Tsuu T'ina First Nation, and in 2013 we are doing the same with the Alexis Nakota Sioux Nation. We are eager to develop partnerships with other Indigenous and/or University-based institutions to bring CLC courses to communities across Canada and beyond.

### Acknowledgements

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**Andrea Berez** (LING 212), **Christopher Cox** (LING 101, INT-D 318), **Margaret Florey** (INT-D 311), **Darin Flynn** (LING 101), **Joyce McDonough** (LING 211), **John Newman** (LING 211), **Susan Penfield** (INT-D 311), **Anne-Michelle Tessier** (LING 211) and **Benjamin V. Tucker** (LING 211).

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For further information on the CLC program and this year's CILLDI Summer School (July 8-26), please visit:

[www.cilldi.ualberta.ca](http://www.cilldi.ualberta.ca)

