

## Addressing Joshua Fishman's Ideological Clarification: Working With Pre-service Teachers

**Heather A. Blair**

University of Alberta

[hblair@ualberta.ca]

**Jacqueline Filipek**

University of Alberta

[jfilipek@ualberta.ca]

**Martin Zeidler**

University of Alberta

[zeidler@ualberta.ca]

### Abstract

The drastic and tragic loss of Indigenous languages in Canada is of grave concern, as about half of the approximately 50 languages are either endangered or close to extinction (Canada, 2002). Reversing language shift (RLS) (Fishman, 2001) involves many considerations, including the value and social status of language in homes and communities. This paper explains how a found poetry exercise that 52 pre-service teachers completed has implications for RLS through a movement towards ideological clarification. The poems demonstrate the essence of both Indigenous identity and language, and the classroom-teacher-to-be impressions of that, in rather moving and powerful expressions. These found poems not only speak to the profound loss of languages, but also demonstrate how the activity itself promoted both a personal and a collective understanding of what language obsolescence means to them and their culture. Potentially, they can work as well towards activating goodwill towards Indigenous languages among those who read and reflect on them

### Résumé

La perte drastique et tragique des langues autochtones au Canada est profondément préoccupante, car environ la moitié des quelque 50 langues sont en danger ou en voie de disparition. Inverser le changement de langue (Reversing language shift, RLS; Fishman, 2001) demande de considérer plusieurs facteurs, y compris la valeur et le statut social de la langue dans les foyers et dans les communautés. Cet article décrit comment un exercice de « poésie trouvée » complété par 52 enseignants pré-emplois peut avoir des implications pour le RLS au moyen d'un mouvement vers une clarification idéologique. Les poèmes exhibent l'essence même de l'identité et de la langue autochtone pour les futurs enseignants, de façon émouvante et puissante. Ces poèmes trouvés parlent non seulement de la perte profonde de la langue, mais démontrent également comment l'activité elle-même a promu une compréhension à la fois personnelle et collective de ce que l'obsolescence de langue signifie, pour eux et pour leur culture. Potentiellement, ils pourront d'ailleurs travailler pour l'activation de la bonne volonté envers les langues autochtones parmi ceux qui liront et réfléchiront là-dessus.

### Background

The drastic state of language loss worldwide has been well documented (Crawford, 1998; Fettes, 1998; Hinton, 1994; Hinton & Hale, 2001; Skutnabb-Kangas, 2000). Thousands of languages worldwide are under threat, and the languages of the most marginalized people in the world are at the greatest risk. In a recent newspaper article from the Canadian Press, Shingler (2013) reported that the Inuktitut language is melting before our eyes and ears, figuratively and literally. It is more than a little alarming when a language that has survived for thousands of years is now eroding yearly on an accelerated trajectory. According to Krauss (1992, 1996), 90% of the languages in the world are expected to disappear within the next 100 years, which will have huge ramifications for human civilization, and particularly for Indigenous peoples. Most recently, that trajectory has been more articulately captured in the July 2012 edition of *National Geographic* when writer Russ Rymer opened his 30-page written and pictorial exposé

entitled "Vanishing Voices" with this simple elicitation: "One language dies every 14 days" (60).

For Indigenous people in Canada, the language loss has been great over the last century; of some 50 languages, about half are either endangered or close to extinction (Blair & Fredeen, 1995; Canada, 2002). Of the languages still spoken, very few are spoken by children at home; therefore, it is reasonable to expect that these languages could be close to extinction within a generation (Canada, 2002). A great deal needs to be done. This paper looks at the role of ideological clarification according to Joshua Fishman in language retention and revitalization; we discuss one project that addressed this concept.

### Theoretical Framework

In his article "What do You Lose When You Lose Your Language?" Fishman (1996) articulated what he viewed as the significance, complexities, and magnitude of losses individually, collectively, nationally, and globally

when an Indigenous language is lost. His delineation and discussion are very important components of Indigenous languages work around the globe. In the field of endangered languages, Fishman's (1991, 1994, 1996, 2001) conditions for reversing language shift (RLS) have been employed in many contexts and are foundational to planning for languages at risk of obsolescence. According to Fishman (1996), if you take language away from a culture, "you take away its greetings, its curses, its praises, its laws, its literature, its songs, its riddles, its proverbs, its cures, its wisdom, its prayers" (81). Moreover, "you are losing all those things that essentially are the way of life. The way of thought, the way of valuing, and the human reality that you are talking about" (81). This connects to his less theorized and even less often put into practice notion of ideological clarification (Fishman, 1991, 2001). Delineating and drawing out why these languages matter to the speakers and society in general are central to ideological clarification and RLS, but not always tangible or easy to document. With this theoretical framework in mind, we explored the important construct of ideological clarification in Indigenous pre-service teacher education. We acknowledge that in the greater scheme of RLS, this kind of articulation requires time, reflection, and discussion; and we set out to attempt this on a small scale to build a conversation on this topic.

### **Methodology: Exploration With Found Poems**

As teacher educators we worked with a group of pre-service teachers in Northern Canada in an online class called "Teaching Language Arts in First Nations, Métis, and Inuit Contexts." One component of this course was the status of Indigenous languages, language policy, language ideology, and pedagogy. Our goal was to teach our students to think more broadly and deeply about the Indigenous languages in their vicinity and in a larger global sphere. Our students came from 18 different geographical locations in northern Canada where Cree, Dene, and Michif, or French Cree, had been the prominent languages. They lived on reserves, in Métis communities, on farms, or in small towns near the reserves and Métis communities. These pre-service teachers were completing a four-year online degree program to become elementary teachers and were in the final semester of their program. Most of the students had some familiarity with their ancestral languages, and some were more fluent and literate than others. The class of 52 participants included a few non-Aboriginal students.

We believe that prior to this class the topics of Indigenous language loss, retention, and revitalization were under the radar for these northerners. There is a taken-for-granted-ness about Indigenous languages in northern Canada, and little attention is paid in either schools or communities to the serious work of retention and revitalization. It is sad that this can be said of many families as well. Many of these pre-service teachers come from families in which there is still some use of

the ancestral language even if they themselves are not speakers. Some of their grandparents and parents speak their Indigenous language, some are parents and grandparents themselves, and only a handful use their Indigenous language daily with youth in their communities.

In the online course the students engaged in reading academic articles and books, participating in online discussion forums, watching videos and podcasts, and completing assignments. These activities became resources for them in the development of their personal and collective ideological clarification. Specifically, the students reflected on the state of Indigenous language loss in their homes, communities, and schools. They watched the online films "Mother Tongues: Languages Around the World" (Films Media Group, 2007a), "Voices of the World: The Extinction of Language and Linguistic Diversity" (Films Media Group, 2007b), and "Urgency" (Studi, 2009); read several academic articles (Blair & Fredeen, 1995; Fishman, 1996; Gardner, 2000; Kirkness, 2002), beginning with Joshua Fishman's (1996) article "What Do You Lose When You Lose Your Language?"; and actively discussed their readings and viewings. They also informally surveyed a small group of members of their own communities on the health of their language and their views of language preservation.

The participants then worked to frame and articulate the personal, spiritual, historical, and educational repercussions at the point at which language and identity converge and compiled their findings into their own personal 'found poem,' a collection or collage of significant phrases, words, and images from the readings and videos that resonated with them. When they had completed the initial draft of their found poems, it was likely the first time that they had ever articulated their thoughts on this topic. As part of this online class they worked through their poems in a writer's workshop and read and offered feedback to each other on their poems in a small online discussion forum. They received feedback from their instructor and the teaching assistants and revised their draft poems to send to a new small online group of their classmates for further input. They then completed one more round of revisions on their poems for the final draft. The authors decided on the final form and content of their individual poems and voluntarily submitted them for an online compendium (Blair et al., 2013).

The poems, which can be found at <http://www.cilles.ualberta.ca/ILISResources>, represent the personal, professional, and passionate thoughts of a group of pre-service teachers as they reflect on the state of Indigenous language loss in their homes, communities, and schools and ring clearly of a call to action. They speak also to the profound loss that these individuals recognize. As instructor and teaching assistants, we believe that these poems work very well to distil the essence of both Indigenous identity and language and the classroom-teacher-to-be impressions of that as seen through the eyes of this group of northern

pre-service teachers, into rather moving and powerful expressions that can be read at several levels.

What follows on page 148 is our further distillation of these for the purposes of this paper. We reviewed and reread each poem and selected one line from each for the following recycled text. Using Beers and Samuels' (1998) reading and writing pedagogical practice, we have constituted a new text. We hope that in reading the composite recycled poem you get a sense of the authors' thinking and clarification of their value for their languages and find a space where they resonate with you as well.

### Discussion

These words speak powerfully to these authors' ethnolinguistic consciousness. In Fishman's (1996) words, "This sense of sanctity, this sense of kinship, and this sense of moral imperative" (83) lead to ideological clarification. Their completed poems are very meaningful to them; they are personal, powerful, and political. This is a micro example of how these pre-service teachers are beginning to see themselves as part of the much larger global discussions of language loss and retention. Many had never realized before that other people and languages in the world were facing similar linguistic repression. It is one small local step toward ideological clarification for these individuals who are part of a larger collective of emerging northern teachers.

Kroskryt (2009) suggested that "three aspects of ideological theory — awareness, positionality, multiplicity — fortify a notion of ideological clarification to make it more useful" (80). He talked about the importance of awareness, which is essential in uncovering linguistic beliefs and practices that have been taken for granted. This is very applicable in northern Canada and to these in-service teachers, and this exercise has "mov[ed] them into a discursive consciousness" (80) that Kroskryt purported is an essential step in recognizing issues, seeing different perspectives, and beginning to engage in dialogue. We think this exercise in writing found poetry, discussing the poems with colleagues, and publishing the authors' statements for a public audience on the Internet has been a powerful step toward further ideological clarification.

Part of the professional side of teaching practice requires us as teachers to be aware and supportive of the languages, literacies, and cultures of our students. In the

formative years the use of and access to a variety of languages, both at school and in the community, have been evidenced as very strong predictors of cognitive and academic achievement (Cummins, 1981, 1986). However, across the world and in our country, the languages and cultures indigenous to this geography have lost their vitality through oppression, assimilation, and subsequent marginalization by the powerful political, religious, and education forces and effects of Canadian colonialism. In turn, and especially in communities such as those in which these pre-service teachers will soon be working, substantial language shift has occurred over the past decades as extended families gradually lose access to their Indigenous heritage through both choice and lack of exposure and, consequently, to the roots of their cultural identity.

A great deal needs to be done for these languages to continue to be transmitted between generations. Nonetheless, we are not suggesting that one small exploratory discussion via poetry is the answer to the monumental task of RLS in this region; however, we do think that these pre-service teachers' work on this poetry exercise speaks to their history and personal loss. They have voiced the need for a renewed awareness and effort for language revitalization and are in the early steps of clarifying their beliefs about their language and why it matters to them. Their poems speak to the profound loss of languages that they recognize and to their growing convictions. They are beginning to answer Joshua Fishman's (1996) question "What do you lose when you lose your language?" for themselves as individuals who have something to lose.

This process also brought us as teacher educators to a greater understanding of the importance of Fishman's (1996) question. These ideological discussions are central to RLS efforts and are an important part of the process for both Indigenous and non-Indigenous Canadians if RLS efforts are to be successful. This is not to say that a short-term opportunity to explore and expose the deeply felt emotions and anxieties about the relationships between Indigenous languages and the languages of power (Kroskryt, 2009: 71) is a complete exploration. It is just a beginning that we hope will lead to deeper examinations and opportunities to explore the "conviction that one's own-language-in-culture is crucially different that makes RLS worthwhile" (Fishman, 2001: 17).

## Recycled Poem

### Hello? I've Lost My Language

Where oh, where have you gone?  
Oppression of language, we must save it

Our own human reality

Language reflects the most important  
aspect of his life

Crying for the languages of the people  
*I question why we were taken away.*

Language is fragmented.

Never spoken in our house

Domination over indigenous languages  
Suffocation; control and power  
*It is time to **wake up!***

It is Time for us all to Rise, take Back what  
was Lost.

We Must Mobilize **OUR RESOURCES**

What **attitude** will make a difference?  
Do I have a Voice?

Encouragement

I was inspired by what they were doing

I will not allow for linguistic  
genocide

To keep our language is our  
cultural right!

Preserve,  
record, use  
Language is the ultimate  
symbol of belonging.

Language is central to identity...the land is the  
culture...our world view is embedded in our language.  
The Living organism of a community

To save it for the ones.  
Who are not yet born.

**IDENTITY**

People  
it is our **expression and communication**

We will not afford  
the  
cost!

*With it, we walk with pride*  
Keep Our Language Alive!

A strong language is made up of elder wisdom  
and knowledge, and storytelling

**Through language our culture is shared**

We are Our Language.

We are a nation and a nation has a language

*Take action, speak, use your words, speak from  
the heart, speak from the soul, don't stop  
speaking*

**PRESERVE**

All the endearments, all the nurturing  
...the ones shaping the identity of the child...

way of thought, way of life  
To advance in life, is to be bilingual  
Indigenous language retention

*Every language has a story*

**Technologies** help us to capture  
Our language for the generations of our  
future.

The more it is used, the more it  
grows.

**In depth understanding**

Language is what makes us whole  
**Circles within circles, to reflect the  
interconnectedness of all living things**

Language as Knowledge,  
Knowledge as Power

Language is our life, it gives  
us integrity!

A unique unit of our understanding of the  
world and of the people in it

**We are tied together in language,  
we belong**

(Complete poems found at <http://www.cilles.ualberta.ca/ILISResources>)

## References

- Beers, K., & Samuels, B. (1998). *In Focus: Understanding and Creating Middle School Readers*. Norwood, MA: Christopher-Gordon Publishers.
- Blair, H., & Fredeen, S. (1995). Do Not Go Gently Into That Good Night. Rage, Rage Against the Dying of the Light [The Case of Obsolescing Languages in Canada]. *Anthropology and Education Quarterly*, 26(1), 1-23.
- Blair, H., Filipek, J., & Zeidler, M. (2013). *Indigenous Languages Retention & Revitalization: Compendium of Poems: Found Poetry. Aboriginal Teacher Education Program. University of Alberta, 2013 Graduating Class*. Retrieved from <http://www.cilles.ualberta.ca/ILISResources#sthash.upcKv3S2.dpuf>
- Canada. (2002). *From Generation to Generation: Survival and Maintenance of Canada's Aboriginal Languages Within Families, Communities, and Cities*. Ottawa, ON: Department of Indian and Northern Affairs Canada.
- Crawford, J. (1998). Endangered Native American languages: What is to be done and why? In T. Ricento & B. Burnaby (Eds.), *Language and Politics in the United States and Canada: Myths and Realities* (pp. 151-165). Mahwah, NJ: Lawrence Erlbaum Associates.
- Cummins, J. (1981). *Bilingualism and Minority Language Children*. Toronto, ON: Ontario Institute for Studies in Education.
- Cummins, J. (1986). Empowering minority students: A framework for intervention. *Harvard Educational Review*, 56, 18-36.
- Fettes, M. (1998). Life on the Edge: Canadian Aboriginal Languages Under Official Bilingualism. In T. Ricento & B. Burnaby (Eds.), *Language and Politics in the United States and Canada: Myths and Realities* (pp. 117-149). Mahwah, NJ: Lawrence Erlbaum Associates.
- Films Media Group. (Producer). (2007a). *Mother Tongues: Languages Around the World* [Video]. <http://digital.film.com.login.ezproxy.library.ualberta.ca/PortalViewVideo.aspx?xtid=37540>
- Films Media Group. (Producer). (2007b). *Voices of the World: The Extinction of Language and Linguistic Diversity* [Video]. Retrieved from <http://digital.film.com.login.ezproxy.library.ualberta.ca/PortalViewVideo.aspx?xtid=36090>
- Fishman, J.A. (1990). What Is Reversing Language Shift (RLS) and How Can It Succeed? In D. Gorter et al. (Eds.), *Fourth International Conference on Minority Languages. Vol. 1: General Papers* (pp. 5-36). Philadelphia, PA: Multilingual Matters.
- Fishman, J.A. (1991). *Reversing Language Shift*. Clevedon, UK: Multilingual Matters.
- Fishman, J.A. (1994, May). *Response to Papers on Reversing Navajo Language Shift: Tribal, Community, and School Perspectives*. Paper presented at the conference of the National Association for Bilingual Education, Los Angeles, CA.
- Fishman, J.A. (1996). What Do You Lose When You Lose Your Language? In G. Cantoni (Ed.), *Stabilizing Indigenous Languages* (pp. 86-91). Flagstaff, AZ: Northern Arizona University.
- Fishman, J.A. (2001). Why Is It so Hard to Save a Threatened Language. In J.A. Fishman (Ed.), *Can Threatened Languages Be Saved?* (pp 17-22). Clevedon, UK: Multilingual Matters.
- Gardner, E.B. (2000). Where there are always wild strawberries. *Canadian Journal of Native Education*, 24(1), 7-13.
- Hale, K. (2001, November 3). Ken Hale. *The Economist*, p. 89.
- Hinton, L. (1994). *Flutes of Fire*. Berkeley, CA: Heyday.
- Hinton, L., & Hale, K. (Eds.). (2001). *The Green Book of Language Revitalization in Practice*. San Diego, CA: Academic Press.
- Kirkness, V. (2002). The Preservation and Use of Our Languages: Respecting the Natural Order of the Creator. In B. Burnaby & J. Reyhner (Eds.), *Indigenous Languages Across the Country* (pp. 17-23.). Flagstaff AZ: Northern Arizona University.
- Krauss, M. (1992). The world's languages in crisis. *Language*, 68, 4-10.
- Krauss, M. (1996). Status of Native American Language Endangerment. In G. Cantoni (Ed.), *Stabilizing Indigenous Languages* (pp. 16-21). Flagstaff, AZ: Northern Arizona University.
- Kroskrity, P. (2009). Language Renewal as Sites of Language Ideological Struggle: The Need for 'Ideological Clarification.' In J. Reyner & L. Lockard (Eds.), *Indigenous Language Revitalization: Encouragement, Guidance & Lessons Learned* (pp. 61-69). Flagstaff, AZ: Northern Arizona University.
- Rymer, R. (2012, July) Vanishing Voices. *National Geographic*, pp. 60-93.
- Shingler, B. (2013, July 7). Group Fights Inuktitut Language's 'Possible Demise' With Theatre, Workshops. *The Edmonton Journal*. <http://www.edmontonjournal.com/life/Group+fighters+Inuktitut+languages+possible+demise+with/8626638/story.html>
- Skutnabb-Kangas, T. (2000). *Linguistic Genocide in Education or Worldwide Diversity and Human Rights?* Mahwah, NJ: Lawrence Erlbaum Associates.
- Studi, W. (2009, August 28). *Urgency* [Video]. Retrieved from <http://www.indigenous-language.org/>