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**Anishinaabemowin Reawakening:
Language Ideology, Pedagogy, and Digital Technology**

Charlotte C. Ells
Independent Program
May 2020

Senior Thesis

Submitted in partial fulfillment of the requirements
for the Bachelor of Arts degree in the Independent Program

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Table of Contents

Land Acknowledgement	3
Acknowledgements	4
Introduction	5
Chapter 1: The History and Speakers of Anishinaabemowin	12
Chapter 2: Language Ideology, Pedagogy, and Revitalization Strategy	21
Chapter 3: Digital Technologies in Anishinaabemowin Revitalization	35
<i>Ojibwemodaa!</i>	38
<i>Honour Water</i>	42
<i>Ojibwe.net</i>	45
Conclusions	49
Bibliography	52

Land Acknowledgement

Vassar College, where this thesis was developed, is situated on lands that belong to the Lenape, Mohican, and Wappinger peoples, and this thesis was written predominantly in Lenapehoking, or Lenape lands.

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I would also like to thank Dr. Ben Burgess, for his generosity in speaking with me even as a student he did not know, in pursuit of teaching about Anishinaabemowin.

Gimiigwechin.

Finally, I am deeply indebted to all the Anishinaabe scholars who have shared their work with others like myself in pursuit of reawakening their language, helping their communities, and opposing colonial structures.

Introduction

The first time I learned any Anishinaabemowin was in a song. It was a short song, and we were asked in my Native studies class to sing it—"Nibi Nagamowin," or "The Water Song." It goes, *Nibi, gizaagi'igo / gimiiigwechiwenimigo / gizhawenimigo*. Water, we love you. We thank you. We respect you.¹ Joan Henry (Tsalagi/Apache), our visiting teacher and song-carrier, is not Anishinaabe, but she told us that the song was written by an Anishinaabe water protector, Dorene Day, to be shared, and to heal the water and our relationship with water.² She taught us word by word, translating each, having us repeat after her, and then we sang it together. She did not write it down and we did not ask her to.

Later, struggling through the basics of Anishinaabemowin grammar by myself, I waded through various online resources to learn the parts that make up *gimiiigwechiwenimigo*, which to my English-speaking brain is a magnificently suffixed sentence in one single word. It wasn't *miigwech*, that first most basic word "thanks," that was the root, but *miigwechiwenim*, "to be thankful for," with appropriate subject and object suffices. I now do this with many other words, puzzling through verb changes and vocabulary lists, playing recordings and checking apps and YouTube videos. In my commitment to learn to speak even though I am studying alone, I often complain aloud, "Zanagad," or whine "Naadamawishin" at an uncooperative language-learning website while studying—"This is difficult," "Help me!"

¹ "Nibi Nagamowin: The Water Song (Lyrics Sheet and Video)," Parliament of the World's Religions, <https://parliamentofreligions.org/publications/nibi-nagamowin-water-song-lyrics-sheet-and-video-0>.

² Joan Henry. Class lecture, Native American Women from Vassar College, Poughkeepsie, NY. November 2019.

These two examples are in many ways a reflection of the modalities by which Anishinaabeg are revitalizing their language—in person, in physical community, with a teacher, and connected through the screen of a computer. My relationship to these methods and materials, however, is fundamentally different from that of Anishinaabeg seeking to reawaken their languages. I have no personal connection to Anishinaabe peoples or their languages, and I came to begin learning Anishinaabemowin out of academic interest as a student of both linguistics and Native American studies. In choosing Anishinaabemowin for my thesis topic, I put myself in the complex position of a settler studying Indigenous communities.

This positionality is complex because research has historically attempted to establish the sub-humanity of Indigenous peoples, and according to Maori scholar Linda Tuhiwai Smith, research is currently allegedly undertaken for “the good of mankind” while continuing to disrespect, misrepresent, dehumanize, and exploit Indigenous subjects.³ Alternatively, research is often undertaken to solve aspects of the “indigenous problem” while squarely laying the blame for the issues they face on Indigenous communities themselves.⁴ These approaches frame Indigenous peoples in the lens of western academia as “victims” or “objects”⁵ and employs research as a tool of colonization and control.⁶ As a result, Indigenous peoples, according to Smith, have “an abhorrence and distrust of research.”⁷

³ Linda Tuhiwai Smith, *Decolonizing Methodologies: Research and Indigenous Peoples* (London: Zed Books, 1999), 25.

⁴ Smith, *Decolonizing Methodologies*, 56.

⁵ Smith, 163.

⁶ Smith, 173

⁷ Smith, 107.

Thus, in order for me to carry out this project on Indigenous peoples without perpetuating colonialism, I have had to modify my methodologies. Smith describes research methodology as matching problems with “appropriate...investigative strategies” in a way that ensures reliability of gathered information, which requires an understanding of the “the world, the problem, and the method.”⁸ This is complicated by Western “common sense” or assumptions about Indigenous peoples that intrude upon the development of sound methodologies.⁹ In order to develop methodologies that are ethical and not colonial or harmful, as predominantly settler academics my readers and I must contest our perceived right to knowledge and truth about Anishinaabeg and their language through questioning my research. Smith proposes the following problematizing questions including:

“Who defined the research problem?
 For whom is this study worthy and relevant? Who says so?
 What knowledge will the community gain from this study?
 What knowledge will the researcher gain from this study?
 What are some likely positive outcomes from this study?
 What are some possible negative outcomes?
 ...
 To whom is the researcher accountable?¹⁰”

These questions suggest that research undertaken by non-Indigenous people that is ethical and not colonial concerns problems defined by Indigenous communities and is conducted to serve the community in some way, through acquired knowledge or other positive outcomes. Furthermore, it is crucial that as a settler academic engaging in such a project I

⁸ Smith, 173.

⁹ Smith, 173.

¹⁰ Smith, 173.

remain conscious of the power dynamic between the researcher and the researched; as Smith eloquently puts it, researchers “have the power to distort, to make invisible, to overlook, to exaggerate and to draw conclusions, based not on factual data, but on assumptions, hidden value judgements, and often downright misunderstandings.”

In response to Smith’s questions, I turn to the work of Anishinaabe scholars. Margaret Noodin explains that “it is simply not enough to preserve linguistic artifacts;” that to care for Anishinaabemowin, it must be understood by how it exists today.¹¹ Part of that is seeing and understanding how Anishinaabemowin is used and transmitted digitally. Noodin also explains that the lack of visibility for Native languages is part of their erasure. She says, “We must undo the unseeing. We must make the language visible in order for it to become speakable.”¹² I hope that I can use—and have been using—this work in order to make Native languages more visible to those around me. Of course, it is also important to recognize that I am benefiting significantly from doing this work, not only because of the knowledge I gain but because I am using it in order to fulfill my requirements for my degree. I cannot pretend that I am doing this selflessly. Still, I do hope that increased visibility is one of the positive outcomes of this work, and perhaps a greater interest from those around me, even other settlers, to learn an Indigenous language. The Lac Court Oreilles Ojibwe scholar Mary Hermes says on the website of her project Grassroots Indigenous Media, “The language revitalization movement is based partially on numbers. That is to say, if enough people start to use even a little bit of Ojibwe, it helps to shift the general awareness and status of the language. Think of how

¹¹ Margaret Noori, “Waasechibiiwaabikoonsing Nd'anami'aami, 'Praying through a Wired Window,'" *Studies in American Indian Literatures* 23, no. 2 (Summer 2011): 4, ProQuest.

¹² Noori, “Waasechibiiwaabikoonsing Nd'anami'aami,” 6.

many Hawaiian words you know and use if you go to Hawaii. This shift in consciousness is a part of the movement.”¹³ That is another potential positive outcome.

Unfortunately, I must also address potential negative outcomes. As Smith acknowledges, as a settler I have an ability to misrepresent Indigenous peoples in a way that is harmful. In order to address this, I have chosen to use the method common in Native studies—centering the work of tribally specific scholars. While the work of analyzing case studies is my own, Anishinaabe scholars make up my core sources—Margaret Noodin, Mary Hermes, Elizabeth LaPensée, Brock Pitawanakwat, Rebecca Chartrand, Anton Treuer, Camille Naslund, Thomas Peacock, Maya Chacaby, and Shirley Pheasant-Williams among them. The words of these scholars define my understanding of what Anishinaabe language ideology and pedagogy are, giving me a basis for my analysis. Where these sources are insufficient for addressing Indigenous language revitalization and technology broadly, I have turned to non-Anishinaabe Indigenous scholars, and finally to the works of linguists and other academics who are not Indigenous. I am also grateful for the accountability I have to my advisors since I am not working directly with a community.

Finally, I must also clarify that unlike the typical framing of research in Western academia, my position on this work is not apolitical or disinterested. My work is undertaken with the belief in and goal of establishing Anishinaabe cultural and literal sovereignty, of which the freedom to learn, speak, and live in Anishinaabemowin is only

¹³ "About Us," Grassroots Indigenous Multimedia, accessed January 26, 2020, <http://gim-ojibwe.org/about>.

a part. The return of Anishinaabe lands to their peoples is central to this and shapes my own understanding of what revitalization means.

Using this framework, this work will address the use of technology in Anishinaabemowin language reawakening, or revitalization. Noodin describes the intimate link between language and the technologies we use to interact with it:

“To see and save language, people have always relied on technology. At first it may have been the fire that kept the storyteller and the audience together after dark, or warmed the women singing beneath the moon. Eventually it became the ability to carve and pain representations of ideas that could enter the mind of another—intact and laden with meaning. Today technology is a myriad of tools and systems allowing language to transfer concepts of identity, complex instructions about the universe, arching narratives, whispers of love, or plans for war. Language is still, and has always been, united with technology.”¹⁴

From YouTube to videogames to unofficial television dubs, digital technology is now similarly linked with Anishinaabemowin, and content in the language can be found all over the internet. While many people today see digital technology as isolating, I hope to show how in the context of Anishinaabemowin revitalization, it is inherently connective, drawing students into community and engaging families and individuals with each other and their culture. My first chapter will show how digital media continues to reflect and inculcate Anishinaabe language ideology and pedagogy, and how they connect with language revitalization as a whole. I will examine video games, through Elizabeth LaPensée’s Anishinaabemowin game applications, family usage of the *Ojibwemodaa!* teaching software (now defunct), and the strategies of Ojibwe.net. The first chapter of this work will give an overview of who the Anishinaabeg are and their history. This will include how they were affected by forced relocation, reservations,

¹⁴ Noori, “Waasechibiiwaabikoosung Nd’anami’aami,” 6.

boarding schools, and in the last century, urban relocation, and how these processes of genocide caused language shift within communities. I will go on to discuss the current status of Anishinaabeg around North America and their traditional languages. The second chapter will provide information on the movement for Anishinaabemowin revitalization, and describe Anishinaabe language ideology and pedagogy as well as the current most commonly employed strategies of language revitalization within communities. The third chapter, divided into three parts, will examine each case study in turn and demonstrate that the way learners interact with them reflects Anishinaabe language ideology and pedagogy.

Chapter 1: The History and Speakers of Anishinaabemowin

Language shift is the process and effects of communities switching from speaking one language to another over time. In the case of Indigenous peoples of North America, it is inextricably linked with hundreds of years of colonial and genocidal policies. If I am to discuss the current status of Anishinaabemowin, how it is known by its speakers, and its challenges for revitalization, I must first discuss the history of these policies.

Anishinaabe history and language are inseparable.

Anishinaabeg as a term refers to the related peoples of several tribes who share a common history, and, depending who you ask, a language with several dialects or a family of closely related languages. These peoples are today the Ojibwe (Chippewa), Saulteaux, Odawa (Ottawa), Algonquin, Oji-Cree (Severn Ojibwe), and Nipissing. The Pottawatomi are also considered Anishinaabeg, but speak their own, more distantly related language.¹⁵ Some groups do not use the term Anishinaabemowin for their language: some Oji-Cree prefer *Anishiniimowin*, while some Saulteaux know their language as *Nakawemowin*.¹⁶ *Anishinaabemowin*, however, remains the most widely used term, in addition to *Ojibwe* when referring to the language in English (including sometimes by non-Ojibwe Anishinaabeg).¹⁷

Anishinaabe history does not begin with the destruction wrought by colonization, but instead with creation. This is a beautiful history that varies by storyteller and tribe, but it must here be condensed for the sake of this paper. As an Ojibwe version was

¹⁵ Brendan Fairbanks, *Ojibwe Discourse Markers* (Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press, 2016), 3-4.

¹⁶ Fairbanks, *Ojibwe Discourse*, 4.

¹⁷ Fairbanks, 3.

related to me: in the beginning, the Creator dreams of the beauty of everything in the universe, and creates the things he dreamed—the materials of which everything is made, plants, animals, and finally people—giving everything “its own soul spirit” and purpose.¹⁸ At one point, a great flood covers the earth. A turtle pities a spirit woman and allows her to rest on his back. The woman asks several animals to fetch her a bit of earth from the bottom of the sea, but all the animals fail in turn, until muskrat¹⁹ manages to retrieve a small pawful of soil, which the woman places the turtle’s back. She breathes life into this little bit of earth, and the surviving animals bring her the other animals and plants, which she restores to life. In this way, the land we and the Anishinaabeg live on today was made.²⁰

The Anishinaabeg trace their ancestry to the East coast, from whence they migrated to the Great Lakes region and surrounding areas. As elder and Midewiwin (religious leader of the Anishinaabeg Medicine Society) grand chief Bawdwaywidun, or Dr. Eddie Benton-Banai, explains, a prophecy instructed the Anishinaabeg to go west until they found the place where there is “food that grows on water,” or wild rice, leading the Anishinaabeg to the Great Lakes region.²¹ Along the way, the Anishinaabeg divided into separate tribes as independent groups continued in different directions or settled at various stopping places, giving rise to the linguistic diversity seen today among Anishinaabeg.²²

¹⁸ Thomas D. Peacock and Marlene Wisuri, *Ojibwe Waasa Inaabidaa: We Look in All Directions* (Afton, MN: Afton Historical Society Press, 2002), 20.

¹⁹ The animal in question, as well as the person who initially survives the flood, varies by tribe.

²⁰ Peacock and Wisuri, *Ojibwe Waasa Inaabidaa*, 21-22.

²¹ Eddie Benton-Banai, *Tribal Histories: Ojibwe History*, produced by Mik Derks, 2000, <https://www.pbs.org/video/wpt-documentaries-ojibwe-history/>.

²² Peacock and Wisuri, *Ojibwe Waasa Inaabidaa*, 25.

French entry into the Great Lakes region in the mid-seventeenth century changed the usage of Anishinaabemowin considerably. Trade and intermarriage with the French caused the language to briefly become a sort of lingua franca for Great Lakes fur trade.²³ French Jesuit missionaries, who first came into contact with Anishinaabeg during this same period, adopted the language for the purpose of conversion, although the language barrier presented by theology remained: as one Great Lakes missionary noted of trying to preach to local peoples in 1640,

"Not only do words fail them to express the sanctity of our mysteries, but even the parables and more familiar mysteries of Jesus Christ are foreign to them. They know not what is salt, leaven, stronghold, pearl, prison, mustard seed, casks of wine, lamp, candlestick, torch; they have no idea of Kingdoms, Kings, and their majesty; not even of shepherds, flocks, and a sheepfold,—in a word, their ignorance of the things of the earth seems to close for them the way to heaven."²⁴

Despite its adoption by colonizers, Anishinaabemowin's current status would be permanently affected by the same blight that struck hundreds of other tribes around the continent and rendered them less able to resist colonization: European germs. Various diseases, particularly smallpox, killed significant numbers of Anishinaabeg during this period, in some villages killing over ninety percent of the population.²⁵

While French Jesuit conversion efforts were ended in 1763 when France surrendered their territorial claims to the British, a new wave of missionaries seeking to continue the work of assimilating the Anishinaabeg in their own languages arrived just a

²³ Peacock and Wasuri, 32.

²⁴ Lalemant, quoted in Leroy Clifton Gaston, III, "Crucifix and Calumet: French Missionary Efforts in the Great Lakes Region, 1615-1650" (PhD diss., Tulane University, 1978), 396n, ProQuest Dissertations and Theses.

²⁵ Anton Treuer, *Living Our Language: Ojibwe Tales and Oral Histories, a Bilingual Anthology* (St. Paul, MN: Minnesota Historical Society Press, 2001), 7.

few decades later. Immigrant Catholics began settling in the Great Lakes region in the early nineteenth century, bringing more missionaries with them. Frederic Baraga, a Slovene priest, was a source of significant conversion efforts: it was through his “tireless recruitment” that a “constant flow” of Slovene priests was available for the specific purpose of converting Ojibwe and Odawa peoples. Like the Jesuits, Baraga also used Anishinaabemowin as a tool of assimilation, preaching and instructing in Anishinaabemowin and eventually publishing the first book ever written in the language—an instructional Catholic text.^{26 27}

In 1819 these missionary efforts—like Baraga’s own school for teaching Anishinaabe children Catholicism—were strengthened by the United States Congress passing the Indian Civilization Fund Act, which allocated funds to “benevolent organizations” like churches to violently “civilize” and assimilate Native peoples around the country through Christianization and western education. This established a relationship between the federal government and religious institutions that would lay the political groundwork for the boarding school system, a turning point for Native languages.²⁸

Carlisle Indian Industrial School, founded in 1879, is widely recognized as the model for the nascent boarding school system in the United States and Canada, although it predates the legislation that made school attendance mandatory for Indigenous

²⁶ Peacock and Wasuri, *Ojibwe Waasa Inaabidaa*, 32.

²⁷ Maureen Anna Harp, "Indian Missions, Immigrant Migrations, and Regional Catholic Culture: Slovene Missionaries in the Upper Great Lakes, 1830-1892" (PhD diss., University of Chicago, 1996), 84, ProQuest Dissertations and Theses.

²⁸ Margaret McMurtrey, "The Second Great Awakening and Indian Removal: Unintended Consequences" (PhD diss., University of California Santa Barbara, 2019), 24, ProQuest Dissertations and Theses.

children.²⁹ As the founder of this first federally funded off-reservation school, Richard Pratt infamously declared “kill the Indian to save the man.” This slogan “openly articulates the cultural elimination that stops just short of physical extermination” that defines the period of Native American boarding schools.³⁰ Both Canada and the United States made boarding school attendance compulsory for Indigenous children shortly thereafter.³¹ Speaking Indigenous languages was banned as a matter of policy, and English (or in Quebec, French) was the only language of instruction. Schools were intent on teaching students to speak English, but also on breaking the chain of language and concomitant cultural transmission from parent to child; John MacDonald informed the House of Commons in 1883 that

“when the school is on the reserve the child lives with its parents, who are savages; he is surrounded by savages, and though he may learn to read and write his habits and training and mode of thought are Indian. He is simply a savage who can read and write. It has been strongly pressed on myself, as the head of the Department [of Indian Affairs], that Indian children should be withdrawn as much as possible from the parental influence, and the only way to do that would be to put them in central training industrial schools where they will acquire the habits and modes of thought of white men.”³²

According to the Lorena Sekwan Fontaine’s (Anishinaabe/Cree) analysis, this statement

²⁹ Jacqueline Fear-Segal and Susan D. Rose, eds., *Carlisle Indian Industrial School: Indigenous Histories, Memories, and Reclamations* (Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press, 2016), 1, <https://www.jstor.org/stable/j.ctt1dwssxz>.

³⁰ Fear-Segal and Rose, *Carlisle Indian*, 17.

³¹ Andrea Smith, *Conquest: Sexual Violence and American Indian Genocide* (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 2005), 36.

³² Lorena Fontaine, "Redress for Linguicide: Residential Schools and Assimilation in Canada / Réparations pour linguicide: Les pensionnats et l'assimilation au Canada," *British Journal of Canadian Studies* 30, no. 2 (2017): 186, <https://muse.jhu.edu/article/670700>.

“reveals two important aspects of government attitudes at the time: first, that the government knew how significant close family and social relationships were to Aboriginal peoples who had been transmitting language and culture to their children for generations; and second, that the government fully intended to remove Aboriginal children from the cultural connections they had to family and community. Although mothering was not directly mentioned in any legislation, the assimilative policies that followed had a direct impact on mother-child relationships. For Aboriginal peoples, as in most cultures, mothering is central to the transmission of culture and language. Through the mother-child bond, many Aboriginal children learn to speak their language by observing and listening... For Aboriginal peoples, learning to communicate in the language results in learning the culture.”³³

In accordance with the Canadian and United States’ governments intentions, many Anishinaabe survivors of boarding schools (or residential schools, as they are known in Canada) recount being physically beaten or psychologically punished for speaking their language. Physical punishments for speaking Anishinaabemowin or other Native languages included being beaten with a strap, and the teachers or nuns putting needles in the students’ tongues.³⁴ Other survivors recount other—though no less violent—methods for ensuring they did not speak Anishinaabemowin. Theodore Fontaine, who attended a Manitoba residential school run by the Catholic church between the ages of seven and twelve, recounts: “I inadvertently said something in Ojibway. She'd assumed I was referring to her when a couple of boys laughed at my comment. She yelled and washed my mouth with soap ... I was shoved into a closet behind her chair. It was under the stairs leading to the second floor and was used to store brooms and other cleaning material. I don't remember how long I was in there, but it seemed like an

³³ Fontaine, “Redress for Linguicide,” 186-187.

³⁴ Union of Ontario Indians, *An Overview of the Indian Residential School System* (2013), 6.

eternity ... Eventually she let me out. Her first word was 'Tiens! (Take that!)' followed by a warning not to speak my 'savage' language."³⁵

In addition to being punished for speaking their own language, all types of abuse—physical, psychological, sexual, cultural, and religious—were rampant in the boarding school system.³⁶ The school system lasted almost until the 21st century, with the last residential school in Canada closing in 1996. As a result, successive generations of Anishinaabeg live with the trauma and their parents' trauma of boarding schools. Survivors often left school “ashamed of their cultural identity and afraid to speak their ancestral language,” and therefore did not or could not teach their children.³⁷ Other survivors retained and used their Anishinaabemowin but would not teach it to their children in order to spare them the violence that speaking it would incur at school.³⁸ Noodin describes the effect this had on communities as a “chasm” between those who were able to speak the language and those to whom the language, fully or in part, was denied.³⁹

Over the course of the 19th and the 20th centuries, the Canadian and the United States' governments significantly restricted or outright banned traditional Anishinaabe lifeways through land theft and coerced cession, prohibition of Indigenous religious practices and traditional gatherings, and bans on hunting, fishing, and gathering even on the small reservations or land plots allocated to Anishinaabeg.⁴⁰ Elders also recall the

³⁵ Fontaine, “Redress for Linguicide,” 191.

³⁶ Smith, *Conquest*, 38.

³⁷ Fontaine, “Redress for Linguicide,” 193, 195.

³⁸ Treuer, *Living Our Language*, 183.

³⁹ Noori, “Waasechibiiwaabikoonsing Nd'anami'aami,” 10.

⁴⁰ Peacock and Wasuri, *Ojibwe Waasa Inaabidaa*, 57.

threat of imprisonment for even speaking Anishinaabemowin.⁴¹ After World War II, the United States federal government, realized that reservations actually “enabled Indians to preserve cultural traditions and social fabrics” rather than aided the colonial goal of assimilation, and enacted a policy of relocation in which Native peoples were encouraged to move to urban centers.⁴² This backfired, and “urbanization brought Indian people together into political alliances, which were increasingly capable of affecting the course of federal and state policy.”⁴³ This jumpstarted the Red Power movement and the heyday of Native activism in the 1960’s and ‘70’s, ultimately leading to the passage of legislation like the American Indian Religious Freedoms Act in 1978.⁴⁴ This also spurred the language revitalization movement into action. Dr. Benjamin Burgess (Ojibwe) remembers the role that language played in the activism of the time: “Language was going to be the vehicle for those things we were trying to accomplish, for connecting with our spirituality.”⁴⁵

By the 1990’s, over two-thirds of the US Indigenous population lived in cities, with significant Anishinaabe populations in cities like Minneapolis-St. Paul and Duluth. Anishinaabeg today have been less and less exposed to Anishinaabemowin in day-to-day life as the consequence of several factors:⁴⁶ the aforementioned urbanization, the necessity of English for work, increased access to English-language media, and a shift in

⁴¹ *Ojibwe: Waasa Inaabidaa*, episode 6, "Ojibwemowin: Ojibwe Oral Tradition," written by James Fortier, directed by Lorraine Norrgard, aired 2002, on PBS Eight.

⁴² Donald Fixico, "Federal and State Policies and American Indians," in *A Companion to American Indian History*, ed. Phillip J. Deloria and Neal Salisbury (Malden, MA: Blackwell Publishing, 2002), 387.

⁴³ Fixico, "Federal and State," 387.

⁴⁴ Fixico, "Federal and State," 389.

⁴⁵ Benjamin Burgess, interview by author, February 28, 2020.

⁴⁶ Mary Hermes and Kendall King, "Ojibwe Language Revitalization, Multimedia Technology, and Family Language Learning," in "Special Issue on Less Commonly Taught Languages," special issue, *Language Learning & Technology* 17, no. 1 (February 2013): 127.

value as the result of boarding schools and other experiences of racism.⁴⁷ Today, while there are an estimated 500,000 Anishinaabeg in the United States and Canada, only an around 30,000 speak some Anishinaabemowin, with fewer than 1000 fluent speakers in the United States.⁴⁸ Around 80% of speakers were over the age of 60 as of 2011,⁴⁹ and in the majority of communities (69%) the language is declining as of 2009.⁵⁰ Compared to other large Indigenous languages in the United States and Canada, Anishinaabemowin has the lowest rate of intergenerational transmission.⁵¹ Fortunately, increased interest in Anishinaabemowin from both urban and reservation residents have led to the language revitalization strategies that are discussed below.

⁴⁷ Peacock and Wasuri, *Ojibwe Waasa Inaabidaa*, 32.

⁴⁸ Peacock and Wasuri, 125.

⁴⁹ Noori, "Waasechibiiwaabikoonsing Nd'anami'aami," 3.

⁵⁰ Brock Pitawanakwat, "Anishinaabemodaa Pane Oodenang: A Qualitative Study of Anishinaabe Language Revitalization as Self-Determination in Manitoba and Ontario" (PhD diss., University of Victoria, 2009), 2, ProQuest Dissertations and Theses.

⁵¹ Pitaanakwat, "Anishinaabemodaa," 1.

Chapter 2: Language Ideology, Pedagogy, and Revitalization Strategy

Language transmission is down, but desire to engage in Anishinaabemowin revitalization has increased in recent years. Although fewer people are using the language, so many people seek to learn, help teach, and transmit Anishinaabemowin because the language is intimately connected to Anishinaabe worldview, religion, history, and ways of being. While it has its proponents and detractors in the Western academic linguistic sphere, linguistic determinism—the idea that language structures thought and knowledge—seems to be widely accepted by Indigenous language scholars who realize that Indigenous languages are essential for the maintenance of tribally specific understandings of the world. The Anishinaabe understanding of determinism, as described by Brock Pitawankwat (Anishinaabe of Whitefish River First Nation) and the elders interviewed Maya Chacaby's work, is not focused on the idea that Indigenous languages necessarily shape or create thought. Instead, the prevailing perspective is that Anishinaabemowin creates in the speaker a greater attention to certain Anishinaabe worldviews and values. Mark Freeland (Bahweting Anishinaabe Nation) defines Anishinaabe worldview as based in four things: "(1) an intimate relationship to a localized space; (2) a cyclical understanding of time; (3) living in a web of relatedness with all life, and (4) understanding the world around us in terms of balance."⁵² These ideas are given significant weight in how Anishinaabeg conceptualize their language, and in turn teach it.

⁵²Mark Freeland, "Conceptual Decolonization of Space: Worldview and Language in Anishinaabe Akiing" (PhD diss., University of Denver, 2015), ii, ProQuest Dissertations and Theses.

Marie Battiste (Mi'kmaq) argues against the "Eurocentric illusion of benign translatability," the notion that Indigenous worldviews can be appropriately articulated in the languages of settlers without losing something in translation.⁵³ Given this prevailing ideology, scholars frequently make the connection between language learning and decolonization or survivance; notable activist and theorist Haunani-Kay Trask (kanaka maoli) says that "thinking in one's own cultural referents leads to conceptualizing in one's own world view, which, in turn, leads to disagreement with and eventual opposition to the dominant ideology."⁵⁴ Odawa scholar Cecil King echoes this sentiment, saying that Anishinaabeg "want to come back to our own words, our own meanings, our own definitions of ourselves, and our own world."⁵⁵

A conceptual model by Tom Holm (Creek/Cherokee) and Robert Thomas (Cherokee) identifies language, along with land, ceremony, and sacred history, as one of the interconnected taproots of Indigenous peoplehood; using this model allows us to understand why land, ceremony, and history are sites where many speakers identify Anishinaabemowin as critical to an understanding tribal worldview. This model also elucidates how learning language, along with the familiar struggles of land rights and ability to conduct ceremony, can be seen as part of a larger struggle for Indigenous survivance and sovereignty as King and Trask identified.⁵⁶ Survivance, a term coined by

⁵³Marie Battiste, "Research Ethics for Protecting Indigenous Knowledge and Heritage: Institutional and Researcher Responsibilities," in *Handbook of Critical Methodologies*, ed. Norman K. Denzin and Yvonna S. Lincoln (London: SAGE, 2008), 504.

⁵⁴Haunani-Kay Trask, *From a Native Daughter: Colonialism and Sovereignty in Hawaii* (Monroe, ME: Common Courage Press, 1993), 43.

⁵⁵Cecil King, "Here Come the Anthros," in *Indians and Anthropologists: Vine Deloria, Jr., and the Critique of Anthropology*, ed. Thomas Biolsi (Tucson: University of Arizona Press, 1997), 116.

⁵⁶Tom Holm, J. Diane Pearson, and Ben Chavis, "Peoplehood: A Model for the Extension of Sovereignty in American Indian Studies," *Wicazo Sa Review* 18, no. 1 (2003): 13, <https://www.jstor.org/stable/1409431>.

White Earth Ojibwe scholar Gerald Vizenor, is thriving Indigenous continuation, survival, resistance, surpassing the passivity implied in mere “survival.” It is instead an active response to and renunciation of colonial and lateral “dominance, tragedy, and victimry.”⁵⁷ Reawakening language use is part of this process for many Anishinaabeg.

Language can be seen as a form of survivance for Anishinaabeg because of their culturally-specific language ideologies. Language ideologies are the beliefs and feelings around language that all peoples have, which vary across different cultures and shape how we think about languages. It is Anishinaabe-specific ideology, based in the aforementioned Anishinaabe worldview, that not only makes revitalization or reawakening of the language so essential, but also shapes how the language is learned and taught. To begin with, as Holm and Thomas’s model might suggest, the language’s origin is rooted in traditional religious beliefs or ceremony. Many Anishinaabeg consider Anishinaabemowin to be a gift from the Creator.⁵⁸ Some elders like the well-known late Archie Mosay (Niibaa-giizhig) insist that ceremony can only be properly performed in Anishinaabemowin, because the Creator would not otherwise hear or understand.⁵⁹ Another elder, Maajigwaneyaash, identifies the spiritual power granted by speaking the language: “If I say something in Ojibwe, ... it has been inside of me awhile and healing me inside ... to the point when I release the language and it goes into somebody else to

⁵⁷ Gerald Robert Vizenor, *Manifest Manners: Narratives on Postindian Survivance* (Lincoln, NE: University of Nebraska Press, 1999), vii, EPUB.

⁵⁸ Pitawanakwat, “Anishinaabemodaa,” 8.

⁵⁹ Treuer, *Living Our Language*, 19.

help them ... and it heals them inside, all over inside their body until it is time to be able to release the language so it goes from person to the other like that.”⁶⁰

Both language and ceremony are inextricably linked with relationships to land, a central aspect of Anishinaabe worldview. Anishinaabemowin place names record the sacred or historical memories of Anishinaabe peoples and their relationship to specific places, while many well-known teachers and scholars like Mary Young (Lac Courte Oreilles Ojibwe) and Basil Johnston (Chippewas of Nawash Unceded First Nation) emphasize the importance of land in being able to learn the language. The land, says Mary Young, is “where our language is from. That’s how we’re connected to the land.”⁶¹ A friend of mine further suggested that Ojibwe is so connected to its landbase that truly learning Anishinaabemowin outside of Anishinaabe-aki, the Anishinaabe lands, is impossible.

The very grammar of the language conveys beliefs about the world around the speaker, something speakers and elders have repeatedly identified as important; participants in one study “repeated connect concepts of grammar and morphology to worldview and wellbeing.”⁶² The agglutinative morphology of the language (which is to say the way that words in the language are made by recombining meaningful word parts and grammatical affixes to form single words that contain a lot of information) allows an understanding that the world is in “constant flux, moving, recombining,” according to

⁶⁰ Camille Naslund, "Ojibwe Elders' Perceptions on Ojibwe Language Revitalization" (PhD diss., University of Minnesota Duluth, 2015), 81, <https://conservancy.umn.edu/handle/11299/200289>.

⁶¹ Brock Pitawanakwat, "Strategies and Methods for Anishinaabemowin Revitalization," *The Canadian Modern Language Review / La revue canadienne des langues vivantes* 74, no. 3 (2018): 473, <https://www.muse.jhu.edu/article/702978>.

⁶² Margaret Noodin, *Bawaajimo: A Dialect of Dreams in Anishinaabe Language and Literature* (East Lansing: Michigan State University Press, 2014), 3, JSTOR.

Leroy Littlebear.⁶³ Moreover, nouns being animate or inanimate isn't simply an arbitrary assignment like, for example, grammatical gender in Spanish. Instead, grammatical animacy reflects that the things in question are “infused with spirit,” and that Anishinaabeg “have a relationship with them as living beings and we respect them.”⁶⁴ For example, trees, as I recently learned, are animate. If I am speaking about “maple trees,” I must convey this information: *aninaatigoog* necessarily takes the animate *-oog/* plural ending, reminding myself and my conversational partner that maple trees are infused with spirit.

The way the structure of the language emphasizes and informs relationships—the way linguistic determinism is seen by Anishinaabe scholars—is often pointed to by scholars discussing how Anishinaabemowin is necessary for transmitting Anishinaabe values and knowledge. Dr. Benjamin Burgess says that through Anishinaabemowin, “you can establish relationships in ways that you can't in English.” He gives the example of the word for “elder”: “In English it's just “old person.” ... In Ojibwe it is *gichi-aya'aa*, or ‘great being.’ It has a different level of respect and reverence than just ‘old man,’” and that in turn shapes relationships with elders.⁶⁵ Elder Bob Jourdain notes, “If you speak the language ... you tend to put other people first.” Jourdain explains that this is part of how the language works grammatically, suggesting the value is reinforced by the language: “When you say ‘*giga-waabamin*,’ *gi* is you. It's like saying ‘you I will see.’ When you speak that way, you tend to live that way. Even animals they say that. You see a dog, and

⁶³ Noodin, *Bawaajimo*, 3.

⁶⁴ Mary Isabelle Young, *Pimatisiwin: Walking in a Good Way: A Narrative Inquiry into Language as Identity* (Winnipeg: Pemmican Publications, 2009). As quoted in Noodin, *Bawaajimo*, 2.

⁶⁵ Benjamin Burgess, interview by author, February 28, 2020.

say ‘*animosh niwaabam*,’ that’s the ‘dog I see,’ so the dog is put first in the sentence . . . in a way the dog is more important than me.”⁶⁶ This reflects the Anishinaabe understanding of the web of relatedness as described by Freeland as central to Anishinaabe life and language.

Lorena Fontaine (Anishinaabe of Sagkeeng First Nation) connects land and values to the language in a similar vein, saying that “the values embedded in our creation stories, stories about the land, our identity in terms of stewardship and caring for the land, are derived from the language. I think you can teach somebody values without using the language, but I think for us a critical component of building relationships to one another and expressing our relationships to land is embedded in our language.”⁶⁷ The embeddedness of this relationship to space is expressed in the grammar of Anishinaabemowin; in his insightful analysis Freeland notes that concept of “*Cogito, ergo sum*”—I think therefore I am—cannot be replicated in Anishinaabemowin because the closest way to translate “I am” is with the verb *ayaa*, or “to be.” However, *ayaa* is necessarily locative: it can only mean “to be in a particular place.” “There is no such a thing as existence as ‘spiritual, non-spatial, immaterial entity’” in Anishinaabemowin, writes Freeland, but rather “spatial location is essential to the idea of . . . existence” and this is necessarily part of the language.⁶⁸

Finally, beyond these language ideologies of grammar—that the language is a spiritual gift and necessary for ceremony, that it is connected to and essential for understanding relationship to land, that it is what allows for an Anishinaabe

⁶⁶ Naslund, “Ojibwe Elders’,” 65.

⁶⁷ Pitawanakwat, “Anishinaabemodaa,” 79.

⁶⁸ Freeland, “Conceptual Decolonization,” 148.

perspective—many elders understand the language as a fundamental part of Anishinaabe identity. In a study with six elders, all six agreed that “Ojibwe language and Ojibwe identity are inseparable” with some saying they were simply the same thing.⁶⁹

While across Anishinaabe-aki these ideologies are held to different degrees, the connections between language and land, identity, history, family, and ceremony are part of what shape Anishinaabe pedagogy and methodology in the course of revitalization. Unfortunately, despite the importance the language to Anishinaabe identity and survivance, the current state of revitalization is beset with a number of difficulties and conflicts. Among these is a debate that most second-language learners never think twice about: whether or not to teach reading and writing. Because Anishinaabemowin is historically an oral language and people used to learn simply from speaking and listening, some teachers struggle with criticism from elders over teaching writing.⁷⁰ However, according to a study by Brock Pitawanakwat (Whitefish River Anishinaabe), most teachers regardless of their original stance have accepted that writing and reading part of life for contemporary Native youth and is a tool that facilitates learning for them, and very few now use strictly oral methods.⁷¹

Programs also complain about the lack of teachers, funding, and materials. Teachers often must be fluent in Anishinaabemowin and be certified, and for many Anishinaabeg neither acquiring the language—which takes years—nor wrangling the Western education system come easily. Many programs also do not have sufficient or

⁶⁹ Naslund, “Ojibwe Elders,” 63.

⁷⁰ Naslund, 469.

⁷¹ Shirley Pheasant-Williams, “The Development of Ojibway Language Materials,” *Canadian Journal of Native Education* 27, no. 1 (2003).

appropriate materials for learners at different ages and stages of learning, and producing materials can be difficult. Noting that there was a lack of materials for youth, several instructors decided to make a CD-ROM about hockey in Anishinaabemowin, but gathering the vocabulary and producing the content took over six years.⁷² Material production can even face difficulties when materials that are not created with the guidance of elders run into unexpected roadblocks; in one such scenario a CD of Ojibwe lullabies remastered from vintage recordings had to be pulled as a Midewiwin who listened to the recordings informed the producers that some tracks were in fact sacred music that may not be heard by non-Midewiwin.⁷³

Additionally, a major problem is the discourse of endangerment which surrounds Native languages, including Anishinaabemowin. Framing the language as “endangered” or “dying” has led to anxiety by learners surrounding language learning. These discourses stress the presumed fragility of the language, and emphasized that the language must be “saved,” putting an enormous burden on the learner. This discourse creates speaker anxiety about learning and speaking the “right” way, with “the right way” erasing differences and dialect and freezing Anishinaabemowin in the past as it is recorded in books, rather than acknowledging its flexible, living, and changing nature.⁷⁴

These anxieties about correctness and the fragility of the language play out in some of the most common Ojibwe language learning methods. These typical methods

⁷² Pitawanakwat, “Strategies and Methods,” 478.

⁷³ Shannon Martin. Class lecture, Decolonizing the Exhibition from Vassar College, Poughkeepsie, NY. February 28, 2017.

⁷⁴ Mary Hermes and Kendall King, “Why Is This So Hard?: Ideologies of Endangerment, Passive Language Learning Approaches, and Ojibwe in the United States,” *Journal of Language, Identity and Education* 13, no. 4 (2014): 270, PDF.

also frequently fail to produce competent speakers of Anishinaabemowin. Mary Hermes and Kendall King describe three standard methods of Ojibwe language learning used not only in schools, but also in self-study and other learning programs, which more frequently take place in family homes or community centers than in schools.⁷⁵ These methods, often used in some combination, are described as book learning, submersion, and performance. Book learning, or decontextualized studying and memorizing vocabulary and grammatical paradigms, is common but often produces students with little to no ability to use the language with other speakers, even after years of study, because of the lack actual practice using the language in a normal way. Part of the value of book learning as subject to discourses of endangerment is that it allows students to learn the “correct” words from a book, placing emphasis on absorbing correct forms rather than practice producing them, practicing, and actively engaging with the language. Furthermore, the value of book learning is a point of contention in some communities because of its connections with institutional schooling which has historically been so traumatic for Native communities (and in many cases continues to be so today), and also because it is “perceived to run counter to elders’ acceptance of ambiguity and uncertainty in the language learning process. For instance, some elders maintain that learning the language happens through careful, extended listening, and that not understanding fully, precisely, or immediately is preferred and beneficial.”⁷⁶

Submersion, on the other hand, resolves some of these issues; it is based precisely in the cultural preference for “careful, extended listening” without the necessity of perfect

⁷⁵ Teresa McCarty and Tiffany Lee, "Critical Culturally Sustaining/Revitalizing Pedagogy and Indigenous Education Sovereignty," *Harvard Educational Review* 84, no. 1 (Spring 2014), ProQuest.

⁷⁶ Hermes and King, "Why Is This So Hard?," 274.

comprehension that elders value. In submersion, learners are simply active listeners of master speakers giving speeches or conducting ceremony without accommodating the listener and their comprehension level. Importantly, the context of use also frequently strengthens traditional knowledge and survival for the listener. However, because this method is mainly passive and also because of typically formal contexts of use, it again does not help learners produce speech naturally. Finally, in the performance method, learners memorize small speeches for situationally-specific scenarios; typical of this method is the *boozhoo* speech, or “hello”/introductory speech. Again, this does not lend itself to normal communicative competence, and is a realization of anxieties over needing to speak and preserving the language “correctly.”⁷⁷

Fortunately, Anishinaabemowin revitalization is experiencing a shift towards immersion learning, which includes a much greater focus on speech production. Immersion schools have become increasingly common in the last decade, particularly following the successful models of Maori and Olelo Hawai’i language schools, and there are now at least four Ojibwe language schools in the United States.⁷⁸ Other programs use in-classroom immersion, or as near to it as possible. Based on studies of Indigenous language schools including those for Anishinaabemowin, immersion programs are especially effective for helping children develop fluency as well as cultural pride in their language.⁷⁹ Some teachers believe that immersion is necessary to move beyond simple verb paradigms and nouns because “from immersion, the learner would internalize ways

⁷⁷ Hermes and King, “Why Is This So Hard?,” 273.

⁷⁸ Mary Hermes, Megan Bang, and Ananda Marin, “Designing Indigenous Language Revitalization,” *Harvard Educational Review* 82, no. 3 (Fall 2012): ProQuest.

⁷⁹ Lindsay Morcom and Stephanie Roy, “Is Early Immersion Effective for Aboriginal Language Acquisition? A Case Study from an Anishinaabemowin Kindergarten,” *International Journal of Bilingual Education and Bilingualism* 22, no. 5 (2017).

of expressing thoughts that are natural to our language. . . . They're not force-fitting Anishinaabemowin into an English way of expressing thoughts," says Mary Ann Naokwegijig-Corbiere (Wiikwemkoong First Nation).⁸⁰ However, there are limits to immersion learning. Immersion schools are necessarily small and can only serve a fraction of a community's children, while finding teachers who are both fluent speakers of Anishinaabemowin and are also experienced and accredited teachers for the appropriate age group and subject is a struggle of its own.⁸¹

All revitalization programs, however, "require adapting to nontraditional teaching methods and practices," i.e. nontraditional to Western eyes. One of the ways that immersion programs—although non-immersion programs may also make use of it—do this is through adopting Anishinaabe pedagogy based around Anishinaabe language ideology. Anishinaabe pedagogy, says Rebecca Chartrand (Anishinaabe Métis), "has a humanistic focus and is aimed at exploring the interrelationships between all things within a critically reflective paradigm. Moreover, it takes into account feelings, attitudes, and values that can add affective components to the conventional subject matter curriculum with a focus on knowledge and skills acquisition."⁸² It also, says Chartrand, should allow for story-telling and –making, be informed by elders, and be relevant to and thematically situated in Anishinaabeg lands.⁸³ Storytelling in particular is central to the pedagogy. Stories are of course a way of transmitting language along with Anishinaabe worldviews and histories that are central to understanding land and relationships, but

⁸⁰ Pitawanakwat, "Strategies and Methods," 465.

⁸¹ Hermes, Bang, and Marin, "Designing Indigenous," 387.

⁸² Rebecca Chartrand, "Anishinaabe Pedagogy," *Canadian Journal of Native Education* 35, no. 1 (2012), ProQuest Dissertations and Theses.

⁸³ Chartrand, "Anishinaabe Pedagogy."

storytelling is key in Anishinaabemowin revitalization in that it is inherently relational, connecting the teller (often an elder) and their listeners. This dynamic shapes Anishinaabemowin teaching including revitalization; according to Chartrand, “From an Indigenous perspective, the power of story is the art of placing learners at the critical centre of their own being and life-worlds. It is a practice that I see as being at the heart of Anishinaabe pedagogy.” This pedagogy, reflecting the ideological focus of language’s connection with land, relationships, and history, is frequently exemplified by most teachers even if not so explicitly stated. The Midewiwin elder and professor Shirley Williams (Wiikwemkoong First Nation), for example, discusses teaching language based on the Medicine Wheel in a way that promotes language in a relational context: as Williams connects teachings of the Medicine Wheel, spiritual, emotional, physical, and mental, to different areas of language learning, she says that the emotional aspect “represents word-watching. When we speak, we watch what another person is saying. As we watch, we feel the other person’s spirit. Thus watching is important in Nishinaabemwin communication.”⁸⁴ Lorena Fontaine, also a teacher, says that “in order to teach the language you need to teach them about cultural objects as well. Like shakers and things that we used in our ceremonies so that you are not only teaching them a language, but teaching about their identity as well.”⁸⁵ Storytelling as a methodology is thus widely used for teaching the language-culture-identity complex.

Some teachers emphatically insist that land-based learning—not just learning how to talk about land in a classroom—is a necessary part of learning the language: “What

⁸⁴ Pheasant-Williams, “The Development of Ojibway.”

⁸⁵ Pitawanakwat, “Strategies and Methods,” 467-468.

they need is to be taken out to the land,” says Basil Johnston. “This is how our ancestors learned things and how they taught things. You didn't go into a classroom and read books. You went out in the field and you saw, what you call specimens in museums, in real life doing real things and where these creatures live and the relationships they had with one another, and with plants and with birds and with animals and with the weather. So they call that I think today holistic learning, holistic teaching. But you've got to get out there.” Wherever possible, programs are keen to emphasize the importance of land to language learning, from teaching students the place names of the areas around them and their literal translations, to taking students outside even just to a city park.

Teaching Anishinaabe worldview and values through language and cultural practices together is, as mentioned, a key aspect of Anishinaabe pedagogy, and as a result many programs, particularly summer camps, teach ceremony and drumming or other traditional skills.⁸⁶ Students at Waadookodaading Ojibwe Language Immersion School, for example, learn and practice sugaring—tapping trees, hauling buckets of sap, and boiling it down—alongside their rigorous academic curriculum.⁸⁷ In these cases, the cultural and linguistic knowledge is necessarily hand-in-hand.

Frequently, transmission of cultural knowledge and storytelling is an area in which elders become involved in the teaching process as they are invited into the classroom to pass on stories and traditional skills and crafts using Anishinaabemowin.⁸⁸ Going beyond brief classroom forays, some learners and instructors believe that working

⁸⁶ Pitawanakwat, “Strategies and Methods,” 467.

⁸⁷ Finn Ryan, “Waadookodaading: Ojibwe Language Immersion School,” video, 4:45, The Ways, <https://theways.org/story/waadookodaading>.

⁸⁸ Pitawanakwat, “Strategies and Methods,” 478.

with elders is crucial because of elders' traditional role in teaching and caregiving; the relational aspect of teaching-learning is an ideology that becomes central to the pedagogy. Alan Corbiere (M'Chigeeng First Nation) states that struggles in revitalization can come from a lack of "intergenerational transmission of the knowledge, and it's because the Elders have been removed or relieved of their role as the teachers."⁸⁹

While some of these revitalization strategies are less effective, the common theme in Anishinaabemowin teaching and learning is the centrality of Anishinaabe worldview. Even in the most limited learning method of performance, the *boozhoo* speech is the most common tool of memorization, centering on an introduction which situates the speaker in relationship to their clan and community of origin, part of the web of relationships central to Anishinaabe worldview. The reflection of this worldview in the language ideologies and pedagogy I have discussed permeates the all of the main strategies for Anishinaabemowin revitalization, from formal lessons to submersion, but it is also a crucial aspect of a growing feature in contemporary revitalization efforts: the use of digital media.

⁸⁹ Pitawanakwat, "Strategies and Methods," 477.

Chapter 3: Digital Technologies in Anishinaabemowin Revitalization

In a linguistic context where land and relationships are so valued, those who understand digital technologies as fundamentally isolating or disconnected from what they understand to be “real life” may be confused at the increasing use of such media in Anishinaabemowin revitalization. I hope to show that the Anishinaabe language ideologies and worldviews shape the way digital learning platforms for Anishinaabemowin are both used and made: the way Anishinaabeg interact with and create digital language materials is still inherently reflective of Anishinaabe worldviews, ideologies, and pedagogy, and therefore connective and relationship-building.

We can understand the increasing prevalence of digital learning strategies based on the difficulties that Anishinaabemowin language transmission faces today. The lower cost and ease of access of producing content on the Internet enables community input, especially with so many Anishinaabeg living far from physical centers of Anishinaabe community.⁹⁰⁹¹ Ojibwe scholars Mary Hermes, Megan Bang, and Ananda Marin identify that “[t]wo essential steps for creating materials for revitalization are to produce them in the community, making heritage language learners an active part of the process, and to capture language in context rather than to artificially construct language for teaching.”⁹² The access that the Internet and digital recording provides to speakers in the community significantly facilitates this sort of production.

⁹⁰ Winoka Rose Begay, "Mobile Apps and Indigenous Language Learning: New Developments in the Field of Indigenous Language Revitalization" (PhD diss., University of Arizona, 2020), 46.

⁹¹ Patrick Eisenlohr, "Language Revitalization and New Technologies: Cultures of Electronic Mediation and the Refiguring of Communities," *Annual Review of Anthropology* 33 (2004): 35, <https://www.jstor.org/stable/25064844>.

⁹² Hermes, Bang, and Marin, "Designing Indigenous," 389.

Furthermore, the use of digital materials can help reverse negative attitudes towards the language, such as the sense of shame some feel about Anishinaabemowin as the result of aforementioned generations of abuse in boarding schools. These “ideologies of contempt” towards the language, including the notion that Indigenous languages are old-fashioned or merely traditional and do not have a place in the modern world can be effectively challenged by the use of those languages in digital contexts.⁹³ By allowing use of the language outside of purely traditional contexts like ceremony, learners, especially youth, can change their perception of the language and its functionality, which promotes the use of Anishinaabemowin. Kanaka maoli scholar Candace Kaleimamoowahinekapu Galla asserts that “if the language can be portrayed as functional, useful and has a place in the larger world, they [Indigenous individuals] may be more inclined to engage in learning the language or at least feel that the language is a necessary part of an Indigenous well-being.”⁹⁴ Following Margaret Noodin’s idea that a language must be seen in order to be used and viable, “Anishinaabemowin words must appear in every place, and in every way, that English words appear” to Anishinaabe children in order to make them interested in learning the language instead of perceiving it as unmodern.⁹⁵ The digital realm is increasingly central to such an undertaking.

Furthermore, digital learning strategies are able to address a weakness of classroom learning: while it is a key player in language learning and crucially addresses the need to learn vocabulary, grammar, and usage, classroom learning does not enable

⁹³ Eisenlohr, “Language Revitalization,” 32.

⁹⁴ Candace Kaleimamoowahinekapu Galla, “Multimedia Technology and Indigenous Language Revitalization: Practical Educational Tools and Applications Used within Native Communities.” (PhD diss., University of Arizona, 2010), 105, ProQuest Dissertations and Theses.

⁹⁵ Noori, “Waasechibiiwaabikoosing Nd'anami'aami,” 4.

language use or transmission outside of the school. Instead, it can create “an academic, frozen, and culturally disconnected register” that is not easily used intergenerationally or outside of class and schoolwork.⁹⁶ However, the use of digital games, social media, and learning software within the home or personal sphere facilitates Anishinaabemowin use within families and casual contexts, connecting youth and families without fluent speakers to elders through materials they have collaboratively created or through networks of communication and relationship among speakers that digital revitalization fosters.⁹⁷ This connective aspect, whereby learners and speakers are connected via pre-prepared and collaboratively generated digital materials or via online networks of communication (e.g. sharing Anishinaabemowin stories or videos on Facebook) demonstrates the particular value that digital technology has within revitalization, as “reestablishing... intergenerational transmission” is widely considered crucial for revitalizing a language.⁹⁸

Finally, digital games and software are able to help address some of the issues with the most prevalent learning strategies previously discussed, namely, learner anxiety over producing “correct” forms, which prevents students from producing speech naturally. According to Galla’s study of digital technologies in Indigenous language revitalization, “For youth and those who have not learned their language, the assistance of a technological tool can be empowering in that the tool never judges the learner,” incentivizing language practice and use through digital media.⁹⁹ It is no accident that all

⁹⁶ Hermes and King, “Why is This So Hard?,” 127.

⁹⁷ Hermes and King, “Why Is This So Hard?,” 127.

⁹⁸ Hermes and King, “Why Is This So Hard?,” 128.

⁹⁹ Galla, “Multimedia Technology,” 105.

three of my case studies allow for practicing speaking (or, in the case of *Honour Water*, singing) alone based on recordings of proficient speakers; two of the three, *Ojibwemodaa!* and *Honour Water*, even allow speakers to record themselves and play their voices back for comparison.

My three case studies are markedly different in format and content. One, *Ojibwemodaa!*, is an interactive language-teaching software designed for use within the home. *Honour Water* is a small interactive game teaching Anishinaabemowin songs about water. Finally, Ojibwe.net is a resource page providing access to many basic language lessons, stories, videos, and projects in Anishinaabemowin. However, all of these case studies are linked in their reification Anishinaabe language ideology: rather than having an isolating effect, their strategies are inherently connective, and through language teaching strengthen relationships between families, children, elders, the land, and non-human relations. Despite taking on new form in the digital realm, Anishinaabe pedagogy remains in these case studies centered on the web of relationships, informed by elders, created at least partly through storytelling, and thematically situated on Anishinaabe-aki.

Ojibwemodaa!

Ojibwemodaa! is a language learning software developed in collaboration between Anishinaabe language scholars and dozens of community members, beginning around 2005. As Mary Hermes, Megan Bang, and Ananda Marin describe in their paper on the development of the software, the focus of creating the software was shifted from producing content to producing a cultural context through immersion camp-like settings that would then yield natural material that could be used as content. The researchers

began by engaging in the Anishinaabe cultural protocols needed to ask elders and ancestors of the community for help and direction, both establishing community relationships as the core of the project development and enabling elder input in a process the authors describe as analogous to peer review.¹⁰⁰ Over the course of several years, the researchers held Anishinaabemowin language camps for the purpose of making movies that would be used for the software. Scene ideas were generated by the group of speakers and researchers together, generating semi-scripted, semi-improvisational videos after scripted content was not sufficiently spontaneous and natural. The videos and transcriptions became the basis of the software, developing games, flashcards, grammar explanations, and speaking practice tools around the naturally produced speech and transcripts. Although camp participants were of many different levels, everyone spoke Anishinaabemowin as much as possible, which “created the feeling of a restored use of the Ojibwe language, made elders switch and stay in the Ojibwe language, and made for more opportunities for spontaneous joking and speaking.”¹⁰¹ Nineteen short videos were produced, with the aim of creating practical materials that are readily understood and accessible by the community for their own use.¹⁰²

The end product was a software with listening, writing, and interactive speaking practice, replete with “more than 2,500 unique lexical items, and more than 3,500 flashcards..., interactive games, grammar on demand quizzes, pronunciation practice with voice recognition software, and recorded conversation practice.” While immersion

¹⁰⁰ Hermes, Bang, and Marin, "Designing Indigenous," 393.

¹⁰¹ Hermes, Bang, and Marin, 394.

¹⁰² Hermes, Bang, and Marin, 390.

schools are an increasingly popular method for creating fluent speakers, the dearth of teachers and other resources make them inaccessible to most Anishinaabeg;¹⁰³ the *Ojibwemodaa!* software is able to simulate an immersion-like teaching experience from home.¹⁰⁴ While not being able to converse in person has its drawbacks, as noted above the function that allows for listening, repeating, and recording frees the user from the fear of making mistakes while allowing them to practice speech production.

In a study of Ojibwe families using the *Ojibwemodaa!* software, Mary Hermes and Kendall King note that “the software has the potential to promote face-to-face, interpersonal interactions within the family. Indeed, we found that *Ojibwemodaa* was incorporated into already-established family dynamics,” in contrast to concerns by some Ojibwe leaders that technology interferes with relationship building.¹⁰⁵ Indeed, the families studied used the software to learn together at a computer, a marked difference from age-separated classroom learning which, as previously discussed, has difficulty bringing the language into the home. While the software did not appear to directly influence language use between parents and school-aged children, it did “seem to have supported family interactions and connections around the Ojibwe language,” and in some users reportedly foster some Anishinaabemowin use with friends and extended family.¹⁰⁶ It also helped some adult learners use more language with their own parents who spoke Anishinaabemowin from childhood, and allowed them to discuss the language together; one participant reported that when her mother spoke with her, language that she had

¹⁰³ Hermes, Bang, and Marin, 387.

¹⁰⁴ Hermes and King, “Ojibwe Language,” 128.

¹⁰⁵ Hermes and King, 131.

¹⁰⁶ Hermes and King, 136, 138.

forgotten when she was “forced to quit speaking” as child came back to her.¹⁰⁷ With this facilitation of intergenerational discussion in and about Anishinaabemowin, Hermes and King report that the software can “jumpstart authentic language use” through providing “scaffolding—a place to start to understand—that affords...a way of being able to re-connect with family language learning.”¹⁰⁸

Uniquely among my case studies, *Ojibwemodaa!* intentionally does not incorporate much or any traditional skills or practices, like traditional arts or seasonal activities,¹⁰⁹ with the creators preferring scenes involving humor, daily life, and modern takes on stories.¹¹⁰ While this appears to be unorthodox in Anishinaabemowin revitalization strategies,¹¹¹ it is interesting to note because of the way that decision was made: consulting with and including input from elders and other community members based around their needs and perspectives throughout the project, from bringing the project to the community at the beginning, to involving community members and elders in the production process and decision-making. Based on the descriptions of the project by the researchers, the design of learning software itself centers Anishinaabe language ideology and pedagogy: in addition to community members making videos of creating and retelling stories as Chartrand identified as central to the pedagogy, Hermes, Bang, and Marin turn repeatedly to the foundational aspects of relationality and reciprocity in their work creating language revitalization materials. “Framing the *Ojibwemodaa!* project within community implies reciprocity within relationships,” with the community

¹⁰⁷ Hermes and King, 136.

¹⁰⁸ Hermes and King, 139.

¹⁰⁹ Although creators stated that they intentionally avoided these as topics of conversation, because *Ojibwemodaa* appears to be no longer sold, I am unable to determine to what extent.

¹¹⁰ Hermes, Bang, and Marin, “Designing Indigenous,” 397.

¹¹¹ Pitawanakwat, “Strategies and Methods,” 466-468

necessarily not consuming language as a product created through a hierarchy of researchers/content creators and learners, but instead producing and maintaining it together it as a living part of Anishinaabe identity.¹¹² The elder-directed, relationship-centering aspect of material creation, as well as the focus by users on both the software's ability to help them maintain the language as part of who they are and its intentional use between family members of different generations reveals the nature of the software as not isolating but rooted firmly in connective, relational Anishinaabe language ideology.

Honour Water

As far as language teaching goes, *Honour Water* is significantly simpler than *Ojibwemodaa!* Created by Anishinaabe/Métis game designer Elizabeth LaPensée in collaboration with the game developers Pinnguaq, *Honour Water* is a tablet game designed to teach Anishinaabemowin songs honoring water and the Anishinaabekwe—Anishinaabe women—who protect it against the greed and destruction of corporations threatening Indigenous lands and waters across the Americas. *Honour Water* uses the same format as Pinnguaq's game *Singuistics*, teaching Anishinaabe song along with the grammar, meaning, and pronunciation of the words that make up the lyrics, while also explicitly teaching about the importance of honoring the water.

The game has three songs, “Miigwech Nibi,” “Gii Bimoseyaan,” and “Gimaamaan Aki,” all written to be freely shared and sung, representing three different levels of singing and language challenges.¹¹³ As users play the songs, the lyrics appear in

¹¹² Hermes, Bang, and Marin, “Designing Indigenous,” 389.

¹¹³ Elizabeth LaPensée, “Singing as Gamplay for Healing in Honor Water,” *Cultural Survival Quarterly*, no. 40 (December 2016): 4, ProQuest.

both Anishinaabemowin and English, highlighting which words are being sung. Users are then encouraged to listen to and repeat the song one line at a time. Finally, users can record their own version of the song to share it with others. At any time, users can look at the complete lyrics and translation, as well as grammatical breakdowns of the words in the song (see figure 1 below).¹¹⁴


LaPensée explains that the game was developed in coordination between elders and Pinnguaq, and that elders specifically wanted gameplay that “encouraged participation, but not in a way that included any form of judgment or comparisons” of correctness or competition.¹¹⁵ Instead, the point of *Honour Water* is not winning, but the ultimate endgame of healing and finding respect for water. As LaPensée and the game teach us, “Anishinaabe water songs can heal the waters. Communities are at such a point of concern that Anishinaabekwe are bringing forth and sharing water songs that all people are welcome to sing.”¹¹⁶ LaPensée found that there was a need to more widely and easily distribute songs, Anishinaabe teachings, and Anishinaabemowin, all of which are linked to the health of the water, and it was through digital gameplay that this could be feasibly achieved.

¹¹⁴ Elizabeth LaPensée, *Honour Water* (Pinguaq Technology, 2016), digital file.

¹¹⁵ LaPensée, “Singing as Gamplay,” 4.

¹¹⁶ LaPensée, “Singing as Gameplay,” 4.

bimoseyaan

Pronunciation: 

Definition: I walk

Root and suffix:

bim	-ose	yaan
Along through space/time	s/he walks	First person: I
	bimose: S/he walks along	bimoseyaan: I walk along




Figure 1: A screenshot from the second song of Honour Water, "Gii Bimoseyaan," breaking down the morphemes of one of the words in the lyrics. The words can be listened to individually for spoken pronunciation.¹¹⁷

The language learning in *Honour Water* necessarily occurs through establishing the importance of relationships to water and the land, and actively strengthens those relationships through the transformative power of traditional singing in Anishinaabemowin. While the language learning aspect occurs digitally, LaPensée explicitly states that singing in Anishinaabemowin is direct action that affects the waters in and around us.¹¹⁸ As Anishinaabeg interact with the app, Anishinaabemowin is taught

¹¹⁷ Elizabeth LaPensée, *Honour Water*.

¹¹⁸ Joanna Hearne and Elizabeth LaPensée, "'We All Stand Side by Side': An Interview with Elizabeth LaPensée," *Studies in American Indian Literatures*, 29, no. 1 (2017): 33, <https://muse.jhu.edu/article/659889>.

in an utterly new physical format in portable digital interactive gameplay, while reflecting central aspects of Anishinaabe language ideology and worldview: the language is taught through forming and respecting relationships with the land and water as well as community members who take action to protect them, with the understanding of Anishinaabemowin as a spiritual force. Furthermore, the game encourages users to be actively connective with other members of community through the personal recording and online sharing of the songs. In terms of Anishinaabemowin revitalization, the app is but one lesson, or a step towards making the language more seeable or engaging for youth. As far pedagogy goes, however, the app is a full realization of Chartrand's definition of Anishinaabe pedagogy, being "informed by elders, ...relevant to and thematically situated in Anishinaabeg lands," with a focus on the interrelationship of Anishinaabeg and non-human relations.

Ojibwe.net

Unlike the complex coding of downloadable software like *Ojibwemodaa!* and *Honour Water*, Ojibwe.net represents a much more basic form of digital revitalization materials: the multimedia website. There remain a number of websites focused on introducing or teaching about Anishinaabemowin, however unlike many sites that face the difficulties of small maintenance, content creator, and web design teams, Ojibwe.net is both regularly updated with new content, and relatively long-lived, dating from 2007 when it was founded as *Noongwa e-Anishinaabemjig*.¹¹⁹ Created and maintained by Anishinaabeg, the website features four tabs of content: Lessons provides introductions to

¹¹⁹ Noori, "Waasechibiiwaabikoonsing Nd'anami'aami," 7.

pronunciation, vocabulary, and grammar lessons like how different verb types are used, complete with fluent speakers pronouncing every piece of vocabulary and example sentences used (see Figure 2), and follows up with practice exercises; Stories is sorted into categories by season and contains numerous short written stories and poems, along with English translations, as well as untranslated recordings of elders or other fluent speakers telling stories; Songs provides audio and lyrics of traditional and translations of popular songs; and Projects contains language resources oriented around specific topics or histories generated by individuals, for example a project with Anishinaabe descriptions of raptors, in-language flashcards, and a raptor song.¹²⁰


Despite the internet's facilitation and encouragement of sharing anything and everything for broad consumption, Ojibwe.net is careful to respect that some songs and stories are not to be freely shared and recorded, and openly state that only allowed traditional songs and stories are included. While site creator Margaret Noodin notes that as a teacher, she wished people would access Lessons first, the data testifies to the focus of Anishinaabeg who are learning their language: stories have historically been the most shared content on the site.¹²¹ The focus on Anishinaabemowin stories as the significant portion of the site's content and the major source of community interaction shows the rootedness of Anishinaabemowin pedagogy in storytelling and the speech of elders; learners show through their enthusiastic response to the stories shared on Facebook that being able to access what elders have to say and the stories they share, even when they are physically distanced from fluent speakers, are a necessity.

¹²⁰ "Raptors (Giiwosebinesiwag)," Ojibwe.net, <https://ojibwe.net/projects/raptors/>.

¹²¹ Noori, "Waasechibiiwaabikoonsing Nd'anami'aami," 8.

Pronoun in Ojibwe	Pronoun in English	Single Statement or "ina" Questions
niin	I	ni + verb nin (initial d,j,g,z,zh) *also remove only nim (initial b) the last "i" or "o" nind (initial vowel)
giin	you	gi + verb *also remove only gid (initial vowel) the last "i" or "o" gim (initial b)
wiin	he / she	o + verb *the "o" is optional
niinawind	just us	ni + verb + min nin (initial d,j,g,z,zh) nim (initial b) nind (initial vowel)
giinawind	all of us	gi + verb + min gid (initial vowel) gim (initial b)
giinawaa	you all	gi + verb + m gid (initial vowel) gim (initial b)
wiinawaa	them	o + verb + wag (final vowel) **o" is optional o + verb + oog (final consonant)

Here are some Type 2 root verbs. They will become the center of your statement as you add meaning.



- > wiisni – to eat
- > gaagiigido – talk
- > giishkaabaagwe – be thirsty
- > bimaadizi – to live

Figure 2: A chart from the *Ojibwe.net* lesson on type II verbs showing how to form them, as well as some of the vocabulary for the lesson accompanied by audio of the pronunciations.¹²²

The frequency of land- and season-based stories in available content situates learning the language as specifically in Anishinaabe-aki, and, like *Honour Water*, emphasizes the centrality of the relationship between the language and Anishinaabe lands. Using language revitalization and, in revitalization, story and land-based learning, the site creates connective tissue for relationship-building across distance. *Ojibwe.net*'s "About Us" page emphasizes that revitalization even through the digital media is not a solitary effort, but a collective one, saying that it is for "anyone willing to listen, learn, and labor

¹²² "Verb Type 2 - Doing Something," chart, *Ojibwe.net*, <https://ojibwe.net/lessons/beginner/verb-type-2-doing-something>.

with us in the effort to maintain Anishinaabemowin.”¹²³ Finally, through the Songs, Stories, and Projects tabs, the language is taught hand-in-hand with Anishinaabe-specific practices like *tiginaaganan* (Anishinaabe cradleboards), birchbark houses, maple sugaring, traditional song and prayer, and recounting Anishinaabe history. Through these aspects of listening to elders, learning and speaking about land, creating relationships through digital space, and using cultural objects for teaching, Anishinaabe-specific pedagogy and the language ideologies that shape it are keenly felt.

¹²³ Alphonse Pitawanakwat and Margaret Noodin, "Our Purpose," Ojibwe.net, <https://ojibwe.net/about-us>.

Conclusions

The case studies discussed here vary significantly in function as well as the aspects of Anishinaabe language ideology they highlight: *Ojibwemodaa!* intentionally rejects more obvious facets of cultural teaching like song, traditional crafts, and seasonal activities—those which are emphasized by Ojibwe.net and in a more limited respect *Honour Water*. *Honour Water*, for its part, gives significant weight to the specifically Anishinaabe language ideology that vocalization in Anishinaabemowin is healing. All of the case studies, however, reflect what Chartrand, Hermes, Bang, and Marin identify as central Anishinaabe pedagogy, despite being mediated through the digital form: connection and relationship-making as central to learning, and the inherent ability of Anishinaabemowin to create an attention to those relationships. The community focus of the pedagogy is apparent in each from the start, as each was made through consultation and collaboration with Anishinaabe elders, who guided the process and helped make videos for *Ojibwemodaa!*, wrote and sang songs for *Honour Water*, and shared their stories, memories, and voices for Ojibwe.net. All foster relationships through the language, respectively creating attention to language use between generations of families, reinscribing a relationship of respect with the waters, and making connections through sharing the language with other Anishinaabeg across digital social networks. All allow for new understandings of relationships with non-humans through use of the language itself, the grammar revealing the animacy of and creating respect for land, animals, trees, and other beings who I do not know myself.

While these digital tools have their definite advantages, including access for those who live a significant distance from elders or fluent speakers, facilitation of co-learning

within the home, collaboration between physically distanced communities, appeal to technologically-oriented youth, and reduced fears of judgement or anxiety about correctness, the digital medium also has its own disadvantages. On the creators' end, digital resources require maintenance in order to remain functional on continually updating web browsers and computer operating systems. On users' end, there can be difficulty keeping up with self-motivated practice on one's own instead of in a class or program, as evidenced by the decline in use of *Ojibwemodaa!* by many families in Hermes and King's study, paralleling other research findings of language self-study.¹²⁴ Additionally, not all communities have reliable access to computers, especially those with up-to-date versions able to run software,¹²⁵ or Internet infrastructure, something Elizabeth LaPensée acknowledges is a barrier in her work to create digital media for Anishinaabeg.¹²⁶ Finally, digital practice and resources cannot achieve the most effective method of attaining fluency—real-time conversations with real people.¹²⁷ These digital strategies are marvelous tools, but they have to be used in order for Anishinaabemowin to grow; Margaret Noodin says “Long knives, long wires, even wireless branches of data only slash forward making space, leaving the real work to the human mind,” and to real people putting their tools to work.

Fortunately, despite ongoing struggles for intergenerational transmission, it seems like more and more Anishinaabeg are reawakening their language with the tools they create together. These digital tools are amazingly viable because of the way they are

¹²⁴ Hermes and King, p. 131.

¹²⁵ Begay, "Mobile Apps," 48.

¹²⁶ Hearne and LaPensée. "We All Stand," 30.

¹²⁷ Hermes and King, "Ojibwe Language," 131.

creatively maintaining Anishinaabemowin in a particularly Anishinaabe way, while transforming what that can look like while adapting to the needs of the community. Noodin insightfully ponders the way Nanabozhoo, a teacher of the Anishinaabeg and a central figure in creation and story, would see the digital age: “If Nanabozhoo were among us (and he might be) working to keep the language alive, he would be a hacker, a gamer, a half-human, half shape-shifting avatar. And he would be interested in collective intelligence, game theory, and digital media.”¹²⁸ The digital landscape was not always an Anishinaabe landscape, but it is now. The use of these tools, as well as the myriad other Anishinaabemowin Facebook groups, YouTube videos, group chats, and phone applications is a testament to this. As a settler, I can barely scratch the surface of understanding what Anishinaabemowin means to Anishinaabeg, but the generous work of dozens of teachers allows us to see what this transformational use of Anishinaabe pedagogy can mean. The digital reawakening of Anishinaabemowin is a brilliantly adaptive, relationship-centered form of creative, active survivance.

¹²⁸ Noori, “Waasechibiiwaabikoonsing Nd'anami'aami,” 18.

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