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## Magpie Naheševehe: An Autoethnographic Study of a Chief's Son Reclaiming His Language

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### Recommended Citation

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**Magpie Naheševehe:**

**An Autoethnographic Study of a Chief's Son Reclaiming His Language**

A Thesis Presented to

The Faculty of the School of Education

International and Multicultural Education Department

In Partial Fulfillment

Of the Requirements for the Degree

Master of Arts in International and Multicultural Education

By Quinn Magpie

May 2024

## CHAPTER I

### INTRODUCTION

“When we tell stories, we put our souls on display for others to see. The children see that and they learn how to do it themselves.” These are the words of my father, a Cheyenne Chief who gave me the gift of storytelling. I always figured storytelling was something only my father and eldest brother were gifted at, but when I found myself explaining my culture to my class, telling them a story about the cedar tree and the boy who was left behind, I felt my father’s energy and realized the gift I had been given.

Although I belong to the Southern Cheyenne and Arapaho Nation, I grew up in California and have only been exposed to my tribe through family members. Even so, I have experienced sweats, prayer meetings, listened to songs, and learned how to bead with my father. In many ways, I feel connected to this identity. However, I only knew three words in the Cheyenne language: salt, pepper, and creator. Learning my heritage languages was not a priority growing up, nor was it something my father could teach me beyond the few words he knew. When I became an adult and decided to explore my heritage, I learned of the dire situation our languages are in. Elders are passing on and our languages are losing active speakers who are fluent enough to pass it on. At the rate things are going, this generation might be the last to hear their language, and the next will lose the gift of their culture.

Before I began learning Cheyenne on my own, I did not realize how much culture is tied to language. Now that I can say, *Natséhestahe naa nahetaevo ’eve*, meaning, “I Cheyenne and I Arapaho,” my whole perception on who I am has changed. If I do not tell stories to my future children as my father did to me, then they will never receive this gift. If I do not teach my

languages to my children, then they might never have the opportunity to joke and play with their heritage language. And so I made a declaration: I am Cheyenne and Arapaho, and I will learn how to speak both of my languages.

### **Statement of The Problem**

The Cheyenne and Arapaho languages are at a serious risk of stagnation. Richard Littlebear (1999), the previous president of Dull Knife College, believes when languages become stagnant, they begin to die. One of the largest misconceptions about language revitalization is how many view the concept as being a “preservation.” Teresa McCarty (2018) believes language revitalization is better defined by scholars as a “regeneration” or a “regeneration.” These terms imply the continuous growth of the language rather than a stagnant existence. When we frame languages as living, we can begin to see how devastating it is that the youth are not actively telling stories or joking in their heritage language (Littlebear, 1999). Students in language classes might remember lists of words or phrases, but they are not thinking in their language or embodying the culture contained in the language (Underwood, 2009). Furthermore, our government’s structure, law and order, jurisprudence, literature, land base, and our spiritual and sacred practices are all held together by our languages. If our language becomes stagnant, then our sovereignty and identity as an Indigenous nation will begin to fall apart (Littlebear, 1999). The number one way tribal nations can retaliate against language stagnation is to simply speak their languages again. If we began speaking with our children, if we began speaking with our friends and family, if we listened to the voices and stories of elders, if we attended local classes to learn more about our language and history, then we would have a new generation of speakers who love their culture and want to pass it on. But we are not speaking our languages and the future of our culture remains uncertain.

Many tribes across North America have attempted to adopt the Hawaiian model where parents and elders become directly involved with the education of their children within immersion schools. The model is reminiscent of how the language was taught before the colonization of Hawai'i where communities would pass on knowledge through shared support of one another. This model is sought after because the Hawaiian language went from critically endangered to now having three generations of active speakers who are continuing to build a foundation for the future education of their language (Kawai'ae'a et al., 2007). However, the Hawaiian model is not a roadmap to follow; rather, it is an example of what happens when curricula are created in service to the language being taught. My tribe's revitalization programs need to consider how our languages have been historically taught and to find ways to emulate it in the classroom. For example, Northern Arapaho Professor Greymorning (1999) speaks on how the old ways of learning for Arapaho would involve families inviting an elder to tell stories to their children in the evening. It would begin with the elder being fed in exchange for knowledge. After eating, the elder would begin telling a story and the children would gather around to listen. Randomly, the elder would call out a child's name to see if they are still awake. If the child was asleep, then the elder would simply stop the story for the night. The children were motivated to keep one another awake to hear the end of the story (Greymorning, 1999, p. 9). In this way, Arapaho culture and language was passed on through a shared love of hearing stories and the community involvement of families coming together to hear the story. The children also learned how elders must be respected and fed if they want to be given the gift of knowledge. A way of life is being naturally passed on through this exchange as language is being used for its true purpose: to be spoken and to be heard.

Preservation is not the solution. Future immersion programs will need to treat our languages as living, but in order to do that, they must recreate teaching methods that are reflective of their tribe's history. Without reflecting, without passing on knowledge as we used to, then the next generation of speakers will be left without the tools they need to keep our languages respected and spoken.

### **Historical Background**

My tribe, the Southern Cheyenne and Arapaho, have an alliance and are recognized as a single nation in Oklahoma. However, in the North, the tribes are separate with the Cheyenne tribe located in Montana and the Arapaho tribe in Wyoming. This means the Northern tribes each have their own separate movements and histories to revitalize their languages.

The Northern Cheyenne reservation is home to Dull Knife College where it is possible to attain a degree in the Cheyenne language in addition to having classes focused on Cheyenne culture such as beadworking. The Northern Cheyenne have also made large strides in developing an online dictionary with explanations of the basic grammar. The tribe also has the support of the State of Montana whose state legislature requires their public education to support the identities and languages of Indigenous peoples (Montana State Constitution, 1999), and The Montana Indian Language Preservation program (2019-2020) has a biennial budget of \$750,000 which is divided into \$90,000 for each of Montana's tribes for the development of their language programs. While there is still a lot of groundwork needed to be done, the Northern Cheyenne has the resources to develop language classes which could lead to future immersion programs.

The Northern Arapaho language began its revitalization in public school in the late 1970s. By 1984, the language was being taught from kindergarten to 12th grade. However, this instruction was limited to a mere 15 minutes in elementary school, 50 minutes in junior high, and

completely optional in high school (Greymorning, 1999). Only in the last couple of decades did this format change as Arapaho Professor Stephen Greymorning and linguist Andrew Cowell began leading the Arapaho revitalization movement. Currently, Greymorning is working to secure a new generation of Arapaho speakers, whereas Cowell is attempting to preserve as much of the language as possible while the elders are still alive (Underwood, 2009). Since beginning their involvement, Greymorning has found success in adapting the Hawaiian model into his program, and Cowell has developed an intuitive online teaching program with the University of Colorado Boulder which is extremely useful for both first and second generation learners.

Unfortunately, The Southern Cheyenne and Arapaho have not received as much support as the Northern tribes. Unlike Montana, the state of Oklahoma has done little in the way of supporting the development of language programs. Furthermore, out of the 39 tribes in Oklahoma, there are currently only 10 languages being taught in high school classes, with the Cheyenne and Arapaho languages being limited to after school programs (Chew & Tennell, 2023). Before the grant money ran out, these programs used to have high participation and hosted field trips that gave students an opportunity to socialize while speaking Cheyenne or Arapaho, but now they are struggling with the lack of financial support (Lonelodge, 2019). The Cheyenne and Arapaho tribes have had to take the education of their languages into their own hands with an apprentice system where young adults learn the language from elders and teach online classes to children. Other resources involve language CDs, which can be ordered through the tribe's website, an official language app, and weekly online lessons through the Cheyenne and Arapaho Department of Education Facebook page (Cheyenne and Arapaho Tribes, 2022). The current state of the Southern Cheyenne and Arapaho language revitalization movement is therefore heavily reliant on the tribe's own efforts and community participation.

## **Purpose of the Study and Research Questions**

The purpose of this study is to understand, through autoethnography, the outcome, process, and meaning of learning my native languages and discovering how the language is tied to my Indigenous identity. By engaging with my culture through the languages and cultural practices of the Cheyenne and Arapaho, I seek to develop a stronger understanding of my identity as an Indigenous person in my time and place. In doing so, I seek to answer several questions about myself:

- What new parts of my identity will be revealed to me through learning each language, and how will my sense of identity shift when switching between them?
- How will my identity be affected by having new words to describe the things important to me?
- In what ways can my family's knowledge play a role in the revitalization of our languages?
- What elements of my culture are central to my identity for each language, and how might these elements be taught in an immersion program?

## **Theoretical Framework**

The ideologies and values which make us citizens of our tribe have historically been delegitimized by Eurocentric knowledge. For this reason, my autoethnography uses Bryan Brayboy's (2005) TribalCrit for its theoretical framework because it is rooted in reclaiming the sovereignty of Indigenous tribes by rejecting Eurocentric science and theory as the only legitimate sources of knowledge. TribalCrit is a branch of Critical Race Theory (CRT), a framework which identifies systemic racism as endemic in the United States. TribalCrit was



developed in response to the stories of Indigenous knowledge not being validated as legitimate within historically white academia.

The first and primary tenet of TribalCrit is that colonization is endemic to society; meaning European American thought and power structures have been set in place to systematically devalue any actions or beliefs which go against the dominant powers. In addition to this primary tenet, my autoethnography will primarily focus on the fifth and eighth of the nine tenets within TribalCrit.

The fifth tenet involves viewing culture, knowledge, and power through an Indigenous lens. Brayboy expresses how culture can be framed as being simultaneously fluid or dynamic, and fixed or stable. This ideology is important for my project because it acknowledges how culture can be “fixed” in how it is rooted into the land while also being “flexible” in its ability to extend itself to other contexts such as urban or academic settings. In my position as a member living several states away, I need to understand how best to engage with my culture within my place and time. This means I combined different forms of knowledge to get a more well-rounded understanding of how my culture and language are intertwined. Brayboy lists three types of knowledge: Cultural, Survival, and Book. In my autoethnography, *Cultural* refers to engaging with my language as a way of life. *Survival* would be utilizing the language to communicate with my community, and *Book* would refer to Western linguistics used to explain specific elements of the languages as well as documenting my experiences in a way that is accepted by academia.

The eighth tenet honors storytelling and oral traditions as legitimate forms of data. Brayboy expresses how there is a difference between listening and hearing stories. Listening means only permitting another to speak, whereas hearing means giving value to the stories and understanding their authority and nuance. Stories must be framed as valuable knowledge worth

trading for. Tribe members used to have to trade for knowledge such as cleaning an elder's house or feed them before they would share their stories. When listening to my father's stories, I gave him utmost respect and treated this knowledge as a valuable gift rather than something taken for granted.

## **Methodology**

I decided to write an autoethnography after having a conversation with my father. We talked about how the past few generations are being distracted from speaking our language and celebrating our heritage. But then my father spoke words which changed my perspective on the situation, "Everything is here to teach us, son. Put in a little bit of effort and that everything can change." Suddenly, I realized my own position as an Indigenous scholar gives me the ability to become involved with my tribe's language revitalization programs. My journey to reclaim my language has the potential to fill a gap of research in which there is a lack of Southern Cheyenne and Arapaho who have written a scholarly work on their own identity. Even if my contribution is small, it could lead to further research on creating curricula that is reflective of Indigenous identity as well as motivate other Indigenous scholars to reflect on their own experiences.

One of the advantages of writing an autoethnography is being able to document at my own pace. I am not swiftly and haphazardly trying to document everything all at once, rather I can take time to reflect as I go through the process and I can return to add new thoughts as they come to me. The act of writing an autoethnography is to go through a process of self-discovery, where I control how to record data, how much to write, how frequently I write, and what I am comfortable sharing.

The autoethnography is organized as journal entries starting with the date and duration studied. I studied for one to three hours a day, and tried to cover a variety of different study

methods from flashcards, writing, grammar, reading, listening, etc. Entries began with an optional notes section where I put down anything I wanted to make note of from the study session. Next is the language reflection section where I theorize about the meanings of the words and grammar I encounter. This section also acts as a place where I can develop new study methods and plan out what I want to practice the next day. The final section of the daily entries is the self-reflection. This section does not work on logic and I avoid the usage of linguistic terms here. I simply write about how I am feeling, memories which are coming back to me as I learn, and asking myself questions about my identity and heritage.

In the next phase, I reflect on the autoethnography while I am still in the process of writing it. Since learning a language is a continuous process, Chapter 3 is a two-pronged approach where I continue my reflection process while also examining my changes in identity. This reflection process also allows me to ask new questions while answering old ones as I develop more of an understanding of my heritage languages. Chapter 3 is divided into two parts, with the first half being a reflection on the process of writing a journal, whereas the second half is a personal reflection on my shifts in identity. Chapter 4 then combines the two understandings to find answers for my research questions.

### **Limitations of Study**

While an autoethnography has the advantages of being a personal collection of data, one of the biggest limitations of this research is the authenticity of my self-reflection. Since I am creating my own cultural narrative on the experience of learning heritage languages, these reflections need to be honest even if they come off as exaggerated or viewed as non-academic in the process. It would be very easy to write down exactly what the academy wants to hear, however, doing so would harm the authenticity of the experience and data. Additionally, there

are personal stories from my father which I omit because these need to stay in our family. While I am able to publish my personal shifts in identity after engaging with Indigenous knowledge, there are certain stories and experiences I do not share in my reflection of the data.

Another limitation of this format is the fact that the emotions I experience in this process cannot be fully expressed in the journal. For example, while I can describe how it feels to speak my languages, this experience is limited by my ability to express it in words. In several instances, I need to use Cheyenne or Arapaho words to express feelings which English cannot. Furthermore, certain experiences are simply oral and can only be expressed in that way, such as the tones of a song or hearing the subtle ways Cheyenne can be spoken differently.

There is also the limited timeframe in which to reflect. I needed to find time to reflect in my journal amid my daily learning. There were some days where I did not have the time to reflect and there was no way to make those days up. This led to gaps in entries during periods when events in my personal life got in the way of studying language. There were also incomplete entries when I was uncertain about my thoughts or ran out of time to write. Finishing entries later on may have taken away from my immediate reaction, but it also resulted in more natural data where I returned to complete old thoughts. There is also little in the way of guidance for learning my languages. Living away from the tribe also meant I had to search for resources on my own which cut into my time for journaling.

### **Significance of Study**

A previous history professor of mine once asked me if Indigenous languages should still be spoken and suggested a handful of linguists could preserve every Indigenous language. Reflecting on this conversation, I envisioned a future where my tribe's languages are no longer spoken and only exist inside a file cabinet. I want to tell that professor how languages are living

and breathing just as we are; how just as we grow and change, languages are ever evolving. But more than anything, I want to put my soul on display for my father to see. I want to tell him jokes in Cheyenne and Arapaho, I want to tell his stories in Cheyenne and Arapaho, and I want to express my feelings in Cheyenne and Arapaho. And then someday, I want my children to see my soul and learn their heritage and languages. So hey! Let's start speaking again!

## **CHAPTER II**

### **REVIEW OF LITERATURE**

The purpose of this review is to show how autoethnographic research is valuable towards the development of language revitalization programs. The review will cover three bodies of literature while highlighting the voices of Indigenous scholars and their movements to revitalize their cultures. Firstly, we will examine how kinship systems have been disrupted and devalued by settler colonialism. I will then provide examples of how families and community support act as the backbones of successful language revitalization programs to put into perspective how important our kinship systems are to our cultures. Finally, I will examine how autoethnography can be used by Indigenous scholars as means to find a voice within academia.

#### **Disruptions of Kinship Systems**

For Indigenous peoples, kinship systems and social relations matter just as much as genetics when it comes to identity (Grande et al., 2015, p. 115). This is because kinship systems introduce culture to new members whether they are born into the tribe or adopted into it. During pregnancy, Cheyenne mothers would sing songs to their child to familiarize them with their voice. Through singing songs, socializing with other mothers, and undergoing ceremonies, the mother's emotions develop their child's body, mind, and spirit (Killsback, 2019, p. 37). A child is born Cheyenne not just because their parents are Cheyenne, but because their spirit engaged with their mother's voice.

The influence of settler colonialism has worked to disrupt these systems of kinship and sovereignty over one's identity. Firstly, legislation such as the Dawes Act in 1887 turned land

into private property owned by men which forced extended families into male run nuclear family structures (Grande et al., 2015, p. 109). The Dawes Act was also responsible for introducing the concept of blood quantum as a criterion for being recognized as Indian which found its way into the discourse of Indigenous peoples. The question of “who is Indian” still continues to affect the ways in which the youth attempt to describe themselves in relation to one another such as using terms like “mutt” or “half” and “mixed” (Grande et al., 2015, p. 114). The Indian Civilian Act in 1924 also worked to disrupt kinship by granting US citizenship to all tribal members. This was an act of forced incorporation into the United States which threatened the sovereignty of Indigenous peoples as most did not want to be recognized as a part of the US (Grande et al., 2015, p. 109-110). These acts were made with the idea of erasure and to grant an identity rather than to respect pre-existing cultures and their ability to self-determine.

### **Identity is Made One-Sided**

In Indigenous contexts, identity is a two-sided question: “How do I see myself in relation to you? How do you see yourself in relation to me?” (Grande et al., 2015, p. 112). When two tribes would speak their languages to one another, it was understood they belonged to a different people with their own spiritual values (McCarty et al., 2006). However, Western education prefers a one-sided conversation in which the colonizer’s identity is never questioned: “Tell me who you are in the absence of me” (Grande et al., 2015, p. 112). English and Western ways of thinking are pushed as the unquestionable standard needed to achieve success in the modern world. We can see how this one-sided viewpoint affects the self-perception of Indigenous students in McCarty et al.’s (2006) ethnographic interviews at Beautiful Mountain high school. When the teachers were asked about the Navajo speaking population, they were convinced the number was around 30 to 50%. However, the students believe it to be closer to 70 to 80%. This

drastic difference is due to many students choosing to pretend they do not speak Navajo to avoid assumptions on their identity, but their peers can tell by their accent whether or not they can speak Navajo. This situation tells us of a large disconnect between the teachers and the students. On one hand, this situation tells of a social pressure to appear as a monolingual English speaker because of fear, shame, or promises of success. However, this situation is also the result of students not receiving the support they need from their educators. McCarty highlights how caring adults (both parents and some of the teachers) play a critical role in helping the students turn their self-hate into self-empowerment because they feel validated by having a person who cares. Conversely, when teachers assume their students do not care for their heritage or language, it causes the student to view it as their teachers not caring about them (McCarty et al., 2006, p. 37-39).

When we think of communication being a two-sided conversation, one where each side genuinely wants to learn about each other, we can understand how a student would feel validated having a conversation with their educators or parents about what their culture means to them, and how this might create a kinship within their community. As we move into the next body of literature, we should keep this concept of two-sidedness in mind as we view what happens when kinship is allowed to flourish in educational settings.

### **Language Revitalization and The Dedication of Parents**

The pinnacle example of language revitalization is Hawai'i. Having gone from a speaking population of under 2,000 in the mid 20th century to an estimate of 18,400 in 2016 (Wong, 2020, p. 2), the Hawaiian language has undergone a revival previously thought unimaginable. Their success is often referred to as the "Hawaiian method" and is one of the most



sought after models for language revitalization programs. However, this is not a one-size-fits-all model and has had very limited success across North American tribes. Andrew Cowell (2012) believes this is due to socio-economic and democratic factors in which the populations of individual tribes are too small to have political weight on public education, as well as there being a lack of Indigenous peoples with bachelor degrees who can support existing programs on reservations (Cowell, 2012, p. 173-176). Since Hawai'i possesses a world famous university and a large population of graduates, they had infrastructure to develop immersion schools. However, other literature would suggest the Hawaiian method can be converted to great success, but only if we understand why their method worked.

### **Parents at The Forefront**

When the Hawaiian language began its revitalization, the movement was held together by a small handful of Hawaiian families who came together under a single vision, “E Ola Ka ʻŌlelo Hawaiʻi” (The Hawaiian Language Shall Live), and they fought each year to keep the program alive in order to achieve this goal (Kawai'ae'a et al., 2007, p. 186, 196). This meant parents would labor for hours for the schools, learning Hawaiian so they could speak it at home, and would show up collectively to lobby for their program to be continued each year (Kawai'ae'a et al., 2007, p. 193, 216). Success was never guaranteed, and the families even received pushback from their own people when the movement first began. Other Hawaiians in their 20s to 40s believed Hawaiian to be a dead language (Kawai'ae'a et al., 2007, p. 194), and there was a social stigma placed on these families as onlookers would question the intelligence of their children due to them not speaking English (Wong, 2020, p. 2). As time went on, the community started to take notice and show their support and, in 1999, the program would produce its first high school graduating class. The students would move on to find success in all different occupational fields

including medical, education, business, and performing arts. Many of them would become honor students in university and, contrary to the initial concerns of parents and onlookers, every one of them were bilingual and fluent in Hawaiian and English (Kawaiyaeja et al., 2007, p. 194-195).

There were now a whole 12 years of proof which could be leveraged towards the school board for more funding and new schools. Carl Kalani Beyer (2018) identifies this phenomenon as a “counter hegemony” where the Hawai’i State Board of Education, which had historically coerced Indigenous parents into teaching their children English with promise of success and better treatment, were now under immense pressure to fund more immersion schools to meet the growing demand by parents for Indigenous language instruction (Beyer, 2018, p. 63).

Effectively, the success of the Hawaiian movement created a feedback loop where the proven success of immersion schools increases the interest and demand from parents, which then pressures the school board to keep funding and opening immersion schools. Despite very limited support at the start, the desire to keep their language alive was felt by their children, and in turn, many of them are now teaching the next generation to pass on the same respect and love they have for their culture and language.

### **When Curriculums Reflect the Language**

When I mentioned how the Hawaiian method is not a one-size-fits-all model, that is because the parents created the program to reflect Hawaiian culture. Kekoa Harman expresses how educators in the Hawaiian immersion programs are trained to use Indigenous pedagogies which are teaching methods that embody the old ways of passing down knowledge. An example of how Indigenous pedagogy is used in their program is through concepts such as *ho'olohe* (silence) and *ho'olohe lawena* (controlling one’s behaviors) which are taught in kindergarten in

order to instill proper manners into children before they learn how to speak (Barbian et al., 2017, p. 260).

There are two essential parts to the Hawaiian program's success: the dedication of parents and the incorporation of traditional knowledge into the curriculum. Therefore, in order to apply the method to another tribe, individual nations need to personalize their language revitalization programs in a way that agrees with their traditions and kinship systems.

An example of the Hawaiian method being utilized can be found in the creation of the first successful Arapaho kindergarten. When Professor Greymorning developed this immersion kindergarten, he recognized how Arapaho, being a tonal language, does not fit into traditional Western curriculums, and instead focused on having students master speaking before they even begin reading and writing (Underwood, 2009, p. 12). Even though the kindergarten was finding success in this shift, Greymorning (1999) would receive pushback similar to what we saw with the Hawaiian movement as parents argued their children would be better off learning Spanish instead (p. 12). However, after learning about the Hawaiian immersion schools and witnessing their practices, Greymorning realized how important it is for children to be exposed to their culture from an early age. He thus began a Mother/Child Program in which elder women would teach Arapaho parents some of the language so that they can speak it to their newborns. By the time the children were in kindergarten, they were already speaking the language and learned it in a way which reflected old kinship systems (Greymorning, 1999, p. 15). Rather than copy the Hawaiian method 1:1, Greymorning chose to develop his program in a way which respects how Arapaho elders have traditionally passed on their knowledge.

We can see how the Hawaiian method was personalized for the Northern Arapaho tribe through the development of their own Indigenous pedagogy, and how parents became involved

in the education of their children's heritage language. As we move into the final body of literature, let us keep in mind just how critical a role family and community play in the passing of cultural knowledge, and how curricula in immersion programs can reflect the traditions of their tribe.

### **Autoethnography as a Two-Sided Conversation**

Institutions have historically misrepresented Indigenous cultures and our voices are often silenced in the vein of a one-sided conversation where the colonizer tells us who we are. Autoethnography is a format which allows Indigenous peoples to provide their own counter narratives within academia. Through providing our own testimonies, we can frame kinship, community, language, cultural knowledge and traditions, sovereignty, and self-determination as all factors of Indigenous identity. The personal nature of autoethnography also presents the researcher's lived experiences within their time and place which offers a counter to the homogeneous assumptions about Indigenous peoples.

### **Finding a Voice**

We can see all these qualities in a linguistic autoethnographic study by Kari Chew, Nitana Greendeer, and Caitlin Keliiaa (2015) which brings together three Indigenous perspectives on what heritage language means to each of these individuals. Firstly, Chew shares their experience hearing their language for the first time in a college internship where they learned from a fluent elder. For the first time, Chew was able to say "I am Chickasaw" in Chikashshanompa' which became a life changing event for them as it made them conscious of how closely related language is to their cultural identity (Chew et al., 2015, p. 79). However,

when Chew further pursued their language, they experienced having their own knowledge of Chickasaw disregarded by a professor who preferred to tell others about Indigenous cultures than actually listen (Chew et al., 2015, p. 80). In this instance, we can see how autoethnography is used by Chew to show their experience reclaiming their culture, but also using this methodology to expose academia for its ignorance of Indigenous perspectives.

### **Community Over Distance**

Another aspect of autoethnography is how it allows individuals to express how they connect with their culture regardless of the distance to their tribe. Natalie Baloy (2011) did a study on the urban population of aboriginal peoples in Canada and how they engage with their languages despite the distance. Baloy found that individuals would study language for a variety of reasons such as to know the meanings of their stories or songs, to speak with their community, to negotiate their Indigenous identity by being able to introduce themselves, or for spiritual engagement by keeping a connection to their homeland (Baloy, 2011, p. 522). Cheyenne scholar Leo Killsback (2019) uses the term “sacred sovereignty,” to describe a person’s ability to uphold the spiritual beliefs of their nation’s spiritual practices. Sacred sovereignty can be strengthened by cultural engagement, but it can also be threatened when people either lose access to their culture, or start to no longer believe in their sacred practice (Pewewardy, 2021, p. 69).

In Greendeer’s autoethnography (Chew et al., 2015) we can see how they became conscious of their sacred sovereignty after leaving for an urban teaching job. Initially, Greendeer’s main interest for learning Wôpanâôt8âôk was to get a degree rather than the prospect of passing on the language. However, after graduation, Greendeer took on an afterschool program for urban Indigenous youth and realized that many of the youth belonged to tribes outside their state. While Greendeer grew up surrounded by her community and culture,

many others do not have access to the same resources, especially in urban areas where their access to nature and cultural practices are limited. Greendeer recognized how fortunate they were to grow up surrounded by their community and culture and ultimately made the decision to pursue a degree close to home with the goal to help with the development of future Wôpanâôk immersion programs (Chew et al., 2015, p.81). Distance made Greendeer realize the true value of their community and now views success in aiding their community rather than seeking Western ideas of success.

In Keliiaa's autoethnography (Chew et al., 2015), we learn how physically hearing their language away from their home gave them a sense of community. Keliiaa learned Portuguese and traveled overseas to see their distant relatives. Upon leaving, Keliiaa's great aunt pointed to their veins and said in Portuguese, "The same blood that runs through your veins runs through mine" (Chew et al., 2015, p. ). It was then Keliiaa realized how language has the power to connect families over thousands of miles, and this power could be used for endangered languages. Keliiaa's grandparents speak Wa:šiw and Numu yadua, so Keliiaa decided to write a historiography of Wa:šiw reclamation efforts, and later on took a class for Wa:šiw. Despite being the only Indigenous person in their Wa:šiw class, Keliiaa expressed, "I did not feel isolated in my daily language exploration. Instead I felt empowered because my campus finally reflected what mattered to me. As someone who lives hundreds of miles away from my community, I felt even closer" (Chew et al., 2015, p. ). Just by having language present, Keliiaa was able to have a connection to both their Portuguese heritage across the world, but also back home through hearing her grandfather's language. With this autoethnography, we can see how important language is for retaining kinship and Indigenous identity and how Indigenous scholars take it upon themselves to keep these parts of their identities spoken.

## Doing The Work

As Chew et al.'s (2015) study showed, each of the Indigenous scholars were able to express how language allows them to have a voice and connection to their culture in a way which allows them to give back. However, this also does not have to be at the scholarly level. I want to highlight a recent interview series with the Cheyenne and Arapaho language apprentices. These are young members of my tribe who decided to take on a complete lifestyle change by becoming a part of a Master-Apprentice program. The benefits of these types of programs, as Baloy (2011) points out, is the long-lasting relationship between young adults and elders who form a strong social community together through passing on language (Baloy, 2011, p. 536-537). In one of the interviews, Cheyenne Apprentice, Jandra Levi, and Arapaho Apprentice, Jeff Black, both express their desire to keep their languages spoken. Levi states, "helping our younger generation build the knowledge with language and actually keeping it alive is one of my reasons why it's important to me" (Lonelodge, 2023, p. 7). Black similarly sees the danger in language loss, "what we're lacking is speakers, we're losing speakers all the time, they're all elders and we're like the final plague, it's what we got left and if we don't do something we won't have it" (Lonelodge, 2023, p. 7).

We can also see how both of these apprentices see the value in creating community, as Black finds satisfaction when teaching classes and sees the children remember and use Arapaho, and Levi expresses how fulfilling it is to speak Cheyenne with their coworkers and just talk about how their weekend went or any type of casual conversation (Lonelodge, 2023, p. 8). These interviews show a dedication as well as a hopefulness for the future as Black says, "I want to create first language speakers where their first language from birth is Arapaho or Cheyenne and completely turn this around and I know that it's possible after being here" (Lonelodge, 2023, p. ).

These types of testimony put into perspective how important languages are to Indigenous peoples, and our need to be in community with one another.

### **Summary**

This literature review shows how by retaining our kinship system and working in community, we can achieve success with the revitalization of our languages. However, Indigenous peoples need to be open and honest with our families, our communities, our scholars, and ourselves over what we want from a revitalization program and what values are essential to pass on through our languages. I believe testimony, autoethnography, and simply having two-sided conversation with community members, can lead us to developing successful immersion programs. Therefore, there is a large need for more research from Indigenous perspectives on our personal and cultural connections to language.



**CHAPTER III**  
**EXPERIENCE AND REFLECTION**  
**ON LEARNING CHEYENNE AND ARAPAHO**

The process of journaling my daily usage of Cheyenne and Arapaho has challenged me to examine how I interact with my heritage as an adult. Prior to this experience, I did not have a place where I could write about my culture, nor was engaging with my language a daily practice. This new environment allowed me to reflect on who I am and how I want to engage with my culture in the future.

My journal totaled over 70 pages and was recorded between late January, 2024 to early April, 2024. I chose to divide my reflection of this journey into two sections: the first section covered my experience learning to speak Cheyenne and Arapaho and how my understanding of the languages has evolved, and the second section examined the various themes I identified in my journal and examined them through the lens of TribalCrit.

**Learning to Speak Cheyenne**

I decided to learn Cheyenne first since it is the language I am the most familiar with. In my early journal entries, I reflected on the bits of Cheyenne I learned from my father. One memory I recalled was when my father taught me how the word “Yes” is different for men and women. For men, we say “Haaahe,” whereas women say “Heehe’e.” When I began using the Official Cheyenne and Arapaho language app, these were the first words I recognized immediately.

While learning how to introduce myself through the app, I also wrote about my early observations of the basic grammar. One aspect I recognized is how Cheyenne does not separate

the speaker and listener from their identity or actions. For example, Cheyenne has three different affixes which give possession to a word: “Na-” refers to the speaker, “Ne-” refers to the listener, and “He-” is used to describe in the third person. I found this grammar to be beautiful because when I say, “Natséhestahe naa nahetaevo’eve,” I am literally saying, “I am Cheyenne and I am Arapaho.” These are the types of connections I want to make between my language and my identity. Being able to verbally describe myself as a part of an identity, an action, or a feeling, has given me a whole new world view through my language, and it motivates me to continue learning more words, grammar, and ways to understand my language.

I decided to end each of my entries with the phrase “Nèstaeváhosevoo mátsé” meaning, “I will see you later” in Cheyenne. I would also incorporate phrases such as “péhvevoona’o” (good morning) at the beginning of entries to begin incorporating the language itself into my journaling. As I continued on, I would do similar exercises and challenges to expand on my usage of the language.

### **Challenging Myself**

Outside of my regular vocab study, I could think up weekly goals to challenge myself. Some of these challenges were learning pronunciation, creating sticky notes to put on items in my room, learning new phrases to speak with my father, and reading a story without looking up the words. I would also research new ways of studying and incorporate them into my daily routine. One of these was “Total Physical Response” which mimics how a child learns their first language through engaging the body to act out new vocab words. For example, saying “Naamehne” while walking in place, and then speeding up when saying “Naamemeohe.” By embodying the movement of the actions, I have had a lot more success in memorizing words.

Later on into my studies, I decided to start incorporating daily reading and writing exercises because I found myself double checking my spelling very often when typing words in my journal. Part of the challenge was due to Cheyenne having many voiceless vowels which can make sounding out words difficult. After a few weeks, I started feeling somewhat confident in writing out Cheyenne words, but I still have a long way to go.

### **Discovering Resources**

While the official app was very useful for daily exercises, I eventually wanted to seek out explanations of the grammar as well as other possible study materials. I started using the online Northern Cheyenne Dictionary for explanations of words, whereas for grammar, I initially used Wikipedia which had some explanations sourced from a Cheyenne textbook. Thankfully, I eventually discovered the website, “[cheyennelanguage.org](http://cheyennelanguage.org)” which is a collection of online learning resources all gathered onto one page. It has links to flashcard decks, online listening practice, stories written in Cheyenne, dictionaries, a downloadable keyboard, and an up-to-date PDF grammar book with very clear explanations of the grammar. The website also taught me proper pronunciation and, after a few days of practice, I could read Cheyenne aloud. This one-stop-shop website was one of the most valuable resources because it provided links to whatever type of practice I needed.

I would later discover Cheyenne and Arapaho Productions (2024) which is a TV station owned and operated in Oklahoma by members of my tribe, and it was here I found several video series and animations for children learners. One of the videos taught me how to describe the weather and so I made it that week’s goal to describe the winter season outside my house. I would also engage with animated content which teaches simple vocab such as numbers and

animals. I would replay these videos multiple times and they were a good way to build up my memorization.

When reflecting on these resources in my journal, I wrote about how much love and dedication I felt from my tribe. They are doing whatever they can to save our languages, and it motivated me to think of ways to help support them on my end. I wrote about the possibility of making video series on grammar after I become fluent, or creating a children's book with my father who once talked about writing a story about a kid who goes into another dimension and gets to meet some of the greatest Cheyenne warriors. Creating something useful or motivating to future learners will be one of my next goals going forward.

### **Difficulties and Adjustments**

There were several difficulties I encountered during the process of learning my languages and documenting my journey which required me to shift the way I studied or recorded data. One adjustment I had to make was to have consistency in my daily study schedule. My original daily routine was to practice flashcards and then begin different types of study such as listening or reading practice. However, as I continued, I wanted to incorporate ways to practice while engaging with my culture such as beading with my father or naming the objects in my room. Shifting my studies in this direction began making my usage of language more natural and eventually I started getting used to just speaking Cheyenne instead of English for certain activities like the names of my bead colors or the weather outside.

Adjusting the way I engaged with the language also meant changing the way I documented my time doing it. When I first began journaling, I would begin my study sessions by timing myself and then recording how long I practiced at the start of every journal entry. However, after about two months, my activities became less about setting aside time to study and

more about incorporating my language into my life daily, and so quantifying my study time became inconsistent and felt arbitrary because certain activities would happen throughout the whole day. I decided to ultimately remove this part from my journaling because it felt limiting to be studying within a window of time. While this does mean I do not have quantifiable data to show an estimate of how long I spent studying, its removal improved my mind set when engaging with my language.

I also had instances where certain entries were left unfinished because of events in my personal life, or due to fatigue from not getting enough rest. I would either return to these entries later to finish my thoughts or I would continue these discussions in later entries.

Balancing two languages also became a challenge once I began incorporating Arapaho into my daily study. Since I now had to divide my time between the languages, I needed to adjust how to interact with each one in a meaningful way every day. This would mean either practicing the same activity twice with each language, such as flashcards, or finding ways to incorporate both into the same activity such as Total Physical Response where I would jump between the Cheyenne and Arapaho words while acting them out. Finding a flow between the languages was a bit of a challenge, but felt rewarding to study both at the same time.

### **Learning to Speak Arapaho**

When it came time to begin learning Arapaho, I was initially limited because my father speaks a lot more Cheyenne than Arapaho, and the Arapaho he does know is mostly from songs. Thankfully, since Arapaho and Cheyenne are both a part of the Algonquian language family, I found many similarities right out the gate when using the Cheyenne and Arapaho app. For example, “possessives” in Arapaho are used in a similar way to Cheyenne, but they are suffixes

rather than affixes. One fact I also knew going in was how Arapaho is a tonal language meaning a lot of meaning of the words hinges on the way it is spoken. With this in mind, I prioritized speaking and listening over reading and writing practice.

When it came to finding resources for Arapaho, I was already aware of the Arapaho Language Project by the University of Colorado Boulder (2024). It is easily one of the most intuitive online language programs I have ever seen. The webpage has access to a series of lessons that walk a new speaker through the language and is made accessible for all ages by offering simplified explanations of the grammar alongside more detailed explanations. It also has pronunciation practice with audio, curriculum resources, stories with translations, and themed vocab for different locations and social situations. I had every resource I needed to get started, so I began studying right away.

I did search for other possible resources to get more immersion practice, and I was surprised to discover an Arapaho dub for Disney's *Bambi*. Resources such as these are invaluable because they offer an immersive way to learn. I decided to challenge myself by watching the film daily and trying to memorize every line from the film. When skipping the non-speaking parts, the film is short enough to watch in around 40 minutes making it a good amount of time for a study session. That being said, we need more resources like this and I really wish there were more speaking lines or more dubs I could watch because this was one of the quickest ways to acquire new words. I am left imagining the possibility of there being a dub for an entire season of a cartoon and just such a resource like that could help both Arapaho and Cheyenne.

Although I did not have as much time to learn Arapaho as Cheyenne during this project, I am glad I decided to learn both languages because I found a door into two amazing cultures, both

of which, as we will see in the next section, have given me new perspectives on how I understand my Indigenous identity.

### **Reflecting on Language, Learning, and Identity**

This section of Chapter III describes four themes elicited from my personal narrative after re-reading my journal through the lens of TribalCrit. These themes were developed as a means to understand how speaking my heritage languages has affected my identity as an Indigenous person. Furthermore, this is a narrative framed in my time and place meaning my experience with this phenomenon is wholly my own.

#### **Hahóo (Agreement/Thank You)**

Early in the process, I began to feel validation hearing Cheyenne words I recognized, such as the different ways to say “yes” for both men and women. The more I thought of the word, “validation,” however, I started to think that the experience would be better described as “Hahóo.” The word, Hahóo means “we are in agreement” and can be used as a way of saying “thank you.” My father and I began using this word in our daily life and it has a very meaningful effect on how we interact. For instance, when I lend him money and he pays me back, we say, “Hahóo!” When we want to thank each other for cleaning up the house, we say, “Hahóo!” When we say something the other agrees with, we say, “Hahóo!” It is also an intertribal word meaning it is used between multiple tribes. In Arapaho it is pronounced “hohou,” and is used in much the same way. Hahóo is also a way for my father and me to connect without relying on English. In just a single phrase, we both understand the context. This works for other words such as “Mesehe!” which is used to ask a group of people to “come and eat!” Nothing more needs to be said. There is a universal understanding to Hahóo, and learning how to say it with my chest and

in community with my father has had a profound feeling on myself, a feeling which is both thankful and agreeable.

The fifth and eighth tenets of TribalCrit frame Indigenous identity as flexible and our knowledge as valuable. When I say “Hahóo” or any other Cheyenne word, it carries an identity and value which is parallel to my white identity. I recognized this connection after finding a recording of a lecture by Richard Littlebear who said, “You know who you are in both worlds...Cheyenne is not a classroom issue, it is an identity issue. It is about who we are...The Cheyenne side satisfies the spiritual side of who I am...There is no opposition between the two identities in my mind” (Cheyenne and Arapaho Productions, 2014, 24:30). The first thought that came into my mind when I heard these words was, “Hahóo!” Littlebears’s words gave me a new perspective on how knowing my language is a step into a second world, one which validates my father’s knowledge as a medicine with the power to satisfy my spirit. Furthermore, I am not going to war with my white identity but claiming an identity which has become lost to me over the years.

I have this memory from when I was in high school. My father came into my room, looked around at all my belongings, and with anger he said aloud, “It’s all white! White, white, white!” I remember feeling a deep shame in that moment, but did not know why. With perspective now, I have become conscious of how my white identity has been in conflict with my Indigenous identity, and why this internal battle needs to end. I have no enemies, rather I am speaking my languages so my identities can stand in conjunction with each other; so they can tell one another, “Hahóo!”

### **Claiming an Identity**



Much of the self-reflection sections were spent remembering. I have memories of being in tipis set up on my school's field, memories of my father and uncles singing songs during barbeques at my cousin's house, and memories of experiencing a sweat lodge. Having grown up away from tribe, my Indigenous identity was reliant on my father's side of the family and how much I was able to interact with them. When I was younger, the opportunities to see my cousins were abundant and there were brief periods of time where they either went to the same school or lived within walking distance. However, as I grew older, my ability to engage with my Indigenous identity slowly disappeared when my cousins and uncles moved away. As an adult, the amount I have engaged with my culture has been very minimal and is usually done with activities such as burning cedar or praying to Creator, whereas beading, prayer meetings, songs, and family meet ups all became missing in my life. When viewing this shift in my cultural engagement through the lens of TribalCrit, I realized how the stability and rootedness of my identity has become threatened in the absence of family. However, just as identity can be stable and rooted in community and land, TribalCrit also views identity as fluid and flexible. After studying my language these past few months, I have begun to recognize how language can act as a flexible way to engage with my culture no matter where I am in the world. This is thanks to two important factors: language can be used to claim identity, and language cannot be taken away once it is known.

The ability to verbally claim an identity, to self-determine, is powerful. When I began this project, I had a lot of self-doubt brought on by a notion of feeling fake. I knew right from the start I wanted to explore my heritage and learn more about who I am, but also felt as if I was not "Indian enough." After beginning my journey, my father told me, "You are Indian, no matter what anyone tells you." These were the words I really needed; words which gave me an identity.

He has told me similar things in the past, and then I became them. “You are an artist” he said one day when we were beading, and so I became an artist. As I began to learn more about my language, I realized how the simple act of introducing myself in Cheyenne or Arapaho has allowed me to claim who I am. This happened recently with nature. For my mother’s birthday, we went to the zoo and my father spoke to the eagles. He told them, “Tsetsètähase,” to let them know who he is. Now I can say, “Tsetsètähase” as well; I can introduce myself to the animals, to the earth, to myself.

In one of my journal entries, I wrote how “speaking Cheyenne gives me a sense of self which cannot be taken away.” These words come from a piece of wisdom my father gave me: “Your knowledge, your education, is the one thing that can never be taken away from you.” I could lose everything I own and everyone I love tomorrow, but I would still be able to say who I am. I am Quinn Magpie. Beaver Clan, Bow String Society. Many Indians cannot name their clan or society. I can, and I will never forget it.

### **Living Through the Languages**

In my very first entry, I wrote about a feeling of nostalgia when I began listening to spoken Cheyenne audio. It took me back to an early memory when my father taught me my first two Cheyenne words, “vohpoma’òhtse” and “mehnemenòtse” meaning salt and pepper. These were the first words in my household which I knew by a second name, and thus, a second way of describing the world.

A large part of this journey was learning how to use my languages to describe the world around me. Through this process of renaming my surroundings, I engaged with three different types of knowledge. The fifth tenet of TribalCrit frames three types of knowledge: Cultural,

Survival, and Book, which are used by Indigenous peoples to navigate and make sense of the world around them. I will go over each type of knowledge individually and how I used them.

***Cultural: Beadwork, Payers, and Language***

Cultural knowledge refers to how we gain spiritual fulfillment from our interactions with our heritage and cultural practices. For language, I view cultural knowledge as those moments when words are used during prayers, songs, and when expressing feelings which can only be understood in one's heritage language.

Recently, my father and I have gotten back into beading and it's become a bonding experience between the two of us. I have been having a lot of fun figuring out new designs and my father has been getting his speed back and can now make about one keychain a day. Beading has also become an avenue to practice my heritage languages, Cheyenne and Arapaho. By making thematic designs, such as depicting seasons or feelings, it can become very easy to build a vocab that can be used to describe it. A more recent one I did was called "Eaeneve" which means "winter" and, for every bead, I would repeat words and phrases used to describe to the season such as "Ehoo'koho" (it is raining). My father says that when you look at beadwork, it takes you back to the time you made it. In that way, I wanted to turn these new words into memories so I will never forget them. But more than that, I also wanted to remember how I felt in those moments, so I would occasionally say, "Napèhevetano" (I am happy).

My family has a tradition of burning cedar. Whenever we pray or leave on a trip, we burn a cedar wrap and use an eagle feather to cedar ourselves off. I started burning cedar before practicing my language on certain days, and it quickly became just a normal part of my day to give a short prayer to Creator. I may only have a handful of words right now, but I can say

“Hahóo!” to Creator for the beautiful day in our language. It is a type of connection which fills my soul and can only be experienced through knowing how to speak.

*Survival: A Shift in Daily World View*

For languages, survival knowledge refers to how people use communication and observation in order to navigate and survive. However, even just the simple action of saying “péhevevoona’o” (good morning) is a form of survival language. I view survival knowledge as how we navigate the physical and social worlds around us. In several parts of my journal, I expressed a displeasure in relying on English for definitions and felt a strong need to move towards learning through immersion. This meant finding new ways to bring the language into my physical surroundings as well as the way I socialize.

One activity I did was creating a more personalized picture deck for my studies. For example, one of my vocab words is “oeškēso” meaning “dog.” I chose to sub out the English word for a picture of my dog, Panda. Having a familiar photo meant I could create a personal association between the Cheyenne word and the dog who is currently sleeping on my bed. At times, I would also point to objects in my room that appear in my vocab. Whenever I saw a greeting I would say it to my dog, and if I got an action, I would act it out. As I began to acquire new words in this way, I realized the world around me began to have new names. On my desk, I have my “nomenévetohko” I use for drinking coffee, and the walls of my room are “eota’tavo.” I do not need to be able to describe these things in English anymore, they just are as they are.

Arapaho Professor Greymoning (1999) calls this a “multifaceted approach” in which you make language appear everywhere around you such as media, objects, books, and audio. When I watched Bambi in Arapaho, I noticed how on multiple viewings, I acquired the words used in the film very fast because I could attach them to the scene and what is happening in them. The word,

nii'ooke' means "good morning" and is used all throughout the scene where Bambi walks through the forest with his mom. Furthermore, the parents of the animals in the forest greet Bambi with nii'ooke', and then their children greet Bambi with nii'ooke'. Another example is with nii'ehiin meaning "bird" and is Bambi's first word. Having this natural way to learn vocabulary has made me realize just how natural language could be learned so long as the environment promotes the usage of the language.

### ***Book Knowledge and Coexisting Identities***

Book knowledge for language refers to how academia and Western linguistics can be used to help break down how a language functions. When I stated earlier that my Indigenous identity does not stand in conflict my white identity, this is how my two worlds can assist one another to gain a better understanding of themselves. This means utilizing grammar books, new flash card technology, and linguistic classes to gain a deeper idea of how Cheyenne and Arapaho function as languages, and how to explain the language to another learner.

One instance where survival and book knowledges worked together was when I challenged myself to read a Cheyenne story without looking up any definitions. I went into the exercise expecting to not understand any of the words and was looking for immersion practice. However, when I saw the word, "Éhéstahe," I knew it sounded very familiar. After a moment, I realized it was the Cheyenne word, "Nahéstahe" which is used to describe where the speaker is from. My book knowledge recognized the grammar from when I studied "possessives" in the online grammar book, whereas my survival knowledge was flexed by recognizing familiar sounds. I experienced joy and validation knowing my studies had gone somewhere and that I was making progress.

So long as I allow all three knowledges to assist one another, I will be able to learn much faster without feeling conflicted or overly reliant on one type of knowledge.

### **Regaining Warmth**

Towards the end of my journaling, I began to feel a nostalgic warmth from my father. I would listen more closely to his stories and I could feel a lot of pride returning to the both of us. I realized that the more I engaged with my culture, the more my father remembered his love of being Cheyenne. Not only are his stories told with a new feeling of warmth, I can feel myself truly *hearing* his voice now when I listen to him speak.

I chose the tenet of TribalCrit with my father in mind because I value his knowledge as a guideline to my life. Storytelling teaches us how to be, and over these past few months, I have opened my ears up to truly hear and engage with my father's stories. I can sense the warmth behind his words and I find myself engrossed in their morals. There is a story I have heard many times growing up. It is about a young man who becomes separated from his tribe due to his cousin's jealousy. The young man eventually becomes the chief of his own tribe, and then grows old with a close friend after passing on his duty. I realized how this story is a roadmap to life, my life. It teaches how brothers must not fight, about taking on the duties of a chief, about visiting and taking care of loved ones, and about allowing oneself to grow old and value their friendships. It may have taken a while to come to this revelation, but my father's knowledge is significantly more valuable to me than anything I have ever learned in school. Nothing about academia has given me the warmth or the morals which my father's stories have. It is a warmth I want to pass on, and cannot see a future without.

In line with storytelling as knowledge, I wish to end Chapter 3 with a post from my journal which I feel the need to share. In this post, I am reflecting on my relationship with

whiteness and how institutions have worked to devalue my father's knowledge. The words below represent how I view knowledge now and the reason why I continue to seek knowledge, both spiritual and academic:

Monday, February 19th

From my point of view, my father is very intelligent and full of knowledge. He has so much spiritual energy, love, endless ideas, and the warmth of a father. What have I achieved in comparison? Good grades and a degree? NO! I earned my father's respect by taking my education further. By earning it, I showed him his success as the parent who raised me. I may not have realized this at the time, in fact, me earning the title of school historian in high school was out of spite. My father reminded me of this recently when he told me, "I asked you one day what you learned in school, and you said, 'ya know dad, I learned absolutely nothing at school today,' and after that you began kicking butt." My idea of success was the same as my father's at that time. I was chasing academia as a means to acquire this picturesque ideal of intelligence. However, what I was met with was a bunch of pieces of paper and I forgot who I was or why I went on this path to begin with.

I see the merit now in having my education and what it means to my family. I acquired something my father was denied because of who he was, and that alone makes my degrees invaluable, not what's written on them.

## CHAPTER IV

### CONCLUSIONS AND FURTHER RESEARCH

To conclude my journey, I now return to my research questions to understand how my perspectives have changed, as well as give recommendations for other scholars interested in pursuing this type of study.

#### Research Questions

**Q1)** What new parts of my identity will be revealed to me through learning each language, and how will my sense of identity shift when switching between them?

I can say Magpie naheševehe, “My name is Magpie.” I can write it, I can read it, and I can pronounce it. But what matters to me is the spiritual meaning of being able to say who I am in my language because the name Magpie reflects my family.

I have brought up my father a lot throughout my writing because he represents a large part of who I am. I grew up listening to these stories about Cheyenne warriors, stories of young men coming of age and becoming chiefs, and stories about the animals and learning from their morals. One story, however, is about the great race which our family name, Magpie, gains its sacred meaning from. All the animals were racing to determine if we would be allowed to eat meat. The Magpie won the race, and so the Cheyenne people would be allowed to hunt buffalo. My name has a meaning to it, but that meaning could also mean nothing if I do not carry it with me. So rather than discovering a new part of my Cheyenne identity, I would say learning Cheyenne has given me a new perspective on what was already there.

I can also say, Magpie nee’eesih’inoo. My Arapaho side was, and in many ways still is, a mystery to me. My father is more familiar with his Cheyenne heritage, but he has told me the



Arapaho are very strict ceremonial people. There are many Arapaho stories I want to hear, and while my time learning Arapaho was limited, being able to claim my identity in Arapaho and to learn to hear the language has given me a harmonious feeling. The Arapaho are allies with the Cheyenne; we both work together, and there's something I love about that connection between the cultures.

**Q2)** How will my identity be affected by having new words to describe the things important to me?

The world around me now operates under a multilingual perspective. I can no longer know the objects, expressions, colors, seasons, or anything without also knowing there is another way to describe them. Even if I do not know the words, I can still perceive how the world around me can be described in Cheyenne or Arapaho.

I spoke in Chapter 3 about how I knew the words for salt and pepper, but there's another word I learned when I was young which means everything to me, Ma'heo'o. The word itself is untranslatable, but it can be understood as Creator. I do not consider myself a religious person, but I do pray very often to Ma'heo'o and the Four Directions. Since starting this journey, praying has become a common practice I do almost daily now. Being able to thank creator in my language, to say, "Hahóo Ma'heo'o" with my chest has given me a spiritual clarity that is difficult to describe in words. But I can say, I see myself as much more spiritually connected than ever before.

**Q3)** In what ways can my family's knowledge play a role in the revitalization of our languages?

A couple months ago, my father told me these words, “we need to wake up and stop wanting; to just smile and be happy for our body, for our life, and to let the spirits guide us through the day.” I have thought back to these words many times throughout my journal and have realized a bit of an irony. I have been so concerned with writing and trying to articulate my experience in the best way possible throughout my journal and in Chapter 3, yet simply being happy, being present and speaking is the greatest insight, and it is something which all learners need to prioritize. Smile, invent jokes, **PLAY WITH THE LANGUAGE!** is what we gotta do. This is a piece of knowledge I want to share because it comes from my father’s soul as well as my own trial and error of learning two languages amid balancing school. Be happy for the gift of language, and use it as a means to connect with each other and the world around us.

**Q4)** What elements of my culture are central to my identity for each language, and how might these elements be taught in an immersion program?

One of the most central parts of my Cheyenne and Arapaho identity is the importance of giving back to the land. I have always been taught to give back whenever I take from the earth. When I take from a plant or when I offer a prayer, I give a piece of myself such as a hair from the top of my head or a fingernail clipping. There is an importance to give back in our culture, which is an aspect children should be taught at an early age. In an immersion program, Indigenous pedagogy could be developed around this aspect such as learning how to say thanks to the earth in Cheyenne or Arapaho.

Another large part of my identity is found through my cultural practices such as beading. Beading is a calming activity for me and it allows me to depict the world around me. It can also

be used to teach a child the names of colors, or animals, or different types of bird feathers, and to just be expressive and make fun memories with their culture.

I also found that speaking Cheyenne with my father has opened me up to much of his knowledge. I am convinced that anyone who begins to learn their languages will gain the same appreciation for their family, and in turn their family will see it and feel loved. The more I validate my father, the more he remembers to love himself. Having family relationships is a core part of revitalizing our languages, and if we can uphold our old kinship systems, if we can tell stories, sing songs in our languages, then I believe children will hear these voices and speak back. The wisdom I started this study with remains what I believe. When we tell stories, we open our hearts up for the other person to hear. By seeing our hearts, they learn to listen, and then to share in the same way.

### **Further Research and Recommendations**

The primary objective of this research was to begin speaking my heritage languages with my father and developing a new understanding of my identity. However, one of my initial plans for this research was to also take weekly online classes provided by the Cheyenne and Arapaho Department of Education. This would have given me a perspective on speaking with other members of my tribe, but unfortunately the classes were unavailable at this time of year. A future autoethnographic study focused on the experience of developing a community over online classes would be an area of research with a lot of potential.

Another plan I had for this research was to develop a way for my family to have an open dialogue about our cultural identities. One idea was to have a whiteboard in the living room where family members could write down thoughts, messages, and greetings in Cheyenne or Arapaho. However, my brothers were preoccupied with their own school and work and lived

away from home, so my interactions with family were mostly speaking with my father and listening to his stories. I believe a group autoethnographic study featuring testimony from an individual's entire family would provide a unique perspective.

While I did appreciate the experience learning two languages at once, it was definitely overwhelming during the short timeframe. I would recommend those with multiple heritage languages interested in doing this type of study to either just learn one, or learn the first language much earlier in the year. Even if you do not have a proper setup for data collection at that stage, learning some of the language ahead of time would create more time for engaging with the second language.

A final recommendation is to experiment with different forms of data collection. While online journaling worked well, my handwritten notes felt a lot more personal in the few instances I chose to do so. Other types of data collection such as recordings or drawings might provide a more accurate representation of experiences which words cannot express. However, I would recommend keeping a consistent schedule to balance practice and data collection as both are very time-consuming activities.

### **Final Thoughts and Future Ambitions**

The end of this study does not mark the end of my engagement with my heritage languages, rather this is just the beginning of a lifelong process. Over the next few years, I will work towards achieving fluency in both languages, and to become an active part of the Cheyenne and Arapaho revitalization programs. This means developing new resources for learners, as well as developing platforms for new speakers to connect with one another, especially for those in my

situation who live across the country from their tribal land. I will also continue my journaling, but this time for my own self-discovery rather than for research data. This process has taught me how empowering it is to reflect on your own culture, and I want to continue to express my feelings on my languages through writing and remembering.

To any Indigenous researchers reading this, I ask you to please begin speaking your heritage languages. Your speaking voice is valuable to your identity and tribe. Never let anyone stop you from learning, nor call your language “dead.” You have a responsibility to keep it alive, SO SPEAK! Even the simple act of learning to introduce yourself, to say you belong to your tribe, will mean the world to you. Tell nature, your family, and Creator who you are.

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