

# Indigenous Language Revitalization and Applied Linguistics: Conceptualizing an Ethical Space of Engagement Between Academic Fields

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Article abstract

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## **Indigenous Language Revitalization and Applied Linguistics: Conceptualizing an Ethical Space of Engagement Between Academic Fields**

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### **Abstract**

This conceptual paper examines the relationship between two academic areas: applied linguistics and Indigenous language revitalization. While the two domains have shared interests, they tend to operate separately. This paper examines: 1) possible reasons for this separateness; 2) mutually beneficial reasons to be in closer conversation and 3) changes necessary for the creation of an ethical space of engagement (Ermine, 2007) between these academic areas. We write from distinct positions: Belinda, a nēhiyaw woman working in Indigenous language resurgence and Andrea, a white settler woman working in language issues related to settler-colonialism. Drawing from our joint and individual experiences, we explore how these research fields can complement each other as well as intersect to create richer interdisciplinary knowledge.

### **Résumé**

Cet article conceptuel examine la relation entre deux domaines académiques : la linguistique appliquée et la revitalisation des langues autochtones. Bien que les deux domaines aient des intérêts communs, ils ont tendance à fonctionner séparément. Cet article examine : 1) des raisons possibles de cette séparation; 2) des raisons mutuellement bénéfiques d'être en conversation plus étroite et 3) des changements nécessaires à la création d'un espace éthique d'engagement (Ermine, 2007) entre ces domaines académiques. Nous écrivons à partir de positions distinctes: Belinda, une femme nēhiyaw travaillant dans la résurgence des langues autochtones et Andrea, une femme de race blanche travaillant sur des questions langagières liées au colonialisme de peuplement. À partir de nos expériences communes et individuelles, nous explorons comment ces domaines de recherche peuvent se compléter et se croiser pour créer des connaissances interdisciplinaires plus riches.

## **Indigenous Language Revitalization and Applied Linguistics: Conceptualizing an Ethical Space of Engagement Between Academic Fields**

### **Applied Linguistics and Indigenous Language Revitalization**

If we want to create a different future, we need to live a different present, so that the present can fully marinate, influence and create different futurities. If we want to live in a different present, we have to center Indigeneity and allow it to change us. (Simpson, 2017, p. 20)

This conceptual article began as a conference paper for a symposium designed to explore the relationship between the fields of Indigenous language revitalization (ILR) and applied linguistics. The panel was part of the annual conference organized by the Canadian Association of Applied Linguistics. Our contribution to the panel was sparked by our experiences conducting Indigenous language revitalization research together and also from listening to a University of Victoria podcast that featured Onowa McIvor, nehinaw (Swampy Cree) and Scottish-Canadian scholar and recognized expert in the field of Indigenous language revitalization. In this podcast, McIvor (2018) explains that ILR had developed largely through the grassroots language revitalization initiatives of Indigenous language activists and communities and mostly in isolation from second or additional language education, areas typically associated with applied linguistics. As a field, applied linguistics can be understood as a “multidisciplinary approach to answering the practical problems presented to learners and speakers of language” (Penfield & Tucker, 2011, p.296), in areas such as language learning and teaching, bilingual and multilingual education, literacy in schools and other places, language planning and policy, forensic linguistics, translation and interpreting, assessment and testing, technology and language, and language for specific purposes (Chapelle, 2013). At first glance, there is overlap between ILR and applied linguistics, so why has this relationship not been closer?

Recognizing ILR as an autonomous field is an important development. Until recently, ILR was perhaps more commonly understood as a context in which academics (of many disciplines) and community-based practitioners interacted together. In her 2020 article exploring concepts, theories, and areas of study that connect applied linguistics and Indigenous language revitalization, McIvor recounts that there was a time in her academic career when she wondered if ILR should be a subfield within the field of second language acquisition. “However, she came to understand that ILR is necessarily autonomous and, rather than being subsumed by another field, the languages and communities involved are better served by the creation of interdisciplinary space for collaboration and partnership from independent places of strength” (2020, p.79). Grassroots initiatives in ILR are important because Indigenous language revitalization plays a role “in maintaining Indigenous peoples' distinct cultural identity against a long and continuing history of political subjugation” (Greymorning, 2019, p. 13). Indigenous language revitalization comes from community, from people who are still engaged, connected, and, in some cases, practicing lifelong learning on homelands. In this paper, we join McIvor (2018, 2020) in recognizing ILR as a stand-alone academic field in its own right, one that recognizes the central role of community.

Returning to the relationship between Indigenous language revitalization and applied linguistics, Leanne Hinton (2011) contends that these connections could be stronger. She explains that researchers from other fields have typically worked more closely with Indigenous language revitalization initiatives but highlighted the reasons that those working in applied linguistics could be of service to Indigenous language revitalization:

In general, outside experts who work with communities on language revitalization are documentary linguists, theoretical linguists, and linguistic anthropologists who do not have an educational background in language teaching and learning. These experts know a great deal about the structure of the languages and are especially helpful in the provision of recorded and written data, and in the development of reference materials—reference dictionaries and grammars, for example [. . .]. But the guidance of experts in language and teaching methods and models could be of great assistance in language revitalization. (p. 317)

Indigenous communities, families, and individuals are creating new and unique strategies to reclaim their languages. Because of their expertise in language teaching theory and methodology, Hinton (2011) concludes that applied linguists can contribute to Indigenous language revitalization in meaningful ways by helping with research on the effectiveness of these new models. Penfield and Tucker also suggest that the field of applied linguistics can be part of a multidisciplinary approach working on practical problems faced by Indigenous language learners (2011). And McIvor's 2020 article identifies several areas of potential research and partnership. She calls for empirical research projects "focused on the most popular language revitalization programs and strategies" including approaches such as language nests, immersion programs, accelerated learning methods, and the Mentor Apprentice Program (2020, p.92). She also highlights the development of resources and sharing of expertise "to create and sustain immersion programs for parents of young children, infants, preschool-aged children, K-12 schools and adults, all of which are critical to the revival and continuation of the first languages of this land" (p. 92). From her view, these research areas could move applied linguistics and Indigenous language revitalization "forward together in new and exciting ways" (p.92).

These calls from Hinton, McIvor, Penfield and Tucker and others are not new and yet the pace of collaboration between the two fields continues to be slow. Although there is nothing inherently problematic with people in the fields not being connected to one another, we begin with the assumption that there is value in examining the possible reasons for this separateness (Sarkar, 2017), the mutually beneficial reasons for these fields to be in closer conversation, and the types of changes necessary to create an ethical space of engagement (Ermine, 2007). We also take the position that the two fields are currently disconnected from one another, in part because of the issues of settler dominance. From this perspective, the symposium in which we participated represented a kind of entering into a dialogue between the two fields and between Indigenous and non-Indigenous academics. Living a different present, one in which Indigenous languages are once again languages of community interaction, will require great effort and must continue to be led by Indigenous communities and scholars. Yet strategic efforts from Indigenous language revitalization in aligning with allies in all fields of interdisciplinary academia, including

applied linguistics, can create new, emerging pathways. This is important because "[t]he First Peoples of this land have been burdened with the responsibility of ensuring that Indigenous languages do not die, but partners and allies need to do more to also ensure this outcome (McIvor & Anisman, 2018, p. 102). We will have to be courageous in trying something different because "[w]e are trying to imagine an applied linguistics that does not exist" (Motha, 2020, p.132). If the field of applied linguistics is to play an ethical role as an academic community, we will have to "center Indigeneity and allow it to change" (Simpson, 2017, p. 20) the interactions between the fields of Indigenous language revitalization and applied linguistics. The primary goal in this paper, then, is to share our experiences and to offer our thinking on the kinds of parameters that we need if we as scholars are going to engage in the ethical space between Indigenous language revitalization and applied linguistics.

### Situating Ourselves

We write from distinct positions. Belinda is a nēhiyaw woman who works in language resurgence, or "the growing wave of social movement with [Indigenous] language at the heart" (McCarty et al., 2019, p. 3). Andrea is a white settler woman who researches and teaches about a range of language issues that stem from settler-colonialism. In this section, we engage the protocol of introducing and situating self, which is key to our research. In providing these details, we are claiming and declaring our genealogy, ancestry, and positions as researchers and authors. Belinda's purpose is to locate herself first as a nēhiyaw person and then as a researcher. In doing so, she is also identifying, defining, and describing the elements of Indigenist research (Martin & Mirraboopa, 2003). Andrea's purpose is to locate herself as a white settler and consider how that identity positions her in relation to Indigenous languages and Indigenous language revitalization. Here, we necessarily shift from our collective voice to introduce ourselves in our individual voices, beginning with Belinda.

My name is Belinda (kakiyosew) Daniels. I am the oldest daughter of my mother (late) Eunice Daniels and my father John Ermine. My father is nēhiyaw from Sturgeon Lake First Nation, Saskatchewan. My (late) mother was Eunice Daniels, eldest daughter of Vital Daniels and Mary (Halket) Daniels. I was raised by my maternal grandparents. My grandfather's parents were Roger Daniels (Sturgeon Lake) and Marie Lavallee (Lake Lavallee, Saskatchewan). Roger's parents were pē-miyo maskwa (Old Dan) of Whitefish First Nation and nay-tow-wan-how (Alice) of Sturgeon Lake First Nation. Marie Lavallee's parents were Louis Lavallee (1863-1935) of Waskesiu, Saskatchewan, and meyahimi-wi-shewe (Margurite/Maggie) Bird of Montreal Lake, Saskatchewan. All had ties to vast areas of land stretching from Prince Albert to Lac la Ronge.

My maternal grandmother's parents were George Halket of Little Red First Nations and Caroline Ballyntyne of Montreal Lake. Caroline's parents were Albert Ballyntyne and Maggie Anderson of Montreal Lake. Maggie's parents were *omasis* and *miyo astew* from the Montreal Lake area. George's parents were Isiah Halket and Ruby (original name not known). Isiah Halket came from La Pas, Manitoba. The lands sustained my grandmother's parents' lives. My father's parents were Martha (Moosehunter) and Gilbert Ermine of Sturgeon Lake First Nation. Martha's parents were Colin Moosehunter and Selina Daniels

(who passed away at a very young age). Colin then married Louisa Daniels (my grandfather Vital's sister).

I am a nēhiyaw woman, carrier of family history, language keeper, and storyteller. My ties to land are vast, from kistapinanihk (Prince Albert) to Lac la Ronge, Saskatchewan, and into The Pas, Manitoba. I am a mother, grandmother, auntie, sister, and wife and have many relationships that are tied to responsibilities and duty in maintaining our nēhiyaw nationhood. My formal credentials state that I am an educator. I hold a master's degree in education; a Ph.D. in interdisciplinary studies at the University of Saskatchewan and, as of 2021, I am an assistant professor of Indigenous Education at the University of Victoria. I have extended professional experiences from teaching kindergarten to university-level undergraduate classes, program development, program planning, curriculum writing, academic writing, academic research, and not-for-profit leadership in the area of language reclamation, work that is not governmentally or institutionally controlled or on someone else's agenda. This leadership arose in the not-for-profit sector because I did not see language revitalization sufficiently supported in academia and nor did I see any new emerging speakers graduating from the core language programs in schools. While there are indeed decades-long collaborations between university and community-based practitioners (for example, the American Indian Language Development Institute [AILDI] and the Canadian Indigenous Languages and Literacy Development Institute [CILLDI]), I want to see the same level of investment in official language learning mirrored in Indigenous language initiatives. I also wanted to see more immersion programs. We urgently need to do more and focus on things that have proven effective.

Now we turn to Andrea. My name is Andrea Sterzuk. I am a white settler Canadian with ancestry in multiple European countries, including Luxemburg, England, Scotland, Ukraine, Germany, and the Netherlands. Treaty 4 and Treaty 6 allowed my family to take homesteads in Saskatchewan and allowed the Saskatchewan towns and cities where I would eventually live to be built. The promise of 160 acres of free land attracted all of my family members who came to Saskatchewan between 1901 and 1925. My mother, Patricia, grew up on a farm in southern Saskatchewan. Her grandfather and his eldest sons received six homesteads near Peebles, Saskatchewan, when they came to Canada. My father, Donald, grew up on a farm near the Manitoba border. His Ukrainian community was part of the ethnic blocks of settlement that the provincial government of the time encouraged. After high school, in the 1960s, my father became a teacher. During his career, he taught in five different small towns, and my family moved with him. I grew up in two small towns, one located in Treaty 6 territory and one very close to the line that separates Treaty 4 and 6.

Like my father (and maternal grandmother, aunts, older sister and a niece), I became a teacher. I entered my teacher-education program in the early 1990s. It was a time when official bilingualism initiatives were heavily resourced. Because of this priority, I was recruited to a French medium-of-instruction teacher-education program despite my inability to speak or understand French. My professional interest in second-language education, as well as my personal interest in learning languages, began with this intensive language-learning experience. Over the past almost three decades, I have continued to work in second-language education in a range of programs in multiple education jurisdictions. Along the way, I also learned Spanish and completed master's and doctoral

programs in second-language education. Since 2007 I have been a professor at the University of Regina, teaching in the area of second-language education as well as multilingualism in schools. Since 2013, I have also been slowly learning nēhiyawēwin. Through this more recent language-learning experience, I have developed professional and personal relationships with Indigenous language activists in the province. I am keenly aware that my family's presence in Saskatchewan has contributed to the reasons behind the need for Indigenous language revitalization. I have a professional and ethical responsibility to support this work when I am asked.

### **māmawi-kiyokēwak: Our Approach to Knowledge Sharing**

As we began to work on this paper, we engaged in familiar academic activities such as reading related academic literature and examining our relevant research data, but we also recognized that we could be open to knowledge sharing in other ways. In our approach to writing, we too have set our own parameters for working together, including taking time to travel to work together and using humour, visiting, and eating meals together to strengthen our relationship. Our approach to this work is connected to Indigenous ways of understanding the world. To devise an approach that centres Indigeneity, we drew on some recent theoretical work by Métis art scholar Sherry Farrell Racette and the knowledge-sharing practices of Belinda's childhood experiences.

As a child, Belinda accompanied her grandparents everywhere. They took her along when they went visiting, and she listened to the conversations over sandwiches and tea. Sometimes when the weather was hot, conversations took place outside and on the ground. These visits were times of sharing stories, relationship building and learning for Belinda. There was never a "rush" to visit; nor was anyone in a hurry. Jay Johnson has referred to this easy conversation as "kitchen table discourse, the kitchen table being the space in which "insider" communication takes place" (2008, p. p.133). In recent academic and community presentations, Sherry Farrell Racette (2018) has conceptualized this approach as Kitchen Table Theory, an approach to learning "through sharing around a kitchen table while eating, drinking, and making from an Indigenous worldview" (Mattes & Farrell Racette, 2019). In a forthcoming piece of writing that expands this conceptualization, she explains the value of this practice:

When our classrooms work as safe spaces for Indigenous faculty and students, they are intergenerational spaces of shared work, thoughtful conversation, laughter, often with food, babies and children - like a kitchen. I have always wanted to teach in a kitchen, where I could make tea, cook bannock, or boil dyes on top of the stove. Elders and community guests often seem so uncomfortable in conventional classroom spaces, but gathering around a kitchen table to talk and share ideas is a familiar and comfortable experience (Farrell Racette, forthcoming)

Farrell Racette explains that others too are shifting the notion of kitchen table into theory and methodology. She mentions the work of Metis curator Cathy Mattes and the research of Caroline Tait, Metis medical anthropologist, who also have been thinking about the role of kitchen tables in knowledge production (Tait & Whitman, 2011). She also highlights the work of Cree/Saulteaux scholar Margaret Kovach (2010a) around conversational methods

of research. As we discussed our method, Belinda suggested that if learning through visiting was good for her grandparents, then it was good for us too. Whether we refer to it as Kitchen Table theory, or *māmawi-kiyokēwak* (“they visit altogether”), this approach allows us to build relationships, share meals, share stories, share laughter, and learn to listen and take turns; and our shared reflections and discussion enrich us.

From an Indigenous perspective, the Indigenous language revitalization movement is bigger or more significant than a simple turn or paradigm shift in an area of scholarship. For Indigenous peoples in the territory currently known as Canada, the push for Indigenous language revitalization comes from Manitow or Creator. When we as co-authors of this paper sit together and think critically about the past, the current moment, and the future, we are creating energy. Michi Saagiig Nishnaabeg scholar Leanne Simpson refers to this practice of engagement, learning, and generating knowledge as “grounded normativity” and described this important intervention in the following way: “[g]rounded normativity isn’t a thing; it is generated structure born and maintained from deep engagement with Indigenous processes that are inherently physical, emotional, intellectual, and spiritual” (p. 23). From a *nēhiyaw* perspective, we all have gifts to contribute. This paper is our shared research; it illustrates our experiences and our deep engagement with Indigenous processes. Manitow provides us with a trail to move forward.

We also draw on our experiences in an ongoing team research project in which we examine teacher and learner experiences in a land-based *nēhiyawēwin* language camp. This research project is useful because it illustrates the similarities and differences between the fields in terms of assumptions about knowledge and teaching and research methodologies. Although our paper draws on the experience of participating in this research and shares some findings from this study, this is not strictly an empirical paper. Instead, we use our individual and shared research experiences to conceptualize arguments about how and why Indigenous language teaching and research methodologies can help to reshape applied linguistics in ways that contribute to ethical relationships among settlers and Indigenous peoples in the territory currently known as Canada.

### **Ethical Space of Engagement**

We now turn to an important theoretical concept that informs this paper: the ethical space of engagement (Ermine, 2007). Our thinking is informed by the work of Willie Ermine, *nēhiyaw* scholar, researcher, faculty member at First Nations University, and a member of Sturgeon Lake First Nation. His primary focus is the promotion of ethical practices of research that involves Indigenous peoples and the conceptual development of the “ethical space,” a theoretical space between cultures and worldviews. The ethical space of engagement is the space between two entities, in this case between Indigenous peoples and settler Canadians, or between two fields defined primarily along the same lines. This concept is useful for the purpose of thinking about how two fields—applied linguistics and Indigenous language revitalization—might work together. Ermine (2007) explains the creation of the theoretical space between Indigenous peoples and settler Canadians in the following way: “With the calculated disconnection through the contrasting of their identities and the subsequent creation of two solitudes. With each claiming their own distinct and autonomous view of the world, a theoretical space between them is opened” (p. 194). What do we mean by this disconnection? Ermine (2007) describes Indigenous



peoples and Western peoples as “philosophically disengaged” (p. 197). He also explains that ongoing practices of settler dominance continue to rupture relations between the two peoples. This notion of settler dominance is important because the academy is known for creating challenging and hostile spaces for Indigenous professors, students, staff, and communities (Ahnungoonhs & Brunette-Debassige, 2018; Henry et al., 2017; Mohamed & Beagan, 2019).

The ethical space offers opportunities to engage differently with one another. Dwayne Donald (2012), a descendent of the amiskwaciwiyniwak and the Papaschase Cree and professor at the University of Alberta, also draws on Ermine’s (2007) writing in his work on Aboriginal-Canadian relations:

Ethical space is a space of possibility. The space offers a venue to slip out of our allegiances, to detach from the circumscriptive limits of colonial frontier logics, and enact a theory of human relationality that does not require assimilation or deny Indigenous subjectivity. (p. 44)

Ethical space theory, then, offers some direction to us as researchers and to the two fields of scholarly inquiry that we discuss in this paper. Ermine explains that learning to meet in this space requires “a protracted effort to create a level playing field” (p. 202) and emphasizes the spirit of cooperation that is required. Choosing to meet in this venue, the venue of ethical space, triggers a dialogue between us. This conversation asks us to “set the parameters for an agreement to interact modelled on appropriate, ethical and human principles” (p. 202). From this perspective, our paper is a discussion of the parameters for an agreement between applied linguistics and Indigenous language revitalization. This move towards interaction between our fields, then, will require sustained effort and cooperation. Before shifting to a discussion on how the two fields might interact, we consider why it might be important to do so.

### **Accepting the Challenge**

Over tea and sandwiches in her home in Saskatoon, Belinda read out loud from books that have informed her thinking, and we talked about our experiences in working in language education, both within and outside formal education settings. Despite having already agreed to contribute a paper to the conference panel, we were quite advanced in our conversation before we decided that there were, indeed, mutually beneficial reasons for the two fields to work together more closely. At one point we discussed our hopes for the future of Indigenous language education.

***Belinda:** My hopes for the future are that Indigenous peoples have control of their own Indigenous language programming; their own curriculum, their own land-based learning stations or places.*

***Andrea:** Do you have any hope for Western universities being involved in this?*

***Belinda:** I don’t think they want to. I don’t think they want to move aside.*

***Andrea:** No.*

**Belinda:** *They don't want to move. They like their positions of being comfortable. People don't like change. I never really understood that until I actually got older, until I saw it myself.*

**Andrea:** *Do you think they [we] want to maintain control?*

**Belinda:** *Universities?*

**Andrea:** *Yes.*

**Belinda:** *Yes. How old is RCAP [Royal Commission on Aboriginal Peoples]?*

**Andrea:** *1996?*

**Belinda:** *Yes. Recommendations were made back then. People don't want to move over. And so, I said "Pfft!" Indigenous peoples just need to awaken to their own fact, create their own curriculum, do whatever they want on their own reserves, with their own authority. And they need to practice self-determination.*

At this point in the conversation, we seemed to have talked ourselves out of an article. We kept talking and drinking tea, and Belinda read some more out loud. While she was reading from the writing of Cree and Saulteaux scholar Margaret Kovach, she came across an excerpt that ultimately convinced us of the value of the two fields working together.

**Belinda:** *And then the last little quote here: "Vine Deloria reminds me that as Indigenous scholars, researchers and thinkers, we have an obligation to challenge the ideologies that shackle us. The purpose then is to push the edge of that ideological servitude of what counts as knowledge and research in the academy" [Kovach, 2010b, p. 93]. So, this is a challenge. Even though I talked us out of it, it's still a challenge that we should take. [shared laughter]*

**Andrea:** *Okay, all right.*

**Belinda:** *It's a challenge. For those of us that get to this level, we have to continue the push to make space for those coming behind us, with our allies.*

Finding ways to engage is, and will continue to be, a challenge, but it is a challenge that we should accept. In speaking of applied linguistics, Mela Sarkar explains that "in my discipline, we all too easily assume that what we know about second language acquisition and pedagogy in the usual Western contexts (from classrooms to factory floors) will be true for all contexts. But this is an incorrect assumption" (Sarkar, 2017, p. 503). We agree with Sarkar's words and recognize that this means that working together will require transformation. We need to learn to support each other; in doing so, we can challenge the colonial ideologies that continue to harm Indigenous peoples and Indigenous languages and that elevate settlers and settler languages. Learning to engage is about creating space for Indigenous languages and for Indigenous language revitalization initiatives, sharing space, and learning from one another.

### **Parameters for Agreement to Interact**

Earlier in this paper, we suggested that the move towards interaction between our fields will require a protracted effort, a high level of cooperation, and the establishment of parameters. For parameters, we recommend some guidelines for this interaction in terms of

understanding the differences between the fields and setting some goals or objectives. These recommendations are based on our respective experiences in working on Indigenous language revitalization, applied linguistics, as well as research together. These recommended parameters, then, are not exhaustive or definitive and likely do not apply to every context or interaction. We offer these as areas of concern or importance and invite others interested in this process to consider their own parameters for the purpose of ethical engagement between Indigenous language revitalization and applied linguistics. In the space that remains, we discuss the following five parameters for an agreement to interact: (a) making assumptions about language and knowledge, (b) making assumptions about knowledge generation, (c) nurturing an Indigenous knowledge base through supporting Indigenous scholars, (d) understanding the central role of community to Indigenous language revitalization, and (e) sharing space. Throughout our discussion of each of these five parameters, our goal is to center Indigeneity and allow it to change the interaction between our two fields (Simpson, 2017).

### **Assumptions About Language and Knowledge**

The first main guideline that we put forward is acknowledging that individuals within the two fields likely think and talk about language differently. Western understandings of language make up most of the field of applied linguistics. The grassroots initiatives of Indigenous communities are typically not as prominent in academic literature, though in the *NETOLNEW* national research project, which Onowa McIvor and Peter Jacobs lead, they are working hard to raise the profile of these initiatives. While Western perspectives might understand language as “what separates humans from non-humans,” this is not the only possible lens (Pennycook & Makoni, 2019, p. 72). There are, in fact, “multiple language ontologies” (Pennycook & Makoni, 2019, p.71). The first parameter or guideline that we wish to set is that, if we are to move forward together, both sides must acknowledge and accept these differences, as well as consider what we can learn from one another. It is important to state that learning from Indigenous knowledge on languages is not a benevolent act of acceptance because Indigenous knowledge on language learning is not secondary or subservient to Western modes of thinking.

***Belinda:** So, with applied linguistics, education, coming together, we need also to do a better job when we teach our teachers about appreciating diversity and what Indigenous peoples come with; they already come with knowledges. And it shouldn't be all just Western ways of thinking and theory.*

In a 2020 paper that considers whether an antiracist and decolonizing applied linguistics is possible, Suhanthie Motha calls on those of us working in the field of applied linguistics to “support each other in altering our epistemological practices to actually change what comes to count as knowledge. Let us ask ourselves, can we truly be effective applied linguists if we are not willing to consider the ways in which our work is complicit with White supremacy and colonization” (Motha, 2020, p. 132). Working together in ethical ways means that non-Indigenous scholars need to speak out in support of Indigenous knowledge (Suzack, 2019) and Indigenous languages.

Indigenous languages and Indigenous language revitalization are connected to Indigenous knowledge. As a concept or term, Indigenous knowledge represents the beliefs, assumptions, and understandings of non-Western people that they developed through a long-term association with a specific place. Through this long-term association, strong relationships have formed among people, the environment, and the more-than-human counterparts (other living things and spiritual forces) that share their land (McInnis et al., 2019). For many Indigenous communities in the Americas, language is part of spiritual communication (Hauck & Heurick, 2018; Pennycook & Makoni, 2019). Spirits are essential to harmony and balance, well-being, and interrelationships. From most Indigenous perspectives, both animate and inanimate objects have a life spirit; every element has its own unique life force, including language. “Many Indigenous people have a spiritual connection to their language that not only has to do with their ancestors but also with the ground beneath them” (McIvor, p. 85, 2020). Indigenous language revitalization work often includes a belief in the unseen powers in the world and acceptance of the fact that all things are linked and depend on each other.

Because of the understanding that all things are interrelated, land-based language teaching is an important area of Indigenous language revitalization.

***Belinda:** It’s about change—and not change in moving over, but change in the way that we even teach, doing the whole land-based pedagogy thing with language. That needs to happen too. This is how we Indigenize. Where Indigenous communities and Indigenous languages thrive, they maintain current traditional knowledge systems and re-generate new knowledge. When Indigenous languages are used and spoken, land and its diverse ecologies are honoured and appreciated, resulting in a healthy environmental space and place. Indigenous communities are fully aware of their relationship to the land, and in this way, they lead their communities back to reclamation of land-based pedagogy.*

Indigenous language revitalization helps peoples to reconnect with traditional knowledge, which we do best by teaching on and with the land. Learners of the language and the maintenance of the language help to develop relationships to the land, animals, plants, and other natural occurrences. “We urgently need such place-based knowledge to help guide both species-recovery and habitat-restoration efforts. These efforts may also be essential in supporting the persistence of resources on which livelihoods for Indigenous fishermen, foragers, or hunters are based” (Wilder et al., 2016, p. 500). Indigenous knowledge, embedded within language, is a source of antidotes that can help to slow climate change and lead to some answers. However, global expansion projects put us all in danger. Collaborative efforts with applied linguistics, as well as other fields of academic inquiry, can help to support Indigenous peoples in leading in responses to the global climate crisis.

Another important area of Indigenous language revitalization work is understanding the link between Indigenous languages and health and wellness. The loss of land, language, spiritual ways and respect for Elders continues to impact the resilience and wellness of Indigenous communities in North America (Whitbeck et al., 2004). Engagement with aspects of traditional First Nations culture, or cultural connectedness, is key to improving Indigenous wellness (Snowshoe, 2015).

***Andrea:** Yeah, that's another big difference between the fields. You know, applied linguistics, [or]second-language education doesn't talk about wellness and language learning. They talk about things like identity and motivation and the affect, the feelings, the feelings of fear that you might have. But nobody in applied linguistics ever talks about the emotional. . .*

***Belinda:** . . . benefits.*

***Andrea:** . . . benefits! And in the field of Indigenous language revitalization, that's a huge area of discussion—the links between wellness and culture, language, traditional knowledge, traditional knowledge keepers; it's this whole big difference between the two fields.*

Indigenous languages and Indigenous health and wellness are connected. “Language is one component of culture and therefore may be a means to improve health among Indigenous populations” (Gonzalez et al., 2017, p. 176). Culture may prevent and treat health outcomes such as depression and substance abuse (Rieckmann et al., 2004; Stone et al., 2006; Walters et al., 2002). Increasingly, research has pointed to the therapeutic value of Indigenous languages: “It is my position that language revitalization is a cultural rehabilitation. Indigenous communities have been injured and it is the language teacher's duty to heal and alleviate the pain in the community through strengthening the language” (Hall, 2019, p. 218). Indigenous languages have a spirit, and the language chooses the speaker to become its helper. Understanding language teachers as having a healing or therapeutic role is an important parameter for both fields. Because Indigenous languages have this recognized health benefit, the urgency to contribute to the field of Indigenous language revitalization in ethical ways becomes even more apparent.

### **Assumptions About Knowledge Generation**

Knowledge generation and knowledge sharing are other areas in which the two fields will have to engage in prolonged cooperation so that we can learn from one another about the differences in knowledge sharing, production, and regeneration. Pennycook and Makoni (2019) point out that if we accept the importance of the ontological challenge to language, we must consider other issues including “ways of doing and thinking about research (p.114). We understand the goal of research as the production of knowledge or as a deepening of current understandings of an issue. As in most academic fields, applied linguists use a broad range of research methods:

***Andrea:** So, I think a lot of traditional applied linguistics research around language learning is extractive and it's interventionist. So, we decide the problem we want to study, we go in and we say we're going to test it on these days, and this is our answer. And it's a really . . .*

***Belinda:** It's very linear?*

***Andrea:** Yes, and it's a controlling way of doing it. And one of the things I've learned from working with our group, our group of six people, and also the research that I've been doing with Keeseekoose, is that there are other ways.*

The research project Andrea refers to in the above excerpt uses sharing circles as a method, respects nēhiyaw protocols, and flattens typical researcher-participant hierarchical relationships. Indigenous research methodology (Drawson et al., 2017; Kovach, 2010b, 2015; McGregor et al., 2018) has informed this project.

In a 2019 presentation, Mela Sarkar highlighted some of the differences between traditional approaches to applied linguistics research and research conducted within Indigenous communities. In her talk, Sarkar described research within Listuguj, a Mi'gmaq community that is working to revitalize its language. Through her partnership with Listuguj, Sarkar explained, she learned to be noninterventionist as a researcher working in the area of critical applied linguistics. She described her experiences as a process of learning to listen when communities talk. Similarly, other writing on the topic of ethics in Indigenous research is available. Riddell et al. (2017) identifies 13 “key principles for conducting research with different groups of Indigenous Peoples in Canada” (p. 7). This list includes ethical research practices such as ensuring benefits to communities, building in opportunities for self-voicing, respecting cultural norms and knowledge systems, using culturally appropriate research methods, understanding interrelationality, and engaging knowledge keepers. This guide is useful in shaping future interactions between applied linguistics and Indigenous language revitalization.

### **Nurturing an Indigenous Knowledge Base Through Supporting Indigenous Scholars**

Another key way that applied linguistics and Indigenous language revitalization can work together is through the investment in and support of Indigenous graduate students and scholars who are working on Indigenous language revitalization. We suggest that this nurturing of an Indigenous knowledge base should be another key point in which the two fields engage.

*Andrea: The academic home that I live in is applied linguistics, which is really language teachers, language policy writers... it's that kind of practical use of language knowledge, and I think sometimes we think, “Well, we're nice people; we know stuff about language. Why do Indigenous communities not want to engage with us, or be at our conferences or study with us?” But I think until we start to be aware of some of our colonial biases that we carry with us, nothing will shift. We'll continue to have grad students who maybe take a look at our programs or our conference: “Oh, not for me.”*

Universities need to invest in recruitment and, perhaps more importantly, the retention of Indigenous professors who can work on Indigenous language revitalization and create supportive measures for Indigenous graduate students. McIvor calls for increased capacity “in the form of new Indigenous scholars specializing in Indigenous language learning and having their work supported by interested additional language learning specialists to make the best use of the limited resources and time we have to turn the tides” (2020, p. 92). This support might include fellowships with monies and language research-assistant work that includes opportunities for time to read, conduct informal research, and engage in Indigenous communities. Kovach (2010b) explains that “[s]upporting

Indigenous research frameworks means supporting Indigenous researchers, and this cannot be achieved without hearing their perspective [. . .]. Focus on graduate programs is critical because it is here that Indigenous research frameworks are being honed and practiced” (p. 164).

In conducting our collaborative writing and research for this symposium/paper, we created a real-life context and process for Belinda that has been both enlightening and enriching, and possibly one of the most memorable experiences in her recent doctoral study. Part of what made the process so meaningful for Belinda was that Indigenous method and inquiry were privileged, her story was validated, and the work that we were doing was meaningful. Conducting our work in this conversational way permitted us to share stories. “Story is an Indigenous method for sharing experience, and interpretative, subjective understanding is accepted. That which contextualizes life” (Kovach, 2010b, p. 176). Although we did not set out to create this type of experience, Belinda considered it an investment in her knowledge and in her as a scholar. The process has enabled Belinda to add to the ever-growing, changing, multilayering Indigenous research framework.

### **Understanding the Central Role of Community to Indigenous Language Revitalization**

Another guideline that we recommend if the two fields are to engage together is a clear statement about the role of Indigenous communities in Indigenous language revitalization. Community is more than a concept; community is also law (Innes, 2013). What we mean by this is that Indigenous scholars want to do right by their communities but this is more than volunteerism or a good sense of civic duty. First Nations on the plains, for example, have traditionally had to rely on community or member unity in order to ensure survival (Innes, 2013). Kinship roles in these groups come with associated responsibilities, what Innes refers to as the Law of the People. Traditionally, these responsibilities and practices were conveyed to community members through a storytelling cycle of sacred stories or *ātayōhkēwina* which were repeated yearly (Ahenakew, 1929; Ratt 1998). Responsibility to the language and to the community is a natural law that is intrinsically a part of Indigenous worldview. Years and years of academia have taken Belinda to this point and to this location. This process has not assimilated her but has mirrored for her the value of her language, her informal education, and the importance of the *nēhiyaw* academy, which has been inclusive of the land. Indigenous language revitalization is activism and self-determination. Language revitalization reasserts and reconnects the Indigenous learner’s “home,” whereas Andrea has found a new appreciation for land and its animacy.

***Belinda:** This is our territory. We still live here. This is our home.*

Belinda feels deeply attached to her home. She has a long, long history with these lands, as she stated in her family history of lineage and connection to land. This connection has deepened through the practice of language revitalization. Community and language revitalization work in unison. Language revitalization requires support from people. Through community language revitalization involvement, Belinda’s home community of

Sturgeon Lake has seen the benefits of love, respect, and trust in each other, along with the land.

### Sharing Space

With some exceptions, those of us who work in applied linguistics usually find our academic homes in departments of modern language, faculties of education, and, in some cases, departments of linguistics. For the most part, this field has academic space and access to institutional support. The same cannot be said of Indigenous language revitalization. Universities and scholars who work in applied linguistics can support Indigenous language revitalization by sharing space. We can create flexible academic homes, plan for Indigenous languages in university settings, and create strategic plans that embed Indigenous language revitalization objectives and create academic programs in consultation with people who are already doing the work in the field of language revitalization. For example, some Indigenous communities have land-based programs; they should be the leaders in these programs. In most cases (University of Victoria is an exception), Indigenous language revitalization programs have no formal space or formal programs within the Western academy. Formal space can mean not only physically being on campus, but also a space and connection to land; however, backing or support from a university with a shared vision in language revitalization is what we most need.

### Conclusion

We offer this paper as just one example of our work together to reshape our own experiences of academic writing in a way that centres Indigeneity. Ultimately, we argue that applied linguistics can positively support the work of Indigenous language revitalization, and Indigenous language teaching and research methodologies can reshape applied linguistics in ways that will contribute to ethical relationships between settlers and Indigenous peoples in the territory currently known as Canada.

*Andrea: I do think there are things that we can learn from each other. I know that doing research with our group this year has changed how I think about research, so it's benefitted me. And I think it's not just a question of "how can applied linguistics help Indigenous communities and peoples?" It's "how can applied linguists be bettered by learning about different ways of doing research and different ways of thinking about knowledge?" There's value in the engagement. There's value in that space between us, in learning how to be there together.*

Indeed, these partnerships could prove to be very fruitful as McIvor explains that "neither SLA nor ILR have, in general, benefitted from each other's knowledge nor reaped the rewards of each field's respective research and practices in any central way" (2020, p. 80). Indigenous language revitalization and applied linguistics have shared interests and can work together to create an honoured space. Applied linguistics exists to offer real-life solutions to language problems. We see threats to Indigenous languages as the most urgent language problem of our time and therefore understand that applied linguistics is called upon to offer solutions. Recognizing this urgency, McIvor calls "upon allies within applied



linguistics and SLA to respectfully join Indigenous communities in their efforts and offer expertise to assist in making the very best use of the time we have left with the most proficient speakers today” (2020, p. 92). This call will require cooperation and a reshaping of interactions. Moreover, because Indigenous scholars, for the most part, want to take the information “home,” Indigenous communities will benefit from this investment too. Through our efforts our interactions will grow, both parties will benefit, and trust and bonds will intensify. When we do the cooperation work and respect the guidelines, we will see real partnerships between Indigenous language revitalization and applied linguistics.

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