

Challenges and Solutions in Adult Acquisition of Cree as a Second Language

by

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BA, Canadian University College, 2006

A Thesis Submitted in Partial Fulfillment  
of the Requirements for the Degree of

MASTER OF ARTS

in the Department of Linguistics

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University of Victoria

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## Abstract

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The purpose of this thesis is to document and analyze the experiences and beliefs of a cross section of the second language Cree learning and teaching community regarding perceived hurdles in Cree language acquisition. Very little applied linguistic research has been done involving indigenous languages in Canada, especially ones focusing on adult learners; as a result this study was conceived of as being exploratory in nature, opening ground for further research. The research questions were as follows: what are the major challenges facing adult second language learners of Cree? And secondly, what are the solutions used by learners to overcome these challenges? Seven participants were interviewed from across western Canada, two learners, three teachers, and two participants who had been heavily involved in both learning and teaching. The interviews covered participants' history with the language, exploring challenges, learning approaches, and goals. The findings suggested that the most significant challenges facing learners were affective challenges such as anxiety; in addition the nature of resources available to learners and teachers was a significant challenge. The study highlighted the connection between methodologies and challenges, suggesting that challenges which appear specific to a particular language are often instead the result of the methodological approach. It also highlighted some areas of disconnect between teacher and learner views on challenges. This thesis also examines the pedagogical implications of this research.

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# Chapter 1: Introduction

## 1.1 My Connection to the Study

I remember the day I began my first major effort to learn a language – my language. After bugging my grandpa for words for weeks without a lot of success (he had forgotten most of what he knew of the language over the years), I prompted my grandma to produce a trio of instructional books written by Anne Anderson, which she passed on to me. At the time I was spending a few days as a spotter for my dad's cousin – he was falling a logging block on his own and needed someone along to call for help if he was injured – so I spent most of the day flopped into a snowdrift under a spruce tree, listening to the voice of his chainsaw while leafing through a small book of wordlists. *Let's Learn Cree: namoya ayiman* the title said, so holding the book open on my lap with my mitts I started putting words to memory. *Maskwa, sisip, atim, pisis, nipiy* – I still remember most of the words I learnt that day, and also the moments of realization as I suddenly recognized the individual words in some of our family's common expressions. I fell in love, not just with the Cree language, but with learning languages.

Discovering a love of languages was a turning point in my life. I went on to take every language course I could through high school, and to spend several years living in different cultures soaking in new ways of expressing myself, new identities, new circles of friends, new ways of seeing the world, and new languages, but Cree was not one of them. I completed an English degree and developed a new appreciation for looking at the world through the stories people told, but still had no way to learn from Cree stories. Having gone through the textbooks available to me and memorizing much of the vocabulary, I was still unable to make heads or tails of what appeared to be a mass of conflicting data, where the endings did not seem to relate consistently to meaning. In short, I could not figure out how to turn my production of words into production of sentences, and nothing I found helped me.

Still pursuing my love of language I began studying linguistics at the University of Victoria (UVIC), and through a series of chance meetings and decisions I had the opportunity to learn Michif (a “mixed” language based largely on Cree) through a combination dictionary development/documentation and master/apprentice program. When it came time to choose a thesis topic, I decided to search out other individuals who had undertaken or been involved in the same journey I had, who had gone through the effort to make the language their own, and to



explore what our shared stories of learning and teaching could tell us about the challenges faced as adult learners of Cree. I wanted to discover how these challenges had been overcome, and how our separate and shared experiences could help new learners and teachers making similar journeys.

## **1.2 Purpose**

The purpose of this study is to examine the experiences and beliefs of a cross-section of adult learners and teachers of Cree as a second language regarding perceived hurdles in Cree language acquisition in an attempt to understand why so few learners are achieving a level of fluency in Cree despite the large number of reported learners (“Aboriginal languages in Canada,” 2011).

## **1.3 Research Questions**

The study addresses the following questions: What are the major challenges facing adult L2 (second language) learners of Cree? And what are the solutions used by learners to overcome these challenges?

## **1.4 Rationale and Significance**

Given that many of the most endangered languages in Canada are spoken primarily by second language speakers (Norris 2007), it is imperative that every effort be made to enable learners to both acquire the second language and also to maintain as high as possible a level of fluency in order to maintain as much as possible of the language patterns and vocabulary for yet younger generations. One way of doing this is to give these languages some of the benefits dominant languages enjoy in the form of language specific language acquisition research. Looking at Cree in particular, I remember my own experiences trying to learn the language (the northern y dialect’) as a teenager and being unable due to a lack of good instructional materials. While I have since managed to work my way through the particular aspects of the language that were halting my progress at the time, many other aspects of the language remain unrepresented to the average learner in available curriculum, requiring either a well-trained teacher or a lot of practice and insight. Given only the materials I had access to it would be very difficult to become a fluent speaker even with a fluent speaker to assist me because of the many gaps in what was presented.

There are more general resources to help learners of less widely taught languages, books like Leanne Hinton's *How to Keep Your Language Alive* (2002), which outlines the master/apprentice approach, or Thomas and Elizabeth Brewster's book *Language Acquisition Made Practical* (1976) which outlines a systematic approach to learning a new language using largely an audiolingual method. This method is based on learning grammar through the repetition of sentences rather than explicit instruction, and a smaller emphasis on memorizing vocabulary. Although it was largely abandoned in the sixties in favour of more effective explicit instruction, it remains a useful approach when there is no available source of explicit grammar instruction or explanation. Another non-specific resource is *The Green Book of Language Revitalization in Practice* by Leanne Hinton and Kenneth Hale (2001), which provides resources for language revitalization. These and similar books would be a great help to anybody trying to learn a language with limited resources, but they still do not bridge the gap that could be filled by language acquisition research.

Also relevant to the purpose is the fact that almost all linguists working with First Nations communities come from a theoretical background – i.e. they go to study the language structure, then do what they can to help develop dictionaries, language material, and programs. The problem is that “professional linguists do not have a good track record in language teaching” (Castel & Westfall, 2001). Meanwhile a group that has had only a minimal involvement in these projects until recently is the applied linguists with expertise in these areas - often operating out of the same universities. As a result, the scope for applied research in Cree, and most other First Nations' languages, is wide open. How fluent are L2 speakers? What are the specific difficulties for L2 learners presented by these languages and language families? Is there a gap between the materials available and what is actually required for learners of Cree today? The potential questions are limitless and linguists have only begun to scratch the surface. Although this is only based on my reading in language revitalization and conversations with linguists, the gap between language revitalization studies (focusing largely on social factors) and language acquisition research has not been bridged as it could be.

In light of the situation outlined above, I wish to obtain a clear picture of both the current resources used by adult L2 Cree learners and the challenges faced by these learners as they work towards fluency. In addition to my stated goals, I hope that the data acquired from this research will be able to help teachers and learners improve their study programs and have a better

understanding of what is entailed in learning Cree. I also hope that this study will highlight areas that will benefit from further research, and indirectly lead to applied linguists helping communities to realize those benefits.

## Chapter 2: Background and Literature Review

In this literature review I have focused on factors that are directly relevant to my research. First I present the Cree speaking peoples and the Cree language, then a synopsis of applied linguistics research into Cree and related Algonquian languages. I then give an overview of the available Cree language resources for language learners. I then present my views on language and language acquisition, along with relevant literature. Following this I summarize current research and theories on the interplay of various affective factors and their impact on language acquisition.

At some point I have had to draw a line between what subjects are directly relevant to my research and subjects with only a peripheral significance, but drawing a clean distinction is difficult. I have not included a comprehensive review of the various approaches to language revitalization, sidestepping discussions of language policy and planning, and only touching various revitalization approaches which have been mentioned by participants. Again much of the varying approaches to language revitalization are conflicting, and the goal of this study is to document participant approaches actually used rather than trying to pigeonhole participant responses into one methodology or another. *The Green Book of Language Revitalization in Practice* by Leanne Hinton and Kenneth Hale (2001) contains articles on most of the methodologies mentioned by name by participants, and these methodologies have also been described during the presentation and discussion of the findings where appropriate.

### 2.1 Background – Plains Cree

Cree is an Algonquian language (or group of languages) spoken in one of several forms across Canada from Labrador to British Columbia. These forms are largely homogenous in terms of morphology, and share the vast majority of their vocabulary, though differences in pronunciation, common vocabulary, and especially syntax mean that comprehension between speakers of different dialects varies widely along an east-west or west-east continuum. The 2006 Canadian census records 99,950 speakers for the various dialects that self-identify as Cree, making it the largest First Nations language in Canada. According to the 2011 census, 83,475 of these are native speakers, leaving roughly fifteen thousand second language speakers (with some arguing up to 20,000 (Norris, 2007)). While these speakers are from all age demographics, and there are still large numbers of children learning the language, when the Cree language speaking

demographics are compared to the burgeoning First Nations' populations it is clear that the percentage of Cree speakers among traditional Cree speaking communities is dropping quickly (ibid.).

### **2.1.1 History of Cree usage**

Besides being the language of the Cree nation, the language (specifically Plains Cree) has played a larger role as the lingua franca of the fur trade and of the prairies for much of the 19<sup>th</sup> century. It was spoken not only by First Nations groups (including many from unrelated language groups who were also involved in the fur trade) but also by many of the company employees of both the Hudson's Bay Company and the Northwest Company, and their children who later went on to form the Métis nation. Although the Métis spoke many languages in the home, English and Cree for the "Scottish half-breeds" (my great-grandma's ethnicity listed on her marriage certificate) and French and Michif for the French Métis, as well as Saukteaux, Mohawk, and Tenas Wawa in some other communities, Plains Cree was the language of the nation.

Today, because of the perceived status of Plains Cree, the language is the First Nations language most likely to be offered for students in much of Western Canada, including British Columbia, with Cree language programs at the University of British Columbia (UBC), the University of Northern British Columbia (UNBC), the University of Alberta, University of Calgary, and many others, at times even where local languages (or even local dialects of Cree) are not being taught. Within the province of British Columbia (BC) there are more speakers of Cree (though not usually Plains Cree) than of any other First Nations language, because of immigration to the Vancouver area, and because of migrations (not always friendly) during the 19<sup>th</sup> century. To quote a friend, "when the Cree pushed west, it started a domino effect of wars all the way to the coast, so we don't like them much." Between war, land immigration, and later migrations because of work or simply to get away from family, in BC "behind every tree, there's a Cree" and many of them speak the language.

Despite this strong language base, Cree has seen a significant reduction in speakers, to the point where in most Cree communities there are few speakers under thirty, and in many, few or no speakers under sixty. Only in the far north of the Cree speaking world are children still learning Cree regularly in the home. In many communities, even those who do speak Cree prefer to speak English because of a history of abuse related to language use through residential school

and community schools. Most of the older Cree speakers will speak English even to each other, and when spoken to in Cree, will often answer in English. Many fluent speakers refused to teach the language to their children in order to spare them hardship in school, and still do not like to speak the language today.

Despite this, the language still has considerable prestige. In many communities events are opened by prayers in Cree, speeches are begun in Cree, and there is much pressure to speak “correctly.” Anecdotally, some communities that attach less importance to the language have more success in passing it on.

This aside, the decrease in first language (L1) speakers is reportedly partially offset by Second Language (L2) speakers, who as of 2001 reportedly make up 20% of the speakers of aboriginal languages in Canada (Norris, 2007), and this number is increasing, especially among non-status and urban populations. For example, according to one analysis there were, as of 2001, over 20,000 people who reported being second language speakers of Cree (Norris, 2007), although there is no data on the actual level of fluency of these individuals. Also, it is likely that the great majority of these learners learnt the language as children (after first learning English) or learnt the language through a school program. Regarding adult learners, I have met people who have made serious progress towards becoming fluent L2 speakers, but have met several times more individuals who had tried to achieve fluency but have instead had to make do with a very basic level of speaking or have simply given up. Significantly, after two years of searching, well over a thousand emails and talking to close to a hundred individuals including dozens of language teachers, linguists, and speakers from many different communities, I have not been able to contact a single fluent second language speaker of Cree who learnt the language entirely after puberty. Of the three elderly individuals that I was told about, they had all lived the majority of their lives in a Cree speaking community, were reportedly multilingual and self-taught, and not one of the three was Cree or Métis.

### **2.1.2 About the language**

The various Cree languages or dialects are primarily distinguished from each other by their choice of reflex of the Proto-Algonquian \*r. Plains Cree is known as Y dialect, Woods Cree is known as TH dialect, Swampy Cree is known as N dialect, and Moose Cree is known as L dialect. This is still a significant simplification – for example, in British Columbia most speakers identify as either northern or southern Y dialect – although both use the Y reflex, northern dialect

has merged *i:* and *e:*, and has more grammar and syntax in common with Woods or Swampy Cree than with Plains Y dialect Cree. Because the vast majority of resources for the language have been produced for Plains Y dialect (the lingua franca of the fur trade after about 1820), including almost all available texts and grammars, most learners are left to piece together the syntax and morphology of other dialects on their own (though some other dialects do have significant resources available for school programs). Despite these differences, the shared identity as “Cree” leads most speakers to insist that they all speak the same language, causing learners further confusion.

Morphologically Cree is an agglutinating, verb heavy language, with essentially three word classes: particles, invariable words which take no prefixes or suffixes – nouns, which mark for number, possession, and animacy – and verbs, by far the most morphologically complex class of words. Most verbs are made up of a combination of roots called initials, medials, and finals. Finals tend to define valency. Medials include classifiers for body parts involved in the action or the nature of the object being acted upon (wood, stone, thin). Initials are the broadest group semantically, including almost everything else. Verbs can be preceded by any number of preverbs which cover much of the semantic area covered by modals in English or other languages, and the entire verb complex takes prefixes and suffixes that mark for number.

Verbs also mark for animacy or inanimacy, with each gender having a separate conjugation and usually separate finals. Also, while verbs taking an inanimate object do not mark for it, those with an animate object do, meaning a separate conjugation, often with portmanteau suffixes expressing both subject and object. Furthermore, the two basic clause types of Cree, generally known as independent and conjunct, conjugate differently, using largely unrelated suffixes, meaning that there are well over a hundred separate suffixes, though luckily not all of them portmanteau. Another aspect of verbal morphology is the concept of a hierarchy of number, where second person pronouns always come before first person pronouns, both of which always come before third person pronouns. When an animate transitive verb has to express the concept of a third person acting on a second person, the pronominal suffixes and prefixes expressing the second person acting on the third person are used, with the addition of what is called an inverse marker, with several different inverse markers used for different sets of relationships.

The ways in which the two clause types (independent and conjunct) are used vary widely from language to language, and have been the subject of a PhD thesis (Cook, 2008). Briefly,

independent clauses are used to introduce or re-establish a train of thought, and to introduce new central third persons. Within a single Plains Cree sentence there can only be one third person, and all other third persons are marked to a lesser degree. When an independent clause is used it can establish who that third person will be until the next independent sentence, as well as information such as relative time. All following conjunct clauses linked to that initial clause, if they use a third person pronoun or mark for a third person, are referring back to the third person established in the independent clause. There is even a separate set of determiners, the first set, used in independent clauses, sort of establishes the existence of the object or person being referred to, and the second set, used in conjunct clauses, refers back to information introduced in those independent clauses. In this way it could be argued that the syntax in Cree can only be understood at the level of the paragraph (or higher). This system varies widely from dialect to dialect, but generally this description at the very least can be used as a starting point for a compare and contrast.

Another very significant aspect of Cree at an even higher level than the paragraph is the source of the information being relayed. To this end, the language uses evidentials heavily in reported speech, and speakers almost always attribute reported speech, sometimes even doubly so (that man told me that that woman told the following to him...). This ties in well with aspects of Cree storytelling and knowledge creation – the importance of establishing the journey of a story as it makes its way to the speaker. To quote Jeffrey Muehlbauer (2008) “Plains Cree speakers will often invest significant time and effort in conveying how they came to believe what they believe”, and speakers “will often present themselves and their message as the current link in a long chain of thinkers” (Cook, Muehlbauer, 2008, p. 1). These cultural metanarratives of the language have a constant influence on language use, influencing speaker attitudes towards the language, themselves, and having a strong influence on how ideas are shared and situated. Although I have yet to see such an argument presented in academia, I believe that there is strong evidence that these attitudes played a strong role in Bungee, a Scots English Métis dialect/language, strongly influenced by Cree semantic domains, phrasing, and concepts. Listening to speakers of English in many northern areas of the Prairies (regardless of background) I’ve commonly heard speakers use many of these same conventions (an overabundance of determiners, double use of pronouns, constant attribution of source, and Cree prosody).



Going back to the Cree language through history, because English, though widespread, was still used subordinately to the lingua franca of Plains Cree for generations, with bilingualism being common, the influence of Cree narratives on Prairie Englishes has likely been higher than the influence of English narratives on Cree. This is my impression based on my experiences in the community; the narrative of language contact is different both because of the length of contact, and also because English was already seen to be “our language” by at least some of the Cree-Métis communities. What impact these narratives have on Cree language acquisition I do not know.

Finally, Cree, like many other First Nations languages of Canada, has a strong tradition of storytelling and rhetoric. Public speaking abilities are respected in the language, and have strong conventions. The use of the language in ceremony is very strong, again with very strong conventions, and a lot of domain specific vocabulary. The level of respect given to the language in this use is extremely high, and is a definite cause of learner anxiety – and anecdotally many communities that do not have such a strong tradition of formal use for the language (many Métis communities for example) actually have much higher use of the language in everyday situations. Stories can be divided into roughly two types – *acimowin*, which are usually retellings of events that happened to the speaker, someone the speaker knows, or the speaker’s family, often humorous, or stories of adventures, and *atayokewin* or *kayas acimowin*, which include older stories such as various creation stories. Each genre has its own conventions, and storytelling is strongly respected.

There is a sense that stories cannot be accurately translated. “There are images, suggestions and associations in these stories that mean nothing to the outsider but are apparent in the minds of the Cree” (“Cree storytelling,” 2010, para. 6). Much of these lost associations in my opinion are a result of the rich structure of Cree words. For example, the routine inclusion of medial roots related to the body (mouth, hand, head, foot) often serve to give what would be somewhat abstract concepts in English a very embodied physical meaning. The Plains Cree words *kitimâkinawew* – to pity someone - includes the medial meaning “by hand” /-n), and as such the word can’t be understood as a purely mental act (although a corresponding word implying a more mental act also exists). A favourite example of many Cree speakers is the word for school – *kiskinwahamâkêwikamik* – roughly translated as a place where you learn in a reciprocal, benefactive, hands-on way. My personal favourite example of how this agglutinative

approach can change perception is from a Cree bible translation. Grace, as in “may the grace of God be with you” is translated as *kisêwâtôtâkewin* – roughly, doing-good-things-to-people-ness. The immediacy of the physical in many concepts is connected with Cree language attitudes towards the body. While in English many concepts and words dealing with the body or bodily functions are considered crude, the same words in Cree, while humorous, are not actually crude for most speakers. In fact, I have been told many times that “those words were never dirty in Cree”. The mind-body split of western philosophy is definitely a foreign narrative for the Cree language.

## **2.2 Research in Adult L2 Acquisition of Algonquian Languages**

Despite this large community of L2 learners of aboriginal languages, there has been very little applied linguistic research into language acquisition processes dealing with indigenous languages. The first study I found of L1 acquisition of Cree (Brittain, Dyck, Rose, and Mackenzie 2007) states that to the authors’ knowledge it is the only L1 acquisition study to date of any Algonquian language, although since the publication of this paper, Dean Mellow has presented a paper entitled “The First Language Acquisition of Functions In Oji-Cree” to the Canadian Association of Applied Linguistics (2007) (Oji-Cree is a related Algonquian language). Although there is extensive literature relating to language revitalization methodology, types of successful programs such as language nests (Maori, Hawaiian), immersion education, and master-apprentice programs (such as those advocated by Leanne Hinton), I have found no research focusing on the process of L2 acquisition of Cree.

Continuing to look at other closely related languages there is slightly more research to go on - the most relevant paper probably being Mela Sarkar and Mali Mettalic’s paper (2009) “Indigenizing the Structural Syllabus: the Challenge of Revitalizing Mi’gmaq in Listuguj”, which presents improvements to L2 teaching practices for Mi’gmaq (an Eastern Canadian Algonquian language) based on recognizing that the language is built on verbs rather than on nouns and modifying a language program accordingly. The paper addresses both cultural and methodological considerations that have been addressed to greatly increase the effectiveness of a community language program. This is the only source I have found that seems to be the product of linguistic research into teaching methodologies for Algonquian languages. Dean Mellow has written at least two other papers related to L1 acquisition of some aspects of Oji-Cree (1989, 2007), and Mary Mitchell has published a short book titled *A Notebook for Teachers of*

*Algonkian Languages (Experimental Edition)* (1975) - though it is more a collection of classroom resources than a study into educational methods.

### 2.3 Cree Language Resources

The following is an outline of potential resources for Cree language learners in existence, and does not reflect resources that are actually available to the average learner or teacher, or materials that are used.<sup>1</sup>

Much of the material designed to help learners of Cree that I have found is either geared towards schoolchildren or is written by linguists for linguists. The few sources available that are in between still fall short of giving a full picture of the language. C. Douglas Ellis's *Spoken Cree* series is an impressive example, though the dialect represented is East Coast James Bay Cree, a language at the opposite end of the Cree dialect continuum from Plains Cree, and as a result is only marginally useful for learners of Plains Cree. Mary Edwards' *Cree: an Intensive Language Course* developed for Plains Cree is of a similar quality, although condensed and not going to as high a level. It can be ordered through the Saskatchewan Indian Cultural Centre. Freda Ahenakew's *Cree Language Structures: a Cree Approach* (2000) is another book that is very useful to learners, covering Plains Cree morphology very in-depth, (though it avoids less common paradigms to save space). Rounding up the selection, Jean Okimasis' *Cree: Lan a e o t e a ns - n ya n as - s n* (2004) is a fairly complete reference to Cree verbal morphology for learners (focusing specifically on verbs), though its explanations of the corresponding syntax are similarly necessarily cursory to save space.

Separate from these, many Cree language programs produce a significant amount of their own curricula. The University of Alberta Cree language program has a grammar and course-books for three years of Cree classes, written by various instructors and published by the university. Other universities use resources from a variety of sources, while most community organizations use resources from local school programs, various publically available books, and folders of photocopied old books and various teaching aids.

Many of the resources used for k-12 Cree education are available online, such as the Lac La Ronge Indian Band's Cree program, the Alberta Cree Language and Culture program, or the Ile-a-la-Crosse school division's Cree and Michif resources. These programs appear to be quite

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<sup>1</sup> The question of learner awareness and use of language resources will be discussed in section 4.2.6.

well thought out and detailed, but these programs are not targeted to adults and appear to be unknown to the adult learners interviewed and also to most of the teachers interviewed.

## **2.4 Summary of Background and Literature Review**

In summary, the Cree languages have a storied and complicated history of use, ranging from being a lingua franca for the most profitable industry in North America to being the language of several different nations. Today it is spoken by close to a hundred thousand people, ten to fifteen thousand of those second language speakers, but it is facing significant challenges in many communities due to pressures from English and popular media. As an Algonquian language it presents a unique way of carving up the world through the ideas carried by its speakers, and presents some serious challenges to new learners, ranging from structures that blur the boundaries between morphology and narrative conventions, to a verb system that employs dozens of portmanteau morphemes for all types of transitive meanings. As a subject of research the language's structure is still being described, with much work left to be done, with some dialects in particular largely undescribed. From the perspective of applied linguistic research however there is even less, with only a handful of papers published on even fewer studies, all focusing on the acquisition of the language by children learning the language as their first. In terms of language resources available to students, there is a rich variety available to learners and teachers, though still some areas are distinctly lacking, or at least not widely available.

## **2.5 My Perspective on Language Acquisition**

Some of the broader analysis and discussion in “Chapter 4: Findings and Discussions” is directly related to an analysis of participant views on language and language acquisition, as well as on an analysis of the implied views evident in many of the language resources accessed by participants. Because of this, I have chosen to present my perspective on language acquisition, language, and my views on the scope of both. My personal perspective on language and learning, and as a result a perspective that has influenced my analysis of the methods and techniques used by the participants in this study, is closest to exemplar models or usage based models of language acquisition. Usage based models of language focus on the communicative events in which people learn and use language (Tomasello, 2003). Rather than assuming innate access to classical syntactic categories (more of a Chomskian perspective), these models hold that “permanent abstract schemas gradually emerge and are immanent across the summed similarity of exemplar collections” (Abbot-Smith, Tomasello, 2006 p. 275) According to Gahl and Yu

(2006, page 213) “developing maximally simple, redundancy-free representations . . . has been central to many proposals within linguistic theory.” They give the example of underspecification theory, which “banned non-distinctive or predictable feature values from underlying representations”, and listed models of syntax that took economy as a guiding consideration of their conceptions of the lexicon. In some way these models are searching for what is non-distinctive amongst languages, and assume in varying degrees the words of Chomsky (1984) who stated “none of these [intellectual] structures is learned, they all grow; they all grow in comparable ways; their ultimate forms are heavily dependent on genetic predisposition” (para. 7) and “the basic structures for our behaviour is innate” (para. 9).

Chomsky predicated his statements on the hope that while the physical basis for these structures was not yet understood, it soon would be. Knowledge of the brain, of psychology and the actual flexibility of the mind has increased dramatically over the last few decades, and while we have discovered very specific areas of the brain that deal with specific tasks, the promise of an underlying simplicity has not been fulfilled. What has been realized instead is an overlying simplicity, whereby complex subsystems (systems of representation, motor actions, or word exemplars) are overlaid by higher subsystems, without the underlying complexity and context of lower subsystems being reduced. Rather than finding evidence that the lexicon or our phonology have been reduced to an elegant simplicity, researchers have found (or have argued for) growing evidence that the underlying messiness remains. In other words, our so-called underlying representations of language are full of non-distinctive features, trace memories of random utterances and connected events, not idealized representations. This does not imply that ultimate forms are not dependent on genetic predisposition in some way, but suggests that the innateness might have as much or more to do with the way we learn than with base state hard-wiring.

My own first introduction to this perspective came through exemplar based models, as described in Joan Bybee’s 1985 book *Morphology: A Study of the Relation between Meaning and Form*, in which she used this type of model to describe the distribution of, among other things, irregular verbs. Since then research has ballooned with studies examining word recognition (sociophonetic variation) and phonology (Johnson, 1997), and empirically showing that representation not only includes subphonemic details (Pierrehumbert, 2002) but also that underlying representations are updated incrementally (Bybee, 2006). Abbot-Smith and Tomasello (2006) critically apply this perspective to L1 acquisition in their paper “Exemplar-

learning and schematization in a usage-based account of syntactic acquisition,” partly based on Tomasello’s 2003 book *Constructing a Language: A Usage-Based Theory of Language Acquisition* in which he outlines much of the research done in this field. I also came into the field sideways, via literary, cultural, and theological criticism, with texts such as Tim Ingold’s 2007 book *Lines: a Brief History*, Tom King’s Massey lecture series (and later 2007 book) *The Truth about Stories*, and a host of other texts relating to embodied approaches to literature and cultural studies. These works explore the same approaches and epistemologies that appear to underpin usage or exemplar based conceptualizations of language, but using very different terminologies.

Describing the approach in relation to a nativist linguistic-universal based understanding of language, Abbot-Smith and Tomasello (2006, page 276) state that “approaches that rely on a priori, classical categories in their descriptions of linguistic competence are incompatible with the many asymmetries, frequency, and item effects observed during the early acquisition of a variety of grammatical structures.” In other words, models of language or language acquisition that attempt to divide language into categories such as grammar and lexicon are trying to simplify the underlying pattern from the context, rather than recognizing that it is the build-up of context that creates the pattern.

The basic principle behind exemplar based models of language (and by extension language acquisition) is that mental representations of language “consist of memory traces of specific tokens” (Gahl & Yu, page 213). Acquisition then depends on “exemplar learning and retention, out of which permanent abstract schemas gradually emerge and are immanent across the summed similarity of exemplar collections” (Abbot-Smith & Tomasello, 2006, p. 275). Each trace or exemplar is connected to many other exemplars or collections, and the resulting “lexicon entries” rather than being “maximally simple” or “redundancy free” (Gahl & Yu, p. 213) are instead the results of complete complexity and a lifetime’s worth of still accumulating memory traces and collections.

This principle results in slightly different predictions regarding how our mind stores words when contrasted with the various classical models that usage based models are a rejection of. For example, a model could assume that a subject would break down a word like “carrot” into syllables, morpheme, and meaning, and that the resulting breakdown would predict that hearing or seeing a word like “car-seat” or “potato” would prime the mind to comprehend the meaning of seeing or hearing the word carrot slightly faster because of the simplified ordered system of an

innate lexicon. An exemplar based model would predict the same results, but the reason for the results would be the connections and overlap between exemplars relating to each phoneme, morpheme, syllable, and subject domain. The construct of a “lexicon”, although useful as a generalization, is not a source of these priming effects; it is only a generalization that explains what happens naturally based on the accrued exemplars and connections. Patterns emerge from the accretion of similarities, rather than underlying patterns (such as an innate structures as per generative linguistics) leading to similar patterns on the surface. This approach is classed as an emergentist approach, under the broader domain of cognitive approaches (Mitchell & Myles, 2004).

A purely usage based theory of language acquisition has several implications for second language learners. The first is that it becomes very difficult to separate various linguistic competencies from each other, for example, lexicon and grammar are learnt and accessed through identical processes. It is impossible to gain competency in any single aspect of the language without also involving other components. In the context of scaffolding or similar concepts of learning progression, once a learner has enough of a linguistic base to absorb new knowledge, the more that knowledge is contextualized into pre-existing knowledge the better. This means that hearing a word spoken in a sentence, in the company of a person, in a context where it will be used, or when connected to a memorable physical action, a smell, or anything, the more all input is contextualized and the more it will build towards broad linguistic knowledge.

At the same time, the more knowledge is contextualized, the easier it is to remember and learn, making it easier to build connections to what a learner already knows. And the more a learner makes the language a part of his/her life, the easier it will be to remain motivated and deal with many of the affective challenges that learners face. In summary, increased contextualization, both from the side of presentation of information and learner involvement with the language, relevance and integration, is key to improving learner success in dealing with many of the challenges facing second language learners of Cree, both related to affective and non-affective factors.

## **2.6 Affective Factors**

Affective factors can be defined as any sort of emotional factor that influences language acquisition. When it comes to analyzing the impact of affective factors on language learning,

there is no single dominant framework. Not only do different researchers work from different paradigms of language, but even the terminology seems to vary. Doing empirical research into affective factors is made extremely difficult for several reasons. First, it can be almost impossible to separate the results of one affective factor from the myriad of other affective factors, and secondly, even the definitions of various affective factors are far from pinned down. For example, looking at foreign language anxiety (FLA) MacIntyre (2007) distinguishes between trait anxiety, situation-specific anxiety, and state anxiety, which, when not distinguished from each other, he argues, will produce conflicting results in any study. The same situation arises when trying to isolate the effect of identity, motivation, or any other affective factor.

I can in part sidestep this issue because this study is looking at learner and teacher perceptions relating to second language acquisition of Cree, meaning that the goal is not to isolate each factor, rather the goal is to explain how learners and teachers themselves see the impact of context (including affective factors) on acquisition success; however, I believe that there is some literature that has a strong bearing on how best to interpret interviewee responses. In this review, I will first look at the affective factor of motivation, including identity and community language attitudes. I will then touch on anxiety, language attitudes, and on various attempts that have been made to explain all these factors under a single framework.

### **2.6.1 Motivation (identity, language ego, language attitudes)**

Motivation is a fairly abstract concept that attempts to gather every different factor that might influence a learner's desire to learn and quantify it as a single variable. Like many such abstract concepts, we can say that motivation is only important in what it does – and in the context of language acquisition what motivation does is lead to more or less study, language use, or general time and effort invested by the learner in learning the language.

The best known theory dealing with affective factors, in particular motivation, is Gardner and Smythe's 1975 socio-educational model (Gardner, 1988), which, while not being universally received, continues to serve as a reference point for new ideas to be measured against. Gardner's theory was originally an attempt to explain different outcomes for different learners based on variables such as intelligence, language aptitude, anxiety, and motivation. Specifically dealing with motivation, Gardner's model requires four elements that must be present for a student to be considered motivated; a goal, a desire to achieve the goal, positive attitudes, and effort (ibid). In other words, motivation requires desire and action. Gardner sees the most significant motivation



as what he calls the integrative motive, the desire to belong to the target language community, something that encompasses identity issues, including language ego and language attitudes. Although studies within this framework have had mixed results trying to separate the various components that make up integrative motive, “elements of the integrative motive are significantly correlated with indices of language achievement” (MacIntyre, 2002, p. 50). Gardner differentiates integrative motive from other types of motive (such as financial gain) arguing that integrative motive plays a stronger role in motivating positive learner outcomes.

A new trend in studying motivation comes from cognitive theories of learner motivation (Ushioda, 2008) and is connected to the wider cognitive revolution in psychology. This framework distinguishes between two types of motivation, intrinsic motivation, doing something for the fun of it, and extrinsic motivation, that is, doing something for the sake of some external factor, be that integrating into a community, pleasing a teacher, or getting a job. Put simply, the message is that if a student loves learning the language, it will be easier. This ties in well with what is written about neural plasticity – increased focus leads to more effective learning. In extreme cases such as when a person falls in love their brain chemistry adjusts to allow them to absorb new information like a sponge (Doidge, 2007). Besides the effect of chemicals, the formation of neural pathways is highly influenced by level of attention. The more focused an individual is on the subject at hand, the stronger the synapse will fire, leading to a stronger memory, to stronger exemplars and more efficient learning. Studies such as Van Lier (1996) and Deci and Flaste (1996) suggest that good learners use all of these motivations (enjoyment, sense of challenge, personal goals) regardless, and that what is really important is the learners sense of agency, whether or not the motivations are “internalized and self-determined . . . or externally imposed” (Ushioda, 2008, p. 22). In other words, the key to motivation is self-motivation, as all other types of motivation (peer or teacher pressure, desire for good grades, and others) are not only less permanent, but also have less impact on learner success.

Several other theorists implement these concepts in slightly different ways. For example, Bonny Norton suggests level of investment in the language learning process and the community as being the concept that ties together internal and external motivation. She defines investment as the “socially and historically constructed relationship of learners to the target language, and their often ambivalent desire to learn and practice it” (Norton, 2000, page 240). She states that SLA theorists have failed to develop a “comprehensive theory of social identity which integrates the

language learner and the language learning context” (Norton, 1995, page 9). She then argues that conceptions of the individual in SLA theory need to be revamped based on the “poststructuralist conception of social identity as multiple, a site of struggle, and subject to change” (ibid). This approach comes out of a view of the individual as being co-constituted within the community, and suggests that an intrinsic/extrinsic view of motivation misses the fact that “intrinsic” identity is often negotiated extrinsically. In other words, motivation is socially distributed (Rueda & Moll, 1994).

Other research into motivation has looked into how learners and teachers maintain motivation as language learning progresses and learners reach the first significant learning curve and beyond (Dongfeng, 2012). The major implication for learners resulting from this perspective is just how important it is for learners to understand the importance of taking their education and their learning journey into their own hands rather than assuming that it is the duty of the teacher to give students the language.

### **2.6.2 Identity**

The question of identity as an affective factor is largely subsumed under the concept of motivation, and has been part of every approach discussed so far; however, there are still some concepts that need to be dealt with separately. *The Sociolinguistics of Identity* (Omoniyi & White, 2006) begins by presenting what has been the most far-reaching paradigm shift in the concept of identity in the recent past; the change from using universal laws of psychology or social structures to explain an individual’s fixed identity to a post-structural view of identity as “non-fixed, non-rigid and always being (co-) constructed by individuals of themselves (or ascribed by others), or by people who share certain core values or perceive another group as having such values” (ibid, page 1). This description of identity is still far from a definition however. My identity has to some extent been described early on in this thesis (Section 1.1) – or at least I have given a brief picture of some of the narratives and ongoing discourses that situate me within the world. As those stories change my overall “identity” also changes, but saying that identity is changeable does not mean that identity is fluid, or that language learning is easier as a result.

The very fact that identity is flexible can actually present serious challenges to language acquisition. The challenge potentially presented by identity stems from a concept just discussed, investment. Even as learners can become invested in learning a new language, adults are often

already extremely invested in identity, and learning a new language will always mean a massive influx of new narratives, new dialogues, and new ways of seeing oneself, changes that mean a change to an identity already held dear. The first change for many is going from being a competent, fluent adult in one language, to being an infant in the target language. As my mother said when she spent a month living with me in Moscow, “now I know what it’s like to be a stroke victim.” Learners have to invest in an alternate, sometimes difficult identity, while their old identity in their L1 is waiting right there in case they ever decide to quit. As we get older, especially as we go through puberty, our investment in our community and in our self-image grows stronger and stronger, and is one of the major differences between L1 and L2 acquisition. Continuing, within a usage-based theory of language, there is no abstract separation between the structures of a language and the semantics of the exemplars which form the basis for those emerging exemplar clusters – instead there is a direct pervasive connection between the stories and attitudes expressed in a language and the structure of the language itself – so even if we are willing to go through that deeply humbling transitional period and start to develop strong language skills, we still are faced by the fact that our new language will change who we are at a very foundational level. This challenge to identity is likely a significant hurdle for many language learners, especially learners of minority languages given the importance of identity as a learning motivator.

Another way in which the strong connection between language and identity can be a hurdle comes from community attitudes towards a language. From the perspective of Cree there are a few things that can be said. Within many or even most Cree communities, the language is used in public only in formal settings, and is accorded a high level of respect. The language is clearly seen as an important part of being Cree – for example, there is the well-known series of lectures by Sarah Whitecalf – *Kinêhiyâwiwininaw nêhiyawêwin: The Cree Language is Our Identity* (1993). The level to which the language is valued – especially as the number of speakers decreases – can be a significant hurdle to a learner’s willingness to speak in a given situation, as the pressure to treat the language with respect makes the prospect of mistakes or appearing less than fluent terrifying. The either/or assumption common in the dominant culture that if you do not speak your language you are not really who you say you are is very widespread, meaning that making mistakes speaking is a challenge not just to who you are, but to an identity that is already being challenged. The resulting anxiety can have a strong negative impact on learner success.

### 2.6.3 Anxiety

Anxiety as an affective factor in language acquisition seems to differ primarily from motivation in that there is no need to make a distinction between intrinsic or extrinsic anxiety – it is hard to imagine a situation where someone could feel anxiety in a way that was not highly personal. From what I can tell, research into anxiety in second language acquisition has mostly focused on the impact of personal anxiety and learner success, and research has overwhelmingly been focused on the classroom setting. After establishing that there was a correlation between anxiety and learner success, researchers argued that anxiety is not only a factor in whether or not learners choose to speak (output), but also negatively impacts learners' ability to register linguistic input and to process it (Dulay & Burt, 1977). Scovel (1978) pointed out the anxiety is an imprecise term, resulting in more precise conceptions of the term in studies. Gardner (1985) and Horwitz (1986) developed the concept of an anxiety related specifically to the foreign languages – FLA. Cohen and Norst (1989) argued that language and identity were so closely bound that an attack on one was an attack on the other – in other words, FLA is the same as the fear engendered by an attack on identity (Section 2.6.2). Sparks and Ganschow (1991) have argued that the apparent impact of affective factors is mostly a result of learner aptitude, something disputed by MacIntyre (1995). MacIntyre proposed the concept of Willingness to Communicate (WTC) (MacIntyre 1998, 2007), described in section 2.6.4, as an alternate model of affective factors, including anxiety (discussed below). Onwuegbuzie, Bailey and Daley (1999) linked high FLA to other characteristics including age, high academic achievement, low-expectations and most importantly (in my opinion), low self-worth.

### 2.6.4 Synthesis models

There are a few ways in which the concepts encompassed by motivation and anxiety have been tied together, the most significant in my opinion being the concept of willingness to communicate (WTC). In his article “Willingness to Communicate in the Second Language: Understanding the Decision to Speak as a Volitional Process” MacIntyre (2007) argues that the impact of affective factors, while having a long-term ongoing impact on language acquisition, can best be understood at a moment by moment basis, and that the principle way in which factors such as motivation or anxiety influence language acquisition is in how they influence a learner's WTC at a given moment.

MacIntyre begins by arguing that all these affective factors can be seen as either trait, situation-specific, or state. At a trait level, “concern is for concepts that endure over long periods of time and across situations” such as extreme shyness or arachnophobia. At a situation-specific level the concern is for “concepts that are defined over time within a situation,” (p. 565) or specific patterns of behaviour such as avoiding your ex or being uncomfortable speaking L2 but not L1. Finally, at a state level “concern is for experiences rooted in a specific moment in time” regardless of what may come before or after (p. 565). Although I find issues with distinguishing between trait and situation-specific types of anxiety rather than seeing them as a continuum, the concept of state level anxiety – looking at how all these factors come together at a single moment in time – gives a perspective on all affective factors.

One possible extension to the way in which this approach is formulated is that it appears to view language acquisition as contingent on communication in the target language, possibly since verbal interaction is quantifiable; however, in the context of many adult learners (including those interviewed) the bulk of their learning is done independently, and the majority of actual language production consists of learners’ own internal monologue during self-practice. This does not negate the importance of WTC in acquisition, but suggests that the concept of WTC could be expanded to include the willingness to simply interact with the language, as communication with oneself is not subject to the same outside affective pressures as communication with other members of a language community, despite being (for many learners) an even more important avenue for language use than spoken interaction.

### **2.6.5 Summary of affective factors discussion**

After looking at all these competing models for explaining the importance and impact of affective factors on second language acquisition I find myself thinking like Tevye from the musical *Fiddler on the Roof* – he confirms that two opposing viewpoints are both correct, and when told that this is impossible, replies “you know, you are also right” (Jewison, 1971). In much the same way, each of these complimentary models brings something new to the table, and though they do not always agree with each other, they all add to our understanding. While a model of anxiety that ignores aspects of identity may be incomplete, the perspective it gives still offers insights that another perspective, however valid, might not. When I begin learning a new language, I usually try to find at least two introductory textbooks, and then go through both of them, because I find being taught the same information from two separate perspectives allows

me to somehow develop an understanding that is more independent of both methods, and in this situation I think the same principle applies. While perhaps they cannot all be completely right, I do think that looking at affective factors from a variety of perspectives will always add to an understanding rather than diminish.

To give a synthesis of the previous views, affective factors are those emotional factors that influence learning. Those factors that influence positively are usually lumped as motivation, and those that influence negatively are usually either classed as lack of motivation or anxiety. Many things can influence a learner's motivation: personal or community attitudes towards language use or new speakers; the degree to which a learner wants to become part of the target community or to which a learner is willing to be flexible on his or her identity; and these motivations can have the strongest positive influence on a learner when they are a result of the learner's agency – they are intrinsic to the learner or community. Anxiety is usually seen as a negative emotion, and is assumed to have a negative impact on a learner's acquisition. WTC links these two aspects together as primarily factors in a learner's decision to communicate or not, focusing specifically on the quantity of potential language input. Anxiety in particular has been shown to have a negative impact not just on quantity of language use but also on a learner's ability to make use of input and benefit from language exposure. While learning can be physiologically more difficult under extreme stress, the opposite is also true, and strong motivation and a love of the subject at hand can increase a learner's ability to take advantage of potential input. On an even broader level, affective factors can have a strong influence on those other speakers and learners that a learner is likely to be able to interact with.

## Chapter 3: Methodology

This study is a qualitative case study, based primarily on interviews and a review of resources used by learners and teachers. Participants were each asked a series of questions designed to elicit their experiences learning or teaching Cree as adults, specifically the challenges they or others had faced, and the approaches that had been used to resolve these challenges. Member check interviews were used with a subset of participants to verify, clarify or elaborate on what had already been said. The methodology of the study and the analysis was influenced by Miles and Huberman's books, *Qualitative Data Analysis: An Expanded Sourcebook*, (1994) and *Te Q a t at ve Researc er's Com an on* (2002).

This chapter first outlines the context of the study, in this case by describing the participants, then describes the design of the study, the structure of the study, and how the study was carried out.

### 3.1 Design of the Study

#### 3.1.1 Objective

The purpose of this study is to examine the experiences and beliefs of a cross section of the second language Cree learning and teaching community regarding perceived hurdles in Cree language acquisition, using a qualitative case study approach based on interviews. The intended result of this research is a better understanding of the major challenges facing learners and the solutions utilized by learners to overcome these challenges.

#### 3.1.2 Case study

This study can best be described as a qualitative, multiple case study. One of many definitions of a qualitative case study is that a "qualitative case study can be defined as an intensive, holistic description and analysis of a single entity, phenomenon, or social unit" (Merriam, 1991, p. 16). In this case, the focus is on the phenomenon of adult second language acquisition, doing so by looking at the cases of adults learning Cree as a second language, and of teachers of Cree as a second language. This study differs from the most common types of case studies in that it involves multiple participants, and in that it is not longitudinal. Instead it relies on multiple participants at varying levels of language acquisition to simulate duration.

Although this study consists of standardized interview questions asked of a cross-section of adult learners and teachers of Cree as a second language, it is a qualitative case study rather

than a survey in that it is not designed to gather quantitative responses; rather, the questions are designed to encourage participants to build a narrative of their personal experiences with language acquisition. Using Stenhouse's typology of case studies, it can be described as *evaluative* - defined as a "single case or group of cases studied at such depth as the evaluation of policy or practice will allow" and done in order to "evaluate policy or practice" (Stenhouse, 1983, as cited in Nunan, 1992, p. 77).

Because there has been little SLA research into any Algonquian languages this study was exploratory in nature, with the goal of being a useful starting point for future research.

### 3.1.3 Participants

This study has collaborated with seven participants: four learners and three teachers. All learners have also been involved in teaching, and two of the teachers also speak of their experiences "learning" or gaining fluency in their own language. The names used in this study are not their real names. As the findings (in Chapter 4) are presented challenge by challenge, I have chosen to present the backgrounds of the individual participants here. The participants consisted of three men and four women. Their backgrounds and experiences are described briefly below, followed by a quick summary of the major themes they brought up in their respective interviews.

#### *Lyle (learner)*

Lyle is a Métis male from Edmonton in his early twenties. He had been learning Cree off and on for about four years at the time of the interview, assisted at first at a local native friendship centre, and then for three years by the Cree classes at a university in Edmonton. He speaks at an intermediate level<sup>2</sup>, and appears to be able to speak as well as he understands. He speaks French fluently as a second language (the result of intense interest and a French immersion education), and has studied other languages as well. His family is very supportive of him learning Cree. Nobody in his family speaks Cree since the passing of his great-grandma. Since the primary interview he has gone on to teach a Cree course, and has now been hired as a beginner Cree teacher.

**Major themes:** Lyle speaks about the connection of language to identity. Cree is his fourth language to study. He is incredibly self-motivated, and creates his own opportunities for

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<sup>2</sup> This assessed level of fluency is my own evaluation based on a lengthy conversation with him, and on comparing his comfort with the language with my ESL students.



language use. He has a high opinion of Cree instruction in relation to French Immersion. He sees the main difficulty being a lack of people to talk to.

***Skyla (learner)***

Skyla is a female from between Edmonton and Vermillion in her mid-twenties. She took the three years of Cree classes offered by the University of Alberta, and also spent two years as a Cree tutor for these classes. She has written and is in the process of writing small children's books in Cree. She has a very good knowledge of all the paradigms and grammar that were presented to her, but her conversational speaking and production are extremely limited. She is not aboriginal, though has strong connections to a Cree community.

***Major themes:*** Skyla has worked on developing language assessment tools. She has learnt French, but has a low speaking ability. She has lived with a Cree speaking elder for some time, which is the origin of her interest in Cree. She sees the main challenges as being shyness and a lack of intermediate resources. She feels the best way to learn is to teach. Her motivation for learning is evident in the passion with which she talks about her experiences and goals.

***Corinne (learner)***

Corinne is a middle aged Cree lady from Mistahi Sakahikanihk. Although she heard her language regularly as a child, she never learned to speak it. She has taken structured language lessons but found the focus on grammar and writing did not help her at all in speaking. She was instrumental in starting speaking circles in Regina, not only for the Cree language, but for many other languages as well, and has done substantial work putting recordings of Cree (and other languages) on the internet for other learners. She is now learning the language by listening to these recordings and practicing speaking with her partner, who is also learning the language. She is a language advocate, resource creator, and learner. Since our interview she reports significant success in learning the language.

***Major themes:*** Corinne strongly focuses on the impact of various community and affective factors, and on creating resources that are accessible to all, including web-based resources for independent learners.

***Adam (learner)***

Adam is Corinne's partner, a middle-aged Dene man also from Mistahi Sakahikanihk. He has been learning Cree for the past few years, mostly through ceremonies and from listening to

and creating recordings that he and his partner make for their website. He has also taught Dene for a number of years, and worked as a translator and broadcaster in the language after studying to gain fluency in the language as a young man. He was interviewed both as a learner and as a teacher.

**Major themes:** Adam focuses on making students confident. He sees the biggest challenge for students being that learners stop using their new language skills after the completion of the course. He also talks about the development of learner language use, and the importance of trusting your emerging knowledge.

***Margaret (teacher)***

Margaret is a lady around thirty, a Cree teacher and curriculum developer from Stanley Mission working in Mistahi Sakahikanihk. I interviewed her as a teacher. She has taught for three years as well as spent a number of years doing curriculum development. Among other subjects, she discussed her views on her own experience developing and maintaining her own language proficiency.

**Major themes:** Margaret talks about her own language learning experiences. She explains how adults are more disciplined learners, and talks about the importance of context in learning a language. She thinks that fluency will only be achieved through more intensive immersion classes.

***Kurtis (teacher)***

Kurtis is a man in his early thirties, a Cree teacher from north of North Battleford. I interviewed him in his capacity as a teacher, but like Margaret he also had much to say about his own language maintenance. Because of the settings he has taught in he has been able to use a variety of different methodologies with reported success.

**Major themes:** Kurtis talks about reviving community use of the language. He has used several different methodologies with learners. He encourages learners to take control of their own learning. He has run immersion courses. In his opinion, the biggest challenge to the Cree language is a decrease in domains of usage, both with students and in the community. He believes the biggest solution to this challenge is educating the community and learners on the benefits of Cree and bilingualism, as a way of increasing motivation.

### ***Darla (teacher)***

Darla is a middle-aged woman and a Cree teacher in Edmonton. She taught Lyle and Skyla, as well as many others to whom I talked outside the study. She has taught for 10 years, has produced a large amount of course materials, and is well respected by all of her former students I have had the opportunity to meet. She was also the one teacher who did not speak specifically about her personal language maintenance, possibly because she was raised in a more monolingually Cree environment, in contrast to Margaret and Kurtis who were raised with significant exposure to English as well as Cree.

**Major themes:** Darla has insight into how the educational system structures the type of instruction she uses in class, the nature of her students, and the strategies students use to overcome the unique challenges posed by learning Cree in an academic setting.

## **3.2 Strategies of Inquiry / Research Methods**

The objective of my research is to document and analyze the reported experiences and beliefs of a cross section of the adult second language Cree learning and teaching community regarding perceived hurdles in Cree language acquisition. To do this I focused on the following two research questions:

1. What are the challenges reported by adult second language learners of Cree?
2. What are some of the ways learners overcome these challenges?

In order to explore these questions I used a face to face interview. In order to contextualize the interview responses, I also reviewed available Cree language curriculum materials mentioned by learners or teachers, as well as all other Cree language resources I could find. Each of these methods is described in further detail below.

### **3.2.1 Interviews**

The primary data collection medium of this study was a face-to-face interview. The interview was semi-structured, consisting of primarily open-ended questions, and there were two separate sets of questions - one for teachers, and one for learners (see Appendix 1). Each interview lasted between forty minutes and an hour and a half. These interviews took place wherever was most convenient to the interviewees, and with the exception of one interview were all face to face.

In their 1990 paper “Stories of Experience and Narrative Inquiry” Michael Connelly and Jean Clandinin argue for the use of a narrative inquiry – studying human experience through the

use of human stories – under the premise that “humans are storytelling organisms” and that the study of stories “is the study of the ways humans experience the world” (page 2). Since I see this study in part as a way of providing context for future research, I designed the interview questions to cover the question of challenges and solutions in as broad a context as possible, providing multiple opportunities for participants to tell and elaborate on their stories of Cree second language acquisition.

I conceived of each interview as progressing through three stages. The initial stage was introductions and background information, with the added goal of getting the interviewee comfortable talking to me: “Can you tell me a bit about yourself and your family? Your background, where you’re from...” or “Can you tell me about how you ended up learning Cree?” The second stage was focused on exploring in some depth the teacher’s or learner’s views and knowledge regarding the challenges and solutions to adult second language acquisition of Cree, with a range of both broad and specific questions regarding resources, methodologies, and personal experiences. These were the questions designed to elicit answers to the research questions. A sample question would be “What resources did you have access to to help you learn?” or “What are the major obstacles students have to overcome if they want to learn Cree?” The third stage involved giving each interviewee questions that allowed them to summarize and expand on their answers, or even give new challenges and solutions. Questions include “What advice would you give to a new student?” or “Can you think of anything that would make learning Cree an easier process for you?” For each question, I also asked clarifying questions to encourage participants to share as much of their experiences as possible.

### **3.3 Procedures**

I received my ethics approval on May 26, 2010. Although the majority of my participants were aboriginal, since the case under study is not specifically members of any particular nation or organization, instead made up of all adult learners of Cree (from many different communities) and because the study focuses on those challenges not specific to aboriginal learners, but rather general to all adults learning Cree, I was not required to seek approval from any specific community.

### 3.3.1 Stage 1: Recruitment

I had two target populations for recruitment: adults who had learnt or were in the process of learning Cree as a second language, and teachers of Cree as a second language who had taught or were teaching adults.

I initially expected few difficulties in finding potential participants. I knew several teachers already, and with 100,000 native speakers and reportedly up to twenty thousand second language speakers (Section 2.1) I believed that adult learners would be very easy to find. While I was able to locate and recruit teachers, learners who had achieved any level of competency as adults were extremely difficult to track down.

The first means of recruitment was through online social networking, primarily Cree Facebook communities and the Indigenous Languages and Technology (ILAT) listserv. Lyle, Skyla, Corinne and Adam were recruited via this method. The second approach I used was convenience sampling from my own friends and contacts within the Cree learning and speaking community. As a result of this approach I found three teachers who agreed to be interviewed, and out of those three I interviewed one, Darla. One friend who had read my post on the ILAT listserv had contacted me as an adult learner of Michif as a second language. Our interview plans fell through; however, she did introduce me to some friends of hers who were Cree teachers. It was through her that I was put in contact with Margaret and Kurtis, as well as two other teachers who agreed to be interviewed, but were then prevented from participating by an inability to coordinate our schedules at the last moment.

I had expected to rely on references from those learners and teachers contacted initially in finding other potential participants, but this plan fell through. While almost every individual contacted was able to refer me to other teachers, only one individual out of all those talked to – including teachers, learners and all others – was able to refer me to a single other person who had learned Cree as an adult. Kurtis stated that he had two students who had learnt Cree as adults; however, my attempts to contact them (they lived out of country) were unsuccessful. He also referred me to a multilingual Manitoban who had also learnt Cree as an adult, and although I was able to get his contact information, he did not respond to my messages. During the recruitment of each individual I initially followed a prepared script (appendix II) that varied depending on the individual and the means of contact.

Because of these difficulties with recruitment, rather than selecting a representative segment of those learners recruited to interview, I instead interviewed everyone who responded. I also expanded my original group to include learners of both Th and Y dialects of Cree, and rather than only recruiting participants from the Edmonton area I interviewed participants from Saskatchewan, Alberta and British Columbia.

Teachers had taught university courses, community courses, immersion camps and language circles, besides all having developed language resources. Learners were Métis, Cree, Euro-Canadian, and Dene, with language skills ranging from beginner to intermediate to upper intermediate, and had tried a wide range of approaches.

### **3.3.2 Stage 2: Interviews**

Interviews with all participants were conducted during summer 2010, either while I was based in Lacombe, Alberta, or during a meandering trip between Lacombe and Camperville, Manitoba. The first interviewee was Lyle, and we met in his parent's home in Edmonton. Following that I drove to Mistahi Sakahikanihk where I had arranged to meet with Corinne and Adam in their home. We visited for three or four hours, including an hour and a half during which we went through the interview questions for both learners and teachers, first with Corinne, then with Adam. The following morning Adam took me to the council office and curriculum centre, where I interviewed Margaret as a teacher, then spent another hour visiting her and the other curriculum developers. Shortly after returning to Lacombe I travelled to Edmonton again to interview Darla (as a teacher), who teaches at the University of Alberta. The interview was held in her office. Later that same day I interviewed Kurtis (also as a teacher), who was in town for a series of classes. Our interview was held in an empty classroom. The final interview was with Skyla, and was held over Skype.

### **3.3.3 Stage 3: Coding and analysis**

I analyzed these interviews in several stages. The design of the interview questions was the first step of analysis. Based on an analysis of my own experiences as an adult learner of Cree, the experience of individuals I had already talked to, and my review of relevant literature, I prepared questions and follow-up questions that I felt would allow me to get the maximum amount of feedback from each interviewee. I continued the process throughout the interviews as I took notes and decided which clarifying questions would allow us to explore each question deeper.

Following the interviews, I transcribed the recordings of the interviews. This required listening to all of the interviews multiple times. Because the coding was such an important part of the analysis, I have chosen to describe it in greater detail. After completing all transcriptions, I developed a coding scheme. The coding scheme was developed to reflect several different aspects of this research. First, it reflected the categories brought up by the specific interview questions (challenges and solutions, specific groupings of resources, personal history, etc.). Secondly, it had to reflect the various categorizations suggested in the literature review discussion on affective factors (identity, motivation, anxiety, and other affective factors). Thirdly, the coding was designed to allow easy analysis of challenges relating to specific aspects of the language such as animacy, verbs, and syntax. Finally, the coding scheme was adapted to reflect some of the insights that I gained through my immersion in the interviews during the transcription process. For a closer look at the coding schema see Appendix 1.

Following the development of the scheme I then coded the interviews using the Coding Analysis Toolkit (CAT), a suite of tools for analyzing qualitative data developed and made available by the University of Pittsburgh. During the process of coding the interviews I refined my coding scheme, and then after reading through the coding report for each code and highlighting what I found to be the most relevant statements, I again modified the coding scheme, and recoded the interviews, this time having a second coder code a third of all code-able chunks independently to check on the reliability of the coding. All interviews had to be separated into code-able chunks before coding began, and the chunks could not be modified during the coding process (other than by being deleted) due to the nature of the program CAT used. I divided the interview transcripts into code-able chunks based on what appeared to me to be all natural breaks in the conversation – changes of speaker, significant pauses, clear sentence breaks, or clear changes of topic.

I trained this coder by going through the list of codes and examples of codes provided in Appendix I, as well as discussing with him the larger groupings of codes, what they meant, and by explaining all unfamiliar terms used. Fortunately the coder was familiar with most of the concepts involved. We then went through fifty code-able chunks independently, discussing our coding choices following each chunk, further clarifying the meaning of each code.

The coding scheme can also be described more in-depth. The coding scheme was made up of 25 separate codes (see Appendix I), which were then used to code each code-able chunk of

the interviews. The codes were chosen to group participant statements into groups that would lend themselves to easy analysis of specific challenges and the corresponding solutions, and also to filter out irrelevant or personal data.

Within the coding scheme multiple codes could be assigned to a single code-able chunk, with the following exceptions. *Off-topic* could not be double-coded with any other code. *Speakers* could not be double-coded with *resources* unless the discussion was of multiple resources. For example the following chunk was coded *speakers* because of the reference to a lack of fluent speakers, but was also coded *resources* because of the reference to CDs, and *methodology* because of the discussion of the discussion on learning phrases:

(Excerpt 0)

Haha, yeah – and that's what I mean, and say, I say you know what, I'll give you a CD so at least if you hear it again you'll remember what you learned, and maybe you can learn some phrases on your own, but the book after certain point, it's like "I can't remember how you say this – and it's not something you hear all the time in a week, you're not going to bump in to a bunch of fluent speakers.

Questions were generally not double coded except when the subject of the response was not clear without having the question immediately available. *Identity*, *Anxiety*, and *Motivation* also, while considered to be subcategories of the Affective code, were not double-coded with *Affective* unless the code-able chunk also covered some other affective factor not included in one of those three categories.

Several other coding rules had to be established in conjunction with the other coder. An excerpt talking about community language use would at first glance be coded as *Language Use* and *Affective* as it is an external factor for motivation; however, if the chunk is not actually dealing with motivation, then it must instead be coded as *Language Use* only. Continuing, the code *speakers* was limited to discussion of the availability of speakers as a resource to learners, whereas the use of that resource (i.e. occasions where learners use Cree, with each other or with speakers) was coded as *language use*. Another decision taken was that simply using Cree in a response was not reason to code as *language use* unless it was discussing language use in Cree.

There were some patterns in the interviews that tended to influence my coding decisions unless I remained aware of them. One example was repetition of phrases: one participant might



use a particular language construct in discussing learner motivation, while the next participant might use almost the exact same structure discussing learning history. While my co-coder was very quick to choose the second option for the second statement, possibly because I tend to pay more attention to the structure of language, I might automatically code both statements the same because the structure brings the subject to mind. This only happened once in the third of all interviews that were co-coded, but likely happened again in the two thirds that I coded independently.

Even after defining each code with what felt like legal precision, during validation we still encountered some differences between our coding choices; however, while going over them it turned out that they were not as significant as we had thought. To begin, I had made nine coding decisions which were clear mistakes in light of the coding guidelines that had already been established, and coder 2 had made seven. In seven instances coder 2 made different decisions because he did not speak Cree. For example, Lyle states: “No I could go *kiskinohamâto* teach or learn, and *wikamik*, a place and I recognize *kisk* from *kiskisin*, *kiskeyihten*, so I recognize that, the rest of it not really.” Coder two marked this as *verbs* because from the English glosses given it appears to be a discussion of various verbs; however, actually it is a discussion of the impact of internal word morphology, and should have been coded as *other non-affective factors*.

Several other discrepancies were a result of the web-based nature of the program – simply clicking back and changing a code instead of clicking on the “change code” button resulted in the same code being chosen twice for a single excerpt, resulting in a difference even when all the same codes were chosen. The most significant difference was that I consistently double coded discussion of *clauses and function words* with *methodology*, while coder two coded as if *clauses and function words* precluded *methodology* as *clauses and function words* was a subcategory. For example, I coded the following statement (by Lyle) as both *Clauses and function words* and *methodology* while coder 2 chose only *clauses and function words*:

(Excerpt 1)

I think it has to do with little words *kaya*, *ekwanima*, *ekose*, where I think it sometimes governs the word order, like I don't know all of them, but umm..., somehow I think it tells you how to interpret which word is doing what to what in a sentence when it's in no particular order.

A second difference was that coder 2 double coded several questions while I treated questions as if they could not be double coded with anything else. Again, because I had already conducted, listened to, transcribed, and read all the interviews, I tended to have a much stronger sense of the context of each code-able chunk, which sometimes led to me selecting a code based on the broader context of that segment of the interview, a code which coder 2 did not select based on his narrower experience with the texts and his narrower focus because of his lack of experience with the texts. An example of this is with the excerpt “Yeah, if there could be an explanation for it, it would for sure help out a lot.” I coded it as *clause and function words* because of the context, whereas the second coder coded it as *off topic*. Also, responses did not target the intended question; for example, learner responses to a question about language use were seen to have nothing to do with language use during adjudication, but during the coding process, both coders coded the response as *language use* because it immediately followed a clear question.

Out of 759 codings that we had both coded, 612 were an exact match, an agreement rate of 81%. When we reviewed coder choices, out of 769 coding decisions 710 were adjudicated as correct according to the coding scheme (the difference between 759 and 769 being because of the program issue with double coding the same code), giving a validity of 92.33%, with the biggest discrepancy occurring in the code *Language Use*, where the definition was likely too close to the code *Speakers*. Eliminating errors resulting from coder 2 not speaking Cree, the misunderstanding over possible co-codings, and those caused by failed attempts to change a code resulting in double codes results in an 88% agreement rate. Factoring in the 16 cases which were obvious oversights on the part of one coder or the other on a second glance, and agreement jumped to 92%.

Following validation I continued on and finished coding the remainder of excerpts incorporating the decisions made during validation; that *clauses and function words* could be double-coded with *methodology*; questions could be double coded to correspond with the corresponding answers, and keeping in mind the coder mistakes noted during validation.

#### **3.3.4 Stage 4: Member checks**

The fourth stage of the research process consisted of member checks with some of the participants, done after coding and most of the analysis. These member checks were done with

two participants, Lyle and Corinne<sup>3</sup>, to verify, clarify or elaborate on what they had already said. I verified my depiction of them as learners, and asked if they had anything to add in terms of revised approaches to learning or new resources.

### **3.4 Auditability**

The auditability and credibility of this study was promoted in several ways: through interview design, interview implementation, analysis and follow-up. The study was designed to promote maximum richness of results in the context of the chosen medium. The decision to incorporate two groups of participants, teachers and learners, was also done with the goal of adding another level of richness to the findings, and although participants were not easy to find, the study was able to include a significant range of experiences, both amongst learners and teachers (Section 3.1.3). Questions were rephrased, and participants were given multiple opportunities to restate their ideas and summarize themselves, and participants were also asked about their own broader experiences with the language and community to help situate responses. Interviews were conducted face to face, recorded and then transcribed as a way to encourage an environment conducive to openness, as well as to preserve the emotional strength of the interviews during coding and analysis. During analysis I spent time with the interviews transcribing them before developing a coding structure, then further revising that coding structure after having tested it on the data. The involvement of two coders allowed me to check my consistency in applying codes, giving a yet clearer understanding of the data. Finally following this process I re-contacted two of the participants of the study, confirming my depiction of them as participants, and as much as possible confirming my interpretation of what they had said, as well as my broader analyses of themes in their interviews.

### **3.5 Summary of Methodology**

This study is a qualitative, multiple case study, designed to examine the experiences and beliefs of a cross section of the second language Cree learning and teaching community regarding perceived hurdles in Cree language acquisition. It focuses on the answers to two questions: “What are the challenges reported by adult second language learners of Cree?” And “What are some of the ways learners overcome these challenges?” The study consists of seven

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<sup>3</sup> I checked with these two participants in particular because together they accounted for over half of the excerpts presented in this thesis, and I concluded that checking with these two would be more valuable than checking with the other participants. I did not check with all the participants because of my assumption at the time that member checks were to be done with a subset of the group.

participants, four learners and three teachers. The primary strategy of inquiry was face to face interviews. Following these interviews the results were transcribed, coded, and analyzed.

## Chapter 4: Findings and Discussion

This chapter first presents participant understanding of language and learning, then within that context presents and discusses the challenges facing adult learners of Cree as reported by the participants, followed by any solutions and approaches that students and teachers report using in overcoming these challenges. I begin with affective challenges of motivation, anxiety, and identity, and then progress to other challenges such as interaction with fluent speakers, time, resources, participant language use, then specific grammatical challenges of the language such as animacy, obviation, clause and function words, verbs and pronunciation. I conclude with a presentation of less direct findings resulting from a broader analysis of participant responses relating to resource use and learner methodologies. The presentation of findings in this chapter has been organized roughly from most concrete findings to the more abstract, or from a narrow to a broad frame of reference.

Throughout this chapter, whenever participants speak in Cree, a translation is given in a footnote unless the statement is later translated by the speaker in the same excerpt. When a single excerpt is used multiple times, the reader is referred back to the first instance, except in cases where specific sections of the excerpt are underlined for emphasis (though these excerpts will still bear the same excerpt number as identical excerpts with different underlining).

### 4.1 Participant Views on Language and Culture

Participants saw language as a very broad term, encompassing more than just words and grammar, extending to identity. For example, Skyla states: “that's what language is – it’s community,” and both learners and teachers see the language and the language learning process as something that extends far beyond the classroom. For example, Kurtis talks about the importance of: “convincing administrators (our leaders) of the benefits of having a second language” and of “giving the people identities, of a positive self-image, confidence.” He then links this to a whole range of other very broad benefits:

(Excerpt 2)

Problem solving goes up, math skills go up, your English skills actually improve because of learning a second language, and there's so many pros of learning a second language, and a lot of our social issues I would say could be solved if a lot more of our people knew

who they were as (unclear) and what better way to teach them but by learning their language.

Lyle states that “Language is like identity.” He adds: “by learning Cree I was learning something about my identity.”

Participants view learning as community and contextually based, and in relation to this, support methodologies such as immersion and the Master Apprentice Program (Section 4.2.9). When participants speak of language or language learning, what they say seems to be best understood by using a very broad and holistic understanding of the terms. This is especially reflected in the importance participants give to community while dealing with issues of motivation (Section 4.2.1) and identity (Section 4.2.3), as well as in some of the general solutions discussed (Section 4.2.9).

## **4.2 Challenges and Solutions**

### **4.2.1a Motivation: Challenges**

One of the main challenges facing teachers and adult learners is the challenge of motivating learners and keeping them motivated. For example, students can have problems with being discouraged as a result of unfulfilled expectations. For example, Corinne states:

(Excerpt 3)

I know a lot of people they've taken a class, this is the most common scenario I've heard, 'I've took the class and I still can't speak the language, and now I can't even remember how to say one thing, so I guess I just don't have what it takes to speak this language,' and when I meet people like that I say this has nothing to do with you and your abilities it's you have not been given the resources to be able to do that.

Another aspect of motivation that learners and teachers discussed was the problem of maintaining motivation through the learning process, and the resulting see-saw progress. For example, Kurtis sees staying committed as a serious challenge for his students. And Corinne described having to really push herself to continue learning and using the resources she has: “I use it for a few weeks then get busy, then stop, then a few more weeks, then stop, so I just have to really push myself to do it.”

Teachers also mention the impact of the initial learning curve on motivation, something that had a significant impact on my own language acquisition. For example, Kurtis states:

(Excerpt 4)

Umm, well there's gonna be hurdles, and there's gonna be a really big stumbling block well not a stumbling block but sort of you hit the wall, but it's not that big of a wall, just time will deteriorate that wall, so motivation will get you through that first one, and have fun with it, and share your information and practice, and umm, don't be shy to use it, to use the language anywhere you can just use it.

The idea of their being multiple stumbling blocks and hurdles regarding motivation also emphasizes the view of motivation as something that must be maintained throughout the learning process.

#### **4.2.1b Motivation: Solutions**

Learners and teachers presented several approaches in dealing with motivating learners. First, they saw a strong sense of identity as essential to motivating students. Lyle, Skylar and Corinne all see language as being connected to identity and a strong motivator. For example, Lyle explains his motivations for learning Cree:

(Excerpt 5)

Ah, I just started wanting to learn Cree and so I - why? Because that's one of the languages that my ancestors spoke, that we don't have any more, and so it's kind of like languages, okay, to me language is like, is like identity. If you think about it, I'll use for example that works both ways so language is like, the structure of it, the different words that are related, actually carries information about the people. I'll give you an example of how language does that, is like, for example, if we're talking about France, right? You say France is a French country, we say the French people, French culture, ah, and we say French language. So by the simple fact that we call all those things French, shows that we think in this language that all those things are related. So to me, that's something that language carries, whereas, I don't know if any language exists like this, but if you called them by different things, then you're kind of like, it indicates that the general thinking is that those things aren't related, that those words aren't related.

Corinne also links her language to identity:

(Excerpt 6)

There's no way I'm gonna know that unless I learn the language and I need to, I need to I need to know stuff like that 'cause it's part of who I am and If I never learn that then I'm never really gonna know that and if I can't communicate on that level with other Cree people in my community and my family, then I'm always gonna be on the outside, and I know that, h-how important that is and I need to be able to communicate, especially the spiritual ceremonies and the prayers and those sorts of things, I need to know my language. To truly understand who I am as a Cree person I need to understand Cree and I'm not gonna be able to unless I do, like I need to know that. So, it's really important to me for a lot of different reasons.

She continues by describing the motivation behind some other learners:

(Excerpt 7)

They're embarrassed because they can't speak their own language, and I think that is something that is systemic, but to be with other Cree people especially your own family, and not being able to understand what other people are saying, it really, really, it really hurts. You just feel totally isolated and excluded, and it's not because people are deliberately trying to do, but you just feel like an outsider as soon as that language barrier goes up, even when it's your own family. And that's why a lot of people want to learn the language, they want to be fully able to communicate with their family within their community and be able to pass that language on, and it's a very personal thing for FN people, that's why they want to learn. If you ask people the reason why they want to learn their language, that's the reason they give is because they want to be able to speak to whoever in their family, there's someone there they probably wish they could speak to.

In this case motivation comes from integrative motive, and that desire to be included is strengthened through all kinds of pressures that leave learners embarrassed and self-conscious about their language abilities. Adam mentioned personal problems as a challenge to motivation, but also gives a partial solution in being strongly focused:

(Excerpt 8) Yep. Motivation. The ones, I'll say, the ones who weren't moving as fast as the others were people who had family problems or some other distraction happening, but if you're 100% focused on learning a language then you'll be able to do it.



While Corinne and Adam focus on a Métis or Cree identity, identity is also important to Skyla, for whom Cree is not a heritage language, who says “that's what language is – it's community.” In other words, identity for these learners encompasses both a sense of self-identity and a sense of community – i.e. an integrative motive.

Learners and teachers talked about strategies for controlling and encouraging motivation. For example, Corinne says the following to other learners:

(Excerpt 9)

If you really want to you can I know a lot of people who have learned their language on their own, be really curious, I think there's probably a lot of different ways that work for different people, and I might have a better idea now of what works for me, because I'm starting to have a little bit of success, which is helpful for me, but it may be different things for different people, but you may need to experiment in other words, and be curious about some other ideas of how you could learn.

Teachers also talked about the role they played in fostering a positive attitude in their students and the benefits. For example, Adam said the following:

(Excerpt 10)

Once they instill pride, and confidence in the way they deliver, you have fun doing it, and you're not scared to laugh about your mistakes, then you learn faster.

And:

(Excerpt 11)

Try and get them to laugh, and try and encourage them to respond back to the sounds I tell them and if I don't hear it just practice and practice and practice, finally they start to pick it up.

A positive attitude is also connected with creating a safe environment for learners. For example, Adam states:

(Excerpt 12)

You just talk to them say “you're allowed to make mistakes, and laugh if you want, the only rule is you don't laugh at someone else, umm..., but if it's really funny then everyone laughs together, you don't just laugh and say ‘oh you said that wrong’ and judge,” the only way I've found is you just get them to have fun right from the beginning. And encourage them and show them that you make mistakes as well as a teacher, you

make mistake too and have fun doing it. That's the way I've learnt, is, usually my students I try and have fun with them all the time.

In other words, Adam suggests that students learn better in a safe environment when they are having fun.

Corinne also talks about how connecting the language, even individual sentences, to positive emotions helped her learn.

In summary, participants recognized that keeping students motivated enough to continue learning, despite a significant learning curve and frequent unfulfilled expectations, was a significant challenge. In order to deal with this challenge, participants drew on their personal motivations. They described their desires to have stronger connections to their Cree speaking families, friends, and community, and the way in which learning Cree was important to their own sense of identity. This was more of a challenge when learners did not have this connection to the language. Participants suggested that having a strong focus was good for motivation, and teachers talked about what they did to instill confidence in their students by encouraging them, and also by providing safe learning environments.

#### **4.2.2a Anxiety: Challenges**

All learners and teachers talked about anxiety as a serious problem for learners. For Corinne, this anxiety began while young, and goes beyond simply FLA:

(Excerpt 13)

And then they were laughed at. Yeah. Especially when it happens when you're a kid. It's kind of like that mental block right, and then I think for a lot of people they're really embarrassed.

In fact, all the learners talked about challenges with anxiety when given opportunities to use Cree. Skyla states: “so yeah, that was hard, and just, not having anyone to speak it with, because maybe I can talk it with Lee, but I just did not feel that confident.” What she says is echoed by Corinne:

Excerpt 14)

One thing that's hard for me is that I'm really quite shy about it. I understand quite a bit but, I have a hard time speaking and that's another thing about our languages that it's hard for people. And, it's not uncommon for people to be really shy to speak Cree just because you feel really self-conscious that you're not saying it right. And, that's a big barrier in

learning it too. And then, I find that if you don't have that blockage you can actually learn it quite quickly compared to people that do.

In other words, pressure to speak correctly makes her self-conscious, and is a barrier to speaking.

When asked how well she speaks Cree, she replies: “Not very well because I'm scared to speak Cree. Which is sad, because that's my ultimate goal is to speak it.” Similarly, when Lyle is asked the same question, he replies:

(Excerpt 15)

*Kâ-pîkiskwâtak awiyak, êka kâ-nihtâ-nêhiyawet* – when I'm speaking with someone who doesn't speak fluent Cree - *Kâpîkiskwâtak awiyak kâ-nihtânêhiyawet, ninohtênêhiywân mina, moya mâka nikakînihtânêhiyawân* – so if I find someone who's speaking Cree good, I'm gonna be wanting to speak Cree good as well, but I can't. So it's hard.

In other words he too finds talking to fluent speakers challenging because of the pressure to speak correctly.

Anxiety is a big concern for teachers as well, especially concerning adult learners, and much of the focus is on how to promote a safe learning environment. Corinne states:

(Excerpt 16)

And, uh, the reason why I really like the model is that, you know that one of the biggest barriers that learners have is being really self-conscious like I was learning the language so it was a safe environment for them to learn because everyone was learning to speak.

This is in line with what Adam says about focusing on creating a safe learning environment and trying to make sure that his students are having fun while they are learning.

When compared to the information covered in the literature review on anxiety as an affective factor, the most noticeable area of divergence between the situation outlined by participants and what is summarized in the literature review is the emphasis on the impact of community-wide anxiety on learners. The history of language suppression that Cree shares with most other First Nations languages in Canada and the United States means that language anxiety is systemic in many communities, not only with first language speakers, but also with younger learners who have inculcated these community anxieties. This aspect of anxiety and its impact on adults learning minority languages in Canada should be studied in more detail.

### 4.2.2b Anxiety: Solutions

Participants offer several different approaches to combating anxiety, including safer learning environments, such as speaking circles or smaller groups where learners feel less pressure. They also list other characteristics that can make learning less stressful, such as having already learnt a second language, or simply being able to decide to ignore the causes of anxiety.

In response to a question about program needs, Corinne replies:

(Excerpt 17)

More speaking circles probably, 'cause I'm not as shy there 'cause everyone is trying to learn with me, nobody is shy there, it's probably the safest place you can learn to speak a language is in the speaking circle, everyone's making the same mistakes so no one is scared at all.

Kurtis also talks about creating safer learning environments:

(Excerpt 18)

But the obstacle to learning in an open room, like this, I'd say, is if there were five of us I'd say it'd lessen the pressure. People are more willing to share with smaller groups, but bigger groups too are kind of [unclear] if you have a really good teacher who can lead the classroom – classroom management has a lot to do with it.

Learners also focus on the benefits of safe learning environments. Skyla states:

(Excerpt 19)

Like, if there's a bunch of people, like, I'm comfortable in those classes because I'm not expected to keep a conversation going, like I felt if I were at a powwow, and started introducing myself in Cree and then couldn't, continue on it, I'd be totally self-conscious, like why'd you even bother with that, you know?

In other words, Skyla can see the risk of making a mistake not worth the benefit of trying, meaning her WTC is extremely low.

Corinne perceived the difference between her husband's and her own abilities to learn Cree to be the result of his lack of anxiety resulting from already speaking a second language, giving one possible explanation for why so many successful learners were already successful learners: "Because, I know from my husband, he's already learned his second language, he's not shy to try and speak the language at all and it's helping him."

Lyle and Skyla also mention advantages gained from previous language learning experience, suggesting that knowing that they *can* learn a language is a big help in combatting anxiety.

Some learners talk about overcoming their anxiety. Here Adam talks about how he felt after being laughed at by more fluent speakers:

(Excerpt 20)

It did at first hurt a bit, but then I said ah, I'll show them, I just learned it from elders, every time I heard a hard word I'd write it down, even the writing I learned on my own, the vowels, the sounds, everything, now I can teach, I teach it as well.

In other words he was able to ignore the challenge, or turn it into a motivator.

In summary, participants listed safe learning environments as the biggest help in dealing with anxiety, but also mentioned other factors that could decrease anxiety such as having previous experience with language learning, or being able to ignore the causes of anxiety.

#### 4.2.3a Identity: Challenges

Teachers and students also recognize ways in which identity can negatively impact learning. For example, Darla links a lack of identity to a lack of motivation to learn in students for whom Cree is not a part of their identity:

(Excerpt 21)

*Nihtâw ayisiyiniwak kânêhiyawet* speaking Cree but even so some of them don't want to anyways, because they're not Cree to begin with. I've spoken to some of my students and, they're like, 'We're supposed to take it because part of aboriginal studies is you're supposed to take an aboriginal language and Cree is what you offer.' So, they're forced to do it and it makes some of them upset that they have to be forced to do it so I just teach - I just do what I have to do.

Yet another way in which identity is mentioned as a negative factor is in this statement by Skyla:

(Excerpt 22)

I guess, it's hard because, one of the reasons that I the thing that's hardest for me in my Cree is speaking and hearing it. But I'm, first of all, an extreme introvert and, even in English, I don't like talking a lot. Like, in social situations... I'll often be real quiet – so the problem is very foundational to the being of who I am, which I have to change. And I'm not sure if I'm strong enough to do that.

For Skyla, her identity, or sense of who she is, is a challenge to her adapting behaviour that will allow her to become a better speaker. Identity as a challenge is also echoed by Corinne in excerpt 14. As she describes Adam's advantages as a learner, it appears that it is not just the fact that Adam has already learnt a second language that makes Cree easier for him, it is also because he does not feel the same pressure to say things correctly, possibly because the language most closely intertwined with his sense of identity is not Cree, but Dene.

#### **4.2.3b Identity: Solutions**

Participants had no specific solutions or approaches targeting these particular challenges related to identity other than, as Skyla states, having to change in a way that is "very foundational to the being of who I am." It could be said that the fact that they recognized the challenges presented was a significant first step. The most applicable approach is likely that given by Kurtis: "*Kaya nipiyosi, soskwac pikiskwî* – don't be shy, just speak!"

#### **4.2.4a Interacting with speakers: Challenges**

Learner access to willing speakers was a challenge for participants. Corinne talks about using recordings because of a lack of speakers:

(Excerpt 23)

Haha, yeah and that's what I mean, and say, I say you know what, I'll give you a CD so at least if you hear it again you'll remember what you learned, and maybe you can learn some phrases on your own, but the book after certain point, it's like 'I can't remember how you say this and it's not something you hear all the time in a week, you're not gonna bump in to a bunch of fluent speakers.'

When asked who he speaks Cree to, Lyle replies:

(Excerpt 24)

*Namawiyak*, no one. The odd time I would meet somebody who speaks Cree, like that Cree lady I told you about meeting on the bus, or my Cree teacher, other students not really, they don't really understand, like cause like I was telling you earlier, *nihtawimasinahikewak*, they write well, *mâka moya nihtâpikiskwew*, they don't talk well.

Corinne mentions that even those speakers who are around aren't always available:

(Excerpt 25)

Same, we found some that were kind of close but out of town, but at their age they weren't gonna want to come in to town for a couple hours in the evening like it's quite

difficult for them to do that so we couldn't expect that, but we thought we have to get this recording, so we did that.

She also talks about what not having a speaker means to learners:

(Excerpt 26)

People were getting really good at recognizing phrases in Cree, it was working really well, it was a really effective method, so when we were planning things out we thought, so people can just go home and practice, right? And then we suddenly realized that there were only a few of us who had a fluent speaker to practice with at home. So then we thought okay, there's no way they're gonna remember how to say all this by next week right.

In other words, having little access to speakers often means no language practice, and makes it hard for learners to retain what they have learnt.

Learners who lived in Cree speaking communities had access to Cree speakers, while those in urban areas had little or none on a regular basis. Learners considered this lack of available speakers to be a major challenge, and access to speakers to be very important. As Lyle explains:

(Excerpt 27)

Not much people to talk to that's the main challenge. Because I think that, like, I learnt French in school, it took me, like, 12 years. French immersion, the goofiest way of being taught, and how I really learned to speak French fluently was by talking to French people, watching French TV, listening to French radio, playing hockey with French kids, talking to French kids, parents, whatever, right? That's how I really learned to speak French. Cree definitely I was taught a way better way than I was taught French, but I could learn even more if I had people to talk to.

However, participants did not find all speakers to be equally useful, pointing out that fluent speakers are not necessarily good teachers, and are often difficult to speak to in Cree because of their own history with the language. Lyle states:

(Excerpt 28)

It depends on, not all of the fluent Cree speakers I've met are like, natural teachers. So I've found that it's better for fluent speakers if I pretend that I'm a fluent speaker too,

because if I tell them *apisis pîko ninistohten*<sup>4</sup> they stop speaking Cree to me, just speak English, so what would be the best would be if they spoke a mixture say the sentence in Cree, I could give an indication if I understand or not, then they could speak it again in English, and then I'll sort of pick up or even if they just talk Cree to me all the time I'll eventually pick it up, like my father-in-law with Stoney, we're always working together, and I say just talk Stoney to me you're telling me everything with your hands already, how to tie the knot, whatever, I'll just start learning. So it's finding situations like that, when you meet a fluent speaker, it's pretty good.

In other words it can be difficult getting fluent speakers to speak Cree, as they can be focused on communication rather than language, something Darla also points out:

(Excerpt 29)

Just trying to teach somebody who's fluent who doesn't know how to write it, umm for instance I tried this on my dad, 'cause he asked me what exactly do you guys do when you're teaching Cree and then umm the thing somebody fluent doesn't realize is that we have these different verbs to begin with like I said to him am, what could I use aah, let's use a pencil so I said to him, oh a rock *awa, awa eekwa oma*,<sup>5</sup> so I said, so, based on these two *eekwa awa, eekwa ooma*<sup>6</sup> so I said to him "So how would you say if I said 'I see the stone 'niwâpamâ',<sup>7</sup> and how do you say 'see this'" and I'm like "*wâpam, wâpahta*,<sup>8</sup> why did you choose two different ways?" He didn't realize he ever did that and he was like 'I never thought about that.'

Speakers can be difficult for other reasons. For example, Lyle talks about speakers who do not like to speak:

(Excerpt 30)

Oh, fluent speakers? *Ayiman*,<sup>9</sup> there's a lot of fluent speakers who don't want to talk to you. They still have that, that, way of thinking where Cree is kind of like, not good, belongs to the past, a lot of them, mostly it's really good. Mostly they're just happy to have someone to talk Cree with to, especially if they're from somewhere else like

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<sup>4</sup> I only understand a little bit

<sup>5</sup> This (animate) is a rock, and now this here (inanimate)? – She is comparing two objects, one animate and one inanimate.

<sup>6</sup> Now this one (animate), now this one (inanimate)

<sup>7</sup> I see him/her

<sup>8</sup> Two commands – “look at him!”, “look at it!”

<sup>9</sup> difficult



especially if they're from somewhere else, like the woman on the bus, she's from Manitoba, northern Saskatchewan, so out here she doesn't have that network of her family, her reserve whatever where she can talk Cree to people, so she's happy to talk Cree to someone.

And Corinne gives some examples where speakers can get easily frustrated:

(Excerpt 31)

So what I tell people is, if you're gonna have to listen to it fifty times, go ahead and listen to it fifty times, because it might be that difficult to hear everything and if you're listening to it digitally, that's another thing that is really helpful (repeats recording) 'cause you can listen to the mini chunks of the sentence quite easily digitally, which you can't do with a real speaker, 'cause not many people are gonna be so patient with me that there gonna say this fifty times for me before I get it so this is the advantage of hearing it this way is maybe I'm gonna start hearing those sounds at least on my own even if I don't have a fluent speaker.

In summary, speakers are often few and far between, and even when they are available, they often feel uncomfortable speaking the language, are poor teachers, and easily frustrated.

#### **4.2.4b Interacting with speakers: Solutions**

Participants suggested ways of finding and interacting with Cree speakers. Lyle suggested that I “should have gone to Hobbema powwow,” as I would have “heard a lot of Cree there.” Other participants see technology as a partial solution. When asked what advice she has for learners Margaret advises her students to record Cree speakers whenever they have the opportunity to:

(Excerpt 32)

To carry a recorder around hahaha and ask any Cree speaker, and do what you do start talking in Cree, and if you have a question, you know, how do you say this, just ask them, and then record them.

Other participants simply talked to themselves. Lyle states:

(Excerpt 33)

Yeah, so I didn't put a time commitment in, but I tried every possible to speak Cree in my life, even somehow, *kâ-pimohteyân*, when I'm walking around, *nipîkiskwâtison*, I talk to

myself in Cree, and that's how I remember it, so I don't know how to translate that into a time commitment, but that's about it.

For more on participant use of the Cree language (including interaction with speakers) see section 4.2.7.

#### 4.2.5a Time: Challenges

Participants listed time constraints as a challenge. Lyle gives the following evaluation:

(Excerpt 34)

Not as much as I wanted to, but at the same time, in a way, I never studied, I don't really study, I kind of like daydreamed. For Cree what I did was I came home, and I would ah, teach my family Cree. So I'd be sitting at the dinner table and I would call everything Cree words [gives examples] what I knew I would call everything in Cree (please pass, etc.).

He also talks about how time factors limit his capacity to study and how time commitments impact learning:

(Excerpt 35)

When you're in school it is hard, and I have a girlfriend too, and so it takes up a lot of time, school takes up a lot of time from doing anything else, play guitar, hockey, piano whatever, so yeah, time constraints is an issue, because, if I could commit more time to it it would be easier, right? But I think that would probably be hard for people, for example at the friendship centre the classes are just once a week. To learn something once a week, then not use it for a week before you came back, so I think maybe because I talk to myself it's okay the time constraints, but for somebody who doesn't do that, if they have time constraints and can only do Cree so often, then I think definitely it'd be hard for them to remember.

In other words, having limited time is a problem, but having large gaps between the time he spends learning or using the language is also a problem.

Overall all participant learners appeared to have put a significant amount of time into learning Cree, though not always consistently. For example, Corinne states: "I used to have like a Cree breakfast every morning, and all we'd do was speak Cree the whole time we were having breakfast, and then we stopped doing that, we started watching TV in the morning instead of that."

#### 4.2.5b Time: Solutions

Learner solutions to dealing with time constraints appeared to be largely a matter of mind over matter. Corinne advises students “Another piece of advice which I don't follow is try every day, even if it's only a few minutes, if you do it every day eventually you're going to learn.” She goes on to describe her own study habit, speaking Cree over breakfast. Although she does not state it specifically, her responses imply another piece of advice – develop study habits, not just study binges.

#### 4.2.6a Resources: Challenges

Learning resources were expected to be one of the main challenges for adult learners of Cree. Both learners and teachers were asked what resources they had access to or were aware of, with the intention of finding gaps in either participant awareness of resources or in available resources. Learners and teachers pointed out some specific gaps in the availability of Cree resources. Skyla and Corinne pointed out that there is a gap between beginner textbooks and materials and resources for more advanced learners. Corinne says:

(Excerpt 36)

Everything is at a beginner level to learn the really basics, and then you're on your own. So even if you get a book you can only go so far and then you're stuck again. So, I don't even know what a second or third level Cree language book would teach because I haven't even seen one. I've seen it in other languages, more advanced books in other languages, and I look at a lot of books in other languages and say “I wonder what we could use from that book or that method to incorporate here.”

And Skyla echoes her, responding to a question about challenges to learning Cree: “Just lack of, lack of appropriate resources. That’s kind of why I'm working on the little books that I am, ‘cause it's such a jump from nothing to like the funny little stories.”

Learners also list specific shortfalls with language classes they have taken. For example, Corinne talks about the negative impact of poor classes:

(Excerpt 3)

I know a lot of people they've taken a class this is the most common scenario I've heard "I've took the class and I still can't speak the language, and now I can't even remember how to say one thing, so I guess I just don't have what it takes to speak this language" and

when I meet people like that I say this has nothing to do with you and your abilities it's you have not been given the resources to be able to do that.

Corinne also brings up the fact that Cree classes are not widely available outside of larger centres or universities:

(Excerpt 37)

Within our family, that second language would have been Cree for us. But, there was nowhere to send her to take that. And, there's nothing for adults, at all, really to learn the language. Except for university classes. Community classes, no one really comes out never, you know, speaking the language like she did.

Lyle points out that many classes meet only infrequently, and as a result progress is difficult:

(Excerpt 35)

When you're in school it is hard, and I have a girlfriend too, and so it takes up a lot of time, school takes up a lot of time from doing anything else, play guitar, hockey, piano whatever, so yeah, time constraints is an issue, because, if I could commit more time to it it would be easier, right? But I think that would probably be hard for people, for example at the friendship centre the classes are just once a week. To learn something once a week, then not use it for a week before you came back, so I think maybe because I talk to myself it's okay the time constraints, but for somebody who doesn't do that, if they have time constraints and can only do Cree so often, then I think definitely it'd be hard for them to remember.

For more related to regular practice, see section 4.2.9.3.

#### **4.2.6b Resources: Solutions**

Although the gaps in available resources remain, the reason there are not more gaps is the result of many other resources that are available and being used by participants, including texts, grammars and grammar resource books, language course books, dictionaries, methodology books, music, and various other resources. Challenges and solutions related to speakers have been discussed in its own section.

#### ***Texts***

Lyle and Skyla both mentioned having used collections of Cree texts to support their language learning. Skyla found that the grammar of even simple stories was still well beyond her

knowledge of the language, and that the jump from even a fourth year Cree textbook to texts represented an excessive gap. Text collections mentioned included the following:

1. *Wawiyatacimowinisa: Funny Little Stories*, edited by Arok Wolvengrey.
2. *kôhkominawak otâcimowiniwâwa/ Our Grandmothers' Lives: As told in Their Own Words* edited by Freda Ahenakew and H.C. Wolfart.

During the call-back interview, Corinne also mentioned the *Castel Westfall Cree collection*, a collection of interviews and recordings done by Cree speaking students.

Although this is by no means all the collections of Cree texts or all the Cree stories that are commonly available, it is the extent of those that were mentioned. Learners likely also had access to several other collections of stories edited by Ahenakew and Wolfart.

### ***Grammars and grammar resource books***

Corinne felt that most of these resources did not work for her, and instead focused on recordings. Skyla and Lyle both expressed similar opinions. This is discussed further in section 4.3.1. Grammars mentioned by participants included the following:

- *Cree Language Structures: A Cree Approach* by Freda Ahenakew
- *Plains Cree Grammar Guide and Glossary* by Lorna L'Hirondelle, Marjorie Memnook, Sally Warr, and Donna Paskemin.
- *Cree, Language of the Plains: n ya n as - s n* by Jean Okimasis and Solomon Ratt.

### ***Language course books***

Learners and teachers mentioned these types of resources in conjunction with language classes. Out of the three listed below, the only one that the learners interviewed had used was the Cree textbooks accompanying the Cree program at the University of Alberta.

- *Cree: an Intensive Language Course* by Mary Edwards and Ida McLeod (1986).
- Some of Solomon Ratt's resources (for Th dialect).
- The beginner, intermediate and advanced Cree textbooks that accompany the University of Alberta Cree program's three years of classes.

During the call-back interview, Corinne mentioned other language course type resources, an introductory Cree audio course by Ken Paupanekis (2011), available from the website

creeliteracy.wordpress.com, and some of my own resources for Michif and Cree recordings (McCreery, 2012).

### **Dictionaries**

All learners used one dictionary or another. All were aware of the *Alberta Elders' Cree Dictionary* (1999) and Arok Wolvengrey's *n ya n: t na, Cree Words, Volumes 1 and 2* (2001) and used both. None of those interviewed used [creedictionary.com](http://creedictionary.com) regularly, preferring paper copies. The only participants to use other dictionaries were fluent speaking teachers (such as Margaret or Kurtis), who used them to expand their vocabulary or to assist in coining new words.

Dictionaries used were the following:

- *Alberta Elders' Cree Dictionary/alperta ohci kehtehayak nehiyaw otwestamâkewasinahikan*, compiled by LeClaire and Cardinal (1999).
- *n ya n: t na: Cree Words, Volumes 1 and 2* edited by Arok Wolvengrey (2001)
- *ans Cree Dictionary n t e "y" D a e c t* edited by Anne Anderson
- [creedictionary.com](http://creedictionary.com)

During the member check interview, Corinne also mentioned a small dictionary produced by Robert Castell, unpublished, but available from [allanadam.com](http://allanadam.com). This dictionary differed from the others in that it included several example sentences with each lexical entry, and came with a recording. Corinne also mentioned *A Cree Phrase Book* by Paul Voorhis (1977), a combination phrase book and series of language lessons.

### **Methodology books and resources.**

Kurtis and Corinne mention books outlining specific learning approaches. The books mentioned were Tom Brewster and Betty Brewster's book *Language Acquisition Made Practical: Field Methods for Language Learners*, published in 1976, and Leanne Hinton's book *How to Keep Your Language Alive: A Commonsense Approach to One-On-One Language Learning* (2002). These books were mentioned along with other resources relating to other approaches generally not associated with a specific publication such as Total Physical Response (TPR) and Steven Greymorning's method, Accelerated Second Language Acquisition (ASLA).

### *Music.*

Darla gives an overview of what audio resources her students have access to: “We have our tapes that accompany this book, the NS<sup>10</sup> 1.2 book, yeah, and then we have the ones from Saskatchewan as well, that they can order or pick up at the bookstore.” Darla also lists artists and sources for songs in Cree: “Delores Sand, Brian Macdonald, Laura Bernouf, Art Napoleon, but also the website, so all the time, in lab, the students can just visit the website and see all the songs and stories we have there.” Corinne explains why she thinks songs are good for learners: “Those seem to be easier to pick up, the words, and connected to the tune and the notes, makes it easier.”

### *Other resources.*

Other resources mentioned by teachers included classroom materials (such as pictures for the ASLA method), recordings and various language materials from the Saskatchewan Indian Cultural Centre, and the Verb conjugation guide from the Blue Quills College website. None of the learners were using these resources. Both learners and teachers mentioned recordings of Cree sentences from Allan Adam’s website. Students also listed youtube videos in Cree, recordings of Cree from Allan Adam’s website, and recordings of Cree and Michif from the website of the Métis Resource Centre.

For online language resources, learners had mixed reviews, although they did use computers for language learning. Lyle, and Corinne reported not using the online dictionary or other text resources, although being aware of them; however, all learners listened to recordings online (or offline), and Lyle and Corinne both frequented Cree online facebook communities. Corinne also lists some advantages of computers over speakers:

(Excerpt 38)

I taught myself some longer Cree words this way, ‘cause I just kept listening and I was like I'm gonna this, I'm gonna get this, so I listened to parts of the sentence using the computer and that helped me, ‘cause when I listened to the whole thing beginning to end sometimes it was really, really hard, then when I listened to the pieces I was able to put them together and I'm like 'hey! I learned a word' so that was another thing that I liked about the digital is I was able to do that and with a tape recorder that would have been kind of awkward, or doing it some other way, so it was a little more versatile that way.

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<sup>10</sup> NS = Native Studies

Lyle tells what kinds of resources he searches for online:

(Excerpt 39)

Online? No because I have those books they pretty much have every word in them, most of what I try to do online is like when I'm trying to learn Michif I look up try and find videos of people talking online right and I just listen to them, *nikakwenisitohten*, try and understand right.

During the member check interview Corinne also mentioned two other online resources that she used: a small dictionary produced by Robert Castell, unpublished, but available from allanadam.com, and *A Cree Phrase Book* by Paul Voorhis (1977), a combination phrase book and series of language lessons.

None of the learners reported using Cree television as a significant resource, though they were aware of the existence of some programs in Cree. Lyle sums up his opinion: “Ah, there’s one show on APTN that comes on sometimes, as far as I can tell it’s always the same show always the same episode [chuckles].”

Corinne and Adam listen to Cree radio regularly, as it is a local station, however Lyle and Skyla never do, despite being aware of the existence of Cree language programming. I suspect the difference is not so much the rural/urban divide as it is a difference in ages and use of radios in general.

Lyle has studied Cree through a friendship centre and through the University of Alberta (for 4 years) where Skyla also studied. Corinne has taken some local language classes, and with Adam has been a member of speaking circles. All learners make use of other learners as a resource, as all four have also taught or tutored Cree on a volunteer basis. Lyle uses his family as a captive student body, and Adam and Corinne practice speaking to each other.

One other resource is in-services and courses for teachers. Margaret and Kurtis mention having attended courses or being at an in-service presenting the Steven Greymorning’s ASLA. A common theme for all learners was the superiority of audio resources over print media.

Corinne says:

(Excerpt 23)

Haha, yeah and that's what I mean, and say, I say you know what, I'll give you a CD so at least if you hear it again you'll remember what you learned, and maybe you can learn some phrases on your own, but the book after certain point, it's like "I can't remember



how you say this and it's not something you hear all the time in a week, you're not gonna bump in to a bunch of fluent speakers.

She also says "I find that really the oral stuff works the best for me, it sticks."

(Excerpt 40)

So I guess umm... that would be the thing that would be the best resource for me is to be able to actually speak it - being in an environment where I could focus on that part just speaking it, like I would like to be in an immersion program, like a real immersion program, like the ones that I've heard about that they have for French. The University of Regina has a language program for a few different languages, which is nice; we don't really have a model for that 'cause I think that's the best way to get started, to really get moving on it.

During the member-check, Corinne added that since the original interview she has started learning primarily through listening to groups of sentences presenting the same verb and syntax patterns, learning the pattern rather than focusing on root words. She reports that this has been very successful for her.

#### **4.2.7 Language use: Challenges and solutions**

All learners reported that they had a difficult time finding opportunities to use the language. Even the context of a language class Skyla states that she had little opportunity to use Cree:

(Excerpt 41)

Very little, I'd say almost none. Like especially for speaking. Occasionally once a week we'd come into class and she'd ask us like did you eat this morning and we'd respond, and yeah, like, I'd use it a tiny bit with Jay when I was tutoring, but not really any at all.

Corinne feels uncomfortable using Cree with anyone other than her partner Adam.

Adam points out that much of his students' problems with retaining their language is through a lack of use, as most are taking the class to get the grade rather than to learn the language:

(Excerpt 42)

They're only there with me for six weeks, and it's not really worth anything after they get their marks, so they just move on to other things and if I see them then I try and practice

some words with them, see if I still get some response, but usually after a year of not practicing anything doing anything with it they lose it.

And Lyle uses Cree whenever meeting another speaker, which is mostly limited to chance meetings. He makes his girlfriend learn, and sometimes uses the language at community events, but says lack of opportunity to use the language is one of the biggest challenges:

(Excerpt 27)

Not much people to talk to that's the main challenge. Because I think that like I learnt French in school, it took me like 12 years, French immersion, the goofiest way of being taught, and how I really learned to speak French fluently was by talking to French people, watching French TV, listening to French radio, playing hockey with French kids, talking to French kids, parents, whatever, right? That's how I really learned to speak French. Cree definitely I was taught a way better way than I was taught French, but I could learn even more if I had people to talk to.

One of the most discouraging challenges is that none of the learners are really part of a Cree speaking community, in that none of them are able to use Cree as a primary language of communication with any other individuals. The closest they get to this is Cree speaking circles, which at best meet once a week. Furthermore, although there is some Cree use between students as far as tutoring each other, it appeared that at the time of the interview few students were advanced enough for something like a Cree speaking club.

There are also various ways in which learners are able to increase their use of the Cree language, and learners and teachers both suggest how this might be done. Skylia and Lyle both participated in Cree conversation groups, and found them useful. Skylia says:

(Excerpt 43)

Yeah, well I joined the Cree conversation group, but I had to quit when I moved to DC, but that was good like I now I'm pretty confident in introducing myself, saying where I'm from, alike just a very basic reasoning for why I'm learning Cree, and, we do like kind of role playing like you're coming to your friend's house like knock on the door! That was really good kind of supportive environment like I think I'd be intimidated by long conversations if I was just with a group of fluent speakers and we sat down for an hour I'd be lost in like five minutes and not be able to maintain control of my ability. But

when we were changing what was happening every five or ten minutes it was never too intimidating.

Lyle's primary solution for a lack of language use is talking to himself:

(Excerpt 33)

Yeah, so I didn't put a time commitment in, but I tried every possible to speak Cree in my life, even somehow, *kâ-pimohteyân*, when I'm walking around, *nipikiskwâtison*, I talk to myself in Cree, and that's how I remember it, so I don't know how to translate that into a time commitment, but that's about it.

Lyle, Adam and Corinne all see speaking as more than simply a resource issue, but as a methodology. Lyle here suggests that he prioritizes speaking and conversation as a means of learning:

(Excerpt 44)

Like, for me, *otipeyimisiw*,<sup>11</sup> it means, independent person. I know how to translate it in English, then I learn *tipeyim* means to own, and *isiw* means it's being done to the actor so *tipeyimisiw* is to own yourself so I like it that way, and I find that like, myself, I learn Cree at school, I learn the writing, *masinahikan*, whatever, I come home, I try and talk Cree, if I know the word in Cree I try to think it in Cree, when I see it or whatever right so now, *kâ-nakiskwâtât awiyak kânêhiyawet*,<sup>12</sup> when I meet someone who speaks Cree, *nikakîpikiskwâtâw*,<sup>13</sup> I can talk to them, but the other people in my class, like I've been saying, they can't talk to them, if they meet somebody, because they don't have that conversational practice, and I think if you have that conversational practice you can start to learn by speaking to people. They don't have the Cree learners lessons developed that far. You can't take it for that long, you don't have that much time, you can learn by talking to people in Cree, hearing what they say, if you have a little bit of fluency, a little bit of conversational ability. So I think that's where I really, really learned good French, was by talking to my friends who spoke French, that's how I learned to speak it. So that's what I think, more conversational.

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<sup>11</sup> Métis, one who owns himself/herself

<sup>12</sup> When I meet someone who speaks Cree,

<sup>13</sup> I can talk to him/her

Adam also put an emphasis on speaking, saying: “We don't practice too much, but the only way I can learn that is to just be with people.” When asked how his learning could be improved, Lyle argues for teaching grammar through conversation:

(Excerpt 45)

More ah speaking, in the Cree class, it's very much for writing, lots of homework I never did, I like to learn speaking by conversing. It's much easier to get a hold on grammar that way, when it gets really complicated. It's harder to learn grammar that way, mathematically breaking it down, this, this, this, this, this, sometimes it's easier to just give me a sentence and say this is what this sentence means.

In other words, he sees targeted conversation as a better way to teach grammar than grammar specific instruction.

#### **4.2.8 Non-affective challenges**

##### ***Animate/inanimate: challenges and solutions.***

Going into this study I suspected that animacy of nouns would be a significant challenge; however, out of the seven participants only Darla mentions that some of her students find animacy to be a challenge. She also provides her approach to teaching animacy to her students.

(Excerpt 46)

Usually on the wall I'll place all the words that are animate, all the words that are inanimate, and how to ask for those items, for those objects, and how to ask in the correct way, *taskoc eh, ipikisowina imihkwanis, pihta ana masinahikan, umm, pikisowina awasihkanis, pihta anima mohkoman*<sup>14</sup>, so you can have those two different, and you can have visuals to go with either, with both. So this way people get to know how to say, how to ask for certain items that are animate or inanimate.

Challenges and solutions related to animacy of verbs are discussed in 4.2.8.

##### ***Obviation: challenges and solutions***

Obviation (described in 2.1.2) presents a challenge to both learners and teachers. Lyle mentions how while he has an understanding of how it works, not all learners have the same understanding: “It wasn't [difficult] for me. Sometimes when I'm talking to people I notice they find it confusing. But if I understand it properly I don't find it confusing.” Lyle then gives an

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<sup>14</sup> Gives examples of irregular animate and inanimate nouns with determiners

example of obviative marking on nouns and the reasons for it; however, with verbs he has more problems – when reading a passage to me out of his textbook he states: “like right now I don’t even know how it’s conjugated, but I still don’t know how *ayâyit* works, oh! It’s obviated but maybe if I hadn’t already read this four times it would still be really confusing for me.” Skyla also describes problems with obviation, mentioning specifically the transitive animate verb paradigm: “yeah we really like my whole class had a hard time with the inverse third obviative to 3<sup>rd</sup> person singular, like sometimes I understand it and sometimes I don't.” Lyle admits that his knowledge of the system is incomplete.

Participants had no specific solutions to the challenge presented by obviation, though some related solutions are discussed under 4.2.9 General Solutions.

### ***Clause and function words: challenges and solutions***

The rules that govern clause typing in Cree has been one of the largest gaps in academic literature on the language, and a significant challenge for the learners and teachers of this study. This gap only began to be bridged in the last several years, beginning with Claire Cook’s thesis *The Syntax and Semantics of Clause Typing in Cree* (2008). Her description of the independent/conjunct clause typing as used in Plains Cree was the first clear description academically, and her description of anaphoric and deictic determiners within that context likewise was the first clear description of a class of words that defies easy description. This gap has apparently led to a corresponding gap in language materials (I have not found any textbook or resource that deals with the subject). Because these subjects (clause typing, determiner use and, by extension, other function words) are so intertwined I have chosen to discuss them as a single challenge facing learners and teachers.

Learners all listed conjunct as something they have had problems with, and when asked specifically about conjunct clause use all learners showed a very incomplete understanding, usually a very straightforward transference from English or French. For example, Lyle states:

(Excerpt 48)

The way I was taught it was conjunct I am doing something, independent is I do something. Myself, mostly I’ll talk in independent, in French that’s how you talk

everything is independent, you can say *je suis en train de faire quelque chose*<sup>15</sup> but mostly you just say *je parle*<sup>16</sup> - it could mean I'm talking, or I talk.

His explanation compares Cree clause typing to both English and French, neither of which are actually a good match.

While learners had some idea of the difference, it did not always match to what they hear from other speakers. Skyla says: “When I've met with other people in Cree conversation groups they've said ‘that's not it.’”

Skyla described how difficulties with conjunct use spilled into other domains:

(Excerpt 49)

Yeah, TA [transitive animate] is tough. I guess we didn't learn II [intransitive inanimate] much, I guess it was just so confusing to us because of when you use conjunct, and when you use independent.

Similarly, when asked about use of determiners and other function words whose distribution is contingent on clause typing, learners showed even less understanding. While learners could give an English gloss of the words, they could not explain why they would choose anaphoric or deictic determiners. Lyle says:

(Excerpt 1)

I think [the challenge] has to do with little words *kaya*<sup>17</sup>, *ekwanima*<sup>18</sup>, *ekosi*<sup>19</sup>, where I think it sometimes governs the word order, like I don't know all of them, but umm..., somehow I think it tells you how to interpret which word is doing what to what in a sentence when it's in no particular order.

He continues: “Yeah whenever there's those little words in there I don't understand them, they sort of mess me up, like I don't understand them.”

Based on quizzing about exactly which “little words” are causing difficulties, it appears that the learner meant most determiners, most words related to marking evidentiality, and a wide range of other function words or particles – all words whose use is governed not simply by the meaning of a gloss, but also by their relations to groups of other words.

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<sup>15</sup> I'm in the process of doing something (right now), thusly

<sup>16</sup> I speak/I'm talking

<sup>17</sup> Negative imperative marker

<sup>18</sup> That one (inanimate, deictic determiner)

<sup>19</sup> Various meanings: “that's it”, “like that”, “enough”, used to conclude letters.

Two years after the original interview Lyle reports that the use of many of these words (as well as clause typing) still seems arbitrary to him, despite using Cree whenever possible and even teaching beginner Cree courses, and he prefers speaking to speakers of dialects of Cree that simply use fewer of these types of words.

None of the participants interviewed had any solutions targeting this challenge specifically, though several were suggested. One statement that has already been used elsewhere in this thesis is the following. In excerpt 45 (page 57) Lyle states: “I like to learn speaking by conversing. It’s much easier to get a hold on grammar that way, when it gets really complicated...just give me a sentence and say this is what this sentence means.” In other words, he suggests lots of speaking, listening, and an emphasis more on examples than on explanations.

Although learners said little dealing directly with this issue, a broader analysis of learner responses does suggest possible approaches and solutions to these challenges (Section 4.3).

### *Verbs<sup>20</sup>: challenges and solutions*

Kurtis, Skyla, Lyle, Darla, and Corinne, all listed verb use as a major challenge, giving several reasons why, and several specific aspects of the verbal system. Darla lists “the TA paradigm and then the II paradigm” as the most difficult part of Cree. Lyle says that obviative and inverse verb forms are the largest challenge. “Probably that’s the hardest thing to get them to understand umm, the obviative forms and also, the inverse. The direct and inverse as well. So that’s probably the most difficult part in learning.” Darla points out that fluent speakers (giving the example of herself and her father) are often ignorant of the complexities of the verbal system, meaning that they often cannot answer questions about how the system works, or know specifically what needs to be taught. Corinne and Lyle both had experiences with learning initially from fluent speakers in informal environments. Speaking of his experiences Lyle states:

(Excerpt 50)

Ah, I think I learned more about how to say words, pronunciation, because there was more of conversational element, and also he was a first language speaker, he didn’t really break the words down that much. So I kind of learned a little bit more about how it’s actually spoken, but I didn’t learn a lot of vocabulary, or a lot of concepts, like verbal concepts like how there’s so many different verb systems in Cree, didn’t learn things like that.

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<sup>20</sup> For a description of Cree verbs see 2.1.2.

He was able to familiarize with the sounds, but did not learn much vocabulary, grammar, or morphology.

Those aspects that teachers pointed out as complexities actually constitute some of the simplest aspects of the verb system (based on my own experience and on the fact that no learners mentioned these aspects as challenges), for example, in this example Margaret mentions conjunct and conjugating the verbs, but gives the past and future markers as examples of difficulties, something that for learners is possibly the easiest part of the system:

(Excerpt 51)

I think it's the conjugating, conjunct, the verbs, 'cause one verb can be added on with the past tense, future, indicators, 'cause you can use *micow*, *kimicon*,<sup>21</sup> 1st 2nd 3rd, then plural, and how you use it in context, and you gonna go eat, you wanna go eat, you know asking questions, like it can, but one you know, if you're able to place those together, then it's a matter of using it in context. *Kiwîmîcon*, *kikîmîcon*<sup>22</sup>.

Another difficulty learners pointed out was the tendency to use a very small number of verbs for all examples of verb conjugations:

(Excerpt 52)

Almost every time we had an example in the classroom it was either *wâpam* or *nisitohtam*<sup>23</sup>. Honestly we didn't do a lot of different verbs, like language skills, I learned most of that from doing projects, but actually learning, we rarely used a lot of different words.

Finally, none of the learners (or teachers) seemed to have a clear understanding of the difference between independent and conjunct verb paradigms.

Teachers and students had different ideas on the best ways to teach verbs. For example, Darla suggests that the biggest thing students can do to succeed in Cree class is “study your paradigms! it's all about reading and writing, basically that's how the curriculum was set before I came here so basically it's all about reading and writing in the university.” After saying this however, Darla did say that she would like to be able to teach conversation. Lyle in a somewhat roundabout way outlines a very different approach:

(Excerpt 53)

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<sup>21</sup> He eats, you eat

<sup>22</sup> You intend to eat, you ate/were eating

<sup>23</sup> *To see* (animate transitive), or *to understand* (transitive inanimate)



Yeah, then I can look at it and say oh because this must mean this, and this is doing this, and this is doing that, that's why you say it like that, etc. if you said *niwâpamâw John* and you say this means I see John then I could say oh the verb must mean I see him, or at least I see, or something, then if you gave me another one another sentence would be *niwâpahten masinahikan*<sup>24</sup> so I could say oh there's a different way to say I see a book than to say I see a person and then if you went on, gave more examples, *niwâpamâw Matthew, nkiskeyimâw wiya*<sup>25</sup>, gave me more of those, *nimicin wiyas*<sup>26</sup>, then I'd start to see oh its animate inanimate, so some of the things may be, well you sort of learn this just by speaking at the same time as you're learning the breakdown. I remember when I was learning French, the good thing about it, was that they talked to us in French at the same time they were teaching us French, right? So you learn it all these expressions fossilized expressions, you know them as words, but they're actually sentences at the same time, it kinda helped me to be more fluent.

Rather than focusing on paradigms, he feels that a better way for him to learn would be by involving a lot more speaking in the teaching process. Lyle does this in part on his own through talking to himself.<sup>27</sup>

### ***Pronunciation: challenges and solutions***

Some participants discussed pronunciation as being a challenge. For example, Corinne talks about the importance of learning through listening, and also the challenge of having to familiarize herself with the range of pronunciation:

(Excerpt 54)

If you try to train yourself on paper you miss all that stuff, because what you see on paper always sounds the same way in your head, but when you go in the community it doesn't sound the same way all the time and that really throws a person, so you have to be really open to that and realize that that is the same word it just sounds different

In the following excerpt Corinne gives more detail about learning to cope with the range of speaker styles:

(Excerpt 55)

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<sup>24</sup> I see the book

<sup>25</sup> I see Matthew, I know him

<sup>26</sup> I'm eating/ I eat meat

<sup>27</sup> For other participant approaches see 4.2.9 General Solutions.

Yeah, that's why exposing yourself to different people, different communities, you've gotta hear that, that's why in English I hear the contraction I hear the whole thing I know what it means, but if you're always listening to one source, one speaker, you're gonna have a heck of a time when you get into the community and hear the variations and can't understand them you really have to train your ear.

In this excerpt Corinne talks about the importance of knowing “how to say things”:

(Excerpt 56)

So [the speaking circle] kinda opened it wide open for anyone who wanted to learn because that was the one thing that was missing from many of them, because some of them had books, but they didn't know how to say things, they couldn't remember how to say stuff when they took the lessons and stuff, so this was giving them an opportunity to relearn some of the stuff they used to know and learn stuff that they wanted to know how to say.

Lyle describes his progression through learning pronunciation, as well as dealing with retention:

Excerpt 57)

First of all I had to get used to Cree sounds. The first few times I heard Cree I wouldn't remember a word unless I heard it a thousand times, but once I started to get used to Cree sounds I could hear a word maybe once, twice, and I could remember it, I already forget that word for write you told me.

His statement suggests that a large amount practice was involved, and also that pronunciation was also connected to a larger process of gaining a feel for the morphology and structure of the language. In summary, learning pronunciation appears to be a matter of protracted conscious exposure, practice, and repetition, and pronunciation is important as a stepping stone to mastering other aspects of the language.

#### **4.2.9 General solutions**

Some solutions repeatedly presented by learners and teachers had such a broad range of application that linking them to one specific challenge was impossible. Instead I have outlined these solutions separate from specific challenges.

***Reading and Writing.*** Some teachers see reading and writing as an important part of teaching adults. Margaret says: “With the adults I did a lot of writing, a lot of written work, and just that's how we conjugated was just through writing and talking, and a lot of [practice].” Adam likewise

considers teaching how to write the language to be an important step. He outlines his preferred sequence for teaching students:

(Excerpt 58)

Well you'd basically have to go through all the steps, a – z, alphabet vs. sounds, how the sounds work, sort of the reverse of what we're trying to do on our language, you'd have to learn how to write it, how to use the sounds then slowly progress into the language, 'cause if you try to get into the language too fast by talking or trying to respond and things like that you'll find it'll be a lot harder you have to start like a little kid, a baby, they don't just start talking right away they hear sounds, they hear how it works and stuff, but because the students are older they already know how to write and that, and from me, it's pretty important to know the writing system as well right from the beginning, but not totally to rely on it, but to know it so you know the sounds in case you need it to write out the words and that, if you see the word and know the sounds, I tell people if you hear me, you'll be able to write it, be able to repeat it, you'll sound like you're speaking Dene, but you won't be speaking Dene yet. If you hear it, and write the words I taught you, you can read it out to people you'll sound like you're speaking Dene but not yet.

Conversely some other participants (such as Lyle or Corinne) see reading and writing as either peripheral or even counterproductive when trying to learn to speak.

**Repetition.** Learners talked about how they used repetitions as a strategy. For example, as discussed above, Lyle talks about how learning the phonology of Cree required significant practice and repetition, especially starting out:

(Excerpt 57)

First of all I had to get used to Cree sounds. The first few times I heard Cree I wouldn't remember a word unless I heard it a thousand times, but once I started to get used to Cree sounds I could hear a word maybe once, twice, and I could remember it, I already forget that word for write you told me.

And Corinne explains exactly how she listens to words over and over again:

(Excerpt 59)

I just use audio recordings, that's what I do and I listen to about four or five different phrases over and over and over again, usually what I do is I throw a CD in my vehicle and I listen to those four or five phrases over and over again.

Corinne also states “if you're gonna have to listen to it fifty times, go ahead and listen to it fifty times.” All in all learners saw repetition as a necessary part of language acquisition, and used it in a variety of ways, with reported positive results.

**Regular Practice.** Learners all emphasize the importance of regular practice. For example, here Lyle advises learners: “Talk to yourself! Talk to other people, teach them Cree, use it. Like I didn't do my homework, but I still learned good, because I was always practicing.” On the other hand Corinne points out that you can have too much of a good thing: “you also can't over-practice, because your brain can only absorb so much.” In excerpt 35 (page 48) Lyle argues that infrequent formal practice (unless combined with regular private practice) makes it “hard for [learners] to remember.” Corinne does consider practice good, and admits that she could be practicing more:

(Excerpt 60) Another piece of advice which I don't follow is try every day, even if it's only a few minutes, if you do it every day eventually you're going to learn, and that's something that's really hard because I know I'm not doing it, and I was for a while and I know I was learning a lot of Cree! I used to have like a Cree breakfast every morning, and all we'd do was speak Cree the whole time we were having breakfast, and then we stopped doing that, we started watching TV in the morning instead of that, but we started learning words.

In summary, participants saw regular, habitual practice as important for successful language acquisition.

**Creating Resources.** Some learners and participants suggested or used creating language resources as a means of teaching themselves. For example, Corinne records sentences for herself and other learners to listen to. Darla mentions that her students also produce recordings to help themselves learn:

(Excerpt 61)

The students also put the recordings on MP3 and listen to them all the time so every time we go to lab when we're recording, they record themselves so they record the session, and then they take that with them.

When asked what advice she has for learners Margaret advises her students to record Cree speakers whenever they have the opportunity to:

(Excerpt 32)

To carry a recorder around hahaha and ask any Cree speaker, and do what you do start talking in Cree, and if you have a question, you know, how do you say this, just ask them, and then record them.

Margaret continues by also recommending writing down words:

(Excerpt 62)

And in your house if you want to learn to say *wâsinamân*, the window - *iskwahtîm*<sup>28</sup>, you can write the word on there, or *waskohtînamîn*, *pîsimohkân*<sup>29</sup>, or *masinahikan*<sup>30</sup>, you can write the word right on there, *masinahikan*.

All in all, every participant, learner or teacher, had produced language learning resources, and during the member check, both participants called stated that they had produced new resources for themselves and for other learners, implementing what they were learning along the way. Participants benefited both from the work that went into the creation of these resources and from using them after they had been created.

**Teaching Others.** Learners recommended teaching others and getting as involved as possible with the language. For example, Skyla recommends incorporating teaching into the language program:

(Excerpt 63)

Let's see. Umm... well I, I've talked with Darla, like I mentioned earlier, I feel that the best way to learn is to teach. When students get to like their second year of learning Cree at least in the university setting then they should be involved in teaching community members and stuff, because tutoring J helped me, it wasn't great for my speaking but it helped me solidify those rules, all those grammatical rules in my head and I know there's a pretty huge desire at least in Edmonton to learn to speak and read and write, and listen

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<sup>28</sup> door

<sup>29</sup> clock

<sup>30</sup> book

to Cree, not just by Cree people but by non-Cree people as well, so I think that would be really helpful, just for practice.

Lyle also taught others – in his case (as in my own) his family members:

(Excerpt 34)

For Cree what I did was I came home, and I would ah, teach my family Cree. So I'd be sitting at the dinner table and I would call everything Cree words [gives examples]. What I knew I would call everything in Cree.

He also states “I make my girlfriend learn Cree. She hates it.”

Kurtis also saw a marked increase in his language abilities once he started teaching:

(Excerpt 64)

When I was the coordinator of the Cree language program, my vocabulary grew by leaps and bounds, (unclear) my attitude, getting paid to talk about language, and what a motivator that is, and what a motivator that is to teach your (unclear) or teach your speakers.

In summary, participants found that sharing their knowledge helped them cement what they already knew, and they also appeared to gain confidence and motivation from the often self-assigned responsibility of teaching.

**Immersion.** Many participants saw some form of immersion program as a catch-all solution to many of the challenges facing learners, providing a broader and more contextualized learning environment, focusing on speaking, giving lots of input in a short period of time, and being a method that would give students ample access to fluent speakers. Describing his own approach to learning Cree, Adam talks about immersion:

(Excerpt 65)

No. except our webpage, though I don't use it too much, I just try to listen to people as much as I can, try to get immersed. That's the only way, is immersion. Then I try to pick it up, to hear it, to feel it, like confidence in speaking a language doesn't come until you feel it. You have to feel what that language feels like first, then you can start talking. If you don't feel it then it's harder to learn I think.

Also talking about immersion, Corinne states:

(Excerpt 40)

So I guess umm– that would be the thing that would be the best resource for me is to be able to actually speak it - being in an environment where I could focus on that part just speaking it, like I would like to be in an immersion program, like a real immersion program, like the ones that I've heard about that they have for French.

Adam also talks about how he learns through immersion, contrasting it with targeted practice: “We don't practice too much, but the only way I can learn that is to just be with people. This four day event this culture event was really good because all they spoke was Cree.”

The Master Apprentice Program (MAP) is a form of immersion, where the learner, or apprentice, spends several hours a day with a speaker, conversing only in the target language, and this program was also mentioned by participants. Kurtis talks about the program's importance to him, even as someone who is already a speaker, in learning vocabulary in context:

(Excerpt 66)

There's another thing called the master apprentice program. And that one was used, developed in California, and there's ten rules that you follow, you just basically hang out with someone, and that's my favourite actually, even as a speaker, hang out with the older guys, older women, some of the words that you hardly use, just in regular talk, you won't be able to use them until you put yourself in that situation, where you can practice and start understanding it eh, and it takes a little while for me as well, to say the word, but also to internalize it – to remember it.

In a somewhat humorous coincidence, Corinne comes very close to echoing the title of Leanne Hinton's book “How to Keep Your Language Alive”:

(Excerpt 67)

‘Cause I also know people who have taught themselves, and I wish I knew how they did it, because if I knew the magic formula I'd try it, but it's, a lot of hard work, but really to me it's a mystery how do you do that, I wish I had a book called "how to learn to speak your language" ‘cause I'd buy it.

This quote also highlights how important the search for a successful methodology is for learners.

In the following excerpt, while talking about the format of her ideal Cree class, Margaret mentions immersion, as well as other methods such as TPR.

(Excerpt 68)

Even full days, or even half a year if they take a daily classes all in Cree, like using that method TPR, visuals, and reading and writing, and the second half of the year you can do a little bit less and just have them converse with speakers. So a lot of immersion, for them to be immersed in the language, and for them to take that you know if their interested in learning the language then they'll do whatever they can to learn it with recorders, they can take a recorder, that helps too, if you can take a recorder and record speakers and ask them questions ask them what you want to learn, *taskoc*<sup>31</sup> how to say good morning or it's a nice day or the weather it's just every day.

Kurtis on the other hand actually does run immersion camps, as he alludes to here while describing the success of some of his students:

(Excerpt 69)

It took the one lady one term- four months. Actually three months realistically, because one month was immersion week and camps, so that first month was shot. It was being immersed, and thrown in, but there was a purpose to that too, it was being around the language, and being around Indian culture, but when October came around, that's when we started teaching students, adult learners, these methods [LAMP and MAP], and then syllabics is there as well. And it's (unclear) writing in SRO, and she took off with it! Both of them took off with it, and they were the two ladies that stick out. Yep, four months, and what she literally did was she went home after that. 'Cause she realized well 'I know the Cree'.

His students apparently were able to achieve a high level of fluency through a mixed-method immersion program.

In summary, participants see immersion as the closest methodology to “natural” language learning, and use the term to encompass any and all approaches that involve intensive speaking primarily in the target language.

***Other Teaching Methodologies.*** Other teaching methods were mentioned by participants, but only briefly, and only by teachers, not learners. Margaret mentions TPR as a method she would use in an ideal Cree class, and Margaret and Kurtis mention having attended courses or being at an in-service presenting the Steven Greymorning's ASLA. Both of these approaches appeared to

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<sup>31</sup> Such as, like



be seen as more of a classroom teaching aid, with various strengths, but participants did not include any serious discussion of either method.

#### **4.2.10 Increased contextualization**

In line with participants' very broad understandings of language and its interconnections with culture, participants also view language acquisition as a process that is interconnected with all aspects of a learner's life and a learner's community. This is possibly the most pervasive theme of all in the responses given by participants. Participants suggest that the more integrated language learning is, and the richer the language input and usage is, the easier it will be for learners to acquire the language.

This "solution" is related to many of the other solutions suggested by participants, such as preferences for as broad as possible a range of learning materials, the choice to make learning as large a part of participant lives as possible, approaches to learning pronunciation, regular practice, and especially participant preferences for methodologies such as immersion or MAP, all of which are based on providing both as much input as possible, but also as much context for that input as possible.

The following excerpts illustrate some learner attitudes towards the importance of context and scope in learning and language acquisition. Lyle talks about how the more you can contextualize new knowledge the easier it is to remember:

(Excerpt 70)

And it's the same with language, if you can remember something that makes a particular concept, and you learn that concept about how the words are put together, it can help your remember for sure.

He says:

(Excerpt 71)

Definitely, because some words use the same things important to remembering things is understanding the meaning and the concepts, even when you're dealing with something that is not language, like history or political science or whatever, you remember the examples you've been taught in class when it's attached to a particular concept. You remember the concept much better than the information.

He also gives what he sees as the opposite approach:

(Excerpt 72)

French is taught really stupidly, like my girlfriend is being taught French at the university. They're teaching them words that aren't really related like I said you don't really mix glove and TV in a sentence, right? So it's good to teach things that are related. Kurtis, speaking of resources available on the website of Blue Quills First Nations College, also emphasizes the importance of context to understanding the language more deeply:

(Excerpt 73)

I like the way they separated the root words, 'cause if you have the root words the history is tied in to that, the world view, you'll actually see the world view in some of the words – you see the long words, but what's the actual meaning behind it.

He adds that if a learner can better situate input (in this case, mentally), learning will be easier: “Once you start breaking it down, fooling around with it, and having fun, then then it's it makes learning that language a lot easier, fun, you know.”

Corinne also talks about her plans to provide more context for the recordings she has done in order to make learning easier:

(Excerpt 74)

One suggestion I had from someone else is to try and put the sentence patterns together, and I would like to actually organize these in lessons someday. Umm... they're just sort of thrown up in miscellaneous order that they were recorded, but I'd like to put them together into dialogues, and patterns, where you're saying kinda the same verb phrase over and over again, but switching verbs, or switching nouns, and people can hear that rhythm over and over again, and start to hear it that way.

During the member check she confirmed that she has been producing recordings of sentences grouped according to targeted language structures. Her comment about how using songs for teaching makes learning easier also relates to this theme: “Those seem to be easier to pick up, the words and connected to the tune and the notes, makes it easier.” This also seems to be a case of providing more potential connections for learners.

Margaret also talks about the importance of teaching language in context as opposed to simply teaching lists of words (such as numbers):

(Excerpt 75)

Where to use it. Like *iskwahtîm, pîsimohkân*,<sup>32</sup> like instead of saying *peyak niso nisto newo*,<sup>33</sup> without using your fingers and seeing with the numeral and saying it, or even the colours. If you use it in context it's easier to remember. *Mihkwâw, miskosiw*<sup>34</sup>.”

She gives her own experiences learning the language in context:

(Excerpt 76)

Aha, ‘cause when we were growing up all we heard was Cree, and that's how we learnt to use it in context and that's how we learnt from observing our parents, from listening to them, from watching them, and watching their movements.

Margaret also talks about the extent to which all knowledge is interconnected, talking here about the advantages adult learners have:

(Excerpt 77)

Well, with children whatever you teach them they I guess it's in their remembering, easier, I shouldn't say that, because adults also remember easier, because adults already have a lot of knowledge in their brain, from growing up and learning everything around them, they just put it into their scheme, whatever they learn like the new language, that's what I do when I learn a new language, because I speak two languages I'm able to make those connections, and I do a lot of interpreting ,and ah so I think, it's not impossible, adults could learn, and I guess with adults you don't have the problems with discipline, that's the only thing yeah.

She sees adults as being better able to contextualize new knowledge simply because there are more potential connections to be made when we already have a lifetime of stored experiences and knowledge.

In relation to these beliefs about language and the importance of context in language learning, participants seemed to view their language learning as something that could not be (or should not be) confined to a classroom, and preferred a more holistic approach. For example, Lyle states:

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<sup>32</sup> Door, watch

<sup>33</sup> One, two, three, four

<sup>34</sup> Red, large

(Excerpt 35)

But I think that would probably be hard for people, for example, at the friendship centre the classes are just once a week. To learn something once a week, then not use it for a week before you came back, so I think maybe because I talk to myself it's okay the time constraints, but for somebody who doesn't do that, if they have time constraints and can only do Cree so often, then I think definitely it'd be hard for them to remember. I try to integrate Cree into my everyday life as much as I can.

And continuing he gives examples of how he makes the language part of his life:

(Excerpt 33)

Yeah, so I didn't put a time commitment in, but I tried every possible to speak Cree in my life, even somehow, *kâ-pimohteyân*, when I'm walking around, *nipîkiskwâtison*, I talk to myself in Cree, and that's how I remember it, so I don't know how to translate that into a time commitment, but that's about it.

Corinne talks about a somewhat different approach – focusing on linking the language to emotions to add an extra dimension of meaning to the language as she is learning it.

(Excerpt 78)

Yeah, see – I don't know, if the sound for me is what clicked, 'cause you know after years of struggling, taking different classes, buying books, I thought well what's gonna work with me. One thing that Allan told me that's really important is he said you have to feel the word, you have to feel the language and he meant like emotionally feel it – when he taught me to say I love you he said 'remember how it was, you know what that means, and that has a meaning for you and a feeling, and that's why you know how to say that, and you'll never forget how to say that because that word is attached to that feeling and that emotion now. And I thought yeah it does need to have some feeling and its gotta have some meaning what you're saying and if I hear it well I bring that emotion or that feeling to that word if I hear it, if I say it – and when it's on paper it doesn't have that, it doesn't have that other dimension that I need to bring the meaning to it for me, and for me to remember it, 'cause that's when it sticks for me.

In line with this view of language and culture being broadly interconnected, Adam also talks about learning through highly contextualized experiences, or immersion:

(Excerpt 65)

No. except our webpage, though I don't use it too much, I just try to listen to people as much as I can, try to get immersed. That's the only way, is immersion. Then I try to pick it up, to hear it, to feel it, like confidence in speaking a language doesn't come until you feel it. You have to feel what that language feels like first, then you can start talking. If you don't feel it then it's harder to learn I think.

And in fact, an immersion program is something almost all participants mention. For example, Corinne states:

(Excerpt 40)

So I guess umm– that would be the thing that would be the best resource for me is to be able to actually speak it - being in an environment where I could focus on that part just speaking it, like I would like to be in an immersion program, like a real immersion program, like the ones that I've heard about that they have for French.

In contrast to what Margaret stated about teaching language in context (giving the example of memorising numbers out of context), Skyla talks about having learnt much of her grammar initially through straight-forward memorization:

(Excerpt 79)

I have the chart memorized in my head, and like for some things I know it like for having said it – to know whether a noun is NA or NI, and to know which one I need to say most of the time I need o took in the chart in my head, and figure out with NA or NI, so it's not very smooth at all.

While this appears to have partially worked for Skyla, as that knowledge is helping her become a speaker, Corinne had a very negative experience with the same approach:

(Excerpt 80)

Just knowing grammar rules and not being able to apply it to anything, not being able to say a sentence, a whole conversation, and trying to memorize all the grammar rules, it didn't work – I learned them all, I got a really high mark in that class, but it didn't teach me how to do anything, like I couldn't converse any more.

### ***Increased contextualization: Summary***

In summary, participants describe the scope of language as extending over all social interaction and relationships. Language is “community” (Skyla), “identity” (Lyle) and the key to solving most social issues (Kurtis). This view of language is more within an interactive view of language and most acquisition methodologies used fall within that category. For example, immersion as described by participants consists of much more exposure to the language, specifically spoken language, and more frequent exposure to the language, i.e. increased integration of the language into the learner’s life (Section 4.2.9). MAP additionally emphasizes contextualizing all this learning in appropriate situations within the context of a real relationship (immersion does as well, but not to the same extent). TPR as a methodology includes physical responses to language as a way of increasing the immediate impact of the language learning activity, and the ASLA method does the same but using images. These methodologies all provide learners with more contextualized language learning, and help them integrate the language into their lives.

This apparent search by learners for greater context is a common thread that appears to be consistent through most learner decisions regarding methods and techniques. No participants limited themselves to a single method or approach, instead using a variety of methods, techniques, and even approaches as they learnt or taught the language. Adam and Corinne have chosen to learn vocabulary largely through recordings, most of which are recordings of phrases rather than of just individual words. Adam and Lyle both appear to reject memorization or “practice” (though what they mean by practice is unclear), instead learning through using the language in context. Learners look for resources that use more of their senses, explanations that give more examples, multiple approaches, multiple speakers, in summary as broad an approach as possible.

### **4.3 Further Analysis**

Most of the analysis of the findings of this study has been interspersed throughout the presentation of the findings in the previous chapter, but some of the analysis fits better in a chapter of its own. In this chapter I first present my own views on language and language learning, then I compare participant views on language and language acquisition with available resources. I then present how some learner approaches might be applied to challenges that participants had not yet surmounted.

### 4.3.1 Resources and learner approaches

When I compare the resources learners and teachers had access to to the way in which learners reported learning, I find a disconnect<sup>35</sup>. While learners talk about learning through conversation, through reading circles, through listening to recorded conversations and sentences, much of the materials available contain little of this, instead the bulk of the Cree resources I have been able to find consist largely of wordlists and charts of grammar. One good example of many is Jean Okimasis' book *Cree, Language of the Plains: n ya n as - s n*, a wonderful reference on many aspects of Cree grammar, however most of the grammar is presented through charts with only minimal examples of use, and a large part of the book consists of a small dictionary where each word is explained not with examples of use, but with an English Gloss. The accompanying workbook is useful, but does not change the method of presentation. Cree dictionaries also follow this pattern, often providing very detailed information about what class of verb an entry falls into, but semantic information is relayed through straightforward minimalistic glosses, without examples of use. There are two dictionaries that differ. The first is *The Michif Dictionary: Turtle Mountain Chippewa Cree* by Patline Laverdure and Ida Rose Allard (1983), which provides one or two sample sentences for each entry, and the second is a dictionary created by Robert Castel which contains three or four sample sentences for each entry. It is part of "Castel's English-Cree Dictionary and Memoirs of the Elders," (2001). No participants were aware of this dictionary at the time of the first interview, but Corinne mentioned it during the member-check interview.

This particularly applies to beginner Cree classes and resources commonly available for these classes. In several classes that I have attended the teaching consisted largely of teaching students lists of body parts, of colours, or animals, with some verbs thrown in for good measure, without their usage explained. Even many of the professionally produced materials, produced for various school boards or for band operated schools essentially the same sets of vocabulary, but with more culturally relevant illustrations. Some of the teachers of these classes have not been trained as teachers (though all participant teachers had received training), and as discussed in 4.2.4 *Interacting with Speakers*, many if not most native speakers cannot explain the structure of the language they speak. Participants end up learning vocabulary, but never being able to transfer

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<sup>35</sup> For more examples of disconnect between teachers and students, see "Seeing eye to eye? The academic writing needs of graduate and undergraduate students from students' and instructors' perspectives" (Huang, 2010).

their knowledge into conversational ability, or even into the ability to create a coherent statement in Cree.

I am not discussing specifically grade school Cree language programs, as these often have very well developed scope and sequence documents (such as those provided by the government of Alberta or those produced by the Gift of Language and Culture Project Team and Saskatchewan Learning).

If learners prefer approaches that involve large amounts of input, lots of conversation, and making their learning as involved as possible, why is it that so much of the resources appear to be designed for a very different style of learning? There appear to be several potential reasons. The first is that many resources that look like they minimize conversation are designed to be used with a fluent speaker as a teacher, where they are simply resources for a teacher to draw on as they teach a class that *is* in line with participant preferences. This only works if learners are taking classes, and does not apply for the many learners who are trying to study on their own, or for learners who have a passive understanding of their role as a student. A second reason is that almost all linguists working with First Nations communities come from a theoretical background that is not focused on curriculum development – i.e. they go to study the language structure, then do what they can to help develop dictionaries, language material and programs. Not only does this mean that many resources are made by individuals who are trained in learning the structure of languages rather than learning languages, but their creations influence the whole “genre” as other curriculum developers look to previous work done for other indigenous languages for inspiration.

Not only materials, but also some methods suffer from the same challenges. For example TPR has been criticized because of the difficulty in using the method beyond a beginner level (leading to the development of Total Physical Response Storytelling, or TPRS), and ASLA has had to have been adapted significantly because while it works well for providing context for individual nouns, as originally implemented it does not provide an easy environment for teaching the verb systems of Algonquian languages (Sarkar & Metallic, 2009). Since most adult Cree language courses (especially courses outside universities) do not last long enough to progress beyond numbers, colours, greetings, and animals these methods work well, but they have a limit.

Possible improvements to this situation are already being implemented as individual after individual (every participant of this study) produces more resources for themselves and for



others, but much remains to be done. Even things as simple as arranging vocabulary thematically instead of alphabetically by English gloss can go a long way to making learning materials more useful for learners. Providing full sentence examples of usage would be ideal, as would more access to speakers. The biggest change from the perspective of the learners in this study would be a realization on the part of curriculum developers and teachers that learners of Cree, even learners who live in traditionally Cree speaking communities, have almost no access to speakers of Cree at home or in the community, and as a result teachers and curriculum are not merely teaching students the structure or grammar of the language (even assuming that the grammatical knowledge can be separated from other types of linguistic competencies), they are also providing the principle context where learners will be learning to speak the language.

#### **4.3.2 Further application of approaches**

Out of the language specific challenges that learners reported having ongoing difficulties with, several are related to each other: the difference between independent and conjunct clauses and verb paradigms; the TA verb paradigms, specifically the inverse and obviative constructions; and groups of Cree words that formed complex systems of meaning operating over a larger scope than a single sentence, such as determiners and evidentials. Participant challenges with these issues have been reported on in section 4.2.8.

This group of challenges appear to be an extension of some of the issues outlined in the previous section on resources (Section 4.3.1). Beginning with verb paradigms (Section 4.2.8), most textbooks teach through the presentation of accurate charts with a few examples. Darla encourages her students to study these paradigms, and learners such as Skyla and Corinne report having memorized all these charts (or at least significant portions of them), yet having not been able to transfer this concrete grammatical knowledge into speaking ability. Corinne as a result has rejected this approach, instead focusing on learning both vocabulary and verbal patterns through memorizing full phrases.

When it comes to semantic domains such as anaphoric and deictic determiners and evidentials, or the use of independent and conjunct clauses, participants showed even less understanding. What all these domains have in common is that they are the aspects of the language that are the hardest to teach using direct translation from English. Crucially the system of meaning that these systems of words represent have a scope of operation that is much larger than a single sentence, sometimes encompassing an entire narrative. If language acquisition is

seen as being the result of repeated language use, prolonged exposure and regular practice, then learning any one of these systems involves exponentially more exposure than simply learning vocabulary, as while ten sentences might give you ten examples of how to use a single noun, for the above-mentioned systems, it should take many more exposures to much longer examples. Given the reported study methods, learning history, and time commitments participants reported, it is highly unlikely that any of the learners had even close to this amount of exposure to most of these systems to gain a full command of them, especially as so little of their practice involved protracted conversations. At the same time, none of the learning resources that learners mentioned using and none of the resources that I have been able to find covered most these aspects of the language, leaving a significant gap between what students can learn from available textbooks and what is required to comfortably read the various collections of texts or to hold a conversation.

Learners still had suggestions as to how they would learn more challenging aspects of the grammar they had yet to confront. Lyle mentions an approach to “really complicated” grammar:

(Excerpt 45)

Lots of homework I never did, I like to learn speaking by conversing. It's much easier to get a hold on grammar that way, when it gets really complicated. It's harder to learn grammar that way, mathematically breaking it down, this, this, this, this, this, sometimes it's easier to just give me a sentence and say this is what this sentence means.

This type of approach is discussed more under 4.2.9 (Immersion, Increased Contextualization, Language Use). Although he is here talking about learning grammar from a single sentence, I believe that this same approach can and should be extended over much larger examples, and that many of these challenges can only be solved by exposing learners to much more of the language, ideally starting right at the beginning of the learning process.

#### **4.4 Summary of Key Findings**

I have summarized the participant responses to the two research questions this study was designed to answer. These two questions are the following:

1. What are the major challenges facing adult L2 (second language) learners of Cree?
2. What are the solutions used by learners to overcome these challenges?

The participants reported a wide range of challenges with affective factors, resources, and the specific structure of the Cree language. The participants also reported on the approaches they had taken to solving these challenges.

Regarding motivation, participants recognized that keeping students motivated enough to continue learning, despite a significant learning curve and frequent unfulfilled expectations, was a significant challenge. In order to deal with this challenge participants drew on their personal sources of motivation. Learners described their desires to have stronger connections to their Cree speaking families, friends, and community, and described the way in which learning Cree was important to their own sense of identity. Motivation was more of a challenge when learners did not have this connection to the language. Participants suggested that having a strong focus on the language was good for motivation, and teachers discussed methods to instill confidence in their students providing safe learning environments and encouraging students.

Several participants commented on the impact teaching the language had on their language skills, whether as teachers, or through tutoring the language. Although much of the benefits came as a result of being forced to rearticulate knowledge for a new individual, cementing the participant's own knowledge, at least some of the benefit was motivational via the sense of responsibility to and for the language resulting from being seen as a source of knowledge. My analysis is that being forced into an active role as a teacher or tutor made passivity relating to the language impossible and strengthened a positive relation with the language.

The other significant affective challenge was anxiety, both on the part of learners and on the part of other speakers. Some learners were nervous speaking Cree publically, and nervous approaching native speakers. Other learners considered themselves shy by nature and considered this a challenge. In addition, learners mentioned that sometimes having a strong emotional attachment to the language could increase the pressure to speak correctly, heightening anxiety, in much the same way as the general respect given the language can also put pressure on learners. Learners also noted that having already learnt a second language decreased language anxiety and gave learners increased confidence and that having a safe and enjoyable learning environment made learning far less stressful.

Participants faced many challenges related to learning resources, comprised of the following: finding people to talk to, the usefulness of these people, time management, and

language learning materials. In terms of being able to use the language, urban participants reported difficulty finding Cree speakers to talk to and most relied on chance encounters, speaking circles, and on talking to themselves or to other learners. Teachers reported that learners had the tendency to only use language in class and for the duration of the course, and that after courses had finished learners usually lost what language skills they had acquired in class.

Participants faced other resource challenges as well. The learners cited gaps between beginner and advanced materials, a “lack of appropriate resources”, and problems with many of the available language classes. On the positive side, participants listed many books they used, including a range of collections of stories and speeches, dictionaries, grammars and reference books, and music. Learners and teachers also mentioned books and courses teaching specific methodologies. Participants listed several ways in which electronic resources were used, including online dictionaries, videos and texts, recording equipment and various recordings, and radio programs. Learners preferred audio resources over print media.

Participants faced challenges that were considered specific to Cree, including dealing with a new gender system, pronouns, the agglutinative aspects of the language, a more complex verb system, and the different ways in which the language connects ideas together grammatically when compared to English or French. Learners had been unable to gain either a working command of obviation or of how to determine what type of clause to use. Learners had been unable to internalize large sections of the verb structure of the language because of the limited scope of their language use.

One challenge that learners and teachers both faced was a gap between their respective perceptions of what the challenges facing learners of Cree actually are. The differences were very apparent when discussing specific grammatical aspects of the language such as verb structures and opportunities, as well as in teacher and student discussion of approaches to learning and teaching.

Learners had a wide range of approaches to facing these challenges. Some listened to and memorized recorded examples, other learners focused on using the language as much as possible. Teachers used charts on their walls and encouraged students to memorize the paradigms given. A broader analysis of learner responses suggested that the primary cause of these challenges was a lack of contextualized input relating to these aspects of the language, with

the implication that a solution can be found in meeting this lack through increased language input and through a greater focus on contextualizing language knowledge in actual linguistic experience.

For a wide range of challenges learners had few specific solutions, in general the learners remained unable to solve these problems; however, the participants did have several general solutions that applied to these challenges as a whole. Some teachers saw reading and writing as an important tool, while most learners were somewhat dismissive. Learners used repetition for dealing with vocabulary, pronunciation, and grammar, with some learners advocating using recordings specifically because of the ease of asking a computer to repeat a phrase over and over again. Learners and teachers advocated regular, consistent practice. Learners and teachers advocated creating learning materials for themselves and for other learners, and all learners also taught what they were learning to other individuals, either other students or members of their family.

All participants saw some kind of immersion as a significant solution to many of the problems facing learners and teachers. They mention immersion methods, and a few participants also mention MAP as a version of immersion that they would like to try. Teachers also mention a range of other methodologies and tools that they would use in conjunction with immersion, including TPR, ASLA, and immersion camps.

The final generally applicable solution drawn from the responses of all participants was the concept of increased contextualization or enriching every aspect of the language learning experience. Learners and teachers wanted more native speakers and more conversation in the classroom, they chose audio resources over written resources, and they preferred resources that provided the most context to what was being learnt. Some participants liked Cree music for the same reason as it added additional layers of context such as the tune and rhythm. Learners talked about increasing the ways in which new language information could be contextualized, for example by organizing vocabulary logically, by including physical actions, by using visual cues and illustrations, through music, appropriate settings, adding emotions, or by explaining the various components of larger multi-root words.

One participant points out that adults, already having a large knowledge base, have an easier time locating their new knowledge in pre-existing contexts, and all learners discuss how to make their new language knowledge a part of their entire lives by not only increasing time

commitments, but also by incorporating the use of the language into new relationships, new locations, activities and hobbies.

## Chapter 5: Implications, Key Recommendations, Limitations, and Future Research Directions

This chapter concludes the thesis by examining the limitations of this study, presenting the major implications of this study in the form of recommendations, and giving my concluding thoughts.

### 5.1 Limitations

This study faced several limitations. The first and most significant limitation was the size of the study. Originally I had intended to interview a minimum of 15 to 20 individuals, divided into clearly defined groups of beginner, intermediate, and advanced learners of Cree, as well as teachers. Instead the study consists of only seven participants due to the reasons described in Section 3.3.1. This means that while I still have a fairly rich description of a significant range of experiences, the study lacks some of the breadth I was originally aspiring to, and as a result I cannot make strong claims about Cree learners.

The second limitation is related to the first. Out of those learners that I was able to recruit, none of them was at higher than an upper intermediate level of spoken Cree. As a result participants had no tried and tested solutions to several of the more advanced challenges presented by the Cree language in particular.

A third limitation was that all of the participants were highly motivated, despite their varying degrees of success, so it is possible that they simply had been able to bypass some of the motivational challenges faced by many other learners, or that challenges largely dismissed by learners (such as time constraints) might play a much more significant role for other learners.

A factor which had the potential to be a limitation was my own bias as an experienced language learner. I have a range of approaches of my own that I have tried and tested with several languages, including Cree, and as such I have to guard against unintentionally interpreting the participant responses as supporting my own approaches, instead relying on the analysis methods (Section 3.3.4) to reveal patterns in the data that can speak for themselves. This factor, however, must also be acknowledged as a significant strength of the study, especially as a source of knowledge useful during the preparation and implementation of the interview process, and also as a source of useful intuitions during analysis.

The study was also limited by my own lack of experience going into the study. Given more previous experience I could have saved time by exploring the more profitable directions of

enquiry more in-depth. I suspect that this is a limit inherent to the nature of research, and not only applied to this situation, and of course a lack of success in a certain direction is as much a finding as is success in another direction.

## 5.2 Significant Implications and Key Recommendations

The majority of the implications of this study have been discussed in the findings, and then summarized at the conclusion to chapter 4, but those I consider to be the most significant are restated here. I first present the principle empirical implications, then present a list of recommendations.

The most significant implication for me was that many of the challenges faced by learners had to do more with the methodologies learners were using to learn than in the abundance or lack of resources, as the methodology dictated what form resources would take, and often what aspects of their knowledge learners were evaluated on, and as a result what aspects learners focused on in their studies.

Also related to methodology is the idea that challenges that were seen as being inherent to the language are actually the results of the interplay between the teaching/learning methodology and the language, rather than being inherent to the language. This same principle applies when looking at student criticisms of various mediums, such as print resources and audio resources – the problems students list are often the result of a methodological approach that relies on a specific medium rather than the results of the medium itself; likewise, the benefits seen in specific audio resources may have more to do with the underlying approach than with the medium.

The following recommendations are organized by topic; I start with recommendations related to the methodological implications discussed above, then those related to how learners view language, then recommendations connected to affective factors such as agency, concluding with recommendations related to curriculum.

***Focus on target language context.*** This can include anything from arranging vocabulary alphabetically by target language rather than by English gloss, to having students break words up into their constituent morphemes (Section 4.3.2). In a broader context, increasing the extent to which learners can contextualize new data is the recommendation to deal with the challenge raised above concerning the methodological origins of many of the specific difficulties learners



had with aspects of the language (Section 4.2.10). The following recommendation is concerned with other ways in which this can be implemented.

***Begin focusing on longer examples earlier, and more, both through using longer examples, but also through having students produce longer conversations (however simple).*** In this context, “longer examples” means examples that are at a minimum more than an English gloss, ideally presenting words with some sort of Cree specific context, even if only a determiner to aid in remembering animacy. This is especially relevant when looking at Cree (Section 4.2.8), but is also valid for other languages as well. Many of the ongoing challenges faced by more advanced learners relating to broader linguistic patterns (discussed under 4.2.8) can be connected to a lack of exposure to language use such hearing it in conversations, stories, and speeches, and based on my analysis of the results I believe that more exposure to longer discourse would not only help with more complex structures, it would also help learners internalize many simpler aspects of the language, and reinforce the conceptualization of the language as a cohesive internally connected whole rather than as a system of translation from the learners’ first language.

In light of learner insistence on increased context (Section 4.2.10) and in conjunction with learner views on what is included in “language” (Section 4.1), ***expand the scope of language acquisition to encompass culture.*** If language is seen as encompassing culture, then the scope of language acquisition and pedagogy has to expand accordingly. This has secondary implications for linguistic documentation (answering the question “what is the scope of a documentation project?”). This increased scope, when combined with learner views on the importance of building context in order to facilitate (or even constitute) learning means that the context provided in learning resources and by teachers is critical in allowing learners to incorporate new linguistic interaction into their body of knowledge (Section 4.2.10).

Looking at language acquisition from a whole-community scope leads to the following recommendation: ***Focus language revitalization on changing speaker attitudes towards the language as much as on creating new learners.*** The unwillingness of many speakers to speak with learners or even with each other is one of the greatest challenges facing learners (Section 4.2.2a). Language learners are not trying to create a new and separate community of speakers, they are trying to join themselves to an existing one. If speaker attitudes towards using the language and towards new speakers do not change the only option for learners may be to speak

mostly with each other. Work towards encouraging existing speakers to use the language is already being done by many organizations, but can bear repeating.

Based on learner responses in section 4.2.9 regarding approaches that work for them, and in line with the goal of having learners use language in as broad a context as possible, ***have learners teach***. This recommendation is difficult to implement, but the benefits of teaching for learners, both in terms of knowledge retention and on learner attitudes towards the language and motivation, are substantial. This is a very real way for learners to embrace agency in their own language learning, something that is important for motivation (Section 2.6). Similar benefits might be possible from classroom activities that promote ownership and identity with the language such as group work that forces interaction with other learners on an equal footing, rather than only in a teacher/student context.

The following recommendation focuses more specifically with promoting learner agency. ***Find a way to emphasize to teachers and learners the importance of self-determination in eventual learner success or failure***. All the learners interviewed in this study were clearly the agents of their own success, but as every teacher ever has likely experienced, not all students realize this (Sections 2.6.1, 4.2.1, and 4.2.3).

***Develop a clearly articulated scope of the language that is readily available to learners and teachers***. This would ideally prevent many of the problems resulting from teachers of various community programs essentially developing programs based on the requirements of the various funding sources, resulting in countless classes teaching, animals, body parts and colours over and over again (Section 4.2.6). It would also support learner agency by giving learners a clearer understanding of the scale of the task they have undertaken, as well as by giving them means to clearly understand their accomplishments in the scope of a larger whole.

***A change of focus from teaching about language to facilitating language development***. This recommendation draws on all the previous recommendations, in that it is related to the scope of language, methodological considerations, and a view of the importance of agency in combatting affective challenges. The expectation of easily standardized grades placed on language teachers at many levels often leads to a type of testing that promotes learning and studying language components in isolation, a very different type of study from the type that promotes language fluency (as discussed in section 4.3.2). This recommendation is based not only on this finding, but also on the importance of agency to learner success (Section 2.6), in

conjunction with participant methods that show the importance they place on self-directed study and methods (Section 4.2.6b and 4.2.9). The argument sometimes made that the classroom is not a good place for language learning is partly a case of confusing the methodological challenges relating to the demands placed on teachers with demands supposedly inherent to the location (Section 4.4). For this to be done teachers would need a clearly defined method for evaluating students that did rely on the same methods of testing. Teachers would also need the method to be in a form that would be acceptable to their respective institutions.

The final two recommendations deal with some of the gaps between learner needs and available resources. The first is that *curriculum developers need to recognize how important it is for resources to be usable by learners on their own, without a fluent language speaker*. The reason is not that people should all be learning on their own, but rather that resources designed for class use often are very limited in how they can be used without a teacher. Specifically, while a resource can be useful for several different teaching styles when used by a fluent speaking teacher, in the hands of a lone student they often become tools of rote memorization that can reinforce bad study practices (if the goal is speaking), as well as reinforcing the idea that teachers are responsible for learner success, rather than learners also bearing some responsibility or agency in the learning process. This recommendation stems from participant views on resource related challenges (Section 4.2.6), as well as on the role of agency in learner motivation (Section 2.6.1).

The following recommendation deals with one way in which the previous recommendation can be implemented. *Greater involvement in the production of First Nations language curriculum resources on the part of applied linguists and practitioners*. Applied linguists have much to offer those already working in the field, and even a small amount of exceptional work could go a long way in adjusting the focus of the entire field in terms of curriculum development (as discussed in section 4.3.1).

### 5.3 Future Research Direction

Continuing recommendations on the basis of the implications of this research, the strengths, weaknesses and implications of this thesis suggest the following recommendations for future research based on the questions raised in the study:

- *Undertake more broad qualitative studies*. This study has shown the usefulness of looking very broadly at a situation, covering learners, teachers, and resources from across

a very large spectrum, in producing specific recommendations and viable empirical findings.

- ***Research minority language acquisition.*** Researching language acquisition in the context of minority languages can reveal useful lessons for all language educators and researchers. Many of the findings of this study apply beyond the Cree language, and indeed beyond other minority language situations. Specifically, looking at a pedagogical situation different from those usually studied can highlight concepts that otherwise get ignored as background noise, much in the same way reading a book in translation can provide new insight to a repeat reader, or looking at a common belief taken to extremes in a fantasy world can show the absurdity of it. It is in extreme cases where assumptions are either broken or proven, and minority language education has a lot to offer researchers in this respect.
- ***Continue researching the disconnect between student and teacher views on the challenges facing language learners.*** How widespread is this within First Nations language education? What are other ways in which student and teachers do not see eye to eye? (Section 4.3.1).
- ***Look at the impact of community language anxiety on L2 learners.*** The level of anxiety encountered by learners of Cree both personally and in interactions with other speakers is very high (Section 4.2.2), higher than I have found discussed in literature looking on the impact of anxiety on L2 acquisition (Section 2.6.3). A qualitative study looking specifically at anxiety in this context might have much to offer not just other communities, but also the linguistic field.
- ***Replicate the study with a different community.*** For all this study revealed, there was much more that it could have revealed if we had been able to interview a group of fluent L2 speakers, and there is much that could be learnt from a group of learners with the same level of success but from a different language community. A replication of this study either within a different group of Cree learners or within an entirely different minority language would hopefully present even more solutions for learners and teachers.
- ***Research the role of methodology in determining “language specific” challenges.*** This research could be carried out in the context of ESL by comparing the challenges

perceived by groups of learners from contrasting English language programs, programs using methodologies with fundamentally different methodologies.

A final research direction comes out of a weakness of the study. All learners were highly self-motivated, and all learners had prior experience studying languages (Sections 3.1.3 and 4.2.1). This means that this study only saw one side of these factors in much detail. *The impacts of self-motivation and prior second language learning can be looked at in more detail, especially in the context of minority language education.* Specifically, it should be possible to compare successful learners for whom Cree (or another language) is a third language with learners for whom the language is their first experience with second language acquisition.

#### 5.4 Concluding Thoughts

This study has had a strong impact on me as a language learner, as a researcher and as an individual. As a language learner it has impacted how I both learn and teach my own nation's language, Michif. As a researcher it has had an impact on my approach to language documentation, as an individual it has prompted a lot of thought about the interaction between the various competing identities I carry through life.

In regards to my own language learning the process of completing this thesis has impacted me in several ways. The first is that I have focused my production of teaching materials on providing learners with audio resources which use multiple sentences and a range of vocabulary to illustrate the various patterns of the language. I have searched for opportunities for conversation more, and focused my practice on the longest recordings I can find.

In terms of my research and work as a linguist, this study has had an impact on my views on language, with a resulting impact on much of my work. The realization of just how much language interacts with every aspect of life, combined with the realization of how inadequate a gloss or simple translation is in providing a sufficient context for a word or phrase in a language led me to concentrate on providing as much context as possible in my documentation work. For several months in 2011 I worked for the Kitasoo/ aishais band documenting the Sg̱ x̱s dialect of Tsimshian, using resources such as grammars and dictionaries from related languages, ESL conversation websites and the Dictionary Development Process worksheets created by the Summer Institute of Linguistics (SIL). Because of the learner responses from this study, when documenting Sg̱ x̱s I tried to never settle for a simple gloss, tried to collate related words into larger systems of meaning, and did my best to not limit my documentation to lexicon and

grammar, instead extending the concept of language structure as widely as possible, to include conversation scripts, stories, and cultural references. Having a better understanding of what learners needed to gain fluency helped me in my goal of documenting for the purpose of creating new speakers of the language.

The process of conducting this study and analyzing the results has also impacted me personally as I have realized just how much overlap there is between how I view language and how I view everything else in life. The correspondences between theories of language and literary criticism, psychology, religion and philosophy have led to a lot of thinking about many subjects besides language acquisition, something that I hope will continue to enrich my life for a long time to come.

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## Appendix 1: Coding Scheme

Master Code ID	Sub-code ID	Code Description	Example Coded Chunk
<b>History</b>	History	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. Learner language history</li> <li>2. Teacher teaching history</li> <li>3. Personal history that is not language history is coded as off-topic</li> <li>4. Personal history that is related to identity as a motivation is coded as identity</li> </ol>	<p>Battleford's about an hour and a half away. I guess, a little bit about myself. Um, I grew up there, I was raised there and my first language was Cree. And my second language is English. And, where I went to school was, uh, in Saskatoon for my undergrad and I got a BA in Native Studies and I got a BEd, Education so I am a qualified teacher. So, I've taught more than ten years and, um, finishing up my masters as well.</p>
<b>Affective Factors</b>		<ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. Affective factors covers the sub-factors of identity, motivation, anxiety, and all other affective factors.</li> </ol>	
	Affective	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. Discussions related to external affective factors (community attitudes, etc.) were coded as Affective, as well as any affective factors that did not fit into the categories of <i>Identity</i>, <i>Motivation</i> or <i>Anxiety</i>.</li> <li>2. Discussion of the possible affective impact of learning styles</li> </ol>	<p>That might be a difference between French and Cree 'cause mostly all Cree people they never say you're not supposed to say that that way or laugh at you, whereas the French, if you say something different they get mad at you</p>

	Identity	1. Discussion of the impact of learner identity on learner success or learner attitudes towards language	Even though French and English are very similar, when you think about Cree, 'cause like were over here, French and English are very similar, I was having trouble translating back and forth so when I was translating back and forth .. say things different ways, to try to get the meaning across, so I started to think that that's how I started to think that identity has something to do with your language, I was having trouble expressing the same concepts in different languages. So I became interested in trying to understand the Cree side of that
	Motivation	1. discussion of the impact of learner motivation or lack thereof on success, and how to encourage motivation	I hope so, he listens for it though, he's interested in learning, so he's picking up a few words
	Anxiety	1. Discussion of the impact or learner anxiety on learner success 2. Discussion of a lack of anxiety	And then they were laughed at. Yeah. Especially when it happens when you're a kid. It's kinda like that mental block right, and then I think for a lot of people they're really embarrassed
<b>Non-affective Factors</b>		1. Discussion of non-affective factors that are not related to methodology or language specific factors	
	Time Factors	1. Discussion of the impact of time constraints on learner success, and of learner time commitment to language study	<u>Yeah, so I didn't put a time commitment in</u> , but I tried every possible to speak Cree in my life, even somehow, <i>kâ-pimohteyân</i> , when I'm walking around, <i>nipikiskwâtison</i> , I talk to myself in Cree, and that's how I remember it, so I dont know how to translate that into a time commitment, but that's about it

	Resources	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. Discussion of resources available to learners and learner use of those resources</li> </ol>	<p>Am – well the ones that I made use of were obviously the Cree classes with were the best, through the U of A, and we had the text book that we used which I guess Emily hunter had written, and we often used the elders Cree dictionary that Arok Wolvengray's dictionary. 3rd year Cree we were using books like funny little stories. Yeah! It's really good, and occasionally we'd use like our grandmother's lives as told in their own words, and I forget the other ones, just collections of stories</p>
	Speakers	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. Discussion of learner access to native Cree speakers, speakers as a resource.</li> <li>2. Does not double-code with resources unless the chunk is discussing other types of resources than native Cree speakers.</li> </ol>	<p><i>Namawiyak</i> no one. The odd time I would meet somebody who speaks Cree, like that Cree lady I told you about meeting on the bus, or my Cree teacher, other students not really, they don't really understand, like cause like I was telling you earlier, <i>nihtawimasinahikewak</i>, they write well, <i>mâka moya nihtâpîkiskwew</i> they don't talk well</p>
	Language use	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. Discussion of all types of learner or community use of the Cree language.</li> <li>2. Discussion of limitations on language use.</li> <li>3. Does not automatically include responses that are in Cree unless they are about the use of the Cree language</li> </ol>	<p>Very little, I'd say almost none. Like especially for speaking. Occasionally once a week we'd come into class and she'd ask us like did you eat this morning and we'd respond, and yeah, like, I'd use it a tiny bit with Jay when I was tutoring, but not really any at all</p>
	Other Non-Affective factors	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. Catch-all for discussion of other non-affective factors, including specifically discussion of internal word morphology, learner styles, and learner lack of vocabulary.</li> </ol>	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. Family, I don't know all the words for family yet.</li> <li>2. No I could go <i>kiskinohamâto</i> teach or learn, and <i>wikamik</i>, a place and I recognize <i>kisk</i> from <i>kiskisin</i>, <i>kiskeyihten</i>, so I recognize that, the rest of it not really.</li> </ol>

<p><b>Language Specific</b></p>		<ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. A group of codes relating to specific aspects of Cree.</li> <li>2. This group of codes falls under the scope of non-affective factors</li> </ol>	
	<p>Common Mistakes</p>	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. discussions of common errors in student productions of Cree</li> </ol>	<p>(referring to conjunct) yeah, no problem, but! when I've met with other people in Cree conversation groups they've said "that's not it" so my understanding of independent is like a noncontinuous statement, I eat, I run, as I understand it, and conjunct is continuous statements? like I am eating I am running. Is that your understanding?</p>
	<p>Animate/ Inanimate</p>	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. Discussing the difficulties of teaching the animate/inanimate split</li> <li>2. As this applies to both verbs and nouns, this is often double-coded with verbs</li> </ol>	<p>It's okay. French masculine/feminine makes less sense than animate inanimate so, you could have like a random object, why is la table feminine?</p>
	<p>Verbs</p>	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. discussion relating to Cree verbs</li> </ol>	<p>I think it's the conjugating, conjunct. The verbs, 'cause one verb can be added on with the past tense, future, indicators, 'cause you can use mitso, kimitson, 2st 2nd 3rd, the n plural, and how you use it in context, and you gonna go eat, you wanna go eat, you know asking questions, like it can , but one you know, if you're able to place those together, then it's a matter of using it in context. Kiwîmîtson, kikîmîtson</p>
	<p>Pronunciation</p>	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. Discussion challenges and solutions related to pronunciation</li> </ol>	<p>If you try to train yourself on paper you miss all that stuff, because what you see on paper always sounds the same way in your head, but when you go in the community it doesn't sound the same way all the time and that really throws a person, so you have to be really open to that and realize that that is the same word it just sounds different</p>



	Obviation	1. Any discussion related to obviation	Umm, yeah we really like my whole class had a hard time with the inverse third obviative to 3s, like sometimes I understand it and sometimes I don't
	Clauses and Function words	1. Any discussion related to clause typing or problems with function words	The way I was taught it was conjunct I am doing something, independent is I do something. Myself, mostly I'll talk in independent, in French that's how you talk everything is independent, you can say je suis en train de faire quelque chose but mostly you just say je parle - it could mean I'm talking, or I talk
<b>Methodology</b>			
	Methodology	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. Anything related to teaching and learning methodologies, and methodological approaches to SLA.</li> <li>2. Includes both concrete discussions of specific methodologies and abstract discussion relating to learning methods</li> </ol>	Ahah, and then you add your plural nouns, pluralize the nouns and the verbs and more verbs and more nouns and phrases and asking questions 'cause that's how 'cause students will eventually learn to answer you when you say keekway ooma, keekway awa, ahaha, a lot of repetition
	Teacher Strategies	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. Anything related to teacher strategies.</li> <li>2. Often overlaps with methodology</li> </ol>	But with the little children you have to do everything, but if you make it fun and you keep them busy then you won't have any discipline problems
	Learner Strategies	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. Anything related to learner strategies</li> <li>2. Often overlaps with methodology.</li> </ol>	And it's the same with language, if you can remember something that makes a particular concept, and you learn that concept about how the words are put together, it can help you remember for sure
	Program Goals	1. Teacher statements of what they would like to have/do to improve their language programs, or what goals they have for their programs	probably more fluent speakers being a part of the organization, <i>tânispi saweyihtakîs</i> . in the classroom like for instance myself there's only me that's fluent in the classroom, how are they going to learn? I can't be speaking to myself, so - more people that can help with the program that understand and can speak the language.

	Evaluation	1. Evaluations of learner success	But the Cree that I can speak I speak it right, I dont have to think too hard. I just say it, whatever I want to say that I can
	Advice	1. Learner and teacher advice to learners	And spend a lot of time with elders, that's when I talk a lot with elders even on the phone. Well all they speak is Cree and more than one elder calls me all the time and tells me old Cree words, so now I write them down
<b>Questions</b>		1. All interviewer questions	If you had to learn all over again what would you do differently?
<b>Off Topic</b>		<ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. Discussions that do not relate to any of the subjects being looked at by this study</li> <li>2. Personal or private information</li> <li>3. Filler statements.</li> <li>4. Non-interviewer clarifying questions</li> <li>5. Cannot be double coded</li> </ol>	<i>Kîksîpayâw</i> – is morning, and <i>mitho</i> , or <i>mithokîsikînisi</i> – have a good day.

## Appendix II: Recruitment Scripts

### Steps in Recruitment

Recruitment of an individual will take place in two steps: initial contact and subsequent follow-up. For the following scripts I have specified for each whether it is for initial or subsequent contact, and whether it is for learners (L), teachers (T) or both (LT). Because I will be contacting potential participants through multiple media I have prepared separate scripts suitable for specific media and target groups.

### Post to Cree Community message board (initial LT)

Taansi kahkiyaaw oota kaa-ayaacik, niwiikakwecimitinaawaaw kispin nohtewiichihiyeko apisis. Ahpitawkosisanis niya, BC ohci, miina nikakwe-maci-miyo-pikiskwaan, maaka ee-ayimahk. kihci-kiskinohamaatowikamikohk nikiskinohamaakosin, ni-masters degree ee-ositayaan, miina ekwa anohc nikiskinwahamaakeewak kiipakitinikwak for my thesis ka-miskawayaan isiyiniwak kaakii-ati-nehiyaawecik adults kaa-ayaacik. Miywehtameeko ka-wiichihiyeek, masinahamawinok!

Hello everyone, I'm wondering if some of you might be interested in helping me out a bit - I'm a Métis guy from BC, working on improving my Cree, but as some of you know it's not easy. I'm going to UVIC at the moment doing a masters in linguistics, and just had my thesis plan approved - I'll be talking to other people who have learnt Cree as adults or are somewhere in the process and sharing experiences and suggestions, with the idea of giving us all a better idea of what we're facing.. If you're interested in helping out and sharing some of your experiences, drop me a line and I'll tell you more about what is involved.

### Post to ILAT (initial LT)

Taansi kiyawaw,

This is Dale McCreery, a linguistics grad student from UVIC, and I've been approved to start research for my thesis - reported challenges and solutions to second language acquisition of Cree by adults - I'll be talking to other people who have learnt Cree as adults or who are somewhere in the process, with the idea that by sharing and comparing experiences something will be learnt. I'm hoping to talk to a good range of learners, and teachers as well, so if you're interested or just want to learn more, email me and I'll tell you more about what's involved.

nohtewiichihiyeeko write me!

Dale McCreery

**Email to teacher I already know (initial T)**

Hey (subject) - this is Dale again, I've had my thesis proposal approved, meaning I can start my research interviewing Cree learners and teachers. I was wondering if you would be willing to have me drop by for a couple hours some time in the next month and ask you about teaching Cree? If you can help me I will be eternally grateful. Let me know, and I'll fill you in on the details of what's involved. Dale

**Email to adult learner of Cree who has been referred to me (initial L)**

Hello (subject), (source) suggested you might be a person who would be interested in what I'm working on. My name's Dale McCreery, a Métis linguistics grad student from BC (UVIC), and I've gotten permission to do my thesis research talking to others who have learnt Cree as adults or are learning, trying to get a good idea of the challenges we all face learning the language and some of the ways we've overcome them. I'll be travelling around quite a bit in the next month talking to everyone who's willing to participate in the study, and was wondering if this sounded like something you'd be willing to help out with. Drop me a line and I'll let you know what all's involved.

Hopefully,

-dale-

**Email to a Métis mailing list I participate in (Initial L)**

Hi guys, I've had my ethics approved and am ready to start finding adult second language learners of Cree to talk to - do you guys know of anyone who fits that description and who you could introduce me to or put me in contact with?

-dale-

**Email to admin of a Cree language online discussion board asking if he'll pass my message on to all the group members (initial LT)**

Taan'si (moderator)— this is Dale McCreery here, I'm a Métis guy from BC (Hazelton) going to school at UVIC and have the chance to do a really interesting project for my thesis - interviewing people who are learning Cree as a second language and compiling all the good advice as well as getting a good idea of the difficulties involved, then making all the info available to those who are learning. I've been learning Cree off and on for about ten years now, starting with what my

grandpa could teach me (he spoke it as a kid around Kinuso) but I haven't met a lot of really good second language speakers. As a result, I'm still looking for more people to talk to and thought that the forum might be a good way to get the word out to see if anyone wants to be involved and help out.

To that end, I was wondering if you'd be willing to forward a message to the group members for me – I'm going to post to the discussion board, but I'm trying to do what I can to get a hold of as many people as possible before I head out that way. Let me know what you think or if you have any questions.

Kinaskomitin,

-dale-

P.S.: the basic message I want to pass on is this:

My name is Dale McCreery here, and I'm looking for adults learning or who have learnt Cree and would be willing to help with some research about what all is involved in learning our language as adults. I'm going to be driving around interviewing people and compiling all our suggestions and ideas to get a good idea of what we believe are the hardest things about learning Cree and how best to overcome the obstacles. If you are interested, want to know more, or just want to ask me about resources for learning Cree, email me at (email address) and I'll get right back to you. Thanks.

**(subsequent L)**

Thanks for the interest! First, I think I'll give you a bit more information about what exactly I'm doing. Basically, I've been learning Cree off and on for about ten years, and now that I'm studying linguistics I'd like to do what I can to make it easier for all of us who are learning. To do that I'm going to be interviewing a group of both teachers and students about learning and teaching Cree (about an hour and half long interview). One of the main reasons for this is that apparently there are something like 20,000 second language Cree speakers in Canada, it seems that a lot of the next generation will be learning Cree from people who learnt it as adults, and I'd like to see what can be done to make these second language speakers as fluent as possible.

I'm not a fluent speaker myself yet, just barely conversational – but have quite a bit of experience learning other languages as well as teaching English. The questions I'll be asking are about how you've learnt Cree, such as how long you've studied, what resources you've had access to, as well as how you use the language today. I'll be asking about what situations you

feel most comfortable in, what the most difficult things were/are to learn, as well as a short Cree language proficiency evaluation. Also, I'm focusing on western dialects (not James Bay) for the moment so if you're learning another dialect I won't be able to use your input for this project I've attached the consent form for you to look over. It basically contains some more of the reasons for the project written up nicely as well as lets you know of some of your rights regarding the material I'll be collecting, how I'll be doing it, how long the interview should last, and reminding you that you can withdraw from the project at any time.

I have a couple questions I'm asking to start with to figure out how many people I need to interview – the first one is “how well would you say you speak Cree? Beginner, intermediate, advanced, or basically fluently”. The second question is “did you learn through a formal program or on your own and/or with the help of other speakers?” Also, if you know anyone else who might be interested in participating in this project perhaps you could pass along my contact info to them? Other than that, we basically just need to figure out a time and place to meet. What days and times are good for you over the next month? If you have any other questions or suggestions please email me at (email address) or give me a call at (phone number) and I'll get right back to you.

-Dale McCreery-

**(Subsequent T)**

Taan'si (subject)

Thanks for the interest! First, I think I'll give you a bit more information about what exactly I'm doing. Basically, I've been learning Cree off and on for about ten years (both on my own and with the help of a lot of wonderful individuals), and now that I'm studying linguistics I'd like to do what I can to make it easier for all of us who are learning and to do that I'm going to be interviewing a group of both teachers and students about learning and teaching Cree. One of the main reasons for this is that according to Statistics Canada there are over 20,000 second language Cree speakers in Canada, and it seems that a lot of the next generation (especially in certain areas) will be learning Cree from people who learnt it as adults. I'd like to see what can be done to make these second language speakers as fluent as possible. (more information about this project is provided in the consent letter that I've attached – and it also clarifies my obligations to you regarding protection of privacy, data, your right to withdraw, etc.).

Clearly the people who have the best understanding of teaching and learning Cree are Cree teachers so I'm hoping to be able to talk to you. The two main questions I am researching are-- "what are the challenges reported by adult second language learners of Cree?" and -- "what are some of the ways language learners overcome these challenges?" The interview should take about an hour and a half.

After you have a chance to review the consent letter could you please email me at (email address) or give me a call at (phone number).

Kinaskomitin,

Dale McCreery

**Telephone Script (initial LT)**

Hello -- this is Dale McCreery -- yeah, I got your number from (source), they said you might be interested in what I 'm doing/be able to help me out a bit. I'm studying linguistics at the University of Victoria and am looking into all the challenges facing people learning to speak Cree as a second language and was wondering if you'd be up for being interviewed about it this month sometime...

.....

Well, basically I'll be asking (go through questions appropriate for teacher or student) -- and I could send you an email of them, and a copy of the consent form and all the rest of the information if that works for you.

.....

## Appendix III: Interview Questions

### Interview Questions for learners

1. Can you tell me a bit about yourself and your family? Your background, where you're from...
2. Have you ever studied another second language?
3. Can you tell me about how you ended up learning Cree?
4. What resources did you have access to to help you learn?
5. What opportunities did you have to use the language while you were learning it?
6. How did you go about learning?
7. What were the main challenges and difficulties you had to work through while learning Cree?
8. What opportunities do you have to use Cree now?
9. In general, how well would you say you speak Cree? How well do others think you speak it?
10. What situations are you the most comfortable speaking Cree in? Least?
11. Can you think of anything that would make learning Cree an easier process for you?
12. If you had to learn all over again what would you do differently?
13. What advice would you give to other learners?



**Interview Questions for Teachers**

1. So what got you interested in being a Cree teacher?
2. How long have you been teaching?
3. What age ranges and skill levels have you taught?
4. What teaching resources do you have to help your students?
5. Which ones do your students use?
6. What resources are you lacking?
7. What are the major obstacles students have to overcome if they want to learn Cree?
8. What are the most difficult parts of Cree to teach to your students? The things they have the hardest time getting?
9. What are the most common mistakes learners make?
10. Do you have any students you would consider to have learnt Cree fairly well?
11. What opportunities do your students have to use Cree outside the classroom?
12. Is there anything that your more successful learners do that sets them apart from your other students?
13. What things would you like to see in a language program?
14. What advice would you give to a new student?