

Identifying and Rectifying Disparities Between Community Teaching Resources and Analytic Linguistic Resources in Passamaquoddy-Wolastoqey

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To begin bridging the gap between technical linguistic resources and a shrinking speaker base, I am undertaking a research project in collaborative design for a first-year Passamaquoddy-Wolastoqey learning “sequence” that could be used in a structured classroom, community learning settings, or by individual learners. The project is still in the beginning stage of interview collection, with a further 1-2 instructor and 5-7 student interviews anticipated. That instructor counts includes all teachers of publicly offered Passamaquoddy-Wolastoqey classes.

While only a small number of interviews have been conducted, they have mirrored the public sentiments that illuminated the need for this project. Participants were concerned about Westernizing influences on Indigenous teaching methods and knowledge, while also expressing worries that in order to further language reclamation, concessions will have to be made. These concessions are manifested in the writing system, where both participants mentioned to varying degrees that they do not think that literacy in Passamaquoddy is necessary to learning it. They also both mentioned however that it is a useful tool in the current modes of language teaching that are available to people.

No participants named any specific grammar patterns as being of difficulty in learning and teaching. Further interviewees may provide grammar-focused answers in future, but current participants focused on social/emotional aspects of learning when asked about difficulties. These answers align with the emotional/intellectual core of the project; aiming to provide a linguistic scaffolding for enhancing and supporting current and future revitalization work. The goal of this curriculum is to cover all core grammatical aspects of the language; the aim of the interviews/conversations is to locate particular areas of focus therein, along with any other topics community members identify as crucial.

The current challenge to getting more interviews is sampling. Recruiting primarily non-Indigenous learners would likely lead to a higher number of participants, due to non-Indigenous college students having different attitudes towards institutionalized knowledge. Given that finding ways to teach and present the language in ways that respect Indigenous teaching methods and Passamaquoddy-Wolastoqey cultural practices is the main goal of the study, it is imperative that interviews be conducted with people who have firsthand knowledge in those areas.

Key themes from the rest of the interviews will guide the direction of the lesson content and sequence development. The resulting sequence will be a useful tool for Passamaquoddy-Wolastoqey speakers, while the process of its creation and implementation will be applicable to other language groups of similar size and resources.