Student Perspectives on Mi'gmaw Language-Learning through Multi-Modal Teaching

A community-linguistics partnership

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Listuguj Education Directorate & McGill University

May 16, 2013

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Contextualizing

- the community and course
- the linguistic involvement
- the students and linguists

The Course

- Defining the multi-modal approach
- Attitudes of teachers and students
- Advantages and disadvantages

Linguists' contribution to project

- Lesson plans
- Documentation
- Digital Support

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Listuguj
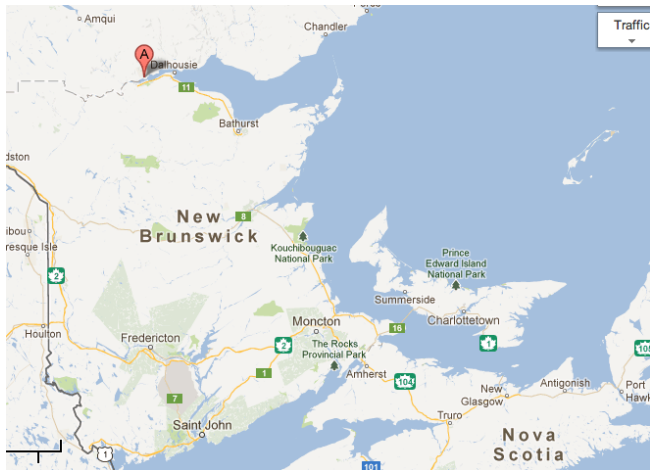
Mi'gmaw in Listuguj

- Listuguj is a Mi'gmaq reserve on the border of Québec and New Brunswick.
- Mi'gmaw in Listuguj is now mainly spoken by elders, to elders
- Partly due to a history of linguistic imbalance from residential schools, often speakers are hesitant to speak to younger generations

The LED Language Course

- Taught by two native speakers
- Semi-immersion, using pictures instead of word-to-word translation (See Sarkar & Metallic (2009) for more detail)
- LED offers it not as part of a credited course, but rather as an optional self-improvement class (sometimes included in the students' job hours)

What do linguists do?

- Speakers have innate knowledge

- Linguists listen to this knowledge and make it more explicit

- Linguists try to understand different grammars of the languages of the world to see which ways they are the same and different

How did this involvement come about?

- Fall 2011: McGill Field Methods course (co-taught by Jessica Coon and Michael Wagner) hired a Listuguj-born PhD student, Janine Metallic as the consultant. Linguists asked Janine questions in order to describe patterns in the language.

- Collaboration required a reciprocal and mutually beneficial relationship between university and community

- in Dec. 2011, the McGill class presented their material (a wiki maintained throughout the course) to the Listuguj Education Directorate

- Listuguj Education Directorate approached linguists involved in the course to help make digital materials

- Through this collaboration came the **Mi'gmaq Research Partnership**

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Background on us as students

Carol & Elise

- No Mi'gmaq family background
- Studied Mi'gmaw in an academic capacity for 1-2 semesters
- Wished to expand knowledge of the language and aid in revitalization efforts
- Employed to document classes and create a virtual language class (more on these later)

Mali-Beth

- Grew up in Gesgapegiag until grade 2
- Exposed to Mi'gmaw in younger years in Gesgapegiag
- Mother non-speaker but understands
- Father is fluent Mi'gmaw speaker, didn't learn English until he went to school
- However mainly speaks English now
- Took course to learn more

The Summer 2012 Mi'gmaw Course

Logistics

- Picture-based
- Two teachers
- 1.5 hours, 4 days/week, 10 weeks
- Moderate class size (10-20)
- No formal marking

Summary

- Multi-modal teaching
- "No-pressure" atmosphere
  - This relieves linguistic insecurity that some students encounter in the community
- Peer-to-peer/Horizontal learning is encouraged
- Students' autonomy is respected

- Speaking
- Listening
- Seeing

- Caring and committed teachers
  - Team of two teachers
- Student-guided curriculum encouraging horizontal learning
  - Teach what students want, allow them to determine what is relevant to them
  - Breaks down the hierarchy of teacher/student, explicitly values the students' knowledge
- Mutual respect
  - Learning happens at a pace determined by the students
  - If a student wants to leave, they are free to do so; this places the student's priorities in their own hands
  - Personal connections between students' lives and teachers' were encouraged

Aspects of the method and its advantages and disadvantages

Method Aspect

- Fluid student-driven curriculum

- Absence of formal marking

- Picture method

Disadvantage

- In-class tangents when students' goals not identical

- Prevents course from being able to easily give its students institutionally-recognised credits

- Less concentration on writing leaving a gap in students' knowledge of orthography

Advantage

- Students learn from each other as well as from teachers

- Relief of academic pressure, allows students to assess and motivate themselves

- Enables students to be comfortable speaking, avoids confusion with different spelling conventions

Outcomes of the course

Linguists

- Learned how to communicate in a language we previously only documented the grammar of and didn't know the basic phrases of
- Helped record and digitize the material

Students (Mali-Beth)

- Speakers started speaking to me in Mi'gmaw since the course
- Became more passionate about the language
- Want to find a career where I can use the language

Before and after videos

Before: https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=ud8J8VaspBg After Carol/Maddie:
https://www.facebook.com/photo.php?v=10151106896933058

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- Lesson plans
- Digital supports
- Documentation of the language

Lesson Plans

- Teachers had not previously documented the contents of their classes, due to the spontaneous nature of the course.
    - Education Directorate was interested in having a record that could be a resource for other teachers.
- Over the summer, a linguist/student documented 2 classes:
    - Morning class of post-secondary students
    - Afternoon class of high school graduates
- In-class notes contributed to 24 ad hoc lesson plans which may now be used by other teachers of Mi'gmaw
- Lesson plans were also used for providing structure to the digital language program (CAN 8)

CAN 8

- Focuses on listen-and-repeat method
- Minimal English
- Can be used remotely
- Now being used in Sugarloaf Senior High School
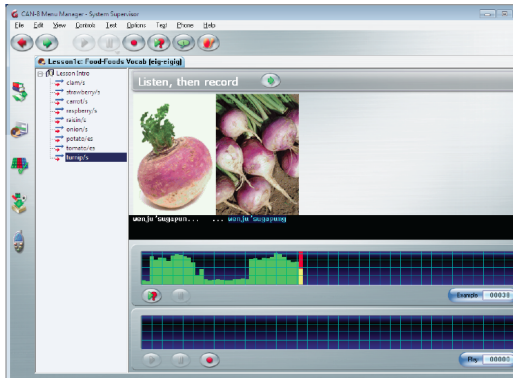
Screenshot of CAN 8

- Blog
  - www.migmaq.org
- Wiki page
  - wiki.migmaq.org
- Research

McGill University members at the LED

- www.migmaq.org
- Progress updates
- Research questions
- Sharing relevant information on Mi'gmaw and language revitalisation
- Point of contact between this project and the world

- wiki.migmaq.org
- Grammatical features of the language
- Background information

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Animacy

All nouns in Mi'gmaq belong to one of two categories: **animate** and **inanimate**. Animate nouns are generally things that are alive, such as people (like *lpatuj*, 'boy') or animals (like *mui'n*, 'bear'), while inanimate nouns are generally things that are not alive, such as places and objects (like *guntew*, 'rock', or *wigatign*, 'book'). However, the distinction is not always so clear-cut: containers, for example, are a type of object that are always animate. In addition, some foods and items of clothing are animate (like *atla'i*, 'shirt' or *gmu'jmin*, 'raspberry') while others are inanimate (like *a'gwesn*, 'hat' or *alogoman*, 'grape'). This animate/inanimate distinction is sometimes referred to as the **gender** of language, in parallel to other languages such as French, where *le couteau*, 'the knife', is masculine and *la cuillère*, 'the spoon', is feminine.

Animacy and Nouns   [edit]

Animacy is important to keep in mind with nouns because it determines which plural ending to take. (Notice in the examples below that sometimes adding the plural ending also changes the final vowel of the word.) Animate nouns (in general) take the ending **-g** (although this sometimes changes to *q*, while inanimate nouns take the ending **-l** (which sometimes changes to *n*):

(1)
```
lpa'tuj-g
boy.AN-PL.AN
'boys'
```

(2)
```
mui'na-q
bear.AN-PL.AN
'bears (cf. singular ''mui'n'', 'bear')'
```

(3)
```
gunta-l
rock.INAN-PL.INAN
'rocks (cf. singular ''guntew'', 'rock')'
```

Discussion

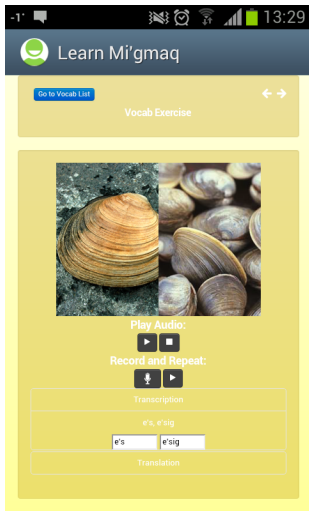What kinds of aspects would be beneficial to put on this grammar wiki?

Research

- Linguistic work on material from Mi'gmaw
- Useful for other linguists and community
- Research goes towards academic papers
- This helps with wiki updates

Gretchen McCulloch presenting at the 44th Algonquian Conference in Chicago, October 2012

- Further dissemination of Mi'gmaw material for interested learners, speakers, and researchers
- Support for a community-based Master-Apprentice program
  - Pilot program successfully completed in August 2012
- Development of supplementary material for learning
  - Along with the iLanguage lab, our team has been working to develop an app to make material from CAN8 go mobile. It is still in prototype stage, but it will be able to be used for other languages and sync with linguistic corpora on the complementary LingSync app (still in beta).
  - These apps are free and open-source

Screenshot of prototype

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2. CAN8 Virtual Language Lab. http://www.can8.com/

3. Hinton, Leanne. 2002. *How To Keep Your Language Alive*. (Berkeley, CA: Heyday Books)

Contact

- **Email:** info@migmaq.org
- **Blog:** migmaq.org
- **Wiki page:** wiki.migmaq.org
- **Facebook:** facebook.com/MigmaweiTlisuti

Questions

- How are Mi'gmaq classes taught in other communities?
- What resources are available for Mi'gmaw language learners?
- What is the effectiveness of Mi'gmaw classes from the point of view of the students, teachers, community members?
- What are aspects lacking in the classrooms that you wish were there?
- Is there advice you can give to linguists working with Mi'gmaw in communities?
- What would you like to see from the wiki page, the blog, and other research?