

STUDENT PERSPECTIVES ON MI'GMAQ LANGUAGE-LEARNING THROUGH MULTI-MODAL TEACHING: A COMMUNITY-LINGUISTICS PARTNERSHIP*

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1 Contextualizing...

The community: Listuguj, QC

- Mi'gmaq reserve on the border of Quebec and New Brunswick, Canada, population ca. 3,400
- English is the predominant public language on the reserve
- Mi'gmaq is available as a second language course in the on-reserve high school, in addition to the Listuguj Education Directorate (LED) course this presentation focuses on.

The language: Mi'gmaq (Eastern Algonquian)

- Mi'gmaq has approximately 5,000 speakers, most of whom are 50 years old or older
- Generally a home language, used between adults more often than with infants
- Due to a history of linguistic imbalance, speakers are often hesitant to speak to younger generations in the language; each generation carries specific socio-cultural burdens associated with (lack of) knowledge of Mi'gmaq

The summer course: Listuguj Education Directorate

- Offers various Mi'gmaq courses year-round; 2 intensive classes run concurrently in the summer
- Courses are not affiliated with other institutions (no high schools, universities, etc. give credit for LED Mi'gmaq classes). This frees the teachers from the requirement of using formal, external assessment methods to grade the students.
- In the summer Mi'gmaq program, students may choose to participate in Mi'gmaq classes as part of their employment with the community, giving them the opportunity to get in touch with this element of their heritage without concern about missing work.

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- The students are young Listuguj community members split into 2 classes:
 1. university students at home for the summer (ca. 15 students)
 2. recent high school graduates (ca. 30 students)
- Students come from a variety of linguistic backgrounds, some having spoken the language with family members when they were younger, others never having been regularly exposed to Mi'gmaq. Whether they use Mi'gmaq with them or not, most students have a family member who is a speaker.

How the linguists became involved...

- Fall 2011: Collaboration grew out of a Field Methods class taught by Jessica Coon Michael Wagner
- Listuguj-born PhD student and Mi'gmaq speaker Janine Metallic hired as linguistic consultant
- Collaboration required a reciprocally beneficial relationship between McGill and the Listuguj community
- Dec 2011: The product of the class, a wiki (wiki.migmaq.org) devoted to information about the Mi'gmaq language, was presented to the LED
- The LED approved of the work, and later approached linguists (students and professors) to consult on language programs—specifically the conversion of the classroom material into a digital format

The Mi'gmaq Research Partnership

- The Mi'gmaq Research Partnership grew out of the collaborative efforts of the linguists from McGill and the Listuguj community
- Summer 2012: two students of the Field Methods class (Little and McClay), and one collaborator (Conor Quinn of the University of Southern Maine) learned and worked in Listuguj, with several other students of the McGill class travelling out to contribute. Their work entailed taking the course, documenting lessons as they happened, and assisting in the development of digital materials
- Linguists and community members work in conjunction to conserve and research the Mi'gmaq language, and to explore new ways of teaching (both online and in person)

2 The LED Mi'gmaq Course

The Multi-Modal Approach: Engaging students on multiple levels

Mode	Implementation	Outcome
Visual	Teachers avoid word-to-word English/Mi'gmaq translation by filling the walls of the classroom with pictures depicting words, sentences, or narratives.	English is not portrayed as a neutral language, and Mi'gmaq grammar is more accurately represented with less influence from English.
Auditory	Teachers speak with each other, and often with students in Mi'gmaq.	Students have a frame of reference for everyday Mi'gmaq speech.
Communicative	Students speak early, frequently, and in full sentences: no lists. There is a strong emphasis on context and narrative, which is particularly important for learning an Algonquian language (with a very rich agreement system).	Students gain confidence speaking to each other, using Mi'gmaq for communicating ideas and not just in terms of rote memorization.

2.1 Attitudes of teachers and students and key aspects for implementation in other communities

- Non-hierarchical Classroom
- Flexible, student-guided curriculum
- Attendance, grades not held over students' heads
- Peer-to-peer/horizontal learning very encouraged
- Teach what students want, trust them to determine what is relevant to them
- If a student wants to leave, they are free to do so
- Rejects power dynamic of Western school systems which played a part in marginalizing Mi'gmaq
- Breaks down teacher-student hierarchy, explicitly values the students' knowledge
- Students' priorities are in their own hands
- Learning happens at a pace determined by the students
- Students stay because they want to learn

Student self-motivation and determination	Caring and committed team of teachers	Equality and mutual respect
Curriculum is shaped by student needs and questions	Teachers help and support each other, ensuring that even if a student inquiry was difficult, it did not go unanswered	Teachers foster an atmosphere of equality and respect.
Students make their own decisions concerning their language-learning	Speaking Mi'gmaq to each other as well as to the students gives students more and better exposure to the language	Absence of mistake-based shame makes students comfortable with teachers and supportive of each other.
Empowerment of students while valuing teachers' skills and expertise	Understanding non-learner-directed speech is concrete proof of the students' skills	Students with differing skill levels made mention of being glad to learn from each other, rather than pressured to perform.

3 Connections with research & community

3.1 Records of the project and linguistic work on Mi'gmaq

- **Blog:** migmaq.org, housing progress updates, research questions, and serving as a general venue to share relevant information on Mi'gmaq and language revitalization
- **Facebook and Twitter:** Vicky Metallic, a community member involved in the project, created and maintained the *Mi'gmawei tli'suti* social media pages as hubs for students and other language-learners during the summer course; posting on both will resume this spring.
- **Affiliated wiki page:** wiki.migmaq.org, providing linguistic summaries and analysis of grammatical features of the language, with the goal of creating an accessible, helpful tool for learners, linguists, and learner/linguists
- **Research:** linguistic work on material from Mi'gmaq, including undergraduate theses, a Master's thesis, and 8 conference presentations to date (all available for download through migmaq.org)

3.2 Lesson Plan Documentation

Summer of 2012 Linguist documents course:

- LED teachers had not documented the contents of their classes before Summer 2012, due to the spontaneous nature of the course
- LED interested in having a record that could be a resource for other teachers
- Summer 2012: a linguist/student (Little) documented 2 classes
- In-class notes contributed to lesson plans which to be used by other Mi'gmaq teachers
- Lesson plans also used to provide structure to the digital language program (CAN 8)

3.3 Digital supports

CAN 8 language-teaching software

- Supplementary software program providing extra practice for students outside of classroom
- Also available to those not able to take class, for distance learning
- Informed by the lesson plans
- Included in CAN 8:
 - Dialogues
 - Vocabulary
 - Exercises
 - Explanations about grammatical points

Planned language-learning app for Android: Learn Mi'gmaq

- Free and open-source, code available on Github.com as it develops
- Application is generalizable to any language
- Format of app allows linguists and community members to easily collaborate to create lessons
- Also, students have freedom to create their own lessons in collaboration with speakers, tailored to their own specific needs—this functionality will allow the app to be immediately useful to the Master-Apprentice (Hinton 2002) program currently active in Listuguj
- A supporting app, LingSync (www.lingsync.org), hosts language databases and will support instant conversion of a given dataset (i.e.: one focusing on negation) into a Learn Mi'gmaq lesson
- Students have the option of sharing their progress and lessons with friends, and linking their accounts with a tutor account to provide personal feedback

4 References

CAN8 Virtual Language Lab. <http://www.can8.com/>

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