A Sociolinguistics of the South

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Chapter 11

ē-ka-pimohteyāhk nīkānehk ōte nīkān

nēhiyawēwin (Cree Language) Revitalization
and Indigenous Knowledge (Re)generation

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nēhiyawēwin (Cree Language) Revitalization and Indigenous Knowledge (Re)generation

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Introduction

In the beginning, the manifestation of our world produced multiple languages born out of local environments. Languages were used and needed by people, all people, for societal development, relationships, education, and traditions. The goal of restoring balance to this ecology now requires the reclamation of the world's Indigenous and minority languages. Multifaceted language reclamation projects must be (re)enacted and maintained by speakers of these languages and be of these lands. These initiatives are important because Indigenous languages foster well-being, are identity markers, and carry incommensurable intellectual, physical, emotional, and spiritual properties. In recognition of the value of their languages, Indigenous peoples have developed revitalization strategies (Hinton et al., 2018; Johnson, 2012; McCarty et al., 2019; McIvor & Anisman, 2018). In our context, Indigenous language revitalization is a growing area of concern for community members and Indigenous scholars alike. This increasing focus can be seen in several interconnected ways. First, Indigenous graduate students working in this field are increasingly choosing related areas of language study in Canadian universities such as second language education, applied linguistics, and linguistics. In turn, Canadian universities are creating new academic positions and developing new undergraduate and graduate courses and programmes in the area of Indigenous language teaching, learning, and revitalization. Turning to Indigenous language programming in schools, school boards are implementing urban language immersion programs. There are also long-running, school-based immersion programmes in several First Nations communities, as well as new community and land-based approaches to language revitalization emerging each year. Finally, as a reaction to hard work and pressure from Indigenous communities and Indigenous leadership to protect and preserve Indigenous languages, the Canadian government passed the Indigenous Languages Act on 21 June 2019. All of these initiatives point to a recognition of the urgency to promote Indigenous languages. In turn, these actions also suggest a need for increased

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research in Indigenous language revitalization. Drawing on our efforts in *nēhiyawēwin* (Cree language) revitalization, our research group strives to produce and share knowledge in ethical ways that can benefit Indigenous communities working to reclaim their languages.

Although linguistic diversity has long been recognized as a feature of Indigenous and marginalized communities, contemporary discussions too often focus on elite multilingualisms (De Costa, 2019; Heugh & Stroud, 2019; Ortega, 2019). Yet, as this volume demonstrates, these hegemonic perspectives are clearly not the only stories. In this chapter, we draw on southern understandings of language (1) to discuss Indigenous research methodologies as an ethical approach to examining the language practices of Indigenous communities and (2) to share examples from our own experience of researching Indigenous language revitalization. Our particular camp context began 15 years ago as Belinda Daniels' master's research project and has since evolved into an annual gathering of language activists, both teachers and learners.

Primarily occurring at Sturgeon Lake First Nation, Treaty 6, in the province of Saskatchewan in what is currently known as Canada, the central aim of this language camp is to revitalize nēhiyawēwin through land-based immersion activities, such as medicine walks (see Figure 11.1). Camp instructors have graduate degrees, expertise in second language teaching and traditional knowledge. Camp attendees include Indigenous and non-Indigenous peoples from around the world. Due to the popularity of this camp, participants re-attend and lasting relationships have formed, including among the six researcher-participants and authors of this chapter who are all nēhiyawak (Cree people) with the exception of Andrea Sterzuk, who is a white settler. In our research team, we all function as researchers as well as participants. In our writing, when we exercise our collective voice as nēhiyawak researchers and Indigenous

Figure 11.1 Medicine walk: Sturgeon Lake First Nation⏎

Source: Photograph by Belinda Daniels

peoples, it should be understood that Andrea is not included in those statements though she is supportive of them. Through our collective research efforts, we strive to centre Indigeneity, nēhiyawēwin, and nēhiyaw knowledge. Our collective research project, discussed in this chapter, examines the following research question: *What are the experiences of adult participants in a land-based nēhiyawēwin immersion camp?* In this chapter, we draw on our research experiences of this camp to address the topic of knowledge production in Indigenous language revitalization.

Southern Multilingualisms

Our approach to this research project aligns with a body of theoretical writing commonly referred to as southern theory (Connell, 2007). In this writing, the term 'southern' is not used in a geopolitical sense but rather to refer to individuals and communities who have experienced historical oppression. Southern theory challenges assumptions about knowledge (Comaroff & Comaroff, 2012) and understands the world, including research and higher education (Mignolo, 2002, 2009), as shaped by a history of colonialism and ongoing north-south global inequalities. Southern theory is not so much 'an alternative paradigm to be erected in opposition to the hegemonic concepts' of the north or of the western world (Connell, 2014: 218). Instead, it is 'a challenge, something that needs to be developed. It is a project that is an integral part of campaigns for democracy and social justice though it invites fresh, and possibly iconoclastic, approaches to old problems' (Epstein & Morrell, 2012: 472). Connell (2014) calls for greater application of southern theory and postcolonial perspectives in the social sciences. Santos (2018: 1) describes the purpose of this endeavour as follows:

> to allow the oppressed social groups to represent the world as their own and in their own terms, for only thus will they be able to change it to allow the oppressed social groups to represent the world as their own and in their own terms.

We recognize this body of writing as a theoretical approach that aligns with our research in the area of Indigenous language revitalization. We also recognize the value of local nēhiyaw epistemologies and ontologies. Through our use of southern theory, we signal our goal of exploring the practices, theories, and language held by periphery communities (Mignolo & Walsh, 2018), in this case the nēhiyawak in what is currently known as Canada.

As a body of writing or enquiry, 'southern multilingualisms' demonstrates that there are many multilingualisms or many ways that people organize their linguistic resources (Heugh, 2017). The term 'southern multilingualisms' comes from Christopher Stroud and Kathleen Heugh's 2012 initiation of the *Southern Multilingualisms and Diversities Consortium*, which was formally launched at the International World Congress of Applied Linguistics (AILA) in 2014. This consortium was established to emphasize the pluriversalities of southern epistemologies,

diversities, and experiences of multilingualism among Indigenous communities and minority and marginalized peoples of the world. Importantly, this writing also recognizes that there are multiple language ontologies (Heugh, 2017). Communities of the south hold 'artisanal knowledges' and understandings of language that may differ from widely accepted understandings of language because of the interconnected ways in which these languages and social practices developed (Santos, 2018: 43). So while northern perspectives might understand language as a method of communication that separates humans from non-humans, this is not the only possible lens. For many Indigenous communities in the Americas, for example, language is part of spiritual communication (Hauck & Heurich, 2018). What can be expressed in Indigenous languages, then, 'may be not so much an alternative epistemology but an alternative ontology' (Pennycook & Makoni, 2019: 73). Because of these differences, what we understand by 'language' needs to be open to interpretation, and how we engage in studies of language needs to differ too.

As nēhiyawak, we believe our languages are alive and sacred. For millennia, the language was abundantly used, not only by nēhiyawak but by others too. Nēhiyawēwin is like any other spoken language, but it also contains other elements. As Ermine (1995: 110) suggests 'our languages reveal a very high level of rationality that can only come from an earlier insight into [spiritual] power'. In terms of the origins of nēhiyawak and nēhiyawēwin, Belinda has heard on a number of occasions from orators and kēhtē-ayak, including Danny Muskwa and Alex Kennedy, that first there was sound and then light. Voice and speech were given to the people so that they could acknowledge the Creator by using their Creator-given language:

> The gift of language, kinēhiyawēwininaw, is a powerful and sacred gift.... This same gift has been given to the human beings by the Creator. The nēhiyawak have been given this language, which is heard all across much of Treaty 6 territory.
>
> (McAdam, 2015: 24)

Nēhiyawak believe in spirits. For each spirit, there is a song, a Calling Song, for each one of them: the Sun Spirit, the Thunderbird Spirit, the Wind Spirit, the Bison Spirit, and so on. Among the nēhiyawak, the language also has a spirit, holds power 'and this spirit will leave if the language is not utilized' (McAdam, 2015: 25). Because of this understanding, engaging in practices of reclaiming the language and researching that process must also involve spiritual communication and use of appropriate cultural protocols.

Indigenous Research Methodologies

The ties between research and colonialism are multiple (Deloria, 1969). Many of the 'portrayals of Indigenous communities in peer-reviewed literatures have been problem focused and deficits based' (Drawson et al., 2017: 1). Indeed, for

many Indigenous peoples, these approaches to research are 'so deeply embedded in colonisation that it has been regarded as a tool only of colonisation and not as a potential tool for self-determination and development' (Smith, 2008: 87). In mainstream higher education, there has traditionally been little to no room or space for other knowledges or for other approaches to knowledge generation. This hegemony is also connected to language and culture. 'Cognitive imperialism denies people their language and cultural integrity by maintaining the legitimacy of only one language, one culture, and one frame of reference' (Battiste & Henderson, 2000: 198). Indigenous research methodologies, however, show promise for disrupting this hegemony in knowledge generation. Studies reviewed by Drawson et al. suggest that 'Indigenous research methods prevent the prioritisation of Western ways of knowing' (2017: 13). This is an important understanding for those of us who are working towards understanding how knowledge and expertise may be exchanged in reciprocal and respectful ways among marginal and mainstream communities.

In explorations of language practices and systems of the south, southern researcher voices and ontologies should be privileged. One need, then, is for Indigenous-led collaborative research so that others can learn from these language reclamation initiatives through an Indigenous research paradigm. Indigenous communities are holders and stewards of a millennia worth of knowledge passed down intact with each generation. This knowledge is tied to language and land and 'includes all aspects of creation: landforms, elements, plants, animals, spirits, sounds, thoughts, feelings, and energies and all of the emergent systems, ecologies, and networks that connect these elements' (Simpson, 2017: 161). Indigenous research methodologies recognize and draw on recognized ways of generating and sharing knowledge as practised in Indigenous communities. Indigenous communities hold an alternative way of knowing about themselves and the environment that has managed to survive the assaults of colonization and its impacts. This alternative way of knowing may be different from what was known several hundred years ago by a community, but it is still a way of knowing that provides access to a different epistemology, an alternative vision of society, an alternative ethics for human conduct (Smith, 2008: 101). Kathleen Absolon (2011: 54), an Anishinaabe scholar from Flying Post First Nation, explains the connections of Indigenous knowledge to contemporary Indigenous research paradigms in the following way:

> Indigenous paradigms/ways of understanding our existence, how we come to know about that existence and what we think about our existence are the roots of Indigenous methodologies in re-search.

Kovach (2015: 53) identifies four central aspects of Indigenous research methodologies. First, Indigenous research methodologies begin from the understanding that 'Indigenous knowledge systems are a legitimate way of knowing'; next, Indigenous research methodologies position 'receptivity and relationship between researcher and participants' as a natural part of research;

and, finally, Indigenous methods 'assume reciprocity to the community' and are understood to be 'a legitimate way of sharing knowledge'.

Indigenous research methodologies acknowledge that knowledge comes from our land, our languages, and our stories. This connection between land and knowledge is also apparent in Janet Armitage's chapter in this volume. Knowledge also 'flows through the layered spirit world about the earth, the place where spiritual beings reside and the place where our Ancestors sit' (Simpson, 2017: 161). This knowledge can be accessed in a number of ways that are recognized as spiritual (Castellano, 2000). 'Solitude with nature and the gift of insight we receive from those experiences' is one source of spirit knowledge (Kovach, 2015: 56). Steinhauer (2002: 74) explains that 'traditionally, much of what we did was influenced by our dreams, our visions, and our intuition', and Kovach (2015: 56) suggests that dreams 'have long been a source of knowledge for Indigenous cultures'. Belinda, the first author of this chapter, is guided by dreams and intuition in the language revitalization work and research she conducts today. As she has written elsewhere, 'the art of visioning and dreaming appears to have been forgotten by so many; however not by me' (Daniels, 2018: 282). When she was about ten years old, she had one of her first dream-like experiences. Belinda was lying on her kitchen floor, and she was playing with a hand mirror, not just looking at her reflection but also imagining what was on the other side of the reflection. She remembers the sensation of falling into a trance. Suddenly her entire surroundings changed, and she was somewhere else, walking through an enclosed area. It seemed to be a tunnel of some sort. Because etchings were visible on the rock walls, she reached out her hand and slowly felt the surface of the wall. She was slightly frightened, but her curiosity pulled her deeper into the enclosed area. On the walls, there were symbols which she today understands to be petroglyphs and syllabics of her ancestors. She then turned and looked to her right and found herself back on the kitchen floor. For Belinda, this was her first experience with a dream that provided guidance to her. She was given a glimpse into language reclamation and the feelings have remained with her since. That dream connected Belinda to her ancestors, and they remain in communication with her to this day.

In drawing upon Indigenous cosmovisions in the study of Indigenous language practices, there are some things to consider. Reynaldo Macías (this volume) offers an important critique of cultural and knowledge appropriation which highlights the dangers of northern appropriations of decolonial thinking. Another consideration is that of research methods. If we accept the importance of ontological challenges to language, we must consider other issues, including approaches to research. Drawson et al. (2017: 15) remind us that 'unlike Western research methods, Indigenous research methods require that all components in the process embody the values of the Indigenous group involved'. Accepting Indigenous cosmovisions in the study of Indigenous language practices means accepting the use of research methods that may challenge existing notions of valid enquiry:

> Methods, such as dream journaling, that capture subjective data are destined to be a part of the discourse on Indigenous research methods. It will be an exciting new dialogue about what counts as legitimate knowledge and how that knowledge is garnered.

Indigenous scholars are leading with theories of learning, being, doing, and knowing. Leanne Simpson (2017: 22) describes this process as 'grounded normativity' the 'ethical frameworks generated by these place-based practices and associated knowledges'. Indigenous researchers have actively explored a variety of restorative practices when it comes to land education and languages (Battiste, 2013; Cajete, 1994; Kovach, 2010, Simpson, 2017). Indigenous language revitalization researchers are also well positioned to support the grassroots language reclamation initiatives of Indigenous communities. Sylix language activist and scholar Sʔímlaʔxʷ Michele Johnson (2012) explains that Indigenous scholars are also reclaiming the role of language revitalization researchers within their own communities. McIvor and Anisman's overview of language revitalization initiatives reveals that there is a 'growing cadre of Indigenous researchers focusing on language research in their own communities and language groups', and these studies are 'driven by Indigenous methodologies' (2018: 95). Indigenous scholars are researching our own pathways and creating and generating knowledge about Indigenous language revitalization. In our work, we join these ongoing, community-initiated conversations.

Our Approach to Generating Knowledge about nēhiyawēwin Language Revitalization

Before moving any further, it is important to introduce ourselves. Locating ourselves in this way is an Indigenous 'way of ensuring that those who study, write, and participate in knowledge creation are accountable for their own positionality' (Absolon & Willett, 2005: 97). Five of the six authors of this chapter are nēhiyawak (Cree people) academics, researchers, and language users. Belinda Daniels (Sturgeon Lake First Nation) is a grandmother, mother, wife, and teacher. She is an emerging adult speaker of nēhiyawēwin, a doctoral student at the University of Saskatchewan, and the founder of the *nēhiyawak Language Experience*, a not-for-profit language revitalization organization. Andrea Sterzuk is a white settler academic in language education at the University of Regina, accomplice to the Indigenous effort, and a beginner learner of nēhiyawēwin. She recognizes that working together with Indigenous peoples in ethical ways means that settler scholars need to speak out in support of Indigenous knowledges (Suzack, 2019) and Indigenous languages. Peter Turner (James Smith Cree Nation) is a husband, father, teacher, and beginner learner of nēhiyawēwin. He is also a PhD student at the University of Regina. William (Bill) Cook (Southend, Peter Ballantyne First Nation) is a husband, a father, and a fluent speaker and teacher of nīhithawīwin (another regional Cree language variety). Bill is also a master's student at the University of Regina. Dorothy Thunder (Little Pine First

Nation) is a grandmother, mother, auntie, sister, wife, and fluent speaker and teacher of nēhiyawēwin. Dorothy has a master's in linguistics and is a faculty member in Indigenous Studies at the University of Alberta. Randy (Boyce) Morin (Whitefish First Nation) is a father and husband and is a fluent speaker and teacher of nēhiyawēwin. Randy has a master's degree from the University of Victoria and currently teaches in the College of Arts and Science at the University of Saskatchewan.

Our collective research project began in the form of conversations at Sturgeon Lake First Nation in July 2018. As nēhiyawēwin learners and teachers, we were gathered together for a week at the land-based language camp. What began as a discussion of the value of exploring the camp as an approach to language revitalization quickly included explorations of how we might approach this research. After camp ended, designing our study involved multiple meetings through online conference calls, emails, and messaging. One of the first things we discussed was research participants. While there are hundreds of past and present camp attendees, none of us were interested in recruiting research participants because of the potential hierarchical nature of these relationships. Fortunately, Indigenous research methodologies offer possibilities for innovation because

> [a]n important component of all Indigenous research methods is situating the research within the context of the data source(s). This means that the data collection, analysis, and interpretation may vary considerably more in research approached using an Indigenous method or framework compared to typically Western methods that are often highly standardized and where removing context from the research is paramount.
>
> (Drawson et al., 2017: 13)

Indigenous research methodologies often blur the lines of researcher/participant and provide opportunities for co-learning (Castleden et al., 2017). Ultimately, we decided to research ourselves as a group. We arrived at a design that we felt would allow us to ethically investigate our collective experiences of the camp: a co-constructed story. Our project asks, What are the experiences of adult participants in a land-based nēhiyawēwin immersion camp? As both co-researchers and study participants, our team used three sharing circles (Baskin, 2005; Kovach, 2010; Lavallée, 2009) to explore the efficacy of language camps as a revitalization strategy. Sharing circles are an effective, culturally appropriate, and generative method that helps researchers and participants make sense of complex experiences. Circles are different from focus groups because of 'the sacred meaning they have in many Indigenous cultures and in the growth and transformation bases for the participants' (Lavallée, 2009: 29). As researchers, we have co-constructed a collective story based on these circles. In the space that remains, we share some features of and considerations from our collective research experience.

In our research project, we followed cultural protocols and incorporated methods used to access spiritual knowledge, including smudging and prayer. *Kākīsimo* is the nēhiyaw word for prayer, and it means to implore with your

whole being. This kind of prayer is typically conducted in a rhythmic tune and is particularly recognizable when Elders, traditional knowledge keepers or Old Ones are conducting a ceremony. From an nēhiyaw perspective, prayer is a form of asking and is used for seeking guidance, knowledge, and wisdom. It is an expression of intent, an action, and a sacred communion between spirits that help us (the spirits of the sun, buffalo, and the cardinal directions) whom we ask to take our prayers to the Creator. It is also a physical action, a plea, and a human example of displaying our humility, meekness, and weakness. When the Old Ones pray, their prayers express that we are pitiful as humans and ask for the spirit helpers to ask the Creator to take pity on us because we need guidance and help. These prayers are important to our community and are understood to be powerful requests. There are different types of prayers and prayerful ceremonies. Pipe ceremonies are among the most significant. During these moments, we sit on the ground because then we are closest to the earth. We acknowledge the earth and the helpers of the plants, flowers, and trees. This is one example of relationality accountability. Sometimes items are used with prayer besides the pipe, such as cloth and tobacco as offerings. Before beginning our research project, we made an offering of tobacco and asked our local *kēhtē-aya* (knowledge keeper) Joseph Naytowhow (who is Belinda's great uncle) to assist us with prayers and guidance in this language revitalization work. Tobacco and a small gift were given to Joseph. This intention creates a good pathway for the project (Wilson & Restoule, 2010).

The research we are doing is spiritual in nature. We understand ourselves as spiritual beings having a physical experience and we conduct ourselves accordingly. This conduct includes the action of miyāhkasikēwin – 'smudging'. Smudging involves burning sage, although other plants and fungi can be used as well. We began each of our sharing circles with a smudge. Each member of the circle uses their hands to move the smoke over themselves. To smudge is a sacred act. We cleanse our hearts, minds, and spirits and reveal our true selves to the Creator in the spiritual realm. We pick the sage we used in our smudges and share it among ourselves. In this project, we had gone harvesting for sage the year prior to our research. The sage for our circles was either Horse or Bison sage. This harvesting also involves protocols. There is a process of laying tobacco down on the ground, saying a prayer, and asking permission to pick the sage or sweetgrass. These plants are then gathered, dried, and later used. Both prayer and smudge are included in our research design to assist us in doing things in the right way, for the right reasons.

Relationship-building as co-researchers was another important aspect of our methodology. Our group relationship formed with the language camps. As researchers, we invested in actions designed to strengthen our ties (see Figure 11.2). Prior to our circles, we always ate meals together. While we do not live in the same cities, we also find ways to connect through conference calls and texts. When together, we socialize and plan opportunities for visiting. This is important because 'visiting is lateral sharing in the absence of coercion and hierarchy and in the presence of compassion. Visiting is fun and enjoyable and nurtures the

Figure 11.2 Walking and laughing together (left to right Belinda, Dorothy, Randy, Andrea, Peter, and Bill)⏎

Source: Photograph by Belinda Daniels

intimate connections and relationship building. Visiting is the core of our political systems' (Simpson, 2017: 165).

We also pray together for ten minutes each Monday night. We pray for the spirit of the language and for the work we and others do. Another aspect of our relationship-building is the way we use humour in our relationships. 'Maintaining good feelings is one reason why a sense of humour pervades Aboriginal societies' (Little Bear, 2000: 79). Humour and teasing are deliberate actions and serve the larger purpose of maintaining connectedness through the development and maintenance of relationships. Our interactions (online and face-to-face) involve a lot of teasing and laughter, which are important in relationships for several reasons. Humour can be used as a method to draw attention to someone's silliness without hurting them; in this way, the integrity of the relationship is not affected. Atleo (2004) describes the joy of having fun as transformative, cathartic, healthy, and deliberate. Humour serves a purpose; it helps to maintain the connectedness of relationships and is healthy and important. It is also through humour that some of our most profound ideas, observations, and findings for our research have emerged. As we listen to our meeting recordings, the successful results of our relationship-building emerge. Close people talk closely; our co-constructed stories are rich with insights. We worked hard to establish a democratic process of jointly constructing knowledge in a communal sense. Our efforts moved us closer towards the possibility of conviviality (Holas, 2018).

It is also important to talk about our collaborative and circular data collection, analysis, and coding process. We met on three occasions in three different cities (Saskatoon, Edmonton, and Regina). We travelled long distances to meet one another, which is reminiscent of how our nēhiyaw ancestors would have travelled to gather and share knowledge. The first time we met in Saskatoon in December 2018, we conducted a sharing circle which focussed on our individual stories of language camp. We subsequently co-transcribed this circle together online using Google Docs, and we talked to one another throughout the process using the Google Docs comment features. Our analysis and co-construction were

informed by this collective transcribing process. Our approach to analysis continued in our second meeting. By this time, we had read the complete transcription of our first circle (39 pages of text). In March 2019, we met in Edmonton, Alberta, during the Think Indigenous Conference, which was held on the Enoch Cree Nation. At this second circle, we shared our individual responses to the collective set of experiences, and we discussed the bigger picture of our stories. We also recorded this meeting, which resulted in a second set of transcriptions (26 pages of text). The time between meetings afforded individual digestion of observations and provided opportunities for continuous contact through conference calls and text message groups. Our next meeting was held in Regina, Saskatchewan, in May 2019. At this third meeting, we all had read both sets of transcripts. For our analysis, we used a layered approach to align with our larger Indigenous research methodology. After engaging in open and holistic coding, we regrouped data into categories so we could identify linkages (McGinnis et al., 2019). During this process, we grouped our data into six categories: spirit, focus, kinship, wellness, land, and nēhiyaw conscientization. We then looked for data excerpts that seemed to fall into these categories. We placed six large pieces of paper on the wall and glued data excerpts onto the pages to assist with our discussion (see Figure 11.3).

There were many overlapping aspects or linkages between these excerpts, and, as a result, utterances were often placed in more than one category. Our co-constructed narrative tells a story of language speakers in relation to language, not of language speakers working to acquire or possess a language. 'We are helpers, conduits, catalysts; we are kin!' The results of this analysis and discussion will be shared in future publications which will examine the kinship ties between land, language, and learners in Indigenous language camps settings.

We would be remiss if we did not mention some of the bumps in the road that we experienced because we chose to conduct our research in this way. The ethics review process had some challenges. There were similarities to more recognizable methodologies such as autoethnography or duo-ethnography, but the reviewers asked many lengthy questions about the study design, participant consent, and the nature of sharing circles. They concluded their review with a statement which seemed to imply that the research would not have an impact.

Figure 11.3 Coding together⏎

Source: Photograph by Belinda Daniels

We met this challenge by writing a careful response to each query, and, ultimately, we were given approval to conduct our research. Another challenge for us was simply that we had to learn how to do research together in this way. We addressed this challenge in several ways. We had many conversations, and we read and discussed literature on the topic of Indigenous language revitalization, as well as Indigenous research methodology, to help the momentum of our learning and research. We discussed strengths, weaknesses, and opportunities of our research practices and asked more questions of ourselves.

Conclusion

This research was a long winter story. Because the spirit of language called us, we came together with a shared goal. In our research of the language camp, we became storytellers and shared our experiences and understandings. Through this process, we learned in spiritual, emotional, physical, mental, linguistic, and theoretical ways. These stories of our experiences are examples of 'survivance' or 'ontologies directly connected to the ways that Indigenous peoples have always engaged the world' (Tuck & McKenzie, 2015: 129). Our stories of survivance contain a nēhiyaw presence, as well as traces of our collective resistance to settler colonialism; cultural, ontological, and epistemological imperialism; and, ultimately, linguistic dominance. Southern multilingualisms create space for oppressed groups to express, voice, and write about their world on their own terms. Writing from a nēhiyaw perspective allows for a regeneration of knowledge and theory and for continued growth within a nēhiyaw paradigm. It also provides a way forward for those who are following closely behind or who do not yet know how to begin.

Our research project draws on Indigenous research methodologies that work to interrupt the hegemony of northern/mainstream knowledge systems. Through our centring of nēhiyaw epistemology and ontology, our writing on the topic of Indigenous language revitalization research contributes to the literature and debates of decolonial and southern scholars that recognize and are comfortable with pluriversalities and multiplicities (Battiste & Henderson, 2000; Connell, 2014; Mignolo, 2009; de Santos, 2018; Simpson, 2017; Smith, 2008). This research also validates us as a people, as well as the choices we make on appropriate language pedagogy and appropriate research methodology. Due to our resilience, persistence, and survivance, Indigenous scholars are taking the lead and using our own frameworks. The research process we share in this chapter provides an example of new beginnings within a nēhiyaw framework. For us as researchers/participants, this research project has affirmed that we must do our own work as people committed to the Indigenous efforts in language revitalization. Our experiences as oppressed people working against the powers shape our motivations, our work, and our discoveries. We hope that our research process and our personal stories of language revitalization can become a potential source of strength in discussions and decision making in academia.

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