

## ***Nenqayni ch'ih revitalization in Yunešit'in***

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This presentation will share main results obtained from a research project on the revitalization experience of *Nenqayni ch'ih* (Tšilhqot'in language) in the Yunešit'in community. Tšilhqot'in is a Dene language (Athabaskan) located in the interior of BC and it presents the highest linguistic vitality of the province: 19.9% of the total population are fluent; around 866 out of a total of 4,352 people (FPCC 2014). However, Tšilhqot'in can still be classified as Stage 7 'Shifting' on the Graded Intergenerational Disruption Scale (Fishman 1991), as the language is rarely learned now as the mother tongue by children. Language revitalization through re-establishing home transmission may still be possible since grandparents and some parents learned Tšilhqot'in as their first language.

Traditionally an oral language, the first Tšilhqot'in documentation efforts started in the early 60s when the alphabet was created. A decade later, the orthography and grammar were developed and recordings of stories and traditional knowledge as well as language teaching materials started to be produced (Cook 2013). In the last decade, several language revitalization efforts have been taken in Yunešit'in, one of the six Tšilhqot'in communities. In 2015, Yunešit'in Government, together with Tl'esqox and Xení Gwet'in communities, developed a Strategic Language Revitalization Plan and since then, community priorities towards Tšilhqot'in language revitalization have been addressed (e.g. language immersion camps, language immersion preschool programs, language mentorship).

This research is a collaborative project run with Yunešit'in Government and aims to advance the Tšilhqot'in language revitalization work in Yunešit'in by gathering community perspectives. The main research question is: what are the community needs and priorities regarding Tšilhqot'in language teaching/learning strategies and language resources towards Tšilhqot'in language revitalization in Yunešit'in? Other secondary questions are: what is Yunešit'in community members' knowledge and usage of the Tšilhqot'in language?; what are the reasons of Tšilhqot'in language loss in Yunešit'in?; why is it important to recover the usage of the Tšilhqot'in language in Yunešit'in?

The research follows indigenous methodologies to ensure the work is not only respectful and culturally responsive, but also based on approaches and processes that fit indigenous cultures, worldviews and ways of being (Absolon and Willett 2005, Graveline 2000, King 2013, Kovach 2010, Sinclair 2003, Tuhiwai Smith 1999). Participatory and community-based research principles are also applied (Strand et al. 2003). This work follows a mixed method approach, as both qualitative and quantitative data have been collected and analyzed (Cresswell 2013); however, the qualitative analysis prevails in this study in order to gain deep understanding of community perceptions and underlying reasons of the research topic (Mayan 2009). Aspects of the grounded theory methodology are also present, owing to the inductive nature of the research process (Glaser and Strauss 1967). Data collection methods are participant observation, semi-structured conversation, sharing circle and document analysis of meeting minutes, language materials and other related documents. To ensure representation of the different community perspectives, all Yunešit'in families and generations have been engaged in the project. Yunešit'in Chief and Council members, Tšilhqot'in Language Committee members, language teachers and experts, and Band Office staff have also participated.

Results represent Yunešit'in community perspectives on the following: Tšilhqot'in language knowledge and usage; main reasons and consequences of the language loss; importance of revitalizing the language; strategies to promote language use; priorities, challenges and strategies to teach/learn/acquire the language; and development of language resources. Project outcomes will be applied to the current Tšilhqot'in Language Revitalization Plan.

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