# Persistence in Indigenous language work during the COVID-19 pandemic

**Kari AB Chew[1]** iD**, Onowa McIvor[2]** iD**, Kanen'tó:kon Hemlock[3] and Aliki Marinakis[2]**

## Abstract

Through the COVID-19 pandemic, Indigenous communities have persisted in Indigenous language revitalization and reclamation efforts. This research utilized a scan of social media, a survey, and interviews, conducted in the summer and fall of 2020 and primarily focused on Canada, to explore: What shifts to support Indigenous language work occurred during the early months of the COVID-19 pandemic? and What were the impacts of these shifts on Indigenous language revitalization and reclamation? This article discusses six cross-cutting themes: (a) shifting and adapting language work to ensure community health and safety, (b) building capacity to make necessary shifts and adaptations, (c) facing challenges in shifting online, (d) promoting Indigenous languages online and in community, (e) creating and sharing language resources as alternative or increased activity, and (f) (re-)envisioning language education and pedagogy in a pandemic time. These themes exemplify Indigenous persistence in Indigenous language revitalization and reclamation work during the pandemic.

## Keywords

COVID-19 pandemic, Indigenous languages, language education, language revitalization, online language learning, persistence

## Introduction

Chokma, saholhchifoat Kari Chew. Chikashsha saya. Chikashshiyaakni' attali. Chikashshanompa' ithanali. Greetings, my name is Kari Chew. I'm a citizen of the Chickasaw Nation. I live in the Chickasaw Nation. I am learning Chickasaw.

tânisi, Onowa McIvor nitisithīkāson. maskēkow-ininiw īkwa moniyaw iskwēw nītha. kinosao sipi oci nītha. nēhithawīwin ē-kiskinohamâsiwin. ləkʷəŋən askiy nîwikin. Greetings, Onowa McIvor is my name. I am Swampy Cree and Scottish–Canadian. I am from Norway House Cree Nation. I am learning to speak my language. I now live on ləkʷəŋən (Lekwungen) territory.

Shé:kon, Kanen'tó:kon Hemlock iontiá'ts. Wakskaré:wake niwaki'taró:ten tanon Kahnawà:ke nitewaké:non. Kanien'kehà:ka nitia'tó:ten. Greetings, my name is Kanen'tó:kon Hemlock. I am of the Bear Clan and live in Kahnawà:ke. I am a citizen of the Mohawk Nation. I am a Kanien'kéha language learner and teacher.

Gilakas'la, nugwa'am Aliki Marinakis. He'man dłigami Tłakwaxse. "Malaksaman. Gayutłan łaẉanam lax m̓usgam̓akw Dzawa̱da'enux̱w. Ḵaḵotłan x̱an kwaḵwale." Greetings, I am Aliki Marinakis. I am a non-Indigenous woman with settler and European ancestry who was given the Kwak'wala name Tłakwaxse. My husband and two of

my children are from the Musgam̓akw Dzawa̱da'enux̱w. I am learning Kwaḵwala.

During the COVID-19 pandemic, Indigenous communities have persisted in language work (Chew, 2021; Enari & Fa'aea, 2020; Gallant, 2021; McIvor, Chew, & Stacey, 2020; McIvor, Sterzuk, & Cook, 2020), demonstrating "collective innovations and resilience" (Enari & Matapo, 2020, p. 7). It is "persistent and resilient cultural, linguistic, and traditional survival that has led to an ongoing presence and survivance" during this moment (Rowe et al., 2020, p. 89). As scholar-practitioners involved in Indigenous language revitalization and reclamation (ILR), we came together as part of a research team, affiliated with the NEȾOLṈEW̱ "one mind, one people," Indigenous language research partnership, housed at the University of Victoria, during summer 2020 to study the impacts of the COVID-19 pandemic on Indigenous language work. The pandemic, which led to shutdowns in Canada and the USA in March

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2020, was potentially detrimental to Indigenous language work, which typically occurred in-person and often with Elders. Indigenous language revitalization and reclamation, a field of study and practice (Hinton et al., 2018), halted for the safety of communities. Then, after a necessary pause, ILR practitioners persisted to find ways to move language work forward in the face of a global public health emergency. Through a mixed-methods study, we explored these questions: What shifts to support Indigenous language work occurred during the early months of the COVID-19 pandemic? and What were the impacts of these shifts on ILR? We story a collective experience (Archibald, 2008) that has impacted individuals, families, communities, as well as examples of Indigenous persistence through the pandemic. Through this article, we share research findings and also offer encouragement to all who work to ensure the continuance (Ortiz, 2011) of their Indigenous languages.

## Indigenous persistence during the COVID-19 pandemic

We frame this shared story in the concept of Indigenous persistence. According to Panich (2013), the concept of persistence deals with "change and adjustment, leaving room for the active negotiation of the various forms of opposition," including disease, and "also allows for a continuum of processes that encapsulates various forms of perseverance" (p. 107). We connect this conceptualization to Thomas et al.'s (2016) discussion of cultural resilience as "the strength and power of the collective cultural knowledge" (p. 116), which we understand to be "carried through language, lives in relationships, and is intricately connected to wellbeing" (Chew, 2021, p. 261; McIvor, Chew, & Stacey, 2020). In this way, Indigenous persistence is tied to land, culture, spirituality, and wisdom passed down generation after generation (Anderson, 2008; HeavyRunner & Marshall, 2003; Kirmayer et al., 2011). We also recognize that, due to diversity among Indigenous Peoples, there is no consensus about what it means or looks like to persist or to be resilient (Anderson, 2008; Fleming & Ledogar, 2008; Reid, 2019), nor does there need to be.

The COVID-19 pandemic is a disaster, which occurs "when natural hazards meet social vulnerability" (Lambert, 2014, p. 168), that has disproportionately impacted Indigenous communities worldwide (Akee et al., 2020). In considering the impact of the Christchurch earthquakes on Māori people, Lambert (2014) asserts the need to "draw a distinction between merely *enduring* a disaster. . . and absorbing and then rebounding from shocks and disturbances" (p. 177, emphasis added). As in the wake of other disasters, media outlets have been quick to label Indigenous communities *resilient* and to portray them as overcoming the pandemic (Hatzipanagos, 2021). We resist weaponizing and sensationalizing the term resilience to shift responsibility for "colonial trauma" to Indigenous communities and to "responsibiliti[ze] [them] for their own distress and disadvantage" (Thomas et al., 2016, p. 5). We recognize that sometimes Indigenous Peoples are resilient while, at other times, they endure. For this reason, we understand persistence not as a label but as action toward what Acoma Pueblo writer Simon Ortiz (2011) calls "continuance," through "our original Indigenous languages, which empower us" (p. 293). Persistence also holds space for grief, as we take time to mourn and to heal during a time of profound loss (Brant-Birioukov, 2021).

Emergent scholarship addressing the impacts of the pandemic on Indigenous communities and languages affirms McIvor et al.'s (2009) finding that language is a "protective factor," creating the "conditions to build resilience" and acting to buffer or even prevent certain risk factors (p. 7). Brant-Birioukov (2021), of the Mohawks of the Bay of Quinte, writes of the pandemic:

> [O]ur response to past and present-day crises is intertwined with responsibilities to future generations. Living oral histories make pandemics of the past feel not so distant to us in our Covid-19 realities of 2021. Whereas shelter-in-place and self-isolation practices are certainly as foreign to Indigenous peoples as they are for all global communities, the ethical and civic responsibilities embedded in Covid-19 measures are congruent with the Indigenous perspective that the individual is responsible for the collective. (p. 8)

Since the onset of the pandemic, those involved in ILR work have turned to language as a source of "comfort, wisdom, and guidance" (Chew, 2021, p. 279) while also innovating to find new ways forward under unprecedented circumstances. Many ILR practitioners used social media as a space to connect around shared commitments to language (Chew, 2021; Gallant, 2021), as well as video conferencing to facilitate online language learning and teaching (Chew, 2021; Daurio & Turin, 2022; Enari, 2021; McIvor, Chew, & Stacey, 2020; McIvor, Sterzuk, & Cook, 2020). Some communities turned to land-based education in the wake of school closures (Brant-Birioukov, 2021). At Kahnawá:ke, for example, Kahtehrón:ni Stacey worked on a family garden as "a space to sustain familial relationships and center language while planting their original seeds passed down for countless generations" (McIvor, Chew, & Stacey, 2020, p. 411). These types of efforts, made by Indigenous peoples around the globe, demonstrate remarkable persistence to adapt and change practices in order for Indigenous languages and ways of life to continue in the face of the COVID-19 pandemic.

## Methodology

Our team engaged decolonizing and Indigenous methodologies aligned with Smith's (2012) assertion that "The intellectual project of decolonizing . . . needs a radical compassion that reaches out, that seeks collaboration, and that is open to possibilities that can only be imagined as other things fall into place" (p. xii). Our methodology therefore centered principles of storywork (Archibald, 2008), relationality (Wilson, 2008), and collaboration (Smith, 2012). As a research team, we met regularly during the summer to co-design the study and to share our own

experiences and observations. Based on early visioning, we developed a mixed-methods approach which included a scan of public social media posts between March and July 2020 (Chew, 2021), a survey of ILR practitioners during summer 2020, and interviews with ILR practitioners based in Canada in fall 2020. Our research methods are described below.

## Social media scan

The research team compiled public social media posts, from Facebook and Twitter between March and July 2020. These posts demonstrated responses to COVID-19 made by individuals and organizations involved in ILR work. While we did not limit the scope of our search to a single country, most posts compiled were from social media accounts in Canada and the USA. We utilized the web application Padlet (padlet.com) to compile, organize, and analyze posts, and to create a digital wall with columns reflecting key emerging themes (Chew, 2021). The themes included "1. language promotion, 2. using Indigenous languages to talk about COVID-19, 3. training to support ILR, 4. language education, 5. creating and language sharing resources, and 6. information about ILR and COVID-19" (Chew, 2021, p. 245). After gathering and organizing social media posts, the team used the comment feature on Padlet for an analysis process. Incidentally, Gallant's (2021) analysis of Twitter posts from Canada about ILR and the pandemic confirmed similar themes.

## Survey

The research team developed a seven-question survey for ILR practitioners, representing many communities and languages, to share their experiences. The survey was distributed via SurveyMonkey over a 3-week period in July and August 2020. Recruitment included a social media campaign advertising the survey on Facebook and Twitter and a weekly prize draw of a $100 gift card of the winner's choice with the aim to get the most responses possible. In addition, individuals, organizations, and communities doing ILR work in Canada and the USA were invited via email to participate. Participation was voluntary and participants could choose to skip questions they did not want to answer. There were no inclusion criteria to be part of the survey; however, the first question asked participants to identify the role(s) they played in ILR, such as teacher, learner, speaker, or other kind of supporter. There were not limited in their choice of roles and could choose one or more.

Language families that participated were extensive and reached across Canada and parts of the USA (Figure 1). We received 140 survey responses, with 118 deemed usable, as 20 respondents answered only the questions about being contacted for more information and two respondents answered just one question. These surveys

were removed from the data pool. The survey reached a wide selection of teachers, learners, speakers, and other supporters. A question was included as to whether participants were open to be interviewed to provide more information to the answers provided in the survey.
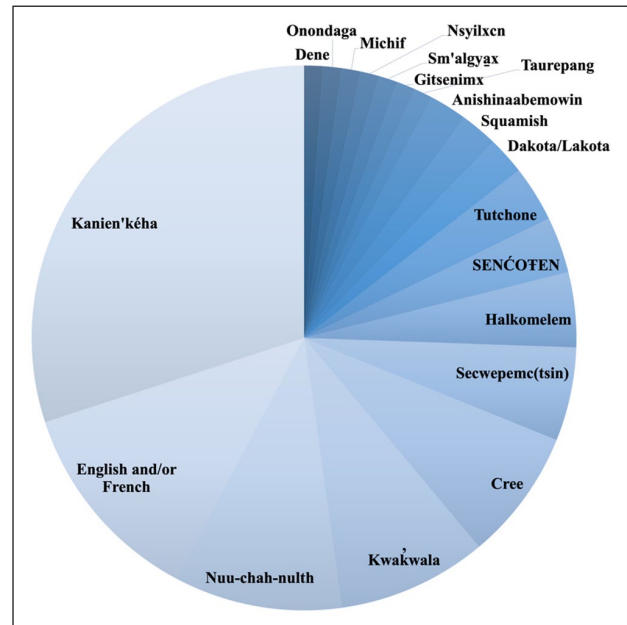


**Figure 1.** Languages represented by survey respondents.

The survey results helped to quantify some of the impacts of the pandemic on ILR work. The survey results showed that for many, the pandemic did not halt the work, but rather shifted it online through the use of various technologies. The survey revealed that social media was the most widely used online space for sharing language, which validated the social media scan as an important method for studying the impact of the pandemic on ILR.

## Interviews

Recognizing that the social media scan and survey provided a broad view of ILR responses to COVID-19, our research team also conducted interviews to understand more distinctive and personal experiences of ILR practitioners in greater depth. In selecting participants, we sought representation from various languages, language families, geographic regions, and learning and teaching approaches. The last criteria ensured we would capture potential differences in the COVID-19 pandemic's impact on Indigenous language work. Six participants who participated in the survey agreed to be interviewed individually. All were based in Canada, represented five languages, four provinces, and had different roles in language work (Table 1). Four team members used a collaboratively developed interview protocol to conduct the interviews between August and October 2020. All interviewees agreed to use their real names in the research outcomes.

**Table 1.** Interview participants.

| Name | Language | Region | Role |
|---|---|---|---|
| Yola Willie | Kwak̓wala | North-Central Vancouver Island, British Columbia | Language learner/program organizer |
| Pewi Alfred | Kwak̓wala | Northern Vancouver Island, British Columbia | Language learner/teacher |
| Callie Hill | Kanien'kéha | Tyendinaga, Ontario | Language center director |
| Kathryn Michel | Secwepemctsin | Chase, British Columbia | Language teacher |
| Khâsha Reid | dän k'è (Southern Tutchone) | Champagne and Aishihik First Nations, Yukon | Language teacher |
| Kevin Lewis | nêhiyawêwin (Cree) | Northern Saskatchewan | Language and culture camp director |

After transcribing interviews, team members did a "close reading plus judgement" (Seidman, 2006, p. 117) of all six interviews, marking in their respective copy what stood out as interesting to them. Then they shared a summary of their first impressions in a shared document, presented as a list of words, phrases, and further inquiries. The first author then reviewed the initial impressions and generated a word cloud based on interview transcripts (Figure 2) to create a codebook for the team to review. Following this, the first author coded the interviews using NVivo software, and team members commented on and further confirmed emerging themes. These themes included adapting, building capacity, challenges, creating new resources, language education and pedagogy, connection to land, reaching new audiences, impacts to Elders, uncertainty about the future, and persistence and camaraderie.



**Figure 2.** Word Cloud generated from interview transcripts.

## Findings

Looking holistically across the three components of the study, we identified six interwoven themes, including the following:

1. Shifting and adapting language work to ensure community health and safety;
2. Building capacity to make necessary shifts and adaptations;
3. Facing challenges in shifting online;
4. Promoting Indigenous languages online and in community;
5. Creating and sharing language resources as alternative or increased activity;
6. (Re-)envisioning language education and pedagogy in a pandemic time.

These themes are discussed in the following section. Notably, following the completion of our study, we learned of a similar study by Laura Gallant (2021) which affirms these findings and also offers additional insights.

### Shifting and adapting language work to ensure community health and safety

As indicated by the survey, language work prior to the pandemic mostly focused on school-based, home-based, and community-based activities, with only 37% of survey respondents engaging in online activities (Figure 3). With the onset of the COVID-19 pandemic, in-person ILR work largely halted due to public health requirements, which included staying at home, social distancing, and wearing face masks. Indigenous language revitalization and reclamation practitioners then shifted and adapted to continue their ILR work in changing times. Survey data showed a significant drop in school-based activities, with 50% of respondents indicating that they participated in these activities *prior to* the pandemic and 14% indicating that they participated in these activities *during* the pandemic. We note that, in addition to school closures, summer break may also have contributed to this decline. Community-based activities also decreased significantly (51%–21%). Home-based activities decreased to a lesser extent (52%–49%), likely because people were working and learning from home due to the stay-at-home orders and restrictions of spring and summer 2020. Significantly, there was a large increase in online learning activities (from 37% to 76%) (Figure 3).
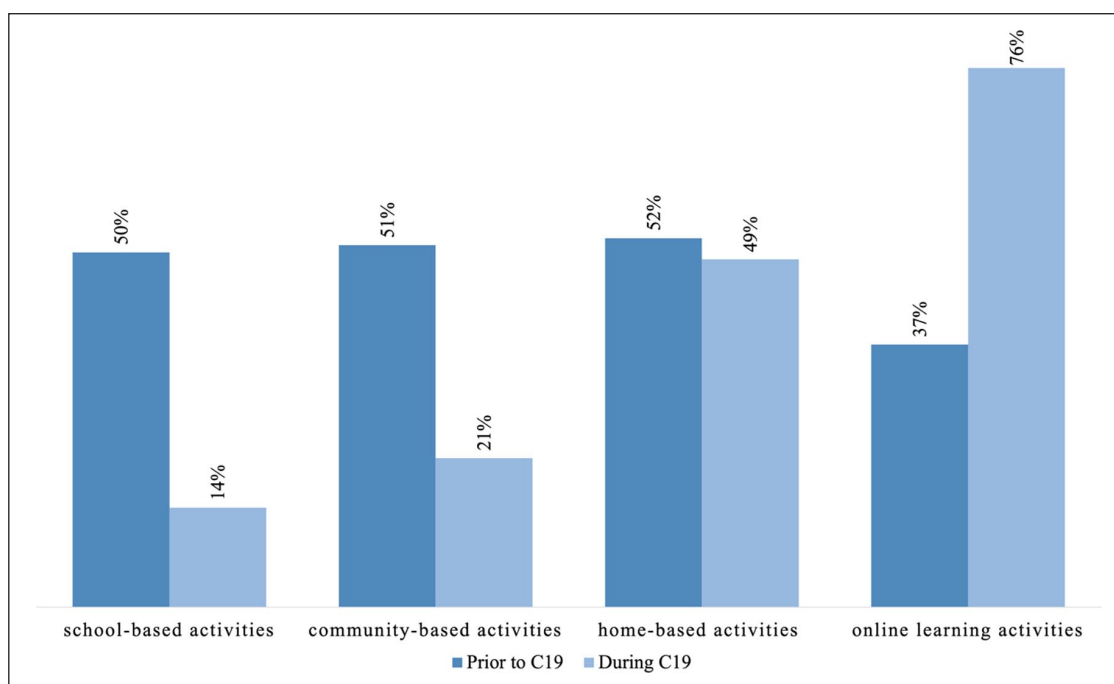
**Figure 3.** Participation in ILR activities prior to and during the pandemic.

Most survey respondents (64%) reported an overall increase in online Indigenous language learning and teaching activities in their communities, that they used new technology to support online language work (63%), and that they developed new strategies to keep language work going during the pandemic (56%). Of those who were engaged in online ILR efforts prior to the pandemic, most used social media (70%) or apps, websites, and online courses (61%) to share language. Few used web-based video conferencing services such as Zoom to deliver language programming (25%). Following the onset of the pandemic, social media remained the most popular tool for engaging in online ILR work while the use of web-based videoconferencing increased dramatically, with 62% of all survey respondents reporting a shift to or increased use of this technology. There was not a major increase in the use of websites, apps, and online courses to support online language learning, likely because these technologies require longer-term investment and commitment to develop.

The experiences of the ILR practitioners we interviewed aligned closely with survey findings. Khâsha Reid, a dän k'è (Southern Tutchone) teacher from Champagne and Aishihik First Nations, Yukon Territory, shared, "The first shift we made when COVID[-19] hit was we moved online and us[ed] phone calls. We stopped gathering in-person." Similarly, Pewi Alfred, a Kwak̓wala teacher from Vancouver Island, British Columbia, explained, "The pandemic broke out. We had a quick meeting and decided that we would start uploading videos onto YouTube. We created a Facebook page." As these language teachers express, not only did Indigenous communities adapt and shift their language work online, they innovated to try new strategies and approaches to language work that they had not done in the past. According to our survey data, this experience was common across Indigenous

communities. Survey respondents reported that they used new technologies (63%) and developed new strategies (56%) to keep language work going online during the pandemic. The survey data indicate that individuals and communities utilized multi-faceted approaches to online learning and teaching during the first few phases of the pandemic.

Importantly, not all Indigenous communities shifted language work online. In some smaller and relatively remote Indigenous communities, in-person language programming continued, often outdoors and with masks. As Kevin Lewis, a nêhiyaw (Plains Cree) language and culture camp director from northern Saskatchewan, explained, the pandemic created an opportunity to develop "our dream . . . Cree immersion program" in the form of a culture camp. Unfortunately, still noteworthy, 30% of survey respondents reported that they stopped the delivery of language programming. A smaller 8% of respondents indicated that their ILR work did not change at all.

### Building capacity to make necessary shifts and adaptations

Some ILR practitioners found that they lacked the capacity, in terms of access to and knowledge of existing technology, to fully shift their previously in-person programming into virtual spaces. Trying to learn new skills and technologies—such as using Zoom, Google Drive, and social media platforms—required additional labor from practitioners who were already spread thin. As Kwak̓wala teacher Pewi Alfred expressed,

> There's only one of me and a lot of people in town that depend on this work . . . The thing people don't realize is that I had to learn and I had to start somewhere . . . I'm limited in skill. I

showed myself how to use a lot of stuff [technologies for online language work] and I taught myself how to do everything I can do.

As ILR practitioners worked to build their own skill sets, they also sought opportunities to mentor others who could help to support the work. The Kwaḵwala language teacher, for example, worked daily to provide language instruction to tech-savvy educational assistants who, in turn, created engaging language videos to share online. Khâsha Reid, who works with adult dän k'è learners, similarly described a process through which students learned language, created a recorded presentation using new technologies, and shared their work. In this way, language learners gained language and technology skills that they could use to teach the language to others.

Regional organizations and institutes which support ILR stepped in to offer support in the form of trainings, thereby supporting efforts to build capacity among ILR practitioners. These organizations and institutes used social media to advertise programming and distribute information. First Peoples' Cultural Council (2020), based in British Columbia, shared downloadable guides for practicing language work safely in light of social distancing requirements. Summer institutes like the American Indian Language Development Institute and the Northwest Indian Language Institute (NILI) offered online programming to support ILR practitioners to continue their language work. Some of the programming responded directly to the pandemic, such as a NILI presentation advertised on social media about staying connected with language during the pandemic (University of Oregon—Northwest Indian Language Institute, 2020). Importantly, while shifting online made training more accessible to some audiences, those with barriers to internet access could not participate. Some trainings and institutes that typically occur in-person were postponed or canceled (Chew, 2021).

## Facing challenges in shifting online

As Indigenous communities made rapid and dramatic shifts and adaptations, they faced challenges. For many Indigenous communities, families, and individuals, a lack of reliable internet posed an enormous challenge. Kathryn Michel, a Secwepemctsin language teacher, explained her situation in an interview, "We don't have the tools of technology and a lot of times even the bandwidth to actually effectively do a program." On social media, Rising Voices (2020) hosted conversations about language work during the pandemic which addressed inequity in internet access. In some cases, ILR practitioners relied on technologies which used less bandwidth, phone, and even created hardcopy packets of language materials to deliver in community. In other cases, programming was canceled or postponed, as ILR practitioners took time to determine how to continue in this context of pandemic restrictions.

Among those who shifted online, many found it difficult to learn and teach in virtual spaces. Interviewees described exhaustion and Zoom fatigue (Bailenson, 2021). As Yola

Willie, a Kwaḵwala program organizer and learner from Vancouver Island, British Columbia, expressed, "It's quite exhausting to be online. There is something easier about being in-person. Language work can be really taxing work anyway, but then trying to do [it] over Zoom." Some interviewees stated that videoconferencing creates a one-way relationship, in which the facilitator talks but cannot tell who is engaging. Being online or wearing masks made it more difficult for people to understand each other and it was especially challenging for language teachers to provide pronunciation feedback to learners.

Several interviewees expressed concern about aspects of language work that are lost or cannot be replicated in a virtual environment. While technology created possibilities for ILR work, it could not replicate the experience of being in-person and in community. Online projects sometimes lacked the integral human contact that creates much of the beauty of language learning. As Yola Willie asserted, "There's just nothing that can replace or replicate that way of being and learning together." Despite successes in creating new communities across language diaspora online, it is a different context and community that is created. Some interviewees were concerned about the impact of the online environment on new language learners who may not have experienced in-person programming. Callie Hill, a Kanien'kéha language center director from Tyendinaga, Ontario, stated, "This isn't the new norm. . . . We still need to [meet in-person]. That's how we build those relationships. It's not through the computer screen. It's through being together and sitting in a room together and sharing and laughing."

Interviewees also noticed a decline among some of the regulars who actively participated in language learning activities prior to the onset of the pandemic. Khâsha Reid explained, "Some students pretty much just dropped off. . . . They needed the structure of our class and, you know, face-to-face interactions." This observation raises questions about the long-term implications of the pandemic for ILR work. While language promotion resulted in new excitement about and attention for Indigenous languages, it is unknown whether new participants in ILR will remain committed. Likewise, it is unknown whether those who were committed but could no longer participate due to hardships imposed by the pandemic will resume their language work.

There was a sense of loss, as in-person language work, especially with Elders, suddenly became dangerous for them in the face of pandemic lock downs. Communities, organizations, and individuals struggled to do everything they could to keep Elders safe. This created a twofold problem, as Yola Willie succinctly identified: "The biggest obstacle [was] not being able to meet with our Elder speakers in-person. And then also that they, in general, are not very tech savvy." In some cases, Elders, who have critical roles in language teaching, were left out entirely as language work shifted online. Language teacher Khâsha Reid, at the time of the interview, acknowledged that, despite attempts to include Elders on Zoom, this issue had still not been successfully resolved. While some programs provided support for Elders to utilize Zoom, it often

remained difficult for Elders to teach and connect to learners in the online environment. Yet, there was a comfort expressed by many to have any interaction with Elders, even if videoconferencing or other online tools did not prove as effective for learning and teaching. As Khâsha Reid explained, "It was basically just nice to see [our Elders]" online even if there was "very little actual learning in that format."

## Promoting Indigenous languages online and in community

The theme of language promotion is defined as efforts focused on raising the visibility of Indigenous languages online and in communities as opposed to activities focused on teaching and learning languages specifically. Examples on social media included, ILR practitioners raising awareness of Indigenous languages through words of the day, contests, and hashtag campaigns. Social media users posted words and phrases to describe COVID-19 and related terms like *social distancing* and *mask* (Chew, 2021). Efforts like a Kanien'kéha (Mohawk) scavenger hunt with prizes organized by Iakwahwatsiratátie Language Nest in Kahnawà:ke and a nêhiyawêwin (Cree) language talent show hosted by Nehiyawak Language Experience, Inc. encouraged language learners of all ages (Chew, 2021). One prominent example of language promotion on social media was the #2020IndigenousLanguageChallenge in which a Facebook user called on others to post a video modeling how to count to 20 in an Indigenous language while handwashing (Braveowl, 2020). Communities also hosted virtual Bingo, Wheel of Fortune, and Jeopardy game nights. Some of these games were designed so that those without reliable internet access could play. For example, a Kwaḵwala teacher had Bingo cards that could either used in both digital and hardcopy forms. The teacher called numbers over Facebook messenger, which was more effective than videoconferencing with a poor internet connection.

According to our interviews and survey data, language promotion efforts, as well as increased access to language learning and teaching opportunities, led to increased participation in ILR efforts. Kwaḵwala language teacher, Pewi Alfred, whose school was not previously connected on social media, explained that after creating a new private Facebook page intended for parents and students, they were inundated with access requests: "We decided . . . because there [are] so many requests . . . [to] give everyone access. . . . [It] is a lot of urban people that are using the site. . . . We want to just get out there and help everybody learn." Interviewee Kathryn Michel related to the experience of connecting to new audiences for language, explaining, "[We] attracted a group of people that never would have had access to our language program." A primary audience was community members who did not live close to the community, but interviewees also perceived that language programs had the attention of non-community members from around the globe. As Pewi Alfred asserted, "I'm not only teaching [my] school. I'm teaching the world."

## Creating and sharing language resources as alternative or increased pandemic activity

One effect of the pandemic on ILR was the ushering of new approaches to creating and using Indigenous learning and teaching resources. The survey reported the way language activities changed by the highest percentage, 59% of respondents reported shifting to both creating and distributing resources online. Prompted by the shift online, some communities dusted off existing resources that may have been forgotten or underused, and digitized them for language learners' use. As part of this process, some communities recognized and responded to gaps identified by revising or creating new resources that they hoped would be longer lasting than the pandemic.

Other innovations reported by language practitioners included distributing resources to families online and then supporting them to use them. They did this by distributing instructions to games, recording lessons for downloading and distribution and others made instructional dancing videos. Language teacher Pewi Alfred created spaces to play popular games in Kwaḵwala. People logged on to play Bingo, Jeopardy, Wheel of Fortune, and Scrabble. At times, Alfred offered prizes, but, more importantly, there was an invitation to those who "just wanted to come and learn Kwaḵwala and listen to Kwaḵwala for an hour." Alfred reflected that even for people who logged on to watch but did not participate, there was value in the opportunity to hear the language used. In Alfred's community, hosting games on Zoom was often difficult due to internet connectivity issues. Ultimately Facebook Messenger proved a useful tool supplement to Zoom because "we were able to answer each other really fast . . . through Facebook they would send me a message or send me a picture." Alfred explained that managing engagement on multiple platforms was challenging, but worth the extra effort to include as many people as possible: "I'd have to use my phone and two computers set up in front of me. [It] ended up being a lot of work, but it was so much fun."

Some resources developed, including audio and video recordings, games, and texts, were designed to be used in synchronous learning environments. Others found asynchronous resources were more helpful given the challenges for some of connecting to internet. Already existing resources were shared or re-shared online for learners use. Language teachers and speakers shared stories, hymns, lessons, video files, word lists or phrases, and labeled images, often through social media, to support online language education (Chew, 2021). Sometimes individual speakers made efforts to share songs, stories, or words or phrases, and, at other times, organizations shared more systematic and thematized language lessons. Some resources or language lessons shared were saved and organized on websites, rather than social media, making them downloadable by learners.

Other communities created new resources in inventive ways. Language teacher Khâsha Reid worked to change language class assignments from in-class presentations to having students present their work at home to their families.

Students recorded the work they did at home and submitted digital versions of their assignments, which could then be shared to a wider audience. In doing so, students became language teachers to their families and developed new skills related to the use of technology. As Reid points out, "having these assignments done digitally creates . . . a different way of keeping that language alive." Some communities experienced canceled programming and thus shifted efforts toward creating new resources. Yola Willie explained that when two scheduled language camps had to be canceled due to the pandemic, the community shifted toward creating resources. Willie also explained that these newly created, alternative resources included the creation of "a set of 20 early learner books" with audio and "some resource videos with the [camp] participants." Willie advocated for a focus on creating "resources that engage littles because I've just found there really isn't much" in terms of resources for young children.

Increased creation and sharing of resources also brought concerns around privacy. Practitioners grappled with questions such as "What is shared by whom and how widely?" "Who is accessing publicly available resources and for what?" In addition, it was not always clear this broader reach would necessarily lead to better outcome in terms of language learning. Those who created resources to share online found it was difficult to gauge the actual impact of their efforts. While some platforms share the number of views on a post or video, or visits to a site, there was no way to know the extent to which the content shared increased use of the language.

### (Re-)envisioning language education and pedagogy

Many ILR practitioners innovated in a forced moment of reflection and re-imagining to sustain language education during the pandemic. Implementing new and creative pedagogical strategies, ILR practitioners worked to shift existing programming online. Evidenced in the social media scan and interviews, Indigenous communities and organization hosted virtual circle times for children, sent packages and books to family learning pods, involved youth in creating language resources to share online, and live streamed adult language classes to learners across geographic distances. In one example, a Facebook post announced that the Assembly of Seven Generations (2020) would move existing weekly Anishinaabemowin community classes online. This shift demonstrates how one group re-organized and shifted their program to ensure cultural transmission was accessible to anyone.

Indigenous language revitalization and reclamation practitioners also innovated to create new language education initiatives. The Hesquiaht Language Program's Facebook page posted an opportunity to apply to a new online immersion class scheduled to meet via Zoom twice a week from September 2020 to March 2021 (Hesquiaht Language Program, 2020). Kahnawake Shakotiia'takéhnhas Community Services also offered new programming in the form of a virtual Kanien'keha Story Time. Promoted on social media (KSCS Kahnawake, 2020), this program brought stories to life for children via video stream. Media shared to the Bakwam'kala Facebook group featured children reporting on daily local weather in the language (Willie, 2020). These examples demonstrate how ILR practitioners adapted and expanded different methods of teaching and learning to enable community members, living both in community and in diaspora, to connect with loved ones through language.

While the pandemic prompted some new pedagogical strategies in virtual spaces, it also created unexpected opportunities for communities to (re)turn to land-based pedagogies, as land-based language education started, continued, or even accelerated. These initiatives followed public health guidelines, as people gathered in safe *bubbles* or socially distanced outdoors in some communities. Some families and practitioners re-envisioned land-based learning by connecting it to daily living, including in urban areas, bringing unexpected grounding and joy during a time of missing loved ones and homelands. Yola Willie, whose plans of a language camp on her ancestral territories were interrupted by the pandemic, described staying at home as "a neat and unexpected opportunity" to connect to the territorial lands she was currently on, allowing her to "better appreciate the land . . . and to find ways of giving acknowledgement to [it]." For Kevin Lewis, who helped establish a nêhiyawêwin (Cree) language and culture camp, land-based learning provided calmness in a time of great fear brought on by the pandemic. He explained the decision to pursue land-based language programming during COVID-19: "If we think land-based teaching is healing and well, let's just go do it. So, we did." In these moments and processes of re-imagining, new areas and domains for learning opened up unexpectedly under the pressures of the pandemic, and languages persisted through in different avenues than they had before.

## Reflecting on the impacts of the pandemic: implications and looking forward

Pausing, and taking some moments to considering the impacts of the pandemic on ILR, is important for each practitioner, learner, teacher, and community organizer. The article authors recommend we should all take the time to consider, not only the ways our language work has been impacted, but perhaps, more importantly, to think about what implications might be more lasting, effecting language revival work for years to come.

Perhaps there is some merit in including online learning opportunities—in recorded sessions for learners to come back to for increased opportunities to hear the language, for the increased access to language learning across diasporic language communities, and those living away from their communities. While study participants and article authors questioned the efficacy of online learning strategies undertaken, there is little evidence for or against these methods as they remain in their infancy and therefore understudied. Other participants reported

some benefit to the pandemic that, while forced, it allowed them time to focus on planning and resource development or amalgamation to assist or boost language learning efforts. Those interviewed expressed feeling uncertain about the future but also expressed experiencing camaraderie and joy in the language work. They voiced finding comfort and wisdom in their languages, explaining that language offers teachings and a calmness in a time that could otherwise invoke panic.

Collectively, our experiences tell a story of persistence—in which language is an enduring source of strength, comfort, and wisdom. HeavyRunner and Marshall (2003) write that "Every [I]ndigenous language has a word that means resilience. . . . The languages of our people unlock the philosophy of our miraculous persistence" (p. 17). We offer expressions of persistence and words of encouragement to ILR practitioners in the Indigenous languages we speak. These words of encouragement are also included, with audio, in a video created by research team members (https://hdl.handle.net/11244/331006).

| | |
|---|---|
| Chikashshanompa': | achónna'chi (keep going) |
| Kanien'kéha: | ionkwahkátste (we are resilient) |
| Kwak̓wala: | ha'nał'la (keep doing what you are doing) |
| nêhiyawêwin: | ᐊᐦᑲᒣᔨᒧᐠ, ahkameyimok (all of you persevere) |

In this moment, of undertaking language work during a global pandemic, these words spoken by our Ancestors, Elders, and community offer comfort and encouragement. They hold the grief we carry as we mourn speakers we have lost during the pandemic. Like beadwork, an art form that master beaders remind us will outlive us all (University of Victoria Legacy Art Galleries, 2021) and that tells stories of our histories and families (Cotnam, 2021), our languages persist in their own way, passing through, to outlive us and onto generations that will come next.

## Authors' note

**Kari AB Chew** is a Chickasaw citizen and Chikashshanompa' (Chickasaw language) learner based in the Chickasaw Nation. As a scholar-educator, Dr. Chew's work contributes to intergenerational Indigenous language revitalization and reclamation. Engaging decolonizing methodologies, she researches technology to support Indigenous languages, pedagogies for Indigenous language learning and teaching, and Indigenous language-in-education policy. She currently works closely with the Chickasaw Nation on language education projects, including Chickasaw Rosetta Stone and curricula for high school world language courses. She holds a doctorate in Indigenous Language Education and Linguistics from the University of Arizona and completed a postdoctoral fellowship with the NEȾOLNEW Partnership at the University of Victoria.

**Onowa McIvor** is maskékow-ininiw (Swampy Cree) and Scottish-Canadian. She is a lifelong learner of her maternal nehinaw language, and a grateful visitor in SENĆOŦEN and Lekwungen speaking territories. Dr McIvor is a Professor in Indigenous Education and holds a President's Research Chair at the University of Victoria. She directs the national NEȾOLNEW Research Partnership, a 7-year project working to understand and enhance Indigenous adults' contributions to reviving Indigenous languages in Canada. Her areas of research span Indigenous language learning, assessment, and planning.

**Kanen'tó:kon Hemlock** ronwá:ia'ts. Roskaré: wake niho'taró:ten tanon Kahnawà:ke nithoné:non. Kanien'kehá:ka nihaia'tó:ten (Kanen'tó:kon Hemlock is a member of the Bear Clan and lives in Kahnawà:ke). He is a citizen of the Mohawk Nation and is a Kanien'kéha language learner and teacher. He is a current PhD student at the University of Hawai'i at Hilo in Indigenous Language and Culture Revitalization. He is actively working to revive and revitalize the traditional tattooing practice of the Rotinonhsión:ni Confederacy, with a focus on the culture and language associated with the traditions. He is a research associate with the NEȾOLNEW Research Partnership at the University of Victoria.

**Aliki Marinakis** is a non-Indigenous woman with settler and European ancestry who was given the Kwak̓wala name Tłakwaxse. She works at the University of Victoria and is learning Kwak̓wala with family. Her husband and two of her children are from the Musgaṁakw Dzawada̱'enux̱w. Aliki is grateful to have had the opportunity to work in the field of language revitalization for over 20 years, developing and delivering programming and curriculum. As the Indigenous Language Program Manager in Indigenous Education at the University of Victoria, she manages the delivery of language-specific, community-based programs that focus on both building language proficiency in adults and K–12 teaching certification. Working in partnership with different Indigenous communities within their own traditional territories, mostly in Western Canada, she supports the community's goals around language learning and teaching.

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## Glossary

***Chikashshanompa' language***

| | |
|---|---|
| achónna'chi | keep going |
| Chikashshanompa' | Chickasaw language |

***Kanien'kéha language***

| | |
|---|---|
| ionkwahkátste | we are resilient |
| Kanien'kéha | Mohawk language |

***Nêhiyawêwin language***

| | |
|---|---|
| ◁ᑉᗠᔤ ahkameyimok | all of you persevere |
| nêhiyawêwin | the Cree language, speaking Cree |

***Kwakwala language***

| | |
|---|---|
| ha'nał'la | keep doing what you are doing |

***Dän k'è language***

| | |
|---|---|
| dän k'è | Southern Tutchone |

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