

Conversational Mi'kmaq For Non-speakers: Level I

1. BACKGROUND

Number 16 of the Truth and Reconciliation Commission: 94 Calls to Action, (Government of Canada, 2018), “calls upon post-secondary institutions to create university and college degree and diploma programs in Aboriginal languages.” In an attempt to begin implementing this TRC mandate, MSVU offered a Mi’kmaw language conversation course this September 2018. Since the university was unable to find an onsite instructor, the course was offered by video conference in partnership with Unama’ki College (Cape Breton University). The purpose of the course was to introduce students to basic Mi’kmaw sounds and words, with an emphasis on pronunciation and everyday conversational skills. Students met twice a week for 1 ½ hours and participated in video-conferencing style classroom.

Part of an option in the PhD program is the ability for a candidate to take extra courses that they feel will support their research and learning. When I heard about the Mi’kmaw language course that was being offered, I immediately jumped at the opportunity. I think I was the first one to sign up!

There are many reasons why I was very excited about taking the Mi’kmaw language course. For starters, I think that learning how to speak and understand the language of the original peoples of Mi’kma’ki is a responsibility I have when doing research with and among the Mi’kmaq. Dan Wulff’s (2010) literature review, *Unquestioned Answers: A Review of Research is Ceremony: Indigenous Research Methods* of Shawn Wilsons (2008) work, reminds researchers of Wilson’s (2008) understanding of the intricate web of relationships steeped in Indigenous research that a researcher must be accountable to.

Wulff (2010) highlights Wilson’s (2008) ability to demonstrate why a researcher must: place emphasis on building relationships over knowledge production; understand that participation is more important than being an expert; and incorporate holistic aspects of research versus prioritizing specialized views. Further to the point, Wulff’s (2010) stresses Wilson’s (2008) capacity to present Indigenous research practices that honour the inherent relationships a researcher has between research and their daily life.

Taking an undergrad course in conversational Mi’kmaq is just one way that I hold myself answerable to Wilson’s (2008) Indigenous research construct known as relational accountability. As Wulff (2010) suggests, relational accountability means that instead of pursuing the western idea of the acquisition of knowledge, I must first honour the understanding of relationships within an Indigenous paradigm. In my case, learning the how to speak Mi’kmaw helps me to build deeper relationships with Mi’kmaw individuals, communities, culture and their heritage which is ultimately connected to the research we are doing together. For example, the relationship that I am beginning to develop with Mi’kmaw linguistic roots further supports my understanding of the connections that the Mi’kmaw language has to the land which is further connected to the relationship that the Mi’kmaw language and land have with the research process itself.

Since learning how to speak Mi'kmaq is a type of experiential learning, I was a student starting at the very beginning and was both inexperienced and unknowledgeable about the Mi'kmaw language. As a participant, I often reflected on the importance of active engagement in learning and its connections to practicing research with and among the Mi'kmaq.

Wulff's (2010) review, expresses Wilson's (2008) opinion that if a researcher is going to honour Indigenous research, they must privilege the inherent relationships that exist between the research, community, and the beliefs and ideas that are embraced by that local culture. Wilson's (2008) holistic way for practicing Indigenous research, I believe includes learning the Mi'kmaw language. My genuine interest in learning how to speak Mi'kmaq is directly related to Wilson's (2008) relational accountability as I understand that I don't do research, but I actually become part of the research. If I follow Wilson's (2008) train of thought, I realize that as a researcher I become part of Indigenous research. Following this logic, it would only make sense that I would learn about the relationship between Mi'kmaw language verbal expression of their culture and its holistic connections to the broader research project. Learning how to speak Mi'kmaq honours Wilson's (2008) relational accountability and his way of doing research that values all relationships both obvious and less obvious as integral to the whole research experience.

In her work, *Becoming an Ally: Breaking the Cycle of Oppression In People*, Anne Bishop (2006) defines an Indigenous ally as someone who supports and advocates for the rights of Indigenous Peoples. Bishop (2006) states that allyship means participating and actively working together to support the self determination of Indigenous Peoples. Since my doctoral work seeks to understand Indigenous allyship and its juxtaposition with relationship as ways to honour an Indigenous research paradigm I believe it is important that I practice Indigenous allyship as a way of life.

Jeff Corntassel (2012), reminds us of the relationship between land pedagogy and language in his work *Re-Envisioning Resurgence: Indigenous Pathways to Decolonization and Sustainable Self-Determination*. Corntassel (2012) states that revitalizing language in Indigenous communities is directly related to understanding the relationship that a community's language has with the Indigenous intelligence of the land. Just like learning and land cannot be separated from Indigenous ways of knowing, neither can learning and language be separated.

When I combine Bishop's (2006) work on Indigenous allyship and Corntassel's (2012) interests in revitalizing Indigenous languages it becomes pretty clear that learning how to speak Mi'kmaq is a way to practice being an Indigenous ally. For me, this is not just about the resurgence of the Mi'kmaw language, but this is about practicing Indigenous allyship which helps to right the wrong of Indigenous languages being forbidden in residential schools. This is about supporting a language that until recently had not been given a voice in the academic setting. Wulff suggests (2010, p. 1290) that "Wilson (2008) makes clear that Indigenous research methodologies manifest Indigenous values and beliefs." If this is the case, it is obvious that Corntassel's (2012) scholarly interests validate the importance of the Indigenous intersections between language, land pedagogy, learning and research. As an Indigenous ally, practicing an Indigenous paradigm it seems obvious that valuing the revitalization of the Mi'kmaw language should be natural part of the research experience.

My understanding for the purpose of the meeting was that Dr. Taylor and Patrick were interested in gathering information about how the course was conducted. They were interested in hearing about my overall impression of how the course was set up, the format, content, instructors and student experience to help inform how the course will be set up and run in the future. As a result of this meeting, I wrote up a formal report which I submitted to Dr. Taylor and Patrick. I have been told by a number of MSVU faculty that my observations and critical analysis of the course were well received and that my suggestions are being taken into consideration for how organize the outline of the course in 2019. The works for this artifact includes the overview, feedback and comments of the course and my final assignment.

2. CONVERSATIONAL MI'KMAQ FOR NONSPEAKERS: LEVEL I

Upon completing the Conversational Mi'kmaq for Non-Speakers: Level One this fall semester 2018, I was asked to attend a meeting at the MSVU Aboriginal student centre and give feedback on the course. The individuals in attendance were Dr. Brook Taylor/Dean of Arts and Sciences, Patrick Small Legs-Nagge/Special Advisor to the President on Aboriginal Affairs, Veronica Gore/ Coordinator of Aboriginal Student Services and myself.

Course Objectives:

This course was an introduction to conversational Mi'kmaq. Students were taught basic Mi'kmaw pronunciation and the Mi'kmaw sound system. Students were introduced to a few common nouns and verbs as well a variety of everyday conversational phrases. Students were taught everyday words such as the days of the week, months of the year, colours, and numbers. At the end of the course students were expected to be able to say a few common conversational phrases in Mi'kmaq.

Course Materials:

There was no required text. Instead, materials for the course were uploaded to the CBU Moodle site. The course followed the Smith Francis Orthography Sound Guide for pronunciation.

Evaluation:

Evaluation for a student's grade was determined by three Quizzes @ 25 %, Written Assignment 15 % and Class Participation 10 %.

Due to the fact that this is a course being taught by video conferencing, make-up quizzes were not allowed. If a student missed a quiz, they then forfeited the mark. Oral quizzes were administered by instructor via video conferencing in a group setting. Students took turns answering questions that the instructor asked.

For the written assignment the students were required to write a conversational and dialogue piece between individuals using words and phrases they had learned during the course. The length of assignment was to be at least one page long. Since there are different Mi'kmaw dialects and word spellings throughout Mi'kma'ki, the instructor suggested that the students stick to the Smith Francis Orthography Sound Guide for pronunciation and what the instructor had taught them.

Lesson Delivery:

For the most part the instructor worked from the course materials that were uploaded to Moodle. She would pronounce words and phrases from weekly worksheets and the students would repeat after her. The students also practiced in unison as a group. The instructor individually called upon each student to answer questions which was similar to the quiz format.

Based on the interest of the students to learn different material than was prescribed and other phrases that the instructor thought the students should learn, the instructor also created unique lessons plans that were not part of the scheduled curriculum. Part of the problem was that the instructor was working from a curriculum that was created in 1997. For example, the instructor chose not to use the Mi'kmaw Conversation Lesson Six about Halloween as she felt it was a bit outdated. She instead created a lesson worksheet based on some of the student's questions and interests. It should be noted that the instructor was very open to helping the students learn phrases and words that individuals were interested in learning that were not on curriculum.

Class Time, Physical Space and Facility

The students attended a total of 17 classes plus three days were allotted for taking a quiz. For a number of reasons, the class rarely met for the full required class time. Obstacles that resulted in reduced class time included: a fire alarm at CBU, door to classroom was locked at MSVU, instructor not feeling well, and a constant barrage of computer difficulties at both sites. Once the class had to be cancelled due to technological difficulties.

FEEDBACK AND SUGGESTIONS:

Working with Local Mi'kmaw Community

First and foremost, as MSVU moves forward in continuing to develop and improve their Mi'kmaw Language course it must privilege the voice of the local Mi'kmaw community in how to proceed. This includes advice, guidance and teachings from Elders, other Mi'kmaw language educators and local community members.

Use of Indigenous Knowledge Based Systems

The use of Mi'kmaw knowledge-based systems should be a consideration for deeper learning. Mi'kmaw educational tools for learning and teaching that would enhance the learning experience include the Wi'koum on campus, Elders, use of ceremony, singing and drumming, storytelling, Indigenous garden, outdoor classroom, holistic approach to learning (intellectual, physical, emotional and spiritual) and land-based education.

Onsite Physical Classroom and Instructor

The overall course experience would benefit from a regular physical space on the MSVU campus. A physical space with a teacher present allows for flexibility and creativity in the learning environment so that Mi'kmaw knowledge-based systems for teaching can be more easily incorporated.

As well, having a teacher physically in the classroom is key for student success in learning Mi'kmaq. Students need to observe body language, facial and especially mouth movements for clear language pronunciation, intonation, cadence, rhythm, flexion, accent on

syllables and so forth. An instructor onsite is also important in case a student has a specific Mi'kmaw language question that can be answered in person.

Optional Language Lab Component.

It would have been nice to have access to either video or audio language laboratory material for each lesson that was taught. Students could benefit from listening and reviewing the course material between classes. This also reduces the error of learning a different Mi'kmaw dialect than the required Smith Francis Orthography Sound Guide if a student asked someone outside the class.

Course Content and Materials.

The course content was cost effective as there weren't any expensive textbooks. Something to consider would be the use of inexpensive preschool children's books that might be incorporated. Although this suggestion might not be acceptable to adult students, but as this is an introductory course, the students are essentially at the same level in the beginning as young children.

Land Based Curriculum

One thought would be to connect the Mi'kmaw language class to the outdoor environment. For example, it would be interesting to incorporate the recent creation of an Indigenous garden at MSVU into the course. Students could visit the garden, see the plants, touch the plants and learn their names in Mi'kmaq. This could be extended to a variety plants, animals and other life that exists all over the MSVU campus.

Mi'kmaw Place Names Curriculum

Another possible type of land-based curriculum would be to incorporate the many Mi'kmaw geographical representation and place names in Mi'kma'ki. Students would learn the pronunciation, spelling and the reason the Mi'kmaq decided to give to a particular place.

QUESTIONS TO CONSIDER

Upon reflection, below are some questions that I think may be pertinent to consider in the development of a Mi'kmaw language class at MSVU.

1. What is the overall purpose of developing a Mi'kmaw Language course at MSVU?
2. What Mi'kmaw knowledge-based systems and methods do the Mi'kmaq use when teaching young Mi'kmaw children?
3. What are ways in which this course can include a holistic framework for teaching?
4. How can this course include Mi'kmaw ways for learning, teaching and understanding of the world?
5. Since there are a number of different Mi'kmaw dialects what is the best approach for teaching conversational Mi'kmaq to non-speakers?
6. What are some creative ways to support and hire a Mi'kmaw language educator so that the course can be taught on the MSVU campus? For example, is there a way to support a knowledgeable Mi'kmaw language educator that encompasses some type of co-sponsorship or co-teaching?

3. FINAL ASSIGNMENT

This artifact is the final assignment for the course. For this assignment we were asked to write a story using the conversational dialogue we had learned in course this fall.

Mi'kmaw Language Conversation Assignment

Situation: Three animals bump into each other on the street. Llui's Lmu'j (Louise the Dog) and Kalolin Kitpu (Caroline the Eagle) are old friends. Nuel Niskimakwe'su (Noel the Brown Eagle) is Eagle's cousin. They decide to walk and get a bite to eat and have a conversation about the weather, what they want to eat, as well Kalolin and Llui's sing Happy Birthday to Nuel on the way to the restaurant.



Mi'kmaw

English

Llui's Lmu'j	Kwe' Me' talwuleyin nitap Sa'q kepsi nmul?	Hi, how are you my dear friend? It is a while since I have seen you?
Kalolin Kitpu	Weleyi, katu ki'l?	I am fine how about you?
Llui's Lmu'j	Weleyi, welta' si na' nike' nemu'l aq/p.	Good, I am glad to see you again.
Kalolin Kitpu	Me'talo'tijik kikmaq?	How is your family?
Llui's Lmu'j	Welo' qtijik, wela'lin!	They are fine, thank you!
Kalolin Kitpu	Weleyi!	Good!
Llui's Lmu'j	Taluisit kitap?	What is your friend's name?
Kalolin Kitpu	Taluisit nitap Nuel, no'kmaw.	My friend's name is Nuel, my cousin.

Llui's Lmu'j	Kwe', Me'talwuleyin Nuel?	Hi, how are you Nuel?
Nuel Niskimakwe'su	Muskajeweyi!	I am great!
Llui's Lmu'j	Keta'l'nusin?	Do you know how to speak Mi'kmaq?
Nuel Niskimakwe'su	Kij ka jijk pasik. Metue'k.	A very little bit. It is difficult hard.
Llui's Lmu'j	Tekke'k, e'e, apajipuk, aq/q paniksik.	It is cold, yes, winter's coming, and blowing snow.
Kalolin Kitpu	Tetpaqa'nek, teki-wula'kw.	You are correct, it is a cold night.
Nuel Niskimakwe'su	Amuj, aluamkwiaq.	I agree, it is becoming gloomy.
Kalolin Kitpu	Suliwey metu'na'q, sikn aq/q o'jikate'j.	Silver, stormy weather, freezing rain and frost.
Llui's Lmu'j	Ntlutewamu'k, alukwiaq, Mesi'kowik!!!	Grey, Cloudy, it is hailing!!!
Kalolin Kitpu	Wape'k, sesaq, sesupe'k, aq/q keltaqam'ktik, tekqamik.	White, snowing, it is slippery, and the earth is frozen, cold evening.
Nuel Niskimakwe'su	Oqwatnuk Wjipnuk, weju'sik aq/q metewaskiaq.	North East, it is windy, and crunching snow.
Kalolin Kitpu	Wini kiskik kiskuk.	Today is a bad day out.
Nuel Niskimakwe'su	Kis' tlu' etis app? Mu Nestmu?	Can you repeat that? I don't understand.
Kalolin Kitpu	Wini kiskik kiskuk	Today is a bad day out.
Nuel Niskimakwe'su	Welikiskik kiskuk???	Today is a nice day???
Kalolin Kitpu	Moqo	No
Kalolin Kitpu Kalolin Kitpu	Wini kiskik kiskuk.	Today is a bad day out.
Nuel Niskimakwe'su	E'e!! nestm, wini kiskik kiskuk	Yes, I understand, Today is a bad day out.
Llui's Lmu'j	Tetpaqa'nek. L'nui'sultinej!	You are correct. Let us speak Mi'kmaq!
Kalolin Kitpu	E'e amuj, l'nui'sultinej.	Yes, I agree, let us speak Mi'kmaq
Llui's Lmu'j	Kewjipinewji aq/q kewjistaqanewji.	My hands are cold, and my ears are cold.
Kalolin Kitpu	Kewjisqunewji aq/q kewjistaqanewji.	My nose is cold, and my ears are cold.
Llui's Lmu'j	Kewisin ?	Are you hungry?
Kalolin Kitpu	E'e	Yes
Nuel Niskimakwe'su	E'e, amuj!	Yes, I agree!
Kalolin Kitpu	Tepias natatalu'k kjikank.	We might as well go to town and eat.
Llui's Lmu'j	Ketu' wije'win?	Do you want to come with me?
Kalolin Kitpu	E'e, tawiju?	Yes, Where to?
Nuel Niskimakwe'su	E'e! Wela'qnmn? Ke'maqatui suliewey.	Yes! Do you have lots of money? Lend me money.

Llui's Lmu'j	Koqoey menuweken, nme' juey kisna ki'kli'kwejuey?	What do you want to eat, Fish or Chicken??
Kalolin Kitpu	Nme' juey!!	Fish!!
Nuel Niskimakwe'su	Amuj, peju nme' juey, sipkné katik aq/q mijipjewey!!!	I agree, cod fish, wild potato and food!!!
Llui's Lmu'j	Koqoey kety' samquan?	What do you want to drink?
Llui's Lmu'j	Wikunapu Kisna piteway?	Coffee or tea?
Kalolin Kitpu	Wi'kunapu, Nutai Wi'kunapu!	Coffee, I need a coffee!
Nuel Niskimakwe'su	Moqo, wen'ju'su'naru!	No, apple juice!
Llui's Lmu'j	Kiska jo'ltioq?	Are you ready?
Kalolin Kitpu	Kiska jo'ltiek!	We are you ready!
Nuel Niskimakwe'su	E'e kiska jo'ltiek! La'tinej.	Yes, we are ready! Let's go.
Llui's Lmu'j	Wije'wi. Jikank ni'n eliey, nike.	Come with me. I am going to town, now.
Llui's Lmu'j	Tami tleyawin ki'l?	Where are you from?
Nuel Niskimakwe'su	Ni'n tleyawi, Kjipuktuk, Mi'kma'ki.	I am from Halifax, Mi'kmaw territory.
Nuel Niskimakwe'su	Tami tleyawin ki'l?	Where are you from?
Llui's Lmu'j	Ni'n tleyawi, Mu'kla'qtik, Mi'kma'ki.	I am from Seal Island, Mi'kmaw territory.
Llui's Lmu'j	Tawijen?	How old are you?
Nuel Niskimakwe'su	Ni'n Nesiska'q tewijey.	I am 30 years old.
Nuel Niskimakwe'su	Tawijen?	How old are you?
Nuel Niskimakwe'su	Ni'n tewijey, newiskikipuna't kiskuk, Ta'puewey, Kesikewiku's, ne'wewey.	I am 40 years old, today, today, Tuesday, December 4 th !
Llui's Lmu'j	Kiskuk!!!!!!	Today!!!!!!
Nuel Niskimakwe'su	E'e, kiskuk!!!	Yes, today!!!
Llui's Lmu'j	Wli Ajipuna'	Happy Birthday
Kalolin Kitpu	E'e, Wli Ajipuna, no'/kmaw	Yes, Happy Birthday, my cousin
Nuel Niskimakwe'su	Wela'lioq!	Thankyou!
Llui's Lmu'j	Weliaq, nitap.	You are welcome, my friend.
Kalolin Kitpu	E'e, Weliaq, no'/kmaw.	Yes, are welcome, my cousin.
Llui's Lmu'j aq/q Kalolin Kitpu	Etluwintu' tinej, Wili Ajipuna'	Let us sing Happy Birthday
Llui's Lmu'j aq/q	Wili Ajipuna', Wili Ajipuna',	Happy Birthday, Happy Birthday, Happy, Birthday Nuel,

Kalolin Kitpu	Wili Ajipuna' Nuel, Wili Ajipuna'	Happy Birthday
Nuel Niskimakwe'su	Wela'lioq!	Thank you!
Llui's Lmu'j	Wen kisi-piktit?	Who farted?
Nuel Niskimakwe'su	Kis tlu'etis app, mu nestmu	Can you repeat that, I don't understand?
Llui's Lmu'j	Wen kisi-piktit?	Who farted?
Kalolin Kitpu	Mu kejitu.	I don't know.
Nuel Niskimakwe'su	Nestm! Kise'k, aq/a jakwen!!	I understand. She is funny, and you speak loudly!!
Llui's Lmu'j	Teki-wula'kw, kujmuk.	It is a cold night, outside.
Kalolin Kitpu	E'e, amuj.	Yes, I agree.
Kalolin Kitpu	Ketu-ktman? Ketu-ktmay ni'n.	Do you want a smoke? I need a smoke.
Llui's Lmu'j	Moqo, mna'q, Wela'lin.	No, never, Thank you.
Llui's Lmu'j	Klapis, kekkam, ala etek Watapek Tskiskl Wasuek, naqa'si!	Finally, look there it is, Yellow Daisies Flower Restaurant (no word in Mi'kmaq) stop!
Kalolin Kitpu	Tami?	Where?
Llui's Lmu'j	Na!! La'taqsun.	There!! Let's go.
Nuel Niskimakwe'su	Tetpaqa'nek. Welta'si.	You are correct. I am happy.
	Na toq	The End

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