

ANISHNABE



NAKOCKITATOWIN OTCI ANICINABEMOWIN



**A
GATHERING
ON THE
ANISHNABE
LANGUAGE**



Kwe
anicinabe acitc
anicinabekwek

ni kitci minendananan eki kictomak
masinaigan kitci nabwatamek wekonen kaki
mikitimak odji anicinebe ijikijiyewin.

Ka 12-13 kakone kisiz ka tasokinikizitc.
Ki mowatcitiyok anicinabek eti kebaowek
anicinabe aki. Nijikon ki nakockitatiok odji kida
ijikijiwinan. Mane kipijaok ewi natcikabwitamowatc
aninapewini. Adi eji kitci apitentakok kidji
mitomiyek kida ijikijiweinan. Wekonen ke
mikitcikatek nikan kidji matinimatiyek
kida anicinapewinan.

2ND MIAJA'S EDITION

On September 12 and 13, 2019, the second edition of the Miaja Gathering was held in the communities of Kebaowek and Wolf Lake, a unique event that celebrated the Anishnabe Nation's language, culture, arts and heritage. This edition was held under the theme of the Anishnabe language. This choice is in line with the International Year of Indigenous Languages declared by UNESCO because of the great fragility of Indigenous languages across the world.

"At present, 96 per cent of the world's approximately 6,700 languages are spoken by only 3 per cent of the world's population. Although indigenous peoples make up less than 6% of the global population, they speak more than 4,000 of the world's languages.

Conservative estimates suggest that more than half of the world's languages will become extinct by 2100. Other calculations predict that up to 95 per cent of the world's languages may become extinct or seriously endangered by the end of this century.

The majority of the languages that are under threat are indigenous languages. It is estimated that one indigenous language dies every two weeks."

United Nations Permanent Forum on Indigenous Issues¹

The Anishnabe language is no exception. It is threatened with extinction and this is why we have chosen to place it at the centre of our celebrations.

People from the nine Anishnabe communities, political representatives, artists, teachers and families came together with members of other Indigenous nations, as well as non Indigenous people, to discuss the future of anishnabemowin².

Various workshops were held to reflect together on ways to promote the transmission of the language and, above all, to get young people involved. It is clear that despite the current challenges, there is hope for the revitalization of the Anishnabe language. The exchanges between the different participants were very fruitful; the arts, the territory and the new technologies were all seen as fundamental tools for language transmission. This report is a reflection of the presentations and discussions that took place during this large gathering: the challenges, our hopes, available resources and the emerging opportunities.



¹ <https://www.un.org/development/desa/indigenouspeoples/wp-content/uploads/sites/19/2018/04/Backgrounder-Languages-French.pdf>

² Anishnabe language



LEGEND: WHY CHILDREN SHOULD SPEAK ANISHNABEMOWIN

TOLD BY PAR RICHARD KISTABISH

"An Anishnabe couple had been trying for a very long time to have a child, unfortunately nothing worked. One day the woman got pregnant and the couple was very happy. After nine months of pregnancy, the woman gave birth to a beautiful baby girl. The parents were so happy with the arrival of this being of light that they always gave her the most beautiful clothes and toys. In fact, throughout her childhood, the little girl received from her parents everything that was best and most beautiful, even if they did not have much money. This little Anishnabe girl was very spoiled, so much so that her parents had enrolled her in a private school so that she would receive the best education possible. At the age of fourteen, the girl became seriously ill and no doctor was able to cure her. When she died, her parents were heartbroken. Some time after the funeral, as the man and woman were walking in the forest, they came face to face with their dead daughter. Addressing her parents, she said:

"When I arrived before the Creator, he asked me who I was. I told him I was a little Anishnabe girl. He then asked me if I spoke the Anishnabe language and if I knew the traditional teachings. I told him that unfortunately, even though my parents gave me the best, they never gave me these teachings. The Creator then asked me to go back to the world of the living to tell all Anishnabe parents that the greatest gift they can give their children is the teaching of the language, culture and traditional ceremonies."

CURRENT CHALLENGES AND ISSUES

Canada's First Peoples are faced today with the impacts of sedentarization, residential schools and colonisation in general. For some individuals, families and communities, the wounds and pain are still deep and the healing path is walked one step at a time. The prohibitions to practice their culture and speak their Algonquin language in residential schools as well as land dispossession have caused many losses resulting in a significant breakdown in the transmission of ancestral knowledge and language to the younger generations. Although colonisation has greatly affected our societies, territory, culture and identity and that our way of life has been profoundly disrupted, we are now witnessing a return to our traditions and a revival of our cultural expression. Following are the three major challenges facing us in ensuring the viability of the language for the future generations:

1. UPDATING THE LANGUAGE

"We have to update the language, we have to bring it into the era of children... we should be able to name objects such as the computer, the iPad. I am in favour of renaming things. But also recall the words we have forgotten and lost because our Elders no longer use them. They were locked up on a reserve. They were forbidden to live their culture and that resulted in the loss of the language."

Virginia Dumont

Anishnabemowin is a colourful language with deep roots in the territory. Today, the destruction of ecosystems, climate changes, the rapid changes that have occurred in the last few decades, such as the creation of reserves, are factors that may explain the erosion of the language and the gap between the generations.

The anishnabemowin spoken in the past referred to objects, actions, responsibilities and the realities of a way of life rooted in Nitakinan. This is why the vocabulary used by the Elders is sometimes difficult to understand for the new generation as their way of life is completely different. The isolation of our communities and their dispersion over two Canadian provinces and the use of two official languages (English and French) are factors that considerably influenced the Anishnabe dialects. Although these differences constitute the richness of the language, they can sometimes be obstacles to communication.

It is sometimes difficult to translate certain words or expressions from Anishnabe to French or English because the latter don't necessarily have equivalents in these languages. For example, the word «respect» does not exist in anishnabemowin because our language does not offer the possibility of uttering insults. Respect is therefore implicit in the very structure of the language; the respectful relation with living beings is embedded in it. Translation therefore requires interpreting the ideas within

the context, depending on the persons involved in the dialogue. Interpretation is a tricky exercise and must be done by competent speakers. Updating the language by creating new words will be necessary to both preserve the knowledge they contain and to adapt it to contemporary life. Therefore, the challenge will be to enrich the language to make it useful and necessary on a daily basis, while conciliating the oral and written traditions; all the more so since each community has its particularities on the way to experience and transmit the language. Nevertheless, for the future of anishnabemowin, our nine communities must initiate a dialogue concerning the process to be undertaken to update it. Many Indigenous peoples in the world have followed suit, so we will need to build on promising initiatives to identify and consider potential actions tailored to our needs.

2. INTERGENERATIONAL SHARING OF KNOWLEDGE

Colonization has greatly affected the traditional ways of transmitting traditional knowledge and ancestral language.

The implementation of new transmission channels has become a necessity. The Kitci Anishnabek³, who remain the guardians of the tradition, must pass on their knowledge to young people. It is by multiplying the exchanges between generations that the transmission of culture can become a reality, consistent with the traditional ways of learning based on observation and listening. Thus, it was the young Anishnabe's responsibility to be attentive and absorb as much cultural knowledge as possible as the adults were not necessarily inclined to repeat what had been said. In those days, language was part of the way of life; that's how it was learned and put into practice.

The current context is quite different. English and French are predominant, so it is important to expand our ways of transmitting and learning anishnabemowin. Among other things, new technologies seem to meet the needs of the young generation because they are rooted in their daily lives. In this digital shift, it is the younger generation's duty to teach seniors and adults how to navigate through these new technological tools. Knowledge sharing is mutual; the capacity to give and receive teachings is a lifelong process. Today and for tomorrow, each person, family, group or community has the responsibility to ensure the survival of the language and knowledge for the future generations.

³ Refers to "Elders" in the Algonquin language.



3. THE NATION'S AUTONOMY

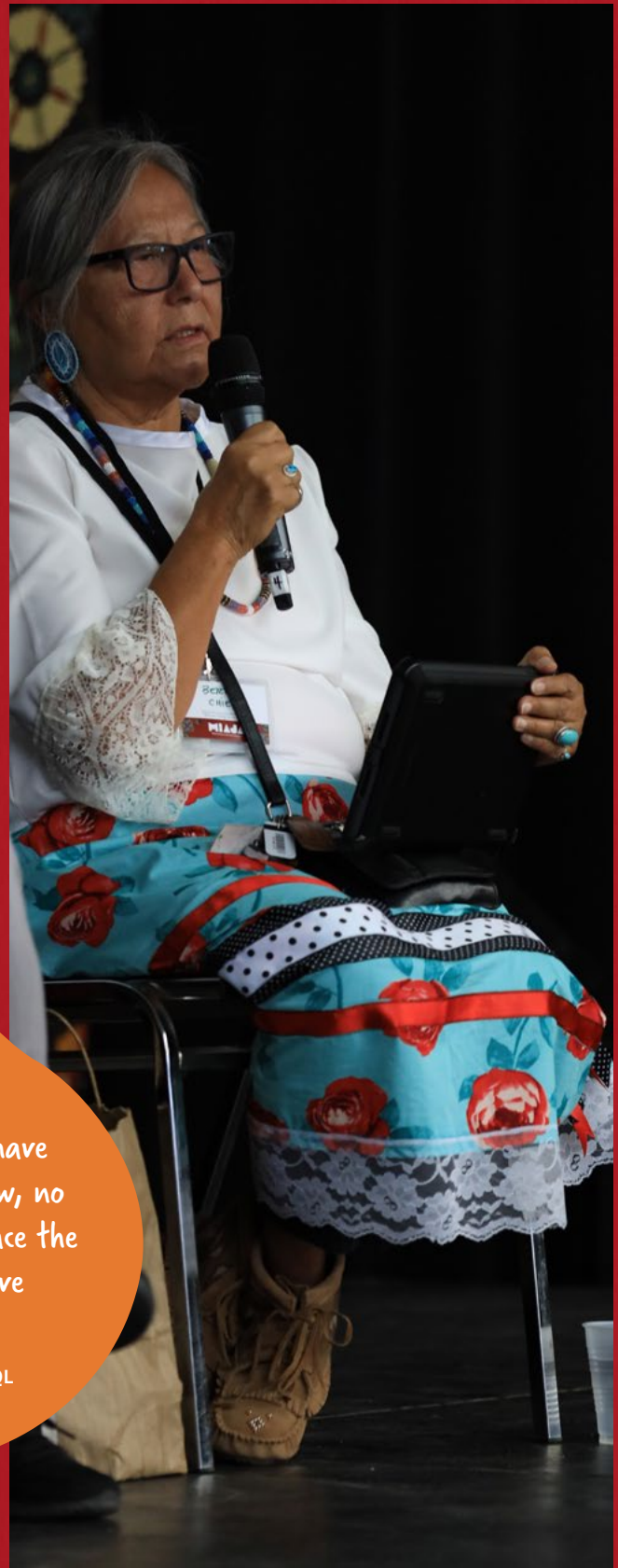
The lack of financial resources is a major obstacle to the revitalisation of our language.

The challenge is therefore to develop our nation's autonomy to facilitate the implementation of initiatives that foster the promotion of our language. In order to stop depending on governments, the development of a circular economy through local businesses would energize our communities. In addition to offering rewarding jobs to our members, a reinvestment of profits in the development of services available in our language in the different community, sports, economic, educational, social and cultural sectors.

The real benefit of such autonomy would contribute to gain recognition of the importance of our language in the public space. Teachers, men, women, Elders, graduate or not, deserve such recognition and valuing of their expertise by means of fair remuneration for their work. Among others, Anishnabek who speak more than one language as interpreters and who do simultaneous translation in large gatherings. By diversifying career opportunities, potential skills development programs in Anishnabe through available resources to create these opportunities, we would restore a sense of pride within families, communities and the nation.

"No law will replace the challenges that we have as individuals, [...] no law, no financial support will replace the obligation that we have as parents."

G. Picard, Regional Chief, AFNQL



♥ CREATING HOPE

"... But all is not lost from us. We have a small and dedicated group of individuals who are working hard and diligently to bring back the culture, the teachings which were never lost, just simply dormant for such a long time. It is exciting to see what they are accomplishing, and what they can do for the future. [...] Acknowledge the importance and significance, not only for the Anishnabe people, but for all Indigenous people languages that have survived and are still spoken. It is the cornerstone of our history, our culture and existence. It's tied to language and the land. Our language and dialects identify us as communities and nation. We must put every effort possible to the preservation and revitalization of the Anishnabe language for our youth and the next generation to come."

Lance Haymond, Chief of Kebaowek



As long as there is one Anishnabe to speak the language and another one to listen, there will be hope.

The work begins within each one of us and extends to the whole nation. Teachers, Elders, parents, children and elected officials must blow together on the embers of Anishnabe culture. Just as real political will is important to effect change in our communities, so too will the participation of non-political organizations be necessary in the effort to revitalize the Anishnabe language. All the Anishnabek and allies must come together and move in the same direction. Each and every one of us has the responsibility to fuel that little fire within our hearts that is still burning.

To this day, the language has been passed down from great-grandmothers to great-granddaughters. Learning anishnabemowin begins in the womb and continues throughout the life of the Anishnabe. It is first within the family that children hear the language. Each day offers an opportunity to learn the language, and it is the connection to the elements of nature that will be the guide in learning it.

"When I became a mom, I realized I had to do something for my daughter. My grandfather said that if children don't speak the language, it's the parents' fault."

Amy Jérôme

AVAILABLE RESOURCES

Miaja brought together many stakeholders, parents, grandparents and teachers who work every day to pass on the language to the next generation. The needs and challenges are significant. A lot of resources have already been developed at school, at home and on the territory. Humour, writings, videos, rituals and radio stations are the vehicles, traditional or modern, of the Anishnabe language. Their creation, promotion and sharing must reach a larger number of people. These resources, that are all the more precious when they are the result of the collective efforts of Anishnabe youth, must reach out to as many people as possible.

Pleasure, which we can make present just about everywhere, is a gratifying way to promote the language. Beauty, art and humour are also resources that contribute to improve learning conditions. Pleasure contributes to create safe environments that helps overcome shyness, fear and vanity. In the spirit of mino-pimatisiwin, it motivates people, and especially young people, to commit themselves to learn the language. The Anishnabek's interests and talents vary a lot depending on the age and level of learning, hence the importance to offer a variety of school, community, artistic and play activities to transmit the language.

Time is also a valuable resource despite the urgency of the language situation. Our families and communities will need as much time to heal as it took them to go through the changes they were imposed. The turtle, who takes the time to do things right, teaches us the importance of progressing patiently on our path. The same goes for the language, which will progressively find its place back in our lives one word at a time. Despite the advanced age of a number of Elders and the little time at our disposal to counter the potential extinction of our language, we need to take the necessary time to reappropriate it.

Traditional medicine allows maintaining the link between generations. Through its teachings, families and communities will be able to practice it. The celebration of life cycles and nature allows us to come together and be who we are. The seasons set the pace of our traditional activities, while our spirituality brings balance to our existence. Since thousands of years, contact between generations during rituals and ceremonies has been the way to ensure that each and everyone had its place within the community and to welcome change and get prepared for it. Traditional teachings offer everyone an opportunity to take care of themselves and others, which is the very heart of the concept of mino-pimatisiwin.

"You can stand up and teach all the language you can, but if it's not being used, what purpose is it? At my age, at this point of time, I say to people: "Use it or lose it!"

Stephanie Nesquau



Resources available online, such as tutorials, will have the advantage of reaching many people at any given time. Furthermore, an intuitive design of applications to learn the language will make the use of new technologies easier. By building upon creativity, the words and pictures in digital format will greatly assist families in learning and practicing the Anishnabe language at home. For example, applications such as *Kokum translator* and *Kokumwordfinder* allow parents and children to translate words into anishnabemowin. Many initiatives are being undertaken across the nation. In Pikogan for instance, a Facebook group by the name of *Anicinapemotan* has been created to promote our language and culture.

Educational games have been developed on mobile applications, but the world of video games and virtual reality remains to be explored. Potential partners such as UQAT could lead to the creation of 3D animation training programs in anishnabemowin that reflect the community members' interests, values, realities and needs. However, the vitality of our language is both an individual and a collective responsibility.

"This is who we are, the reason we are on this land, why the Creator put us on this land with the language. Only the language will help us identify each other."

Richard Kistabish

Nitakinan, the territory, is a privileged place to teach young people. For thousands of years, the anishnabemowin has always been learned in relation with Mother Earth. The Anishnabe people must therefore preserve this territory in order to protect the language. Despite the land dispossessions that occurred throughout history, the defence of the territory is a way to claim the uniqueness of our culture for future generations. To strengthen our relationship with nitakinan and to revitalize anishnabemowin, community and school activities provide opportunities to learn how to hunt, skin and cook wild animals.

More particularly, anishnabemowin immersion programs on the land are getting more popular with the communities. For example, the *Anishnabe Odinewin - Anishnabe Odinewinenidamowinan* project is an initiative inspired by the Haudenosaunee people and then adapted to Anishnabe values. Led by Elders from different communities, the project aims to ensure that the language and traditional teachings are passed on to the next generation. The territory is a healing place that allows regaining the Anishnabe identity by observing and integrating the teachings of the Kitci Anishnabek. The use of the language in these traditional activities allows members of the nation to come together to reconnect with the Anishnabe culture.





THE INNU WAY

With great humility, Marie Tshernish, an Innu working for the Tshakapesh Institute, highlighted the challenges and courses of action that have arisen on the path taken by the Innu people to promote the innuaimun (the Innu language).

In the 1970s, the preliminary steps consisted of finding funding and assembling a team to work on the project. Financial contributions from the many government programs available to promote the dissemination of Aboriginal languages in the communities have been essential for the hiring of specialists. The team of about a dozen people included linguists, teachers, writers, publishers, translators and Elders. Afterwards, key people were called upon to discuss with the communities when it was time to make concessions.

After reviewing all the existing written documents in innuaimun, the second step was to analyze all this documentation in order to arrive at a standardized writing system. In these documents, 88 language differences between the communities were found. For each one of them, the steps taken to standardize them were recorded in documents that are now available on the Internet. Their consultation helps to understand what the initial difference was, what solutions were proposed, which communities were affected, as well as the challenges and advantages that motivated the final choice. Ms. Tshernish mentioned that even though the Innu language is an oral tradition, it was important to write the language to ensure its survival. It was also important to record the pitfalls of the standardization process, especially considering that the experts who worked on the language issue are old and their lives are not eternal.

The Innu nation is scattered over the vast nitaskinan, so it was difficult to make compromises on the standardization process when the differences were too great. Despite the oppositions, the Innu nation remained united. Marie Tshernish considers that debates on language must take place to allow all those involved to express their views and make the best choices. During the standardization process, the communities could withdraw or re-enter the process at any time, without preventing the nation from progressing on its path. Language standardization could not be imposed and above all, remain free of any form of violence or coercion. Both participation and learning must remain free and voluntary.

The third and final step taken by the Innu was to create teaching material for elementary and secondary school students and teachers. Communities that did not want to participate in the process could still have access to all the documents produced by the innuaimun standardization team. Today, when we talk about the state of the Innu language, we can easily observe the positive results of the standardization, such as the creation of the Tshakapesh Institute. At the forum on the Innu language held in 2018, all the communities came together to pursue, hand in hand, the collective and ongoing effort to promote the Innu language.



THE FUTURE OF THE ANISHNABE LANGUAGE

As the chief of the Lac-Simon community, Adrienne Jérôme, said, despite all the work that has been done and all the available resources in the Anishnabe communities, «we must not stop there. We must believe and go further. You have to force the door and not let go». Inspired by what has been accomplished by our Innu brothers and sisters, we have the opportunity to standardize our language and then create an institute to protect the language and promote our culture.

This institute could also ensure the preservation of our traditional stories, the *atisokan*. These stories are about the trees, birds and fish that surround us; they have been repeated for generations to keep our Anishnabe values alive.

Also, such an institute could ensure the development of the Algonquin toponymy among elected officials and the non-Indigenous population in general and help re-appropriate the knowledge related to our territory. Our communities could finally create, manage and own their own cultural content to make it accessible to future generations. Digital technology conveys a philosophy of sharing, controlling and accessing data, which is therefore a real challenge facing our nation. Choices have to be made, actions have to be taken, and we have to talk to and understand each other to know how to respect each other in this whole process. We have to get together.

Today, the Anishnabe nation is in a position to decide for itself what it wants to do to revalorize its language. Enhancing our language will contribute to promote our values and culture. In order to ensure the transmission of anishnabemowin to the next generations, it is necessary to write it. The greatest challenge will be to reach agreement on how to transpose from oral to written language. The political and non-political organizations will be able to contribute as allies of the Anishnabe nation to facilitate the initiation of the first step. By pooling our efforts and disseminating our creations, we foster innovation. A first paddling stroke was given with Minwashin in the past year, but the bulk of the work remains to be done.



“I want to thank everybody here, for being here; as we stand together we could build up something. To work hard for it, to use our language every day [...] So much to teach, so much to do and very little time.”

Theresa Maranda



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