

2006

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Mary Jane Norris

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Norris, Mary Jane, "Aboriginal Languages in Canada: Trends and Perspectives on Maintenance and Revitalization" (2006). *Aboriginal Policy Research Consortium International (APRCi)*. 122.
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Aboriginal Languages in Canada: Trends and Perspectives on Maintenance and Revitalization

Mary Jane Norris¹

Introduction

Across Canada, languages indigenous to this country are many and diverse, with some 50 individual languages belonging to 11 Aboriginal language families or isolates,²—10 First Nations, Inuktitut, and Métis.³ These languages reflect a diversity of distinctive histories, cultures, and identities; linked in many ways to family, community, the land, and traditional knowledge. And, these many languages and their communities also differ widely in their state and conditions, with varying degrees of vitality—some flourishing, others endangered, and some close to extinction.

Unlike most Canadians, Aboriginal people are confronted with the issue that many of their languages are in the process of disappearing and nearing extinction. The implications of language maintenance and revitalization are profound for Aboriginal languages. In June 2005, the Task Force on Aboriginal Languages and Cultures presented its report to the Minister of Canadian Heritage, entitled “Towards a New Beginning: A Foundation Report for a Strategy to Revitalize First Nation, Inuit, and Métis Cultures.” This report addresses issues and makes recommendations concerning strategies to preserve, revitalize, and promote Aboriginal languages and cultures.

In its discussions, the Task Force emphasized that a strategy to support First Nation, Inuit, and Métis peoples to revive, maintain, and strengthen their languages must reflect the great variety of language conditions; and that these complexities and variations in language conditions can impact on planning and programs at the local, regional, and national levels. Also, during consultations, the need for a community-driven revitalization strategy was stressed in identifying priorities and developing plans to revitalize their languages, along with the recognition that community needs and plans would differ from community to community, depending on the state of their languages and resources. (Canadian Heritage, 2005, 33, 63).

This paper first discusses the current state of First Nations, Inuit, and Métis languages, together with recent trends, from various perspectives including

communities, cities, regions, and the specific languages themselves. Discussion is necessarily focused on community-level indicators in relation to the need for community-driven language planning and strategies—be they associated with preservation, maintenance, or revitalization. The paper then explores long-term trends over the past 20 years, and future prospects in maintenance and revitalization, germane to language planning, programs, and policies that address the challenges of protecting and promoting Aboriginal languages. The research utilizes data on Aboriginal languages from Canada's censuses from 1981 through to 2001.

State of First Nations, Inuit, and Métis Languages, 2001

Of the 976,000 people who identified as Aboriginal in the 2001 Census, just under a quarter (235,000) said that they had knowledge⁴ of, or ability to converse in, an Aboriginal language. Some 21% of the Aboriginal population learned an Aboriginal language as their first language or mother tongue,⁵ but only 13% reported speaking an Aboriginal language most often in their home. New information from the 2001 census indicates that an additional 5% do use an Aboriginal language regularly, if not mainly, at home.⁶ This may be relevant for endangered languages where the languages are used less frequently.

The 2001 census data reflects the outcomes of long-term language erosion. For the first time since 1981, the total population with an Aboriginal mother tongue declined from 208,600 in 1996 to 203,300 in 2001.⁷ Prior to 1996, the population speaking an Aboriginal language at home was declining, but the mother tongue population still grew. However, data now show that the number of people with an Aboriginal mother tongue is decreasing instead of growing.

State of Languages: Selected Indicators

Home Language of Today: Mother Tongue of Tomorrow

Although population size is an important consideration in determining the health of a spoken language, if it is not being spoken within the family home it is less likely to be the mother tongue of the next generation. The viability or continuity of a language is dependent on it being used on a daily basis, ideally as the major home language (Report of the Royal Commission on Aboriginal Peoples (RCAP) 1996). The prospects of transmitting a particular language as the mother tongue of the next generation can be assessed on the basis of an indicator, the continuity index. The continuity index of a language measures current home use relative to first-language speakers, based on the ratio of the number of people who speak the language at home for every 100 persons who speak that language as their mother tongue.⁸

Declines in Language Continuity

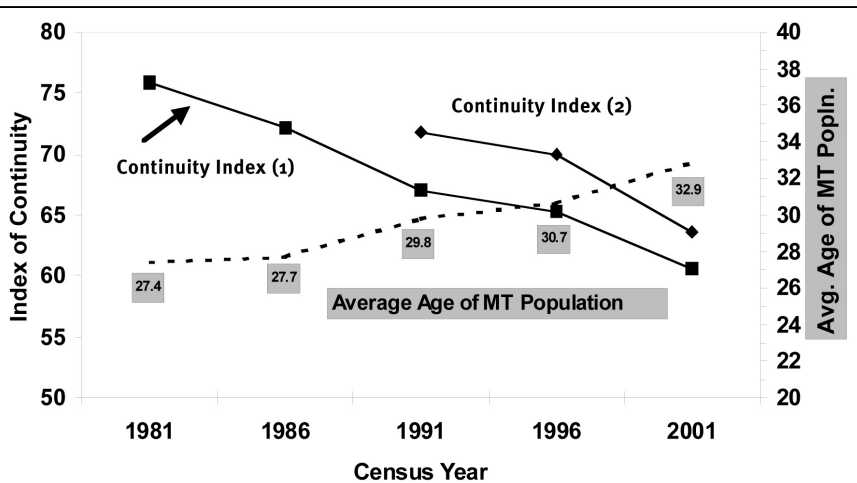
Trends indicate that many Aboriginal languages—even ones with large mother tongue populations—will be confronted with the challenges of continuity for the next generation. For example, even though Ojibway has a sizable population of first-language speakers, representing the third largest Aboriginal mother tongue in Canada today, trends indicate that the number of Ojibway first-language speakers are aging and declining, and that the use of Ojibway as a major home language is diminishing. For most Aboriginal languages, the transmission of Aboriginal mother tongues (first languages) to younger generations is declining due to their decreasing use as major home languages. Overall, the 1981 to 2001 period saw steady erosion in home language use, with decreased continuity, and increasingly older populations of speakers. For language survival, the impact of the long-term decline in continuity, or transmission to children, is now being felt more profoundly than ever.

Children are the future speakers of Aboriginal languages; their language outcomes are critical to the maintenance and revitalization of their languages. Language outcomes of children today have significant implications for the language status of future generations. According to the United Nations Educational Scientific and Cultural Organization (UNESCO), a language is considered endangered if it is not learned by at least 30% of children in a community. The 2001 census indicated that only 15% of Aboriginal children in Canada under the age of five had learned an Indigenous mother tongue. Children are the major source of growth for the Aboriginal mother tongue population in Canada. The decrease in the numbers of first-language speakers since 1996 attests to the impact of declining continuity. Lowered rates of language transmission to younger generations seem to no longer be offset by still relatively high levels of Aboriginal fertility.

The average age of the population with a given Aboriginal mother tongue is a significant indicator of the health and future prospect of languages because it reveals the extent to which it has been transmitted to younger generations. The higher the average age, the fewer young people have learned or still understand the language and the older the people who still speak it. When these older people die, so may the languages.

For Aboriginal languages overall, the average age of the speakers have been increasing. This trend is due to decreasing shares of children acquiring an Aboriginal mother tongue, and, to some extent, to declining fertility rates, which although still high, eventually translate into relatively fewer children. The twenty year period from 1981–2001 saw an erosion of home language use, and an aging population with Aboriginal mother tongues. Over this period, the index of continuity decreased from about 76 to 61; the average age of the mother tongue population rose by 5.5 years to 33 in 2001 (**Figure 11.1** – page 200).

Also, corresponding to long-term trends of declining continuity and aging first-language speakers, the proportion of children in the population with an Aboriginal

Figure 11.1: Aboriginal Languages: Index of Continuity and Average Age of Mother Tongue Population, Canada, 1981–2001

(1) Based on Single responses to language (MT, HL) questions.

(2) Based on Single and Multiple responses.

Source: 1981–2001 Censuses, Norris 2003

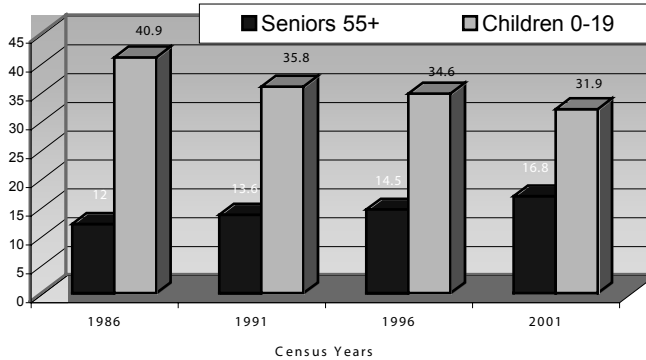
mother tongue has been diminishing. Between 1986 and 2001, the percentage of first-language speakers aged 0 to 19 declined from 41 to 32%. In the opposite direction, the percentage of adults aged 55 and over increased from 12 to 17% (Figure 11.2).

Shifts from First to Second Language Acquisition

Age and continuity factors do not tell the whole story, however, since second language acquisition is prevalent among younger generations. With the declining use of Aboriginal languages as the major home language, younger generations of speakers are increasingly likely to acquire their Aboriginal language as a second language rather than as a mother tongue. For example, the Kutenai language family has one of the oldest mother tongue populations and lowest continuity indexes but the index of ability or second language acquisition⁹ indicates that there are two people (usually younger) who speak the language for every one individual with a mother tongue, suggesting that younger generations are more likely to learn Kutenai as a second language. Second language acquisition patterns are also more highly pronounced off-reserve, especially among youth in urban areas (Norris and Jantzen 2002). It should be noted though, that with respect to second-language acquisition, varying degrees of fluency could be represented among census respondents reporting knowledge of the language—that is, the ability to conduct a conversation in an Aboriginal language—suggesting some caution in considering the implications of second language acquisition for transmission and continuity.

Figure 11.2: Children and Seniors as Percentage of Population With an Aboriginal Mother Tongue, 1986 to 2001

Children's & Seniors' Share of Aboriginal Mother Tongue Population



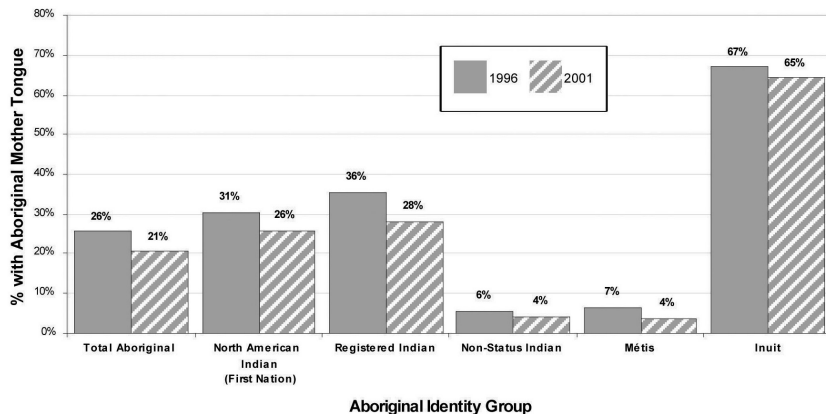
Source: 1986–2001 Censuses, Norris 2003

Most languages over the 1996 to 2001 period, experienced greater growth in the numbers of speakers overall who could carry on a conversation, regardless of how they learned the language, compared to the growth of their first language only speakers. These trends suggest that some languages are gaining speakers at a faster rate through second-language acquisition than through mother tongue transmission. Learning an Aboriginal language as a second language appeared to be on the rise between 1996 and 2001 for most Aboriginal languages, based on the index of second language acquisition. Some languages saw a growth in their numbers of total speakers, while others experienced declines overall because of shrinking mother tongue populations.

First Nations, Inuit, and Métis Languages: Distinct States

Significant differences in the state of First Nations, Inuit, and Métis languages, in their home communities and in cities, reflect in part the differences among these groups in the degree of their urbanization. Groups that live in remote communities or in settlements with concentrated populations of Aboriginal speakers, such as registered Indians on-reserve or Inuit, generally find it easier to retain their language than other groups like non-status Indians or Métis, who have higher proportions of their population residing in urban areas. Census data illustrate the sharp contrast across Aboriginal groups in the state of their languages. For 2001, the proportions of populations with an Aboriginal mother tongue are highest among Inuit (66%), followed by First Nations (26%), and lowest among Métis (4%). First Nations, Inuit, and Métis also differ in the transmission and acquisition of their languages for the next generation. Inuit languages show the

Figure 11.3: Percentage of Aboriginal Identity Population with an Aboriginal Mother Tongue, Canada, 1996 and 2001



Source: 1996 and 2001 Censuses, Norris 2003

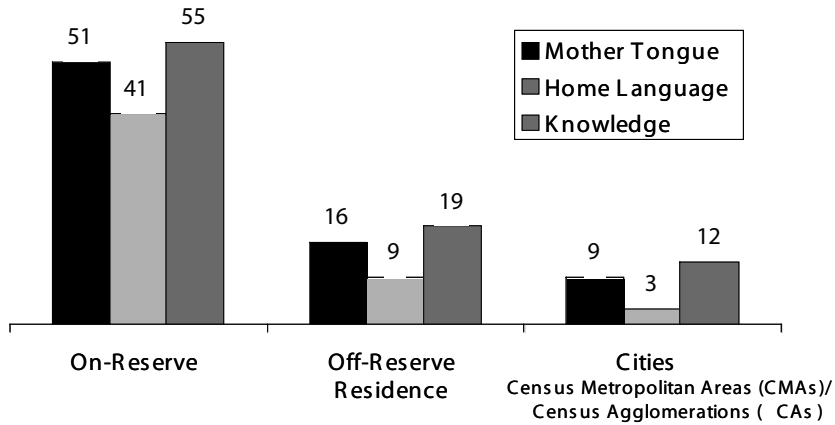
greatest continuity, being most likely to be transmitted as the mother tongue of future generations, followed by First Nations languages. While Inuit speakers are most likely to have learned their languages as their mother tongue, Métis speakers are most likely to learn their languages as second languages. (Norris and Jantzen 2002). Despite their differences, First Nations, Inuit, and Métis languages experienced similar trends between 1996 and 2001, of declining shares of populations with an Aboriginal mother tongue (Figure 11.3), decreased continuity, and increased second language acquisition.

The State of Aboriginal Languages Within Communities and Cities

Aboriginal languages appear to fare much better within Aboriginal communities as opposed to outside, especially in larger urban environments. The transmission of Aboriginal languages as a mother tongue from parent to child is clearly jeopardized in an urban environment given the small share of Aboriginal persons speaking an Aboriginal language at home, and findings suggest that urban Aboriginal people continue to be confronted with considerable challenges in maintaining their Aboriginal languages where the dominant languages (English or French) prevail (RCAP 1996; Norris and Jantzen 2002). The 2001 census suggests overall continued patterns of erosion of Aboriginal language use and maintenance within cities.

Aboriginal communities, including First Nations reserves and northern Inuit communities, can serve as enclaves for the maintenance and survival of their languages, especially those with sizable mother tongue populations and high

Figure 11.4: Percentage of Aboriginal Identity Population with Aboriginal Mother Tongue, Home Language or Knowledge by Place of Residence, Canada, 1996



Source: 1996 Census, Norris 2003

continuity. In 1996, half of the Aboriginal population residing in reserve communities had an Aboriginal mother tongue. Some 55% had the ability to speak an Aboriginal language, and nearly 40% spoke their Aboriginal language most often at home. In sharp contrast, much smaller proportions of Aboriginal people residing in cities had an Aboriginal mother tongue (9%), spoke their language as the major home language (3%), or had the ability to converse in their language (12%) (Figure 11.4).

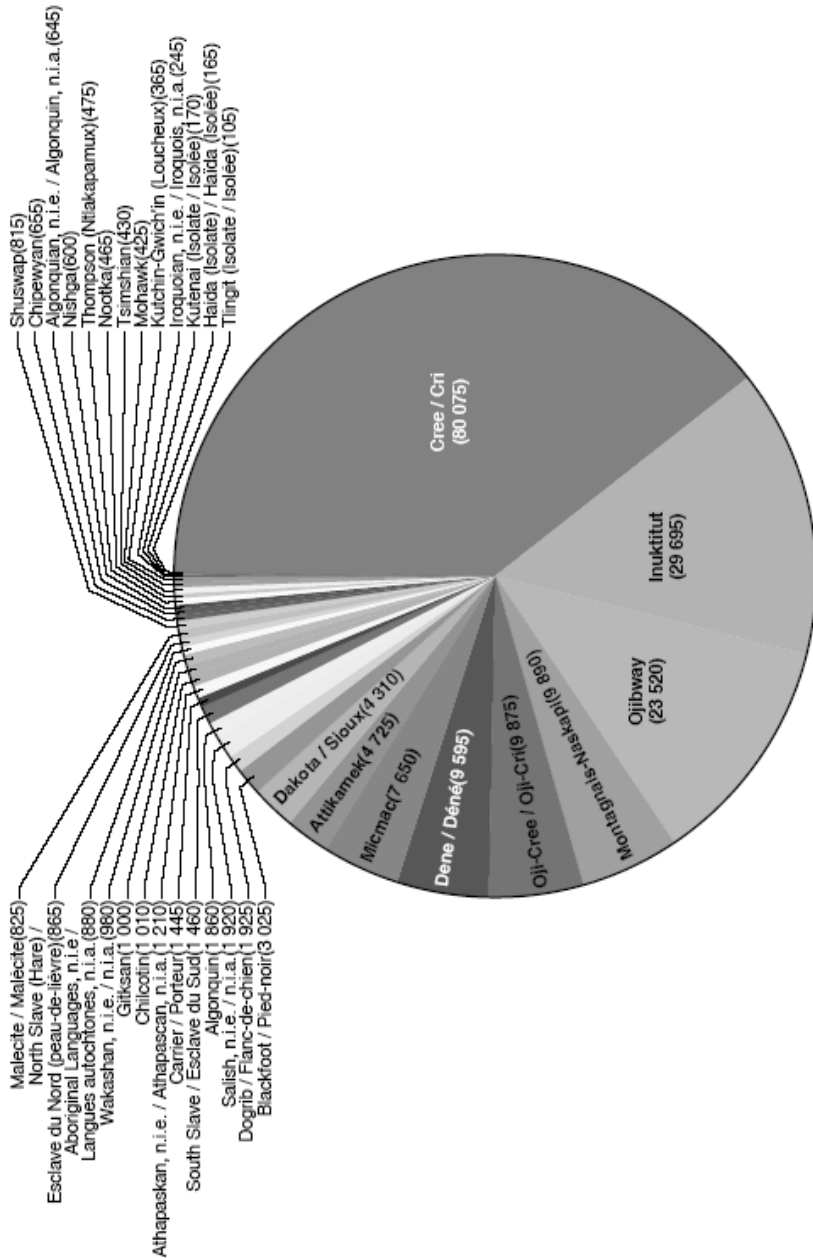
Yet, language situations of communities can differ significantly in their outlook depending on their location, degree of remoteness, or urbanization (even among the same language). The more viable languages tend to be spoken in isolated and/or well-organized Aboriginal communities with large numbers of resident speakers. Compared to speakers in Aboriginal communities, those in cities are less likely to use their languages as the major language in the home, and are also more likely to learn their language as a second language.

The next section explores the state and conditions of the many and diverse Aboriginal languages from a number of different perspectives.

Diversity: Perspectives on State, Community, Urbanization, and Regions

Language planning, strategies, programs, and policies associated with the promotion, preservation, maintenance, and revitalization of the many and diverse Aboriginal languages in Canada need to be developed from a variety of perspectives. A range of perspectives and measures are examined in relation to indi-

Figure 11.5: Percentage of Aboriginal Identity Population¹⁰ with Aboriginal Mother Tongue, Home Language or Knowledge by Place of Residence, Canada, 1996



Source: 2001 Census, updated from Norris 1998,2005

vidual languages: the size of speaker populations and state of intergenerational transmission, the numbers of communities, the degree of urbanization, and regional characteristics. From this multi-dimensional approach, a more complete picture is emerging about the range and extent of maintenance and revitalization requirements at the level of specific languages and their communities. Analyses of the size of languages and their shares according to these different perspectives could have significant implications for planning and allocation of resources associated with various language revitalization strategies.

Viable and Endangered Aboriginal languages

Aboriginal languages differ significantly in their state, and in their trends and outlook, and as such they can be classified accordingly. On the basis of a classification by Kinkade (1991), they can be divided into five groupings: already extinct; near extinction; endangered; viable with a small population base; and viable with a large population. Languages classified as near extinction¹¹ may be beyond the possibility of revival. As only a few elderly people speak these languages, there may only be enough time to record and archive them. Endangered languages are spoken by enough people to make survival a possibility, given sufficient community interest and concerted educational programs. They tend to have small populations, older speakers, and lower rates of language transmission. Many of the smaller languages, often with fewer than 1,000 persons, have very low prospects for ongoing transmission across generations. This is particularly relevant to the situation in British Columbia where many of the languages found there have very low prospects for continuity, and are either endangered (e.g. Nishga, Haida) or near extinction. Viable small languages generally have more than 1,000 speakers, and are spoken in isolated or well-organized communities with strong self-awareness. In these communities, language is considered one of the important marks of identity. A language can be considered viable if its continuity is high and it has relatively young speakers, for example, Attikamek and Dene. Viable large languages have a population base large enough that long-term survival is likely assured. Cree, Inuktitut, and Ojibway are the only viable languages with large population bases. Large or small, viable languages tend to have relatively young speakers, compared to endangered languages. Census data are available for viable and endangered languages, but are not available separately for languages near extinction owing to their small numbers of speakers.

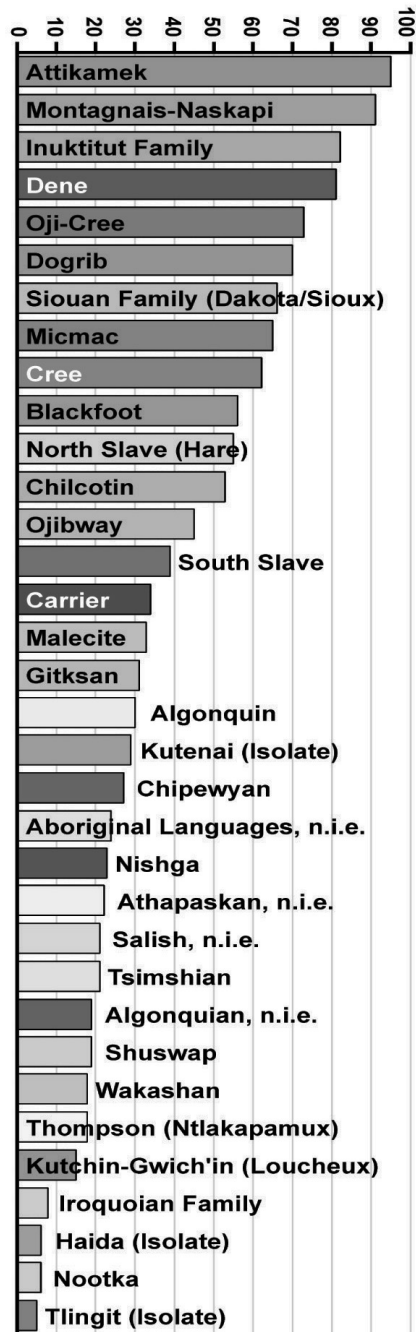
The following provides a summary of the state of these viable and endangered languages along selected dimensions of population size, continuity, number of communities, and urbanization to illustrate how individual languages differ in their situations depending on the perspective considered.

By Mother Tongue Population, 2001 Census

In Canada's 2001 census, 203,300 persons reported an Aboriginal language as their mother tongue. The Algonquin, Inuktitut, and Athapaskan language families

Figure 11.6: Index of Continuity by Aboriginal Languages, Canada, 2001

Index (No. of persons with home language per 100 with mother tongue)



Source: 2001 Census, Updated from Norris 1998, Norris and Jantzen, 2002

have the largest mother tongue populations; together, they represent 94% of the total Aboriginal mother tongue population. In contrast, the eight other language families account for the remaining 6% of the Aboriginal mother tongue population, including many smaller languages in British Columbia. According to the 2001 census, the five largest individual Aboriginal languages, all considered to be viable, are Cree (39%), Inuktitut (15%), Ojibway (12%), Montagnais-Naskapi (5%), and Dene (5%), which, when combined, account for 76% of the total population of Aboriginal mother tongue speakers (**Figure 11.5** – page 204).

By Strength—Continuity of Language, 2001 Census

As noted previously, the state of a language is not just linked to population size; continuity is also an indicator of vitality. From the perspective of intergenerational transmission, a different picture emerges compared to population size alone. Those languages with the greatest prospects for transmission as the first language of the next generation are some of the smaller viable languages: Attikamek, Montagnais-Naskapi, Inuktitut, Dene, and Oji-Cree (**Figure 11.6**). These continuity measures suggest that the two larger languages—Cree and Ojibway—are less likely to be passed on as a mother tongue compared to these smaller viable languages.

By Number of Communities,¹² 2001 Census

From the perspective of the sheer number of communities, clearly a different picture emerges with respect to British Columbia. Although BC languages are characterized by small populations and weak prospects for continuity, they are nevertheless many in number, and associated with a disproportionately large number of communities where the languages, are or have been, spoken. The five languages with the largest number of communities, out of a total of 879 communities in Canada, are Cree (23%), all Salish languages (17%), Ojibway (16%), Inuktitut (6%), and Micmac (4%). These five languages account for 60% of all communities in which an Aboriginal language is spoken or was the original language.

By Urban Areas, 2001 Census

Not all Aboriginal people reside in predominantly Aboriginal communities. Close to 39,000 people, or almost one in five who reported speaking an Aboriginal mother tongue, resided in major cities across Canada. In terms of the urban situation, clearly not all Aboriginal languages are similar in their degree of urbanization. For example, even though Inuktitut comprises the second largest share (15%) of Canada's Aboriginal mother tongue population, only 3% of Inuktitut first language speakers reside in cities. In 2001, the five languages comprising the largest populations and shares of first-language speakers residing in urban areas were: Cree (36%), Ojibway (18%), Micmac (10%), Montagnais-Naskapi (6%), and Salish (4%).

Regional Perspectives: Distribution of First Nations, Inuit, and Métis Languages

Regional perspectives are important because the size, diversity, and state of First Nations, Inuit, and Métis languages differ significantly across provinces and territories. This has implications for understanding differing regional needs in language maintenance and revitalization. The current geographic distribution and size of Aboriginal languages, and a variety of geographical, cultural and historical factors reflect the different situation of First Nations, Inuit, and Métis languages. First Nations languages comprise the vast majority of Aboriginal languages spoken in Canada, with their more populous languages tending to be the most widely dispersed across Canada. Algonquian, the largest language family, extends from the Atlantic region to the Rocky Mountains. Although home to at least half¹³ of Canada's Aboriginal languages, British Columbia accounts for just 6% of first language speakers in Canada. Languages spoken by Métis people are mainly concentrated in Manitoba, Saskatchewan, and Alberta, and to some extent in parts of the NWT, British Columbia, Ontario, and Labrador. These include Dene (Athapaskan family), Cree and other Algonquian languages, and Michif, considered the historical and cultural language of the Métis. Manitoba (37,085), Quebec (36,535) and Saskatchewan (33,330) have the largest populations of Aboriginal first language speakers. Combined, they represent just over half (52%) of the 203,000 people in Canada who reported speaking an Aboriginal language as their first language. Smaller populations of first language speakers are found in Alberta (13%) and Ontario (10%). Inuktitut is distributed widely across northern Canada, including northern Northwest Territories, Nunavut, northern Quebec, and Labrador.

Linguistic Diversity in Provinces and Territories: From Few to Many Different Languages

The range in the regional diversity of Aboriginal languages is considerable: from only one or two Aboriginal languages spoken in some provinces/territories to a multitude in British Columbia. In both Nunavut (Inuktitut) and Nova Scotia (Micmac), practically all the first-language speakers speak just one language, making them the two most linguistically homogenous areas in Canada. In most provinces, the three largest Aboriginal languages generally account for at least 80% of the province's total population of first-language speakers. In contrast, in British Columbia where 20 languages make up the total population with an Aboriginal mother tongue, the three largest Aboriginal languages—Salish, Cree, and Carrier—account for only 38% of the province's first-language speakers. The next most diverse area is the Northwest Territories, where 10 different Aboriginal languages account for 67% of that territory's population of first-language speakers.

Provinces and Territories Differ Broadly in the State of their Languages

Various census-based measures and indicators demonstrate the substantial differences that exist across provinces and territories in the state, maintenance, and revitalization of Aboriginal languages. In 2001, about one in five Aboriginal people (21%) in Canada reported an Aboriginal mother tongue. Regionally this share ranged from a low of 7% in British Columbia to a high of 84% in Nunavut. Between these extremes, nearly one in two (46%) Aboriginal people in Quebec reported an Aboriginal mother tongue, followed by about 25–30% of Aboriginal populations in each of the NWT, Saskatchewan, Manitoba, and Nova Scotia.

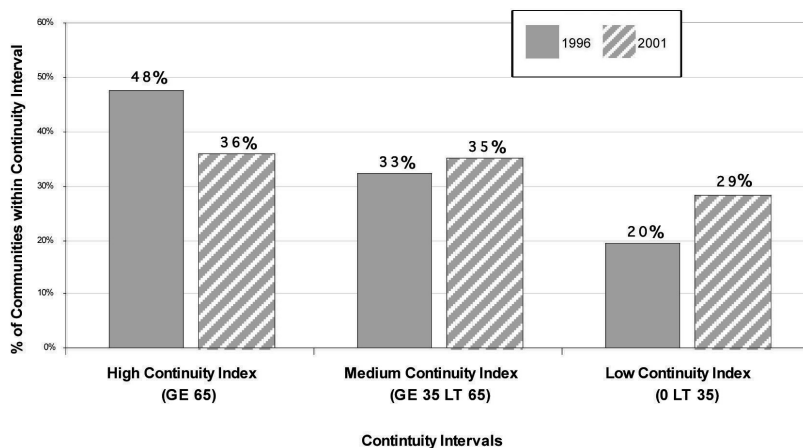
In some regions where intergenerational transmission remains strong, children are still highly likely to learn an Aboriginal language as their mother tongue, and less so as a second language. Owing to the linguistic vitality of languages like Inuktitut, Attikamek, and Montagnais-Naskapi, practically all the speakers of Aboriginal languages in Quebec, Nunavut, and Labrador have learned their language as a mother tongue. And, it appears that younger generations continue to do so, having some of the youngest first-language speakers in Canada, with ages ranging on average from the mid- to late-twenties. In sharp contrast, some of the oldest populations of first-language speakers are found in British Columbia and Yukon, averaging over 40 years of age. For many of the endangered languages in these areas, the prospects of being transmitted as the mother tongue of the next generation are extremely low, although it appears that young people may be learning some of these languages as their second language.

The next section explores most recent short-term trends over the 1996–2001 period for different Aboriginal languages with respect to their continuity, transmission, and acquisition.

Recent Trends in Selected Viable and Endangered Aboriginal Languages: 1996–2001

Between 1996 and 2001, the average age of mother tongue speakers rose, even in cases where an Aboriginal language is not the only mother tongue of the respondent, but can be a “multiple.”¹⁴ As with long-term trends, aging was less pronounced for those languages that had been spoken frequently at home. For example, the average age of first-language speakers increased only slightly, remaining in the early- to mid- twenties, for the Montagnais-Naskapi, Attikamek, and Inuktitut languages, with only slight declines in their high continuity over the 1996–2001 period, (from 94 to 91; 97 to 95; and 86 to 82 respectively). By contrast, those languages that experienced a steady long-term decline in home use and in continuity, exhibited significant aging of their first language speakers. Even larger languages, such as Ojibway, experienced a sharp increase in the average age of first language speakers, from 36 to 40 years between 1996 and 2001.

Figure 11.7: Distribution of Aboriginal Communities* by Continuity Index of Aboriginal Language, Canada, 1996 and 2001



*Number of comparable communities between 1996 and 2001 = 390.

Source: 1996 and 2001 censuses, updated from Norris 2002, 2003

Intergenerational Transmission Contributes to Growth of Mother-tongue Population

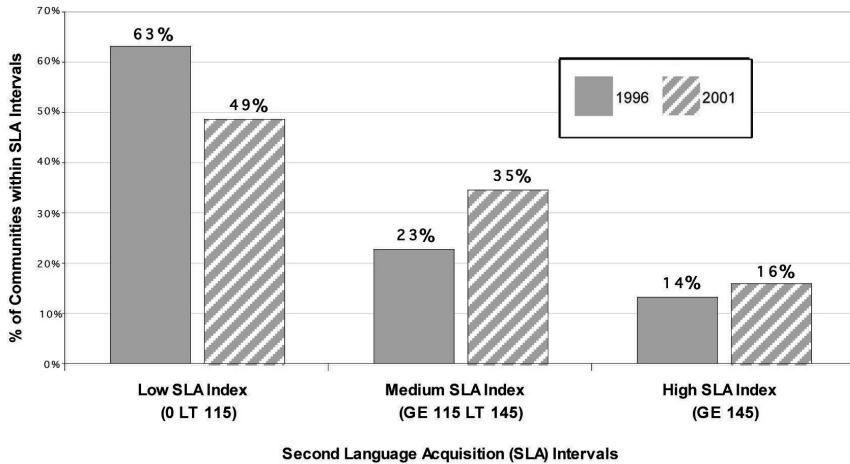
While the population with an Aboriginal mother tongue declined overall between 1996 and 2001, some languages experienced growth in the number of speakers, with the strongest growth observed for those with high continuity levels of at least 80. In 2001, a total of 29,700 people reported Inuktitut as their mother tongue, up 7% from 1996. Even stronger growth in mother tongue populations was observed for the smaller high continuity languages such as Attikamek (18%), and Montagnais-Naskapi (9%). Other languages that showed increases in mother tongue included Dene, Micmac, Oji-Cree, and Dakota/Sioux.

While it is not surprising that populations of endangered mother tongues shrunk over the 1996–2001 period, it perhaps seemed more unexpected that some of the larger more viable languages, like Cree and Ojibway, also decreased, by 3% and 10% respectively. This reflects the impact of long-term declines in continuity and in aging first language speakers, and demonstrates that population size is not the only contributing factor to the health and vitality of a language.

Trends: Transition from First-language Transmission to Second Language Acquisition

Between 1996 and 2001, there was greater growth in the number of people who were able to converse in their language, irrespective of whether the language was learned as a first or second language, compared to the growth of first language speakers. These patterns suggest greater growth among those who reported learning an Aboriginal language later in life—that is, as a second language. For

Figure 11.8: Distribution of Aboriginal Communities* by Index of Second Language Acquisition, for Aboriginal Language, Canada, 1996 and 2001



*Number of comparable communities between 1996 and 2001 = 390

Source: 1996 and 2001 censuses, updated from Norris 2002, 2003

those languages that experienced declines in their mother tongue populations, the extent of the overall decline in speakers tended to be less, being offset by the addition of second-language learners. For Attikamek, between 1996 and 2001, the population with the ability to speak the language increased 21%, compared to 18.5% for its mother tongue population. Similarly for Dene, knowledge of the language increased 10%, while mother tongue speakers increased only 6%. For Blackfoot, while the mother tongue population declined by 27%, the total population of speakers declined to a lesser extent, by 20%, over the same period, with losses offset by the addition of second-language speakers.

Trends in second language learning are increasing, especially among endangered languages, and are most pronounced among youth. For example, among the smaller Salish languages in British Columbia, there are signs that revitalization is occurring among youth. By 2001 the second-language index increased to 156 from 132 in 1996, while the average age of all Salish speakers (including second language learners) is notably younger at 42 years of age, compared to 50 years for the population with a Salish mother tongue.

Community Perspectives on Maintenance and Revitalization

Clearly, the census information demonstrates that Aboriginal communities play a critical role in the maintenance and revitalization of their languages. Yet many communities have stated that their languages are eroding, mirroring the trends of declining continuity and diminishing prospects of intergenerational transmission,

and shifts towards second-language learning. As with their languages, this transition is just beginning for some communities, is well underway in others, and completed in some communities, especially for endangered languages that are being learned increasingly as second languages.

Community Shifts 1996–2001: Lowered Continuity, Increased Second-language Acquisition

The prospects for a community's language being transmitted as a mother tongue can be assessed using the continuity index, while the extent to which the community language is being learned as a second language can be assessed using the index of second-language acquisition. Comparisons between 1996 and 2001 for the same set of comparable communities (with a minimum mother tongue population of 30 in 2001 and enumerated in both 1996 and 2001)¹⁵ showed an overall shift to lower continuity; that is, decreased prospects for intergenerational transmission, and over the same period, an overall shift towards second-language acquisition. (Figures 11.7 and 11.8 – pages 210 and 211).

In 1996, practically half, 49% of communities experienced relatively “high” levels of continuity (indices of greater than or equal to 65); another 29% experienced “medium” continuity (indices between 35 and less than 65); and 22% experienced “low” continuity levels (indices of less than 35). By 2001, the percent of communities in the “high” continuity category fell significantly to just 34%, while in contrast, the “medium” and “low” categories of continuity saw increased shares of 38% and 28% respectively. Corresponding to this overall shift in the distribution, while many communities (59%) remained within the same range of continuity levels over this period, another 30% shifted into ranges of lower continuity, while 11% saw shifts into higher ranges.

Similarly, in 1996, with respect to the index of second-language acquisition, close to two out of three communities (64%) had “low” second-language acquisition indices (less than 115), implying that most community speakers had learned their language as a mother tongue. Another 28% of communities fell into “medium” ranges (greater than or equal to 115 and less than 145), while the remaining 8.5% displayed high indices (greater than 145), suggesting that a significant proportion of their speakers would have acquired their Aboriginal language as a second language. By 2001 these distributions shifted notably, such that now less than half, 45%, of communities had measures of second-language acquisition in the low range; in contrast the percent of communities with second language measures in the “medium” category increased to 38% while the percent with relatively “high” levels of second-language acquisition doubled from 8.5% to 17%. Corresponding to this shift in the overall distribution, second-language indexes remained within the same range for most communities (54%) while 34% of communities saw their indexes shift into higher ranges of second-language acquisition, with the remaining 13% shifting into lower ranges.

Community-driven Revitalization Strategy

In the Task Force report, those consulted about a community-driven revitalization strategy stressed that the community must play a central role in revitalization, and that planning should be community-driven, by the needs and aspirations of each First Nations, Inuit, and Métis community. The involvement and participation of all community members from all age groups are required if a language revitalization plan is to be realistic and achievable.

It was recognized that plans would vary from community to community, depending on the state of the language and the resources available in each. Some languages may have a large number of speakers and be widely spoken: here efforts would focus on maintaining and expanding the language. In other communities, only a few elderly speakers may be remaining; efforts here would need to concentrate on preserving the language (Canadian Heritage 2005, 63–64).

The Task Force pointed out that few fluent speakers are left in many communities, and that it is not unusual for a language to be spoken in only one or two communities within the territory in which the language had been spoken, especially in British Columbia. Even languages with many speakers encounter difficulties, such as losing the names and uses of local flowers, and forgetting ways of describing kinship relationships (Canadian Heritage 2005, 65).

From a planning and policy perspective, demographic research on the conditions and characteristics of Aboriginal languages at the community level can help inform the development of language strategies, through the use of various measures and indicators relative to the type and extent of language-related activities—be it preservation, revitalization or promotion across First Nations, Inuit, and Métis communities.

Communities in Transition: A Continuum of Transmission, Acquisition, and Decline

From the 2001 census data, 879 communities have been identified as Aboriginal—specifically First Nations, Inuit, and Métis, and by major language, based on criteria first established using 1996 census data (Norris 1998; Norris and Jantzen 2002 a&b). Communities were classified by language states using various indicators of maintenance and revitalization. These indicators included: the community's continuity index cross-classified by its second-language index, by population size of first-language speakers, by ages of all speakers, and by first-language speakers. Apart from population size, the other indicators were restricted to the 445 communities with a minimum mother tongue population of 30 or more first-language speakers. The measures are not reliable for communities with small population sizes. In summary, all 879 communities are classified into nine mutually exclusive and exhaustive categories, which yield a continuum of categories of communities by differing language states. These categories range from “communities with flourishing languages and young first language speakers” (category 1) to

“communities with no first-language speakers” (category 8). Category 9 consists of those communities for which census data is unavailable. These categorizations may provide some insight into the type, range and extent of appropriate community-level interventions and activities. The categories and demographic implications are summarized in the following:

1. Communities with Flourishing Languages, Young First-language Speakers (116)

There are 116 communities in this category. The language situation for communities in this category could be considered to be ideal in terms of language maintenance and transmission. Revitalization does not appear to be an issue at this time. About one out of every four communities with a mother tongue population of at least 30 or more speakers fit this category. These 116 communities can generally be characterized as having “high continuity, low second-language acquisition,” with large populations of first-language speakers, numbering 500 or more, and mainly very young, with average ages of between 15 and 24 in about half of communities. Children in these communities learn their language almost exclusively as a mother tongue. Communities in this category are First Nations (70%), Inuit (27%), and Métis (3%), with five languages accounting for nearly 90% of the communities: Cree (34%), Inuktitut (27%), Dene (10%), Montagnais–Naskapi (8%), and Ojibway (6%). Ojibway communities are under-represented in this category given their 16% share of communities; while Inuktitut speaking communities are over-represented with a share of 6%. These communities are concentrated in the eastern Arctic, Quebec, and the interior and northern areas of the Prairie provinces. None are found in British Columbia, or in southern Ontario.

2. Communities Beginning Transition: From First- to Second-language Acquisition Among Youth and Young Adults; Middle Aged First-language Speakers (39)

The 39 communities in this category can be characterized as having “high continuity, medium to high second-language acquisition,” with medium to large Aboriginal mother tongue populations (between 100 and 500 first language speakers), who are mainly middle aged (between 35 and 54 years of age). The community’s language has been learned mainly as a mother tongue, but there are also beginning signs of shifts from first-language transmission to second language acquisition among youth and young adults. Nearly all (97%) of communities in this category are First Nations. Some 85% of these communities are accounted for by three major language groupings: Cree (36%), the Athapaskan family of languages (28%), and Ojibway (28%). The shares of Ojibway and Athapaskan communities in this category are disproportionately high. Most communities tend to be located in the more southerly Prairie province areas and in the Northwest Territories. None are found in British Columbia, and few exist further east than Manitoba.

Owing to their demographics, these communities have a high prospect for revitalization of their language, especially for young adults in their child-bearing years, who, if motivated, are likely to transmit their language to their children, as a first language.

3. Communities Already in Transition: Decline in First Language, but Young Adults Acquiring Second Language; Middle Aged First-language Speakers (116)

The 116 communities in this category are characterized as having medium continuity, and medium to high second-language acquisition, with a medium to large mother tongue population, and predominately middle aged first-language speakers. The community's language had been learned previously as a mother tongue, as evidenced by older first-language speakers, but there are indications that the transition from first to second language acquisition is well underway, and has been occurring for some time among young adults. Communities include First Nations (83%), Métis (12%), and Inuit (5%). While about 64% of communities are Cree (44%) or Ojibway (19%), communities from the Salish language family are also represented. Largely concentrated in the Prairies provinces, these communities are also found in parts of British Columbia, all Territories, Ontario, and Atlantic Canada.

From a demographic perspective, given the long-term decline in mother tongue transmission already evident in older generations, second-language acquisition will become an increasingly important factor in offsetting declines in first language transmission.

4. Communities That Have Completed Transition: Predominately Second-language Acquisition; Middle Aged and Older Speakers (81)

The 81 communities in this category are characterized as having low continuity, and medium to high second-language acquisition, with small (between 30 to 100 persons) Aboriginal mother tongue populations and many middle aged and older speakers. In these communities, children are no longer learning the Aboriginal language as their mother tongue, since many of the older first-language speakers are beyond child-bearing years, and the language is being spoken infrequently in the home. Learning the language as a second language appears to have been occurring for some time, particularly among middle aged adults. Communities include First Nations (82%), Métis (12%), and Inuit (6%), and represent a number of languages, including Cree (28%), Ojibway (19%), Inuktitut (6%), and some endangered languages such as Salish (10%) and Wakashan (7%). These languages tend to be distributed across all the Western provinces, from Manitoba westward, the Northwest and Nunavut Territories, southern Ontario, and Atlantic Canada.

Intergenerational transmission has clearly declined. Given that most of the remaining first-language speakers are older and beyond the parenting years,

prospects for transmitting the community language as the mother tongue of the next generation are low. From a demographic perspective, this would suggest that languages in these communities would be increasingly likely to be learned as second languages, especially among younger generations. Also, these communities have older populations of first-language speakers—implying that community elders could be potential sources for language learning.

5. Communities in Decline: Decline in First-language Transmission, No Second-language Acquisition; Middle Aged First-language Speakers (50)

There are 50 communities in this category. They can be generally characterized as having medium continuity and low second-language acquisition, with medium to large Aboriginal mother tongue population, and mostly older middle aged speakers. The language is still learned to some extent as a mother tongue, but relatively little second-language acquisition is occurring, even among younger generations. There are no indications of second-language acquisition among any age group even as mother-tongue transmission declines. Communities comprise First Nations (88%), Métis (8%), and Inuit (4%), and two thirds of the communities are Cree (44%) and Ojibway (22%). They are located mainly in the Prairie provinces and in the interior of British Columbia.

From a demographic perspective, intergenerational transmission is in decline, because the mother tongue populations of these communities are aging. Second-language speakers, even among younger generations, are not making up the number of speakers.

6. Communities Where Languages are Most Endangered and Fading: No First- or Second-language Acquisition; Few and Aging Speakers (43)

There are 43 communities in this category. They can be generally characterized as low continuity, low second-language acquisition. The community's language is not being transmitted as a mother tongue, or as a second language. Aboriginal mother tongue populations tend to be older and small, between 30 and 100 first-language speakers. All speakers, not only first language learners, are relatively old, and it appears that few in these communities are acquiring their language as either a first or second language. The distribution of these communities includes First Nations (86%), Inuit (9%), and Métis (5%). Their linguistic composition is heterogeneous, with representation not only from endangered language communities, but also from communities with languages that otherwise are viable overall such as Inuktitut. Nevertheless these communities are struggling. These communities include: Cree (28%), Ojibway (12%), Salish family (14%), Inuktitut (9%), and Tsimshian (6%). Communities tend to be located mainly in British Columbia, the western Arctic, and in southern areas of the Prairie provinces.

From a demographic perspective, these communities face the prospect of ongoing decline in the numbers of speakers. It appears that their languages are not being learned as either first or second languages. The situation is urgent, particularly for those communities with already endangered languages, where the few speakers that are left are probably elderly.

7. Communities with Few First-language Speakers (174)

Among the 619 communities with Aboriginal mother tongue populations, 174, or 28%, have very small populations of less than 30 persons reporting an Aboriginal first language. These communities are liable to be losing most if not all of their first-language speakers over the next few years. Almost all of these communities (95%) are First Nations, and most have endangered languages. These communities are concentrated mainly in British Columbia, and in some of the more urban areas of Saskatchewan and Ontario. About 30% of the communities that have very few first language speakers are Salish, a disproportionately high share considering that 16% of all Aboriginal communities are Salish. Conversely, there are few communities in this category with the more viable languages.

From a demographic perspective, intergenerational transmission is not viable, and the remaining speakers are few in number and probably elderly. Hence, preserving the language would likely be a major consideration.

8. Communities with No First-language Speakers (90)

No Aboriginal mother tongues were reported in 90 of the 709 Aboriginal communities that were enumerated in the 2001 census—in other words, nearly 13% of enumerated communities have no first language speakers. Practically all of these communities (98%) are First Nations and are concentrated in British Columbia. Most of these communities are associated with the Salish family of languages¹⁶—again emphasizing their high degree of endangerment¹⁷. This category raises more questions than answers with respect to the types of appropriate interventions. How many of them have recently lost their first language speakers? How many have simply not had any speakers for decades? For example, there are at least 40 communities that did not report any Aboriginal mother tongue population in 2001, but did have first language speakers in 1996. About half of these communities are from the smaller endangered Salish language categories. From a demographic perspective, apart from the obvious loss in speakers, it is difficult to assess the long-term implications for community prospects.

9. Unknown: Communities with No Census Data on State of Their Language (170)

Census language data are not available for about one in five (19%) of the 879 Aboriginal communities. In the 2001 census, 170 communities either did not participate, that is they were incompletely enumerated, or their data were suppressed

due to data quality issues. Consequently, there is little if any information from the census about the language situation of these particular communities. These missing communities are largely First Nations (82%) and Métis (18%). There are no Inuit communities in this category—consequently we have an accurate as possible picture from the census for most Inuktitut language communities. Though the affected communities are relatively widespread, not all languages and regions are equally affected. For example, none of the Mohawk-Iroquoian-speaking¹⁸ communities participated in the census, and other missing communities include Ojibway (25%), Salish family (22%), and Cree (12%). Thus, gaps exist in the community picture for some of these languages, and the entire picture is lost in the case of the Mohawk/Iroquoian family. Regions with communities most affected by incomplete enumeration/suppression include Atlantic Canada, Ontario, Saskatchewan, Alberta, and British Columbia.

Clearly these categories of “community language conditions” reveal significant variations by Aboriginal groups, languages and regions. Consequently, language planning and strategies need to take into account these complexities and variations in order to gain insights into effective courses of action across First Nations, Inuit, and Métis communities and languages. Finally, it should be emphasized that the role of this analysis and exercise is strictly informative—not prescriptive—in its approach. The community ultimately identifies the priorities and determines the appropriate course of language strategies. The objective here is to provide a demographic overview of language conditions of languages at the community level, through a variety of indicators that can inform language planning at all levels—community, regional and national.

The next section explores long-term trends in intergenerational transmission, examines factors and processes underlying those trends, especially in relation to family and community, and, based on their implications, considers the outlook for the maintenance and revitalization of Aboriginal languages.

Long-Term Trends 1981–2001 and Outlook

Trends in Continuity and Aging for Viable and Endangered Languages: 1981–2001

Declining Continuity for Most Languages, Especially Endangered

Over the 20-year period from 1981 to 2001, most Aboriginal languages, both viable and endangered, have experienced long-term declines in their continuity.¹⁹ Although most languages experienced steady erosion in linguistic continuity, endangered ones suffered the most. Several of the more viable languages, such as Inuktitut, appear to have retained their linguistic vitality. Even the larger viable languages like Cree and Ojibway posted steady long-term declines in the intergenerational transmission of their mother tongues. Continuity indices for Cree

declined from 78 in 1981 to 58 in 2001. The same indices for Ojibway declined even more sharply, from 66 to 39. In contrast, the continuity of Inuktitut appears to be relatively stable, showing only a slight decline to 82 by 2001.

Among endangered languages, the isolates of Haida, Kutenai, and Tlingit have experienced ever-decreasing prospects of transmission to the next generation, declining from already low 1981 levels of continuity of 40, 50, and 30, respectively, to practically nil by 2001. These languages now have fewer than 200 first language speakers. Within the home, only 50 people report Kutenai as their major home language, and virtually no one speaks Haida or Tlingit at home.

By 2001, for every 100 speakers with an Aboriginal mother tongue, viable language groups have an average index of nearly 70, compared with 30 or less among endangered groups.

Aging Mother Tongues: Seniors are the Main First-language Speakers of Endangered Languages

The average age of language speakers and rates of population aging vary significantly due to differences in intergenerational transmission of languages and fertility. For viable languages, the average ages of mother tongue populations tend to fall within the young adult ages, between 25 and 40 years of age. For endangered languages, the average ages of mother tongue speakers tend to approach the age range of seniors, from 50 to 60 years of age and over. Not only do viable languages have younger populations, the average age of these groups also rises more slowly than that of endangered languages.

Over the period 1981 to 2001, the average age of the Salish mother tongue population rose from 42 to 52 years; for Wakashan, from 40 to 56 years; and for Tshimshian, from 33 to 63 years. High rates of intergenerational transmission of Inuktitut, combined with Inuit fertility rates, contribute to only a slight shift in the average age of speakers, from 23 to 25 years over the past 20 years. On the other hand, the average age of Cree speakers is older and has increased from 26 years in 1981 to 33 by 2001. These trends in aging speakers reflect the long-term decline in the continuity of the Cree language.

The actual process and dynamics of sustaining language transmission and acquisition among children over the long-term are explored next within the context of families and communities—critical considerations in understanding transmission of Aboriginal languages to the next generation.

Intergenerational Transmission: Critical to Long-term Health and Vitality of Languages

Ensuring the transmission of a language as the mother tongue of the next generation is vital for both maintenance and revitalization of an Indigenous language. This is especially true, as Aboriginal languages cannot rely on immigration to

sustain the population of speakers. Intergenerational transmission contributes to the maintenance of viable languages in communities where the Aboriginal language is the mother tongue as well as the main language of communication.

For endangered languages, in communities that are undergoing a shift to the dominant language, the capacity to transmit a language from one generation to the next must be restored. Increasing the number of second language speakers is part of the process of revitalization, and may go some way towards slowing down the rapid erosion of endangered languages. Nevertheless, it remains critical to increase the number of first language speakers, and to restore transmission of that language from one generation to the next.

Sustaining Intergenerational Transmission and Revitalization: Families and Communities

Both families and communities play critical roles and provide support in intergenerational transmission, maintenance, and revitalization of Aboriginal languages. Research shows that language acquisition in children, including the extent to which they acquire the Aboriginal mother tongue of their parent(s), is related to various family and community factors such as home and community use of languages, intermarriage/parenting, family patterns, and residence within an Aboriginal community or urban area. Over the life cycle, language loss and decline in home use, and hence transmission, is most likely to occur during the important 'family formation' years as youth leave home, enter the labour force, marry, start families or move to a larger urban environment. (Norris and Jantzen 2002, 2003; Norris 1998, 2003)

Transmission from Parent to Child: Mother Tongue, Home Language, Second Language

Children from two-parent families where only one parent has an Aboriginal mother tongue, (linguistically exogamous intermarried) are much less likely to acquire the Aboriginal mother tongue of their parent, than those children who have two parents that are first language speakers. An analysis of family data from the 1996 census (Norris and MacCon 2003) shows that among children aged 5–14, whose both parents have an Aboriginal mother tongue, nearly 70% have learned their parents' Aboriginal language as their mother tongue, and 40% use it as a major home language. In sharp contrast, when only one parent in a family has an Aboriginal mother tongue (exogamous parenting), only 11% of children have acquired an Aboriginal mother tongue, and just under 6% of children have an Aboriginal language as the major home language.

However, from the perspective of at least knowing an Aboriginal language, regardless of whether it is a first language or not, the vast majority, 83%, of these children with only one parent having an Aboriginal language, could converse in their parent's Aboriginal language, as could practically all of the children having both parents as first language speakers. Regardless of intermarriage/parenting

patterns, among children who have at least one parent with an Aboriginal mother tongue, over 90% of children can converse in the Aboriginal language of their parent. However, only 47% of children had learned their parent's mother tongue, and only 38% of children speak an Aboriginal language at home.

Endangered Languages: Children Acquiring as a Second Language, Not as Mother Tongue

The pattern and the extent of parent/child transmission differs significantly between viable and endangered languages, especially when the prospects of linguistically exogamous parenting are much greater for endangered languages due to smaller numbers of first language speakers.²⁰ While viable languages such as Attikamek, Montagnais-Naskapi, and Inuktitut, tend to exhibit low rates of exogamous parenting, among a number of endangered languages, such as Haida, Tlingit, and Kutenai, nearly all children (90%) are in linguistically mixed Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal marriages. For most of the viable languages, at least 85% of children are able to speak their language, whereas among some of the endangered languages, only about half the children are able to speak the language. However, in the case of children with Salish or Tsimshian parents, higher proportions, about 70 and 90% respectively, are able to speak the language, compared to other endangered languages.

For endangered languages, there are sharp contrasts between the proportion of children who know an Aboriginal language, and the proportion that actually have an Aboriginal mother tongue, or home language. For example only about 10% of children with Salish and Tsimshian language parentage have an Aboriginal mother tongue, and even fewer (less than 2%) use them as major home languages. In general, endangered languages are increasingly likely to be learned as second languages rather than as mother tongues, especially with their diminishing use as major home languages (Norris and MacCon 2003). However, their transmission to children, even as second languages, may go towards preventing or at least slowing down the decline towards extinction of these languages that are no longer being transmitted as a mother tongue.

Children's Best Prospects: Both Parents First-language Speakers, in Aboriginal Community

Family and community together play critical roles in the transmission of language from parent to child. On their own, neither family capacity nor community support is sufficient to ensure the maintenance and transmission of an Aboriginal language from one generation to the next. The community can help to facilitate the transmission of language from parent to child within families by providing opportunities and settings that support the use of the language in day to day activities, and in schools with the help of other members of the community, such as elders and teachers (Norris 2004).

Communities Support the Transmission of an Aboriginal Mother Tongue

As the analysis demonstrates, children are most likely to acquire the Aboriginal language of their parent(s) in families where both parents have an Aboriginal mother tongue. However, the likelihood of such children acquiring an Aboriginal first language is significantly greater within, than outside, Aboriginal communities. In 1996, the highest proportions of children with an Aboriginal mother tongue occurred among children in families where both parents had an Aboriginal mother tongue, and where they were residing either on-reserve (68%), or in rural areas with Aboriginal communities (77%). In contrast, among children whose both parents had an Aboriginal mother tongue, but were residing in large cities, only 41% had an Aboriginal mother tongue. Similar effects are observed for lone parent families—in the case of female-headed families—corresponding proportions of children are 53% on-reserve, and 13% in large cities. It appears that the chances of children having Aboriginal mother tongue are almost nil, if one parent, especially the mother, has a non-Aboriginal mother tongue, and they reside in a large metropolitan area—fewer than 2% of these children have an Aboriginal first language.

Regardless of parenting patterns or residence, the vast majority of children who have at least one parent with an Aboriginal mother tongue have the ability to speak the Aboriginal language of their parent(s). However, what does differ by parenting patterns and residence is how children learn their Indigenous language. The index of second language acquisition shows that children living in large cities or those from linguistically exogamous families, compared to those from endogamous or lone-parent families within Aboriginal communities, are significantly more likely to learn their parent(s)' language as a second language (Norris 2003).

Future Prospects

For Aboriginal languages, both community and family are significant factors in the transmission from parent to child that can affect children's language outcomes. At the same time, while the research attests to the importance of communities as enclaves of language survival and maintenance, it also demonstrates that language conditions can differ significantly across communities, even among those with the same language. The state of languages in Aboriginal communities can range from flourishing large mother tongue populations to few or no first language speakers. In between these two extremes, many communities are undergoing a transition in learning their languages, moving from transmission as the mother tongue of the next generation to being learned as a second language. Other communities are experiencing declines in learning the language altogether, with few speakers remaining.

These findings suggest the best conditions for a child to learn an Aboriginal language as a mother tongue occur within Aboriginal communities, among

families where the language has a strong presence in the home, when either both parents or a lone parent has an Aboriginal mother tongue, and ideally, in communities where languages are flourishing. Yet, the reality is that many Aboriginal children do not live in families and communities with such ideal learning conditions, let alone have a parent with an Aboriginal mother tongue, especially those living in urban areas, or whose languages are endangered.

The trends that underlie the current state of Aboriginal languages threaten the considerable diversity of the 50 or more Aboriginal languages that are spoken today in Canada, and in particular, the very survival of endangered languages. Nearly ten once flourishing languages have become extinct over the past 100 years or more. Many of the 50 Aboriginal languages spoken today are close to extinction or endangered, and only about a third of Aboriginal languages originally spoken in Canada have a good chance of survival. "Fewer than half of the remaining languages are likely to survive for another fifty years." (Kinkade 1991, 158, 163). In the face of these findings, many First Nations, Inuit, and Métis communities and organizations are committed to the preservation, revitalization, and promotion of their languages. The data attest to efforts of revitalization as younger speakers acquire these endangered languages by learning them as a second language. Also, while currently viable languages may also experience declines in transmission to younger generations, other viable languages are still showing strong signs of flourishing and continuing for at least the next generation to come.

And while it is true that children are increasingly likely over time to learn their Aboriginal language as a second rather than a first language, continued and increased efforts to learn one's language are also associated with developing and maintaining the links with identity, land, and traditional knowledge. The task force on Aboriginal languages and cultures reported from its consultations the important role of languages:

... Many stated that the ability to speak one's own language helps people to understand who they are in relation to themselves, their families, and their communities, and to Creation itself. They spoke of the connection between one's own language and spirituality, noting that focusing on language, spirituality, and ceremonies can increase personal self-esteem, familiarize people with their culture and bring about community healing. (Canadian Heritage 2005, iv)

From this viewpoint, emphasis on the revitalization and learning of Aboriginal languages cannot help but enhance the well-being of Aboriginal peoples, preserve and enrich their linguistic and cultural wealth, and increase the awareness of the importance of First Nations, Inuit, and Métis languages and cultures among all Canadians.

Endnotes

- 1 The author acknowledges the support of Canadian Heritage in the preparation of this work, with special thanks to: Stéphanie Leduc for excellent analytical and data support; John Clement for thoughtful discussion and feedback; Lorna Jantzen for her expertise, advice and long-standing contributions; and Norman Williams, Director Policy and Research, Aboriginal Affairs Branch for helpful editorial comments. The views expressed in the paper are those of the author and do not necessarily represent the views of either Canadian Heritage or Indian and Northern Affairs Canada.
- 2 Isolates are languages that cannot be related to any of the major families.
- 3 Michif, a language developed by the Métis, is also spoken in Canada. In the Canadian census data on Aboriginal languages, Michif is not separately classified, but is included in the category "Algonquian n.i.e." As a consequence data on Michif are not separately analysed in this paper.
- 4 Knowledge of languages refers to languages other than English or French in which the respondent can conduct a conversation. In the 2001 census guide respondents were instructed to report only those languages in which they can carry on a conversation of some length on various topics (Statistics Canada 2002).
- 5 Mother tongue is defined as the first language learned at home in childhood and still understood by the individual at the time of the census.
- 6 Home language is defined as language spoken most often at home by the individual at the time of the census. In the 2001 census a new section on languages spoken on a regular basis at home was added (Statistics Canada 2002). Here the analysis is restricted to language spoken most often.
- 7 Comparable counts adjusted for incomplete enumeration for 1996 and 2001 are 207,200 and 200,300 respectively, representing a 3.3% decrease.
- 8 Index of Continuity measures language continuity, or vitality, by comparing the number of those who speak a language at home to the number of those who learned that language as their mother tongue. A ratio less than 100 indicates some decline in the strength of the language (i.e., for every 100 people with an Aboriginal mother tongue, there are fewer than 100 in the overall population who use it at home). The lower the score is, the greater is the decline or erosion.
- 9 Index of Ability (KN/MT), or Second Language Acquisition, compares the number of people who report being able to speak the language with the number who have that Aboriginal language as a mother tongue. If for every 100 people with a specific Aboriginal mother tongue, more than 100 persons in the overall population are able to speak that language, then some learned it as a second language either in school or later in life. This may suggest some degree of language revival. Throughout this paper this index will be mostly referred to as the Index of "Second Language Acquisition."
- 10 Population reporting an Aboriginal Mother Tongue in 2001 = 203,300. Data for the Iroquoian family is not particularly representative due to the significant impact of incomplete enumeration of reserves for this language family. Other languages such as those in the Algonquian family may be affected to some extent by incomplete enumeration. For further discussion please see Section "Communities in Transition: A Continuum of Transmission, Acquisition, and Decline," "Category 9: Unknown: Communities with no Census data on state of their Language."
- 11 Generally, the level of detail in terms of individual languages increased over the censuses. However, some of the smaller languages coded separately in an earlier census had to be collapsed into broader groupings because of declining numbers. In 1991 several Aboriginal languages identified in 1986 (Kaska, Tahltan, Tutchone, and Yellowknife) were included in the category "Athapaskan languages, n.i.e." It is interesting to note that Kinkade (1991) in his analysis of Aboriginal language survival classified Tahltan as being near extinction.
- 12 Aboriginal Communities are based on census subdivisions enumerated in the 2001 census, including reserves, settlements, northern communities etc. Not all of these communities have populations reporting an Aboriginal mother tongue. In the case of no Aboriginal MT popula-

tion, or incompletely enumerated communities, Aboriginal language was assigned from either previous 1996 census information where available, or from language information from Indian and Northern Affairs Canada (INAC).

- 13 This share is based on the number of individual languages classified in the census. Taking into account the smaller individual languages not coded separately by the census, British Columbia's share of Canada's Aboriginal languages would be greater than their census-based proportion.
- 14 Trends between 1996 and 2001 are based on single and multiple responses for mother tongue, home language, and knowledge variables. Also, comparisons between the two censuses incorporated adjustments for comparability. Four reserves in Manitoba had changes in reporting patterns for Cree, Oji-Cree and Ojibway between 1996 and 2001. Adjustments for these specific languages, along with adjustments for incomplete enumeration of reserves and settlements for all other languages concerned are incorporated.
- 15 Out of the 879 communities in this study, there are 445 communities reporting a minimum mother tongue population of 30 in 2001; of these, 390 were enumerated and shared the same CSD codes for both 1996 and 2001. Comparison of continuity and second language acquisition categories between 1996 and 2001 were based on these 390 comparable communities. Note that the extent of change among those communities shifting from one category to another is not the same: some shifts may be due to relatively minor changes in community index measures; others to notably larger changes.
- 16 Specific languages could not be assigned for 24 of the 90 enumerated communities without Aboriginal mother tongues. However, of the remaining 56 communities, well over half (38) were known to be Salish language communities, and most (33) of them from the smaller Salish (n.i.e.) language origins.
- 17 However, the interpretation of endangerment is not always necessarily appropriate for some communities because their languages of origin are not known. Also, in some cases, such as Métis communities, the traditional language may not necessarily correspond to an Aboriginal language specifically, but could be another, such as French.
- 18 In the case of the Iroquian language family, relatively little is known from the census since 1986 due to incomplete enumeration of practically all Iroquian reserves in the census.
- 19 For comparability over the period from 1981, continuity indexes are based on single responses to mother tongue and home language, and data were adjusted for changes in incomplete enumeration and language categories over the 1981 to 1996 censuses, and for changes in reporting, language variables and incomplete enumeration between 1996 and 2001 censuses. Note that long-term trends are not available for "Knowledge of Aboriginal language" since this variable was not introduced until the 1996 census; only short-term trends in knowledge are available for the 1996–2001 period.
- 20 On the other hand, increased intermarriage could contribute to the growth of young second language speakers.

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