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Social Exposure and Perceptions of Language Importance in Canada's Urban Indigenous Peoples

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Abstract: *The following analysis uses data drawn from the 2012 Aboriginal Peoples Survey (APS) to examine the effects of age, sex, education, household type, and exposure to Indigenous[1] language in the home and outside the home on the perceived importance of Indigenous language for Indigenous people living in urban centres across Canada. The results of regression analysis indicate that "exposure to Indigenous language in the home" and "exposure to Indigenous language outside the home" are directly related to how important Indigenous language is perceived to be by urban Indigenous peoples.*

While Indigenous peoples are increasing in number in Canada (Adelson 2011), the frequency with which they are speaking their original languages is dangerously low (Blair et al. 2011, 91), particularly as their first language (Norris 2007, 19). The response by many communities has been to move toward language revitalization, leading more Indigenous peoples to learn their original language as a second language to English—especially in the case of young people (22). Language retention is widely described as the best way to understand a worldview or culture—when people learn an Indigenous language, it helps them to understand cultural meaning and expression better: "As you learn a language, you get a better knowledge of the culture" (Toulouse in Archibald et al. 2003). Indeed, the vitality of Indigenous cultures and worldviews and the languages that compose them have been affirmed as integral to the health and well-being of the peoples with whom they originate (Hallett et al. 2007, 393).

The 2015 conclusion of the Truth and Reconciliation Commission called upon the government of Canada to engage in meaningful action on ninety-four items, many of which are concerned with the preservation, sustainability, and provision of adequate resources in support of Indigenous languages (Truth and Reconciliation Commission). In her remarks in May 2015, Chief Justice Rt. Hon. Beverley McLachlin asserted that Canada had committed cultural genocide including in the forbidding of Indigenous languages in residential schools. The admission that degradation of Indigenous languages has been systemic and was rooted in colonial, culturally genocidal policies no doubt had an impact on the broader mainstream awareness of Indigenous issues, which were prominently supported and featured in Justin Trudeau's 2015 federal election platform (Liberal Party 2016).

1 Statistics Canada and the government of Canada use the term "Aboriginal" to identify diverse First Nations, Metis, and Inuit peoples. I have chosen to use "Indigenous," a term that communicates the quality of being original in land and place.

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Research indicates that threats to the continuation of Indigenous peoples' cultural identity pose a corresponding threat to the well-being of Indigenous communities (Hallet et al. 2007). The adverse effects of colonialism (one being the condemnation of Indigenous languages in residential schools) have been identified as a determinant of lack of well-being in Indigenous populations (Howard 2014; Czyzewski 2011). This has influenced Indigenous peoples' efforts to shape and determine their well-being via the resurgence of Indigenous worldviews and cultural strength as a proactive response to the destruction wrought by colonialism:

> Healing the self … refers to a reconnection with family, friends, community, land and cultural heritage. Healing from the disruptions of colonialism is thus a process in which selves acquire a new sense of "being" defined in continuity with the past, but also in relation with the land and others. (Guindon 2015, 81)

Ensuring the continuity of Indigenous languages ensures the endurance of unique worldviews and original perspectives that contain factors important to Indigenous well-being—particularly place-based oral history. In a recent widely publicized example, the recovery of the Franklin expedition ship HMS Erebus in the Arctic was linked to a location known to speakers of Inuktitut, indicating the strength and accuracy of Inuit oral tradition (CBC News 2014).

The urbanization of Indigenous people has been a growing trend in Canada, in some ways exacerbating the decline of language use and traditional practices (Anderson 2013, 76). What is apparent is that while Indigenous peoples in Canada are increasingly moving to urban areas, language revitalization efforts often remain concentrated in on-reserve spaces (Baloy 2011, 515). This poses considerable challenges for policymakers in terms of creating effective language revitalization programs. That being said, the language revitalization movement in urban areas is promising, with innovative and reordered practices arising out of the unique urban settings (Baloy 2011, 519; Blair et al. 2011, 93) that have potentially positive implications for the broader Indigenous language revitalization movement, both on- and off-reserve. In a recent example of indigenous language made visible in the urban landscape, Anishinaabe collaborators Susan Blight and Hayden King of the Ogimaa Mikana Project posted reclaimed historical place names in Anishinaabemowin overtop Toronto street signs (*The Toronto Star* 2015).

The discussion in this paper is indicative of an Indigenous perspective that communicates the importance of Indigenous language retention and use. What is the perception of those who do not otherwise find their Indigenous languages important to learn? Archibald et al. (2003) share an example of a situation in which language diversity and ability are a barrier, particularly across generations:

> We were interviewing an elderly monolingual Cree woman on a northern reserve, and we asked her, "What language do you speak to your grandchildren?" She looked at us as if we were asking an unusual question and finally said, "I don't talk to them because they only speak English and they don't understand Cree." I was taken aback

> by this response as I thought about all the things that this woman had to offer her grandchildren, but that without a common language she would never have an opportunity to share. (n.p.)

Past research states that household size is a significant indicator for the well-being of Indigenous children, while the involvement of extended family has important implications for the support of partnered and lone-parent families in raising children (Quinless 2013, 2014). Norris (2004) states that language transmission is reliant on intergenerational retention, and by extension on the place-based community—a consequence being that transmission of language is greatly reduced in urban settings (1). Does the presence of children in a household determine how people perceive the importance of language? Drawing on Norris's work (2004), we see that age is an indicator of language use, particularly by location—as community remoteness decreases, the age of Indigenous-language speakers increases (4). Language use in urban and on-reserve settings has policy implications as well. The effort of making Indigenous languages more visible and heightening exposure to languages has resulted in increased efforts by Indigenous organizations to advocate for and create campaigns about the importance of language retention or declaration of official languages.

It is apparent in the current reconciliation discourse in Canada that Indigenous languages are a locus of recovery as well as an important method of cultural revival in the face of genocide (Truth and Reconciliation Commission, 94 Calls to Action). The focus of this analysis is to explore what affects the perceptions of language importance in Indigenous populations in Canada using the 2012 Aboriginal Peoples Survey (APS) data, if only to illuminate the variables that should be considered when exploring how our Indigenous languages are valued. In their discussion of quantitative research methodologies, Walter and Andersen (2013) note that population data research occurs in a social world in which moral, political, and cultural values are implicit facets of the social landscape—at least partly reflecting the dominant mores of the space (50). The APS dataset, while containing a multitude of variables ranging from education to employment to culture, is nonetheless a quantified and numerical representation of lived Indigenous realities. This paper explores the numerical representation in a quantitative regression analysis style as an example of an Indigenous researcher working with a dataset that attempts to measure Indigenous life. While the APS was developed by "a diverse group of researchers and subject matter experts, both from within and outside Statistics Canada" and tested with the help of "First Nation people, Metis and Inuit across Canada" (APS website), the APS has implicit values and interests, reflecting most specifically large government policy concerns (Walter and Andersen 2013, 121). What follows is a quantitative discussion of the relationship among variables selected by the author as possibly significant in affecting perceptions of Indigenous language importance among self-identified "Aboriginal" respondents to the APS.

Methods

Sample

This analysis uses the 2012 APS survey data, a sample drawn from respondents who self-identified as "Aboriginal" in the 2011 National Household Survey (NHS). The sample survey consisted of approximately 28,410 Aboriginal individuals and achieved a response rate of seventy-six percent (Statistics Canada 2012). For the purposes of this analysis, it provides a glimpse into the perception of Indigenous language importance on the part of respondents to the survey.

Hypotheses

It is proposed that perceptions of Indigenous language importance are affected by the variables of age, sex, education level, household type, exposure to language in the home, and exposure to language outside the home.

Hypothesis 1—Age: Norris (2007) states that the age of mother-tongue language speakers is increasing, with a greater number of younger Indigenous-language speakers picking it up as a second language (22). It is proposed that respondents' age has an effect on the perceptions of Indigenous language importance.

Hypothesis 2—Sex: Sex as a variable is chosen to understand better the general frame of demographic differences with perceptions of language importance.

Hypothesis 3—Education level: It is posited that as the level of education increases, so does the perception of language importance. As more education is attained, the chances of an Indigenous individual being exposed to learning about language endangerment and the issues associated with colonialism may increase.

Hypothesis 4—Household type: Previous research has indicated the crucial role of family in the transmission of language (Norris 2004), and it is possible that the presence of children may increase perceptions of language as important due to heightened awareness of cognitive development and a desire to pass on cultural traits.

Hypothesis 5—Exposure to language in the home: Research shows that Indigenous languages spoken in the home increase chances of language transmission (Norris 2004, 8), and presumably, perceptions of language importance.

Hypothesis 6—Exposure to language outside the home: Previous research suggests that school instruction in an Indigenous language might better prepare Indigenous students for success in mainstream society (Usborne et al. 2011, 199). It is possible that with increased exposure to language use by peers, teachers, or other individuals outside of the home, perception of language importance increases.

This analysis will focus on the urban Indigenous population's (child and adult) perceptions of Indigenous language importance. This variable appears in the APS in the form of a Likert scale. To simplify perceptions from negative to positive in this analysis, I collapsed the Likert scale dependent variable "Importance of speaking/understanding

an Aboriginal language" (LAN_09) (Statistics Canada 2014, 606) from the original "1=Very Important, 2=Somewhat Important, 3=Not Very Important, 4=Not Important" to "1=Not Important, 2=Somewhat Important, 3=Very Important," with all missing data, even "no opinion," excluded. Six independent variables are used in this study to predict the importance of language to respondents. All variables were recoded so that the closer to 0 meant the absence of, and higher numbers indicated the presence of—i.e. the absence of language exposure is coded lower than the presence of language exposure.

Results

Descriptive Analysis

TABLE 1: Percentages of Variables

Categorical/Ordinal Variables		Percentage (%)
Age		
	Under 18	39.2
	19-34	26.9
	35-54	23.4
	55+	10.5
Sex		
	Male	48.3
	Female	51.7
Education level		
	Less than secondary	31.3
	Secondary/some post-secondary	31.1
	Post-secondary diploma/degree	37.5
Type of household		
	Non-family	9.8
	Couple w/o children	13.7
	Other family, no children	5.4
	Lone-parent w/ children	25.4
	Couple w/ children	45.7
Exposure in the home		
	Never	65.8
	Less than 1x week	9.8
	1x week or more	7.1
	1x day or more	17.4
Exposure outside the home		
	Never	49.6
	Less than 1x week	20.6
	1x week or more	12.7
	1x day or more	17.0
Importance of language		
	Not Important	42.6
	Somewhat Important	27.8
	Very Important	29.6

N (Sample Size)= 24,803

Table 1 shows the sample percentages by variable. The largest age category in the sample is under eighteen years of age at 39.2 percent. Of the sample, 48.3 percent is male, while 51.7 percent is female. Education seemed to be normally distributed among the respondents, with 31.3 percent having less than secondary school (likely due to a large youth population), 31.1 percent have secondary school or some post-secondary, and 37.5 percent have a post-secondary diploma or degree. In terms of household types, 9.8 percent live in non-family households, 13.7 percent are households with couples with no children, 5.4 percent are family households without children, 25.4 percent are lone-parent households, and 45.7 percent are couples with children. Those respondents who indicated that they are never exposed to an Indigenous language within their home totalled 65.8 percent, 9.8 percent stated they are exposed less than once a week, 7.1 percent stated they are exposed once a week or more, and 17.4 percent stated they are exposed more than once a day in the home. Those reporting that they were never exposed to an Indigenous language outside of the home constituted 49.6 percent of respondents, while 20.6 percent stated that they were exposed to language less than once a week outside of the home. 12.7 percent and seventeen percent were exposed to language outside of the home more than once a week and more than once a day respectively. Respondents gauged their perceptions of Indigenous language importance as follows: 42.6 percent stated that language was not important; 27.8 percent stated that language was somewhat important; and 29.6 percent stated that language was very important.

The correlation matrix shows that all independent variables are significantly related with perceptions of language importance when p=0.01, except for age. Sex has a very weak negative correlation at -.056, meaning there is a weak significant relationship that suggests females value language slightly more than males. Those with lower education levels appear to have a very weak negative relationship (at -.093) with importance of language, indicating that those with lower education value Indigenous language slightly less than those with more education. Households containing children appear to have a very weak positive relationship (at .036) to importance of language, as in the presence of children increases the perception of how important Indigenous language is. There is a more significant correlation in the variables "exposure to language in and outside the home" in the form of a moderate positive relationship with importance of language, at .565 and .502 respectively, increasing the possibility that those who are exposed to Indigenous languages value it more.

Correlation Matrix

TABLE 2: Correlation with Dependent Variable "Importance of Language"

	Age	Sex	Education level	Household type	Exposure in the home	Exposure outside the home
Pearson's Correlation	-.004	-.056**	-.093**	.036**	.565**	.502**
Significance 2-Tailed	.510	.000	.000	.000	.000	.000
N	23997	23997	14941	23655	23965	23776

**Correlation is significant at the 0.01 level (two-tailed)

Reliability Analysis

The independent variables "exposure in the home" and "exposure outside the home" may be very closely related, potentially obscuring the results of the regression analysis. It is important to run a reliability analysis on these two variables to ensure they are sound. For this, a multicollinearity test was conducted to check for discrepancies, and then a Cronbach's Alpha test was conducted to ensure significance further.

TABLE 3: VIF Test for Multicollinearity

Coefficients[a]

	Collinearity Statistics	
Model 1	Tolerance	VIF
Language exposure in the home	.559	1.790
Language exposure outside the home	.559	1.790

a. Dependent variable: Importance of language

In the multicollinearity test, the variables do not appear problematic, as the Variance Inflation Factor (VIF) score is 1.79 with a tolerance of .559.

TABLE 4: Reliability Statistics of Two Independent Variables and the Dependent Variable

Reliability Statistics[a]

Cronbach's Alpha	N of Items
.799	3

a. Variables: Language exposure in the home, Language exposure outside the home, Importance of language

The Cronbach's Alpha reliability test was run on the three variables. This allows us to see that the presence of the independent variables (language exposure in the home and language exposure outside the home) account for a significant change in the dependent variable (.799).

Regression Analysis

TABLE 5: Regression Model Summary (all independent variables included)

Regression Model Summary[a]

Model	R	R Square	Adjusted R Square	Std Error of the Estimate	Change Statistics	
					R Square Change	F Change
1	.590[a]	.349	.348	.68711	.349	1321.996

a. Predictors: (Constant), Age, Sex, Education level, Household type, Language exposure in the home, Language exposure outside the home

The regression model summary shows an R square of .349, indicating a weak fit for all variables combined. The higher the r^2 value, the better the model fit.

TABLE 6: Analysis of Variance (ANOVA) Table

ANOVA[a]

Model		Sum of Squares	df	Mean Square	F	Sig.
1	Regression	3744.797	6	624.133	1321.996	.000[b]
	Residual	6999.562	14826	.472		
	Total	10744.359	14832			

a. Dependent variable: Importance of language
b. Predictors: (Constant), Age, Sex, Education Level, Household type, Language exposure in the home, Language exposure outside the home

In the analysis of variance output, the F score[2] shows us that the variance in the regression analysis is not by chance or coincidence but represents a significant and linear relationship between the independent variables and the dependent variable.

TABLE 7: Coefficients Matrix of All Independent Variables

Coefficients[a]

		Unstandardized Coefficients		Standardized Coefficients		
Model		B	Std. Error	Beta	t	Sig.
1	(Constant)	1.052	.033		32.122	.000
	Sex	-.110	.011	-.064	-9.682	.000
	Age	.017	.007	.016	2.322	.020
	Education Level	-.018	.007	-.018	-2.603	.009
	Household Type	-.001	.004	-.002	-.305	.760
	Language Exposure in home	.276	.007	.379	41.181	.000
	Language Exposure outside home	.188	.007	.256	28.261	.000

a. Dependent variable: Importance of language

In the coefficients table, we see the amount of variance of the dependent variable "Importance of language" when all of the independent variables are present. Sex accounts for -.06 percent variance in the perception of language importance. This means that as female gender occurs or "decreases" (female is coded at 0, male is coded at 1), the value for language increases, and as $p<0.05$, this is significant. Age accounts for .016 percent variance in the dependent variable—as age increases, the value for language increases—yet

2 $F_{6, 14826}$=1321.996, and p=.000

the p>0.05, so this is not a significant relationship. Education level accounts for -0.018 percent variance in the dependent variable—as education level decreases, the value for language increases; p>0.05, however, so it is not significant. Household type accounts for -.002 percent variance in the dependent variable—as household sizes decrease, the value for language increases; here, p>0.05, so it is not significant. Language exposure in the home accounts for .379 percent variance in the language value; as language exposure in the home increases, the value for language increases, and here p<0.05, so it is significant. Language exposure outside the home accounts for .256 percent variance in the dependent variable—as exposure outside the home increases, value for the language increases; p<0.05, so this is significant.

Since a p value of less than .05 indicates statistical significance at the 95 percent level, we see at this point that when we calculate the presence of all independent variables with the dependent variable "perception of language importance," there is statistical strength for the independent variables Sex, Language exposure in the home, and Language exposure outside the home.[3] Following is a regression model that shows independent variables run individually and their effect on the dependent variable.

TABLE 8: Regression Model Summary Matrix of all IVs Run Individually

Regression Model Summary[a]

					Change Statistics				
Model	R	R Square	Adjusted R Square	Std. Error of the Estimate	R Square Change	F Change	df1	df2	Sig. F Change
Age	.004	.000	.000	.83963	.000	.435	1	23995	.510
Sex	.056	.003	.003	.83834	.003	74.568	1	23995	.000
Education level	.093	.009	.009	.84808	.009	129.557	1	14939	.000
Household type	.036	.001	.001	.83881	.001	30.884	1	23653	.000
Language exposure in home	.565	.320	.320	.69244	.320	11262.64	1	23963	.000
Language exposure outside home	.502	.252	.252	.72601	.252	8010.039	1	23774	.000

a. Dependent variable: Importance of language

The summary of the independent variables when run individually is interesting, because it gives a clearer picture of which variables have a stronger influence on the dependent variable. The independent variables of Language exposure in the home and Language

3 When finding the regression line using equation Y = a + bX, x1=Age, x2=Sex, x3=Education level, x4=Household type, x5=Language exposure in the home, x6=Language exposure outside the home:
Y=Importance of Language=(1.052)+(-.110)+(.017)+(-.018)+(-.001)+(.276)+(.188)=1.404
The regression line intercepts on the Y and X-axis at 1.404.

exposure outside the home appear to be most significant, with higher R square values of .320 and .252 respectively, showing the strongest linear relationship to the dependent variable of language importance.

There is no relationship or significant strength among Age, Sex, Education level, or Household type on perceptions of language importance. Yet there is a significant linear relationship and moderate strength between in-home exposure to Indigenous language and the dependent variable of perceptions of language importance. As well, there is significant linear relationship and moderate strength between exposure to Indigenous language outside the home and the dependent variable "perceptions of language importance."

Discussion

There are promising next steps to be taken in the area of research into how Indigenous language is valued by urban Indigenous peoples, yet, as is sometimes problematic in quantitative analysis, there are weaknesses in the foundational coding concepts. In the data set, the variables Sex, Education Level, Household type, Language exposure in the home, and Language exposure outside the home all have significant relationships with the perception of language importance, yet the variable Age is, interestingly, not significant at all. Perhaps if the analysis had included only adults or only those under eighteen, age may have been more significant.[4] Additionally, this analysis shows linear relationships in a quantitative model, which cannot contextualize the complexities of the importance of language, the extent to which urban Indigenous peoples can access these resources, or even the particular differences between more widely spoken Indigenous languages and those with fewer speakers.

Efforts to retain language are often thought of as an on-reserve endeavor (Baloy 2011). According to Norris, "Only 3% of Aboriginal people in cities reported an Aboriginal home language, compared to 18% overall and 41% for reserves" (2004, 6). In 1996, The Royal Commission on Aboriginal Peoples (RCAP) stated that many of the challenges of Indigenous language retention are exacerbated in an urban environment.

Norris (2004) notes that endogamous families (families in which both parents have the same mother tongue) transmit language to children at a much higher rate (10) than exogamous families (in which parents have different mother tongues). Out-marriage is higher in urban areas, and is associated with lower language transmission rates (7). These are all very important considerations for the data, as they point to the foundational

4 The only variables that followed through as significant predictors of the importance of language were the "exposure to language" variables that gauged respondents' contact with the language in and outside the home. Exposure to Indigenous language in and outside the home did not have multicollinearity issues, and it is interesting that respondents reporting exposure outside of the home were much more frequent than those who reported exposure inside the home. In future research, these variables should be examined further with other variables such as location, place of employment, or how long an individual has lived in an urban area, as it is not clear how respondents continue with in-home language use or where Indigenous people are encountering language outside of the home.

assumption that efforts to retain language are efforts that generally take place elsewhere. As we have very little to no access to on-reserve datasets, it is difficult to understand in this analysis whether perceptions of language value are significantly affected by location.

Conclusion

Urbanization of Indigenous peoples has been increasing over the past several decades. According to Statistics Canada (2013), Indigenous mobility into urban areas is projected to rise by 2031, with five major Canadian metropolitan areas expected to attain Indigenous population levels of ten percent. Because urban Indigenous populations are on the rise, understanding how these populations value Indigenous language and the contributing factors to increased perceptions of language value has very important political and cultural implications. The analysis shows that more value is placed on Indigenous languages when individuals are readily exposed to them both in and outside the home. This has important implications for understanding that when Indigenous languages are used on a regular basis, exposure increases, and their perceived value also increases. With increased perceptions of the value of Indigenous language might come increased study, interest, and advocacy for the use of such languages—and by extension, their retention and transmission across generations. The increased perceived value of Indigenous languages is a key factor for the survival of endangered languages and the worldviews reflected therein.

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