

# Language Use and Attitudes Among the Fisher River Cree in Manitoba

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*Much social psychological research has focused on the role of attitudes and ethnolinguistic identification in language learning, maintenance, and revitalization although few studies have been conducted among members of Aboriginal communities in Canada. In order to explore how such social and psychological factors are involved in a community attempting language revitalization, measures of group identification, perceptions of vitality, and self-reported patterns of language use, attitudes, and contact were obtained from 78 Cree participants in Fisher River (Manitoba). Analyses revealed generational differences on several measures, suggesting that adults were more favorable toward Cree language maintenance and identity than children. In addition, multiple regression analyses revealed that identifications and the perceived legitimacy of vitality beliefs were significantly predictive of language use and attitudes. The overall findings are discussed in terms of an intergroup approach to language survival that gives primacy to identity variables in the low vitality context of the Fisher River Cree.*

There is consensus in the research literature that a history of concerted and cruel efforts to assimilate Aboriginal peoples, accompanied by modernization, has led to the demise of Canadian Aboriginal languages (Hébert, 1984; Gardner & Jimmie, 1989; Foster, 1982; Sachdev, 1995; Kirkness, in press). In precolonial times Aboriginal languages flourished within the boundaries of what is now Canada (and the United States). Many Aboriginal people were multilingual, and for several millennia their languages were the main means by which culture, identity, and spirituality were articulated, shared, and passed on to successive generations. Late in the current millennium, in a relatively short period of European colonization, a much-cited study alarmingly concluded that only three (Cree, Ojibwe, and Inuktitut) of 53 Aboriginal languages had an "excellent chance of survival" by virtue of having more than 5,000 speakers, while the rest were endangered, with some verging on extinction (Foster, 1982; but see Assembly of First Nations, 1990; Sachdev, 1995). Surprisingly, with the exception of studies among the Inuit (Taylor, Wright, Ruggiero, & Aitchison, 1993), few social psychological studies have examined the intergroup dimensions of sociolinguistic phenomena among members of Aboriginal communities in Canada. Intergroup approaches to language phenomena in social psychology emphasize three main sets of factors: (a) group identity; (b) ethnolinguistic vitality; (c) intergroup contact (Giles, Bourhis, & Taylor, 1977; Giles & Coupland, 1991; Giles & Johnson, 1981; Landry & Allard, 1994; Sachdev & Bourhis, 1990). Following a brief overview of these factors, an intergroup study that empirically explores an intergroup approach to the relationship between these variables among members of the Fisher River Cree community in Manitoba (Canada) is presented below.

There exists a substantial body of literature in social psychology demonstrating that linguistic criteria serve as important markers of social categories (Giles, Scherer, & Taylor, 1979; Giles & Coupland, 1991, for reviews). That language is often *the* central criterial attribute for group identity is evident even from a cursory review of intergroup relations in numerous countries around the world including Canada, Russia, Spain, Belgium, India, Malaysia, and Finland (Fishman, 1989; Giles, 1977; Ros, Cano, & Huici, 1987; Liebkind, 1982; Bourhis, 1984; Gudykunst & Schmidt, 1987; Sachdev & Bourhis, 1990; compare Edwards, 1994). Moreover, much of this research suggests that language use and identity appear to be related reciprocally: language use influences the formation of group identity, and group identity influences patterns of language attitudes and usage.

Several researchers in Canada have suggested that fluency in Aboriginal languages is an essential contributor to self-determination, in addition to being a consequence of it (Brandt & Ayoungman, 1989; Gardner & Jimmie, 1989; Kirkness, 1989; AFN, 1990; Sachdev, 1995). Arguably, the fact that Aboriginal languages have not been completely eradicated, despite the long-term and cruel enforcement of English-only government educational policies, is testimony not only to the depth of Aboriginal resistance, but also to the importance of Aboriginal languages to Aboriginal identity in Canada. It is important to note that it is not only actual language use and proficiency that is associated with identity. Ancestral languages may also be valued aspects of group identity despite not being spoken by most group members, and the revival of ancestral languages may become a central issue around which group members mobilize to affirm or redefine their group identities (Ross, 1979; Bourhis, 1984; Giles & Johnson, 1981; Fishman, 1989).

Based on Tajfel and Turner's (1979) approach to social identification, Giles and his colleagues proposed their theory of ethnolinguistic identity in order to understand the social psychological processes underlying the complexities of language and identity phenomena (Giles & Johnson, 1981; Giles et al., 1977). Tajfel and Turner's (1979) approach emphasized processes of social comparison that serve to establish positive differentiation on valued dimensions (e.g., language). In this theory intergroup comparability is related to the perceived illegitimacy (and instability) of the intergroup relations situation. Giles et al. (1977) extended this theory by arguing that social psychological processes mediating language and intergroup communication needed to be situated in their appropriate sociostructural contexts. For this purpose they developed the notion of "ethnolinguistic vitality" (Harwood, Giles, & Bourhis, 1994). This was defined as the degree to which a combination of demographic, status, and institutional support (and control) factors contributed to the survival of a group as a distinctive and active collectivity in multigroup settings. It was argued that a combination of *objective* (actual) and *subjective* (perceived) assessments of vitality was necessary to understand the ethnolinguistic behavior of group members (Bourhis, Giles, & Rosenthal, 1981; Sachdev & Bourhis, 1993).

Allard and Landry (1986; Landry & Allard, 1994) further extended vitality analyses by suggesting that the predictive power of vitality would be greatly increased if the subjective aspects of vitality were considered as part of a broader belief system reflecting individual predispositions and orientations about vitality

(Labrie & Clement, 1986). For instance, in their extensive program of research among francophone communities in North America, their findings have shown that egocentric beliefs about vitality (e.g., identification, personal goals) were more predictive of ethnolinguistic behavior than egocentric beliefs about vitality (e.g., estimates of current general in-group vitality, and normative or legitimacy beliefs about "what should be" the in-group vitality, Landry & Allard, 1994).

According to Landry and Allard (1994) the development of ethnolinguistic identities and other cognitive-affective dispositions (e.g., beliefs about vitality, attitudes), like the development of linguistic competences, is rooted firmly in individual networks of contact (compare Hewstone & Brown, 1986). However, ethnolinguistic identities and vitality perceptions may not only (directly) affect linguistic competences, language use, and attitudes, but may also affect the quantity, quality, and composition of contact networks. This line of reasoning suggests that the relationship between variables of contact and identity is likely to be one of mutual causality. The present study was not designed to assess this mutual causality, although the predictive utility of identification, vitality, and contact variables on language attitudes, use, and competence was explored among the Fisher River Cree in Canada.

According to Sinclair (1993), the Fisher River area was settled by about 160 migrating Cree peoples in 1887. The modern community is located on one reserve in the Interlake region in Central Manitoba and is populated overwhelmingly by Cree peoples with a total population of about 2,500 (Fisher River Band Council Register, 1996). Preliminary research suggested that this small community has a deeply religious heritage, regards fishing as central to culture and identity, has only a small group of fluent speakers of Cree (mainly elders), and Cree is taught (only as a subject) at the school in the community (Sinclair, 1993). Dominated by English, the overall vitality of Cree in Fisher River is low given the previous history of oppressive residential schooling and devaluing of Aboriginal languages that resulted in more than an entire generation being deprived of learning and speaking in-group languages. However, the past lack of institutional support and status for Aboriginal languages is slowly changing. The representation of Cree in some contexts (church, personal care home, healing center) is being encouraged. The formal teaching of Cree in Fisher River has been a relatively recent affair (10-25 years). It currently takes place only in the early school years and is in some difficulty, having been withdrawn from the high school curriculum owing to shortages of adequate teaching materials and suitably qualified and trained (but enthusiastic) staff.

Sinclair (1993) conducted several small surveys among Cree adults and children in Fisher River (with a limited number of questions), suggested strong support for a program of Cree language revitalization. The main focus of these surveys was to measure attitudes toward a Cree Language program at school, but data about relevant non-Aboriginal groups (e.g., White people) and the languages associated with them (e.g., English) were not obtained. In the present study the adoption of a quantitative and explicit social comparison approach was expected to allow a systematic exploration of intergroup factors involved in patterns of

ethnolinguistic behavior and attitudes (Tajfel & Turner, 1979; Giles & Coupland, 1991; Sachdev & Bourhis, 1990).

Based on the review of the literature above, this study explored how patterns of in-group and out-group language proficiency, use, attitudes, identifications, contact, and general and legitimate vitality were related among the Cree in Fisher River. The general expectation was that intergroup contact and variables identified by ethnolinguistic identity theory (e.g., identity, general and legitimate, or normative vitality) would be positively related to patterns of language proficiency, use, and attitudes (Giles & Johnson, 1981; Landry & Allard, 1994). Given the importance of intergenerational transmission in reversing language shift (Fishman, 1990), intergenerational differences in identifications and attitudes were also explored in this study. Following Gardner and Jimmie (1989), Sinclair (1993), Barsh (1994), and Sachdev (1995) it was expected that adults would report higher in-group language proficiency and more positive attitudes about Cree than teenagers.

### *Method*

#### *Participants*

Seventy-eight people of Cree ancestry were randomly recruited from the high school (32 teenage participants aged 13-18 years) and the community (46 adults aged over 18 years) in Fisher River. Twenty-eight participants reported their gender as male and 48 as female (two did not report their gender) on the questionnaires.

#### *Procedure*

Participants were asked to fill in an anonymous language and identity survey (in English) that began with an item assessing their language of preference for the questionnaire, assuming they were equally fluent in Cree and English. Other items on the questionnaire assessed self-reported language proficiency, language use, and attitudes about language use in various public and private contexts (e.g., home, school, work, religious contexts, and social events). Beliefs about group vitality (general and normative), amount of linguistic and intergroup contact, group identity, and value of Aboriginal language to group identity were also obtained. In addition, participants were asked to provide other information (e.g., age, gender). Participants responded to most items on 5-point Likert scales.

### *Results and Discussion*

Unsurprisingly, analyses of the amount of linguistic contact suggested that greater contact was reported with English than Cree speakers (see Table 1). However, levels of contact reported with White and Cree people were fairly equivalent in spite of the overwhelmingly high demographic presence of Cree people in Fisher River. This is probably due to the considerable drawing power (and proximity) of urban Winnipeg (with its majority White population), not only for commerce, employment, and health services, but also for its high level of social and cultural (e.g., entertainment) activity. In addition, several teachers and other professionals (including some in the church) in Fisher River are also White, thereby contributing to the higher levels of contact reported with White people than might be expected solely from the sheer number of White people residing in Fisher River.

**Table 1. Means and F-Ratios for Self-Reported Contact, Vitality Beliefs, Identification, and Value of Language**

| Item                                  | Generation (G)   |                                 |                  |                                 | F(1,75) for Rating (main) | F(1,75) for G x R (interaction) |
|---------------------------------------|------------------|---------------------------------|------------------|---------------------------------|---------------------------|---------------------------------|
|                                       | Teen rating (R)  |                                 | Adult rating (R) |                                 |                           |                                 |
|                                       | Cree             | English (White for items 2 & 5) | Cree             | English (White for items 2 & 5) |                           |                                 |
| 1. Contact with language speakers     | 2.8 <sup>a</sup> | 4.6 <sup>c</sup>                | 3.2 <sup>b</sup> | 4.5 <sup>c</sup>                | 196.04***                 | 5.06*                           |
| 2. Contact with people                | 3.6              | 3.9                             | 4.1              | 4.0                             | .89                       | .16                             |
| 3. General vitality                   | 2.9 <sup>a</sup> | 4.2 <sup>b</sup>                | 2.7 <sup>a</sup> | 4.1 <sup>b</sup>                | 262.65***                 | .23                             |
| 4. Normative vitality                 | 3.8 <sup>a</sup> | 3.6 <sup>a</sup>                | 4.4 <sup>b</sup> | 3.7 <sup>a</sup>                | 18.72***                  | 4.97*                           |
| 5. Group identity                     | 4.2 <sup>a</sup> | 2.6 <sup>b</sup>                | 4.4 <sup>a</sup> | 2.1 <sup>c</sup>                | 243.64***                 | 8.24**                          |
| 6. Value of language to Cree identity | 3.7 <sup>a</sup> | 3.2 <sup>b</sup>                | 4.1 <sup>a</sup> | 3.1 <sup>b</sup>                | 28.55***                  | 3.74, p=.057                    |

Notes

- 1. Different superscripts differ significantly at  $p < .05$ , Newman-Keuls post hoc comparisons.
- 2. \*\*\*  $p < .001$ ; \*\*  $p < .01$ ; \*  $p < .05$ .

Analyses of items related to beliefs about vitality (see Table 1) revealed that both adults and teenagers were consensual about the high general (current) vitality of English and low vitality of Cree in Fisher River. However, both adults and teenagers were also encouragingly consensual in feeling that Cree ought to have higher vitality than English (normative vitality in Table 1). In all likelihood these normative vitality beliefs are related to other findings of this study showing that both adults and teenagers not only reported greater identification with Cree than White people, but also thought that the Cree language was more important than English to their in-group identities (Table 1). Intergenerational differences were also revealed on some of these measures, suggesting that adults were more favorable about Cree than teenagers (Table 1). Indeed when asked which language they would have preferred the questionnaire to be in (assuming that they were equally fluent in Cree and English), a significant interaction effect revealed that adults may have been slightly more favorable about Cree than English, but teenagers were clearly more favorable about English than Cree (item 11, Table 2).

Across Canada, adults in Aboriginal communities are more likely to have learned their in-group languages informally (at home and in the community), whereas teenagers are more likely to have learned them formally at school (Barsh, 1994; Sachdev, 1995). As noted above, the introduction of formal schooling in Cree is a relatively recent phenomenon in this community. Findings reported in Table 2 clearly reveal the extent of linguistic assimilation to English, with both adults and teenagers reporting high oracy and literacy in English and considerably lower proficiency in Cree. As expected, adults reported significantly higher levels of oral proficiency than teenagers. The lack of success in learning Cree by teenagers at

**Table 2.** Means and F-Ratios for Self-Reported Language Proficiency, Use, and Attitudes

| Item                       | Generation (G)   |                                   |                  |                                 | F(1,75) for Rating (main) | F(1,75) for G x R (interaction) |
|----------------------------|------------------|-----------------------------------|------------------|---------------------------------|---------------------------|---------------------------------|
|                            | Teen rating (R)  |                                   | Adult rating (R) |                                 |                           |                                 |
|                            | Cree             | English (White for items 2 & 5)   | Cree             | English (White for items 2 & 5) |                           |                                 |
| <i>Proficiency</i>         |                  |                                   |                  |                                 |                           |                                 |
| 1. Oral                    | 1.6 <sup>a</sup> | 4.6 <sup>c</sup>                  | 2.4 <sup>b</sup> | 4.6 <sup>c</sup>                | 357.12***                 | 7.73**                          |
| 2. Literate                | 1.6 <sup>a</sup> | 4.5 <sup>b</sup>                  | 1.7 <sup>a</sup> | 4.5 <sup>b</sup>                | 690.94***                 | .04                             |
| <i>Language Use</i>        |                  |                                   |                  |                                 |                           |                                 |
| 3. Home                    | 1.7 <sup>a</sup> | 4.9 <sup>c</sup>                  | 2.3 <sup>b</sup> | 1.8 <sup>a</sup>                | 398.17***                 | 6.93*                           |
| 4. Social events           | 1.4 <sup>a</sup> | 4.9 <sup>c</sup>                  | 2.1 <sup>b</sup> | 4.7 <sup>c</sup>                | 456.87***                 | 10.49**                         |
| 5. School/work             | 1.4 <sup>a</sup> | 4.9 <sup>c</sup>                  | 2.1 <sup>b</sup> | 4.6 <sup>c</sup>                | 392.54***                 | 9.62**                          |
| 6. Religious contexts      | 1.6 <sup>a</sup> | 4.6 <sup>b</sup>                  | 2.0 <sup>a</sup> | 4.4 <sup>b</sup>                | 182.69***                 | 2.26                            |
| <i>Attitudes About Use</i> |                  |                                   |                  |                                 |                           |                                 |
| 7. Home                    | 3.2 <sup>a</sup> | 4.3 <sup>b</sup>                  | 4.1 <sup>b</sup> | 4.0 <sup>b</sup>                | 16.38***                  | 24.31**                         |
| 8. Social events           | 2.6 <sup>a</sup> | 4.2 <sup>b</sup>                  | 3.8 <sup>b</sup> | 3.8 <sup>b</sup>                | 41.79***                  | 44.21***                        |
| 9. School/work             | 2.7 <sup>a</sup> | 4.1 <sup>b</sup> 3.9 <sup>b</sup> | 3.8 <sup>b</sup> | 21.73***                        | 27.28***                  |                                 |
| 10. Religious contexts     | 2.9 <sup>a</sup> | 4.0 <sup>b</sup>                  | 3.9 <sup>b</sup> | 3.8 <sup>b</sup>                | 12.06**                   | 16.95***                        |
| 11. Questionnaire          | 3.0 <sup>a</sup> | 4.1 <sup>c</sup>                  | 3.7 <sup>b</sup> | 3.4 <sup>b</sup>                | 3.33                      | 14.65***                        |

## Notes

1. Different superscripts differ significantly at  $p < .05$ , Newman-Keuls post hoc comparisons.  
 2. \*\*\*  $p < .001$ ; \*\*  $p < .01$ ; \*  $p < .05$ .

school is probably due to a variety of factors including large class sizes, meager financial resources, insufficient curriculum development, little sheer time spent learning Aboriginal languages, inadequate teacher training, and insufficient community and elder involvement in school programs (Sinclair, 1993; Kirkness, 1989; AFN, 1990).

Given the patterns of linguistic proficiency self-reported by the participants, it is perhaps not surprising that levels of language use reported in Table 2 show the dominance of English use in all settings by both adults and teenagers. However, as the findings in Table 2 also indicate, adults reported generally greater use of Cree than teenagers. Attitudes to the use of languages in different settings suggested that whereas adults did not differentiate between English and Cree, teenagers felt that the use of English was more appropriate than the use of Cree in all settings.

The difference analyses reported above were informative about specific differences between adults and teenagers but were less revealing about the applicability (and predictive utility) of ethnolinguistic identity and vitality theory to observed patterns of linguistic behavior (Giles & Coupland, 1991; Landry & Allard,

**Table 3. Multiple Regression Results: Predicting Cree Proficiency, Use, and Attitudes**

| Predictor Variables           |                  | Dependent Variables |       |                      |           |
|-------------------------------|------------------|---------------------|-------|----------------------|-----------|
|                               |                  | Oral Prof.          | Use   | Attitude language Q. | Preferred |
| Value of Cree to identity     | r                | –                   | –     | .29*                 | –         |
|                               | s <sup>2</sup> % | –                   | –     | n.s.                 | –         |
| Cree identity                 | r                | .41**               | .34** | .40**                | –         |
|                               | s <sup>2</sup> % | 12**                | 6*    | 4*                   | –         |
| White identity                | r                | –                   | –     | –.39**               | –.39**    |
|                               | s <sup>2</sup> % | –                   | –     | n.s.                 | 6*        |
| General vitality difference   | r                | –                   | –     | –                    | –         |
|                               | s <sup>2</sup> % | –                   | –     | –                    | –         |
| Normative vitality difference | r                | .25*                | –     | .53**                | .40**     |
|                               | s <sup>2</sup> % | n.s.                | –     | 14**                 | 7*        |
| Age                           | r                | .35**               | .34** | .58**                | .43**     |
|                               | s <sup>2</sup> % | 8**                 | 8**   | 22**                 | 10%       |
| Gender                        | r                | –                   | –     | –                    | –         |
|                               | s <sup>2</sup> % | –                   | –     | –                    | –         |
| Linguistic contact            | r                | .24*                | .33** | –                    | –         |
|                               | s <sup>2</sup> % | n.s.                | n.s.  | –                    | –         |
| Total variance (%)            |                  | 28                  | 29    | 57                   | 37        |
| Unique variance               |                  | 20                  | 14    | 40                   | 23        |
| Shared variance               |                  | 8                   | 15    | 17                   | 14        |
| Multiple R                    |                  | .53**               | .54** | .75**                | .61**     |

\*p<.05; \*\* p<.01.

Significant intercorrelations between Independent Variables:

1. Cree identity and importance of Cree language to identity: r=.36 \*\*.
2. Cree identity and Normative Vitality beliefs: r=.33 \*\*.
3. Normative beliefs and importance of language to identity: r=.31 \*\*.
4. Normative beliefs and White identity: r=–.26 \*.

1994). Because a multiple regression approach was thought to be more suitable for this purpose (Tabachnick & Fidell, 1989), two further operations were performed on the data before conducting multiple regression analyses. Specifically, to reflect the comparative nature of intergroup processes (Tajfel & Turner, 1979; Harwood et al., 1994; Sachdev & Bourhis, 1993), relative difference scores between in-group (i.e., Aboriginal group or language) and out-group (i.e., White or English) were calculated for general and normative vitality beliefs and linguistic contact. These difference variables were subsequently employed with variables of the value of Cree to group identity, in-group identification, out-group identification, age, and

gender in a Standard Multiple Regression analyses to predict Cree language oral proficiency, use, attitudes, and preference for Cree as the language of the questionnaire. It should also be noted that all language use and attitudes variables across settings were combined into two separate use and attitude scales (Cronbach's alphas were .90 and .92 respectively for these scales).

All regression equations (see Table 3) were statistically significant, with the total variance explained by the full set of independent variables ranging from 28% (Cree oral proficiency) to 57% (attitude to the use of Cree). Although the total amounts of total variance explained seemed moderate, statistical analyses revealed significant and systematic patterns. As expected from the difference analyses reported above, age was positively related to Cree oral proficiency, use, attitudes, and preference for a Cree language questionnaire. In other words, the older the participant was, the greater was the reported proficiency and favorable attitudes about the use of Cree. Note that Table 3 presents the results of the regression analyses in summary form because of the large number of predictor variables. In addition, all the significant correlations between predictor variables are also reported as they aid interpretation of the regression analyses.

The results also revealed that identification with Cree significantly and positively predicted Cree oral proficiency, self-reported use of Cree as well as attitudes about the use of Cree. In addition, out-group identification (i.e., as "White") was negatively related to the preference for Cree as the questionnaire language. Overall, these findings underline the previously reported close relationship between in-group identity, language use, and attitudes (Giles & Johnson, 1981; Sachdev & Bourhis, 1990). Other findings of the analyses also suggested that in accordance with previous literature (Harwood et al., 1994; Landry & Allard, 1994), beliefs about the normative vitality difference in favor of Cree also significantly predicted language attitudes and the preference for Cree as the language of the questionnaire. Although these findings are in accordance with some findings of previous research, the lack of a statistical association between general vitality, linguistic contact, and language proficiency, use, and attitudes is somewhat problematic. This lack of predictive power of language group contact and general vitality is in all likelihood a function of the low objective linguistic vitality of Cree in Fisher River (compare Landry, Allard, & Henry, 1996). Although participants from the Fisher River community have had to endure an extremely large absolute loss in in-group "linguistic capital" (Landry et al., 1996) due to the severely oppressive policies of European colonizers of North America, they have maintained high levels of Aboriginal identification that are likely to provide a strong platform for linguistic revitalization efforts.

### *Summary and Conclusions*

The results of this exploratory study among the Fisher River Cree revealed expected intergenerational differences favoring adults (over teenagers) in Cree proficiency, use, and attitudes, although English was clearly the dominant language for both adults and teenagers. A history of oppression of Aboriginal peoples, cultures, and languages (Gardner & Jimmie, 1989) has considerably reduced the objective ethnolinguistic vitality of Aboriginal communities across North America today (Sachdev, 1995). Landry et al. (1996; Landry & Allard, 1994) have argued that low



objective ethnolinguistic vitality of the in-group restricts the frequency (and nature) of contacts with in-group language speakers, and is thus related to poor proficiency and low use of in-group languages. Findings of this study among the Cree in Fisher River were consistent with this analysis and showed that participants reported more contact with speakers of English than Cree, and perceived the vitality of English to be greater than that of Cree. Furthermore, participants in this study reported fairly low overall levels of Aboriginal language proficiency and use, and high levels of English language proficiency and use. However, the lack of a statistical relationship between contact and language use or attitudes is somewhat problematic. Following Landry et al. (1996) this may be explained by arguing that the currently cumulated Cree linguistic capital is insufficient in providing individual networks of contact with Cree speakers for language revival. Although these results may suggest a pessimistic outlook for the Cree language in Fisher River, other findings were more encouraging.

Participants generally reported high levels of identification with their in-group (i.e., Cree peoples), felt that Aboriginal languages were more important than English to in-group identity, and that Aboriginal languages should receive greater sociostructural support than English in the future. These findings augur well for language revitalization given the important role of language in intergroup relations (Giles et al., 1977; Sachdev & Bourhis, 1990). Furthermore, statistical analyses designed to see how variables predicted patterns of self-reported in-group language behavior and attitudes revealed the important role of in-group identification and normative vitality. These results thus probably represent an early and promising stage in the progress toward Aboriginal language revitalization in these communities (compare Fishman, 1990). Of course, our findings are tentative at best and await validation from further research.

The present study collected self-reported language use, attitudes, vitality perceptions, contact, and identifications from adults and teenagers in Fisher River. Clearly self-reports are not the most satisfactory measures of actual proficiency, use, and attitudes. For instance, although self-reports are usually correlated with actual proficiency (Gardner, 1985), they may actually be reflecting the degree of self-confidence with the language (Clement, 1986; Clement & Kruidenier, 1985). Similarly, self-reported attitudes may be related to issues of social desirability and impression formation rather than privately held attitudes. Future studies employing independently assessed measures of proficiency, as well as indirect measures of language attitudes may prove more informative about the generalizability of the findings of this study. In addition, a richer picture is likely to emerge if such quantitative research is complemented by qualitative, ethnographic approaches (compare Bell, Burton, Funk, & White, 1995).

It is important to emphasize that language education needs to be considered in the broader context of empowerment in Aboriginal education in Canada (Sachdev, 1995). Critical theorists (Cummins, 1986), evaluating research data gathered in a variety of non-Aboriginal settings, have argued that the linguistic and educational failure of minority students can be explained by the degree to which schools reflect or counteract the power relations that exist in the broader society. Specifically, empowering students by promoting and valorizing their linguistic and cultural

talents (Hamers & Blanc, 1989; Cummins, 1986), actively encouraging community participation in student development, and moving away from the dominant, transmission-oriented teaching model will lead to significantly better linguistic and educational progress.

Incompatible cultural assumptions and practices underlying formal study and language programs may also affect linguistic and educational outcomes. In the broadest terms, cultural assumptions about schooling and the learning of languages formally are based on European and not Aboriginal values, and generally focus on literacy and knowledge *about* languages (Perley, 1993). In contrast, Aboriginal cultures give primacy to oral traditions, informal language learning, and to the actual use of languages for everyday purposes. This mismatch in cultural assumptions may also affect the relative success or failure of language programs. Studies that systematically and quantitatively focus on such factors need to be designed to explain patterns of sociolinguistic behavior in Aboriginal communities.

The findings of the present study provided evidence that was generally consistent with current intergroup models of language behavior. Results suggested that although the current health of Cree in Fisher River is poor, and formal Aboriginal language acquisition in this context is currently undergoing reevaluation (e.g., recent withdrawal of Cree language instruction at high school level), there are grounds for a more optimistic outlook. The high levels of ethnolinguistic identification, value of in-group language to identity, and perceived illegitimacy of the current status of the in-group language reported in the present study provide the necessary platform for language revitalization. However, as several researchers (Kirkness, 1997; Hamers & Blanc, 1989; Cummins, 1986; Sachdev, 1995) have argued, the success of revitalization efforts by the communities will also depend crucially on the wider valorization and support (specifically by governmental agencies, and generally by non-Aboriginal communities) of Aboriginal languages and cultures.

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