

# The Future of Cree<sup>1</sup>

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Cree is one of approximately 6,000 languages spoken in the world today. Experts estimate that by the end of this century only a tenth of these 6,000 languages will still be spoken ([http://web.mit.edu/linguistics/mitili/language\\_loss.html](http://web.mit.edu/linguistics/mitili/language_loss.html)). Will Cree be one of the 600 languages to survive the century? Will your grandchildren's grandchildren still be speaking Cree? The answer to this question is by no means clear at this point in time.

While the survival of Cree cannot be taken for granted, there is still time and opportunity to safeguard its future. Unlike so many of Canada's Aboriginal languages, which have few to no speakers left, Cree remains a vital language across much of Canada, particularly in the eastern parts of the country. Most importantly, Cree is being passed from one generation to the next; it remains the mother tongue of tens of thousands of Cree children. There is thus reason to celebrate the strength of the Cree language as we enter the second decade of the 21<sup>st</sup> century. However, it is also true that those who seek to safeguard the future of the language face significant challenges, with fluency in one or both of Canada's official languages (English and French) being prerequisite to accessing so much of what our world has to offer, from higher educational opportunities to success in the business world. Parents are frequently faced with hard choices when it comes to deciding which language(s) their children should be educated in. And children are the key to the survival of any language – if Cree is not passed on to the next generation, if they fail to become fluent speakers of the language, then it will not survive.

This essay presents some important facts about language decline, the situation in which a language comes to be spoken by fewer and fewer people, as it is replaced by an invariably more dominant language such as English or French. We discuss the situation with respect to Cree, and make some recommendations for strengthening the future of Cree.

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<sup>1</sup> This article was written for a Cree readership. Research and writing was undertaken within the context of a project funded by the Cree School Board of Quebec ([www.cscree.qc.ca](http://www.cscree.qc.ca)) to assess Cree as a medium of instruction in Cree territory. It is posted at [www.eastcree.org](http://www.eastcree.org) (resources).

### **When is a language endangered?**

Languages which are in decline frequently reach the point of becoming “endangered,” a term borrowed from the world of the physical sciences (where animals deemed to be in need of protection are referred to as “endangered species”). The ultimate fate of many endangered languages is language death, the case where a language ceases to be spoken. A dead (or extinct) language may still be read and even written, as Latin is, for example, but no child learns the language as their mother tongue, and there are no native speakers of the language. Whether Cree will be one of the 90% of world languages projected to decline and die in the next 90 years, or whether it will survive the 21<sup>st</sup> century, depends on the decisions taken by the Cree people right now, and in the very near future.

There are approximately 14,000 Cree people in Iyiyuuschii, most of whom speak Cree. Linguists refer to this variety of the language as “East Cree”. Should speakers of East Cree be concerned about their language? Is it endangered?

First of all, we need to know what it means for a language to qualify as “endangered” There is general agreement with respect to what the danger signs are; how many people speak the language, for example, is an important factor. That said, absolute numbers must be viewed in context as each language exists in its own unique set of circumstances. To illustrate, take the case of two hypothetical languages – Language A and Language B. 10,000 people speak language A and 20,000 people speak Language B. We may conclude on the basis of these numbers that Language A is more endangered. However, if we also know that speakers of Language A are monolingual and live on an isolated island, rarely visited by outsiders, while Language B is spoken by refugees, all of whom are now bilingual and living in many different countries throughout the world, then we have to reassess our evaluation of which language really has the better chance of survival. So if we return to our question, “Is East Cree endangered?”, let’s look at speaker numbers, and consider the context in which the language is spoken.

### **Is Cree endangered?**

While many factors other than speaker numbers come into play when determining whether or not a given language is endangered, there is some agreement among experts that a language which has fewer than 20,000 speakers should be considered endangered (Crystal 2000), placing East Cree, with 14,000 speakers, on the danger list. How about the wider context in which East Cree is spoken? If we look to Canada as a whole we find many more than 14,000 speakers of Cree. Statistics Canada (2006) reports the following.

*The Aboriginal language spoken by the largest number of First Nations people is Cree. An estimated 87,285 could carry on a conversation in Cree, followed by 30,255 who could speak Ojibway, 12,435 who spoke Oji-Cree and 11,080 who spoke Montagnais-Naskapi. (Statistics Canada 2006)*

Including the varieties of Innu/Iyiyu-aimun of Quebec and Labrador (referred to above as Montagnais-Naskapi), which linguists recognize as belonging to the same language as Cree, the total number of speakers is 98,365. Given this larger number, can we say that Cree as a whole is not an endangered language? There are a number of reasons for believing that this larger Cree-speaking population actually contributes little to protecting

each individual variety of the language, and that it is the 14,000 figure (for East Cree) that should be the focus of our discussion here.

In the first place, there is insufficient interaction between the various groups to regard them as a single speech community. One reason for this is that communities in which speakers live are distributed over a vast geographical area, from Alberta in the west (Plains Cree) to Labrador in the east (Innu-aimun). Another important factor is that varieties of Cree can differ considerably from one another, making it hard for speakers from different parts of the country to understand each other. Every language in the world is made up of different varieties (more commonly referred to as “dialects”), which is why you can often spot where someone is from by the way they speak (the English spoken in Labrador, for example, is distinct from the English spoken in Alberta). The differences among varieties of Cree, however, can be quite significant. By way of example, we consider the impact of the sound-changing rule that linguists refer to as “k-palatalization” on pronunciation (and consequently spelling). In the Cree dialects of Quebec ‘k’ is pronounced as ‘ch’ before ‘e’, ‘i’ and ‘ii’. For example, the Cree word ‘it is long’ is *kinwaau* in some dialects, but *chinwaau* in others. While it is easy to see the relationship between these two words, and to realize that they are in fact the same word, it is not always as easy to spot a sound rule relationship. Western Cree *kisemanitu*, ‘God,’ appears in East Cree writing as *chishemanitu*, but in spoken East Cree it is contracted to *chemantu*. We find a comparable disparity between forms in Swampy Cree: *kikiskeniten* ‘you know it’ and the contracted spoken form of the same word in Innu, *tsseniten*. Likewise, Western Cree *kitawâsisîm* ‘your child’ is pronounced in the east as *stawâsîm*.

Compounding the problem created by dialect variation is the fact that no one dialect has been agreed upon as the standard. While each community tends to look to its elders to set the standard for good speech and writing, beyond this there is no agreed upon standard version of the Cree language. Without a standard, speakers of a language tend to have less awareness of dialects other than their own, a fact which reinforces the polarization of different speech communities. Older speakers of East Cree who used the Moose Factory Cree (Anglican) bible and hymnals would have a heightened awareness of dialect variation outside their own territory and, with that, an appreciation of the usefulness of a standard version of the language. With the rise of Christian denominations which avoid use of the Anglican bible, East Cree speakers have lost one source of exposure to other varieties of Cree. That said, the degree of communication between members of the different speech communities in Iyiyuuschii is sufficient for speakers of East Cree to be aware of the variation that exists within their own language.

An important consequence of there not being a standard version in Cree is that there is no Canada-wide Cree dictionary. If one existed, it would serve as a guide to standard pronunciation and spelling, facilitating communication between people from different parts of the country. As things stand, not only are there different spellings (reflecting the different pronunciations), there are even different ways of writing Cree, so that not all reading materials are accessible to all speakers. These differences go beyond the choice between the Roman versus Syllabics orthography, because there are different conventions even within these two systems.

Currently, for each variety of Cree, speakers either have their own dictionary, or aspire to have one in the near future. And there should indeed be a dictionary for each Cree dialect/language, as each one is unique, but if there were in addition a pan-Cree dictionary, based on a standard, it would greatly facilitate the creation of a countrywide speech community. This larger community would not only be stronger in numbers – important to language survival – it would also be stronger in terms of political representation, and would be better able to pool valuable resources, time not being the least of these.

Finally, an important factor standing in the way of the creation of a national Cree-speaking community is the fact that speakers live in a number of different provinces. Most obviously this has an important impact on decisions made with respect to children and language, as education is a matter of provincial responsibility.

Taken together, the factors we have itemized here not only fail to promote a unified approach to strengthening the Cree language, they inhibit and discourage it. In a very real sense then, each variety of Cree can be regarded as a separate language. Returning to the question we asked at the beginning of this essay, “Is Cree an endangered language?”, we can see that this question is best asked of each individual variety of Cree. For this reason we focus here on matters having to do with the future of the language of Iyiyuuschii, East Cree. We propose that, with only 14,000 speakers, East Cree should be counted as an endangered language; at the very least, it should be regarded as a language whose vitality must be carefully monitored. In particular, East Cree must continue to be effectively transmitted to each new generation. When there is a break in language transmission from one generation to the next, there is a real danger that the language can be lost in as little as one or two generations down the line.

### **Outside pressures**

Besides low speaker numbers, let us consider a number of other early warning signs, or “linguistic red flags,” which may, or may not (depending on what language decisions are made in the near future), herald the decline of the language. While the East Cree speech community remains relatively healthy, it is instructive to look to other communities where Cree has fared less well as these may provide some clue as to the future of individual languages. Serious language decline has already happened in the neighboring communities of Moose Factory to the west, and Mashteuiatsh to the east. Why these communities in particular?

Both have a long history of interaction with speakers of English (Moose Factory) and French (Mashteuiatsh), and this has provided a strong impetus over the years for people to become bilingual, this at a time when most other Cree communities would have been monolingual. Moose Factory has had an English-medium mission school since 1855, attracting not only speakers of English, but also speakers of Inuktitut as well as other varieties of Cree. The level of contact intensified with the establishment of the general hospital in 1950. In Mashteuiatsh, only a few older people now speak the Aboriginal language (Drapeau and Moar 1996) and the community has implemented a program to bring back Innu as a second language ([www.mashteuiatsh.ca/pol\\_education.php](http://www.mashteuiatsh.ca/pol_education.php)).

With proficiency in French or English came enhanced opportunities in education and employment; in the past, as in the present, bilingualism offered access to a wider world. As educational and often economic success has increased for bilingual individuals, the Aboriginal language has frequently been relegated to a less prominent position. While loss of the Aboriginal language is by no means a necessary consequence of bilingualism, it frequently ends up being so as people are forced to make difficult life choices.

Other factors may have contributed to language loss in these two places, but it would nevertheless seem prudent for speakers of East Cree to take a careful look at how to manage bilingualism in their communities. In the 21<sup>st</sup> century, fluency and literacy in English, and increasingly in French also, has become a necessary part of the every day life of most Cree-speaking adults. This places the Cree language under ever-increasing pressures. A crucial part of promoting and protecting the language will be making the right decisions with respect to how and when to deliver instruction in Cree, French and English to the children of the community. With Cree being under such pressure, merely having it as the home language cannot ensure its continuance as a vibrant system of communication. Relegated to the confines of the home, any language becomes like a caged animal, a poor shadow of its former self, reduced in the richness of its vocabulary and grammatical structure. Cree children need to use Cree to talk and write about many different things beyond their home environment, from space travel to world history, from geography to photography, from aviation to conservation; the list, obviously, is infinite, and so is the capacity of the Cree language to articulate any idea, no matter how far removed it is from every day life. But this will only happen if care is taken to make it happen, a subject to which we return at the end of this essay (with our recommendations for future action). The school classroom is one place where extended opportunities for such wide-ranging language use can be provided. At the same time, we recognize that children must emerge from school proficient in English and/or French if they are to go on to higher education, vocational training, or enter a workplace requiring either language. Balancing these linguistic demands requires careful planning and management.

Bilingualism in and of itself should not be a cause for concern vis-à-vis the survival of East Cree as a language. Not only is it a necessary fact of life, being able to live in more than one language is an enriching experience and one which is the norm for at least half of the world's population (Crystal 2000). There is also growing evidence to suggest that children who are either bilingual, or who learn a second language or third language, go on to perform better at school in all academic areas. However, communities should be aware of the potential threat that bilingualism, mismanaged or unmanaged, can pose to the survival of an Aboriginal language. In the absence of clear and well-informed language policy, bilingualism can in fact pose a threat. The more dominant official language can come to assume a more prominent position than the Aboriginal language, causing the latter to become increasingly marginalized and fall into decline. This eventuality is not inevitable, of course, and can be avoided by having good language planning in place to determine the best way to balance a community's competing linguistic needs.

### **East Cree and language change**

Thus far in thinking about the vitality of East Cree as a language, we have considered speaker numbers for the language as well as the fact that many of people also speak English, French, or both official languages. We turn now to what speakers of East Cree themselves are saying about the state of their language, and here we must rely for the most part on anecdotal reporting, as, in the absence of linguistic research, we lack the statistical facts that would allow us to be more objective. We report on observations which have been made to us over the years (forty years for Marguerite MacKenzie, seven in the case of Julie Brittain) by East Cree speakers whom we have met during the course of our work as linguists.

Many older speakers of East Cree are expressing some concern about the way Cree is being spoken by younger generations, including Cree teachers. As we have said numerous times now, the key to the survival of a language is how well it is transmitted from generation to generation – young speakers will determine the future of the language. Younger people are said to be using many more English words when they are speaking Cree, even in the case where a Cree word already exists. Two pieces of research support this observation. A recent assessment of Cree-speaking five year olds shows a gap in their knowledge of common words (see section 2.3.1 of this report). Further, a Cree language acquisition study, ongoing since 2004, shows for the community of Chisasibi that children who are as young as two, three and four three years old, who are growing up in a Cree-speaking home, use a high proportion of English nouns when speaking Cree. (The Chisasibi Child Language Acquisition Study (CCLAS) is located at Memorial University of Newfoundland. Julie Brittain is project director. Marguerite MacKenzie, Yvan Rose and Carrie Dyck are co-investigators.) The phenomenon of inserting words from one language into another is referred to as “code switching.” For monolingual speakers, code switching can pose a serious barrier to communication. If we take the case of East Cree, depending on how many English words are used in a conversation, it can become difficult or impossible for a person who only speaks Cree to follow a conversation. As monolingual Cree speakers tend to be elderly, code switching further contributes to the creation of intergenerational communication problems.

Those of you who are Cree speakers will be able to think of English words which are routinely inserted into Cree speech. Code switching in general often follows a pattern whereby certain sets of words, such as numbers, days of the week, month names, and so on, from one (usually “majority”) language are inserted into another (usually “minority”) language. Or it may be the case that certain topics of conversation, such as computing or commerce, favour the use of the majority language. To take an example of a language other than Cree, we turn to Tibetan, a so-called “minority” language in the People’s Republic of China, which has approximately six million speakers. This may not sound like minority language speaker numbers, but compared to the approximately one billion speakers of China’s official language, Mandarin Chinese, it is. Many (especially urban) Tibetans are bilingual, as fluency in Chinese enhances one’s opportunities to access certain kinds of employment, higher education, etc. A certain amount of code switching, where Chinese words or phrases are inserted into a Tibetan grammatical framework, is attested among Tibetan speakers when they are engaged in discussion of specific topics - this is a good example of code switching where speakers of a minority language insert

fragments of the majority language into their speech (Yeshe 2008). It is not uncommon, for example, for Tibetans to use Chinese to talk about numbers (to exchange phone numbers, for example), even though the Tibetan language has a perfectly well developed number system. Which language a bilingual person chooses as their language of business and commerce will be influenced by the language they learned to do calculations in at school, as well as by which language is determined to be the lingua franca of commerce.

Code switching may seem innocuous enough – a mere convenience – but it can become systematic, leading to the widespread replacement of a whole class of words, and thus contributing significantly to language decline. In Betsiamites (Innu-aimun), for example, we see in certain contexts, a systematic replacement of Innu nouns with French nouns. Also, Innu verbs are replaced at times with the French infinitival form of the verb in combination with the Innu verb *tutam*<sup>u</sup> (s/he does something) (Drapeau 1995). This constitutes a case of what linguists refer to as a loss of ‘morphological complexity,’ the move from a Cree-style of language, which relies on having many prefixes and suffixes (creating frequently long and complex words), toward a word-building style that more resembles English or French, where ideas are conveyed by stringing together a series of simple words. This pattern of change is familiar from many of the world’s declining languages – it seems to be one of the things that can happen to languages under pressure from a more dominant language. A characteristic feature of the Cree language is its large number of verbal suffixes. Use of these suffixes, which enable a speaker to express important linguistic information with precision and eloquence, is one area of the language in general which seems to be in decline. As we look at the Cree language across Canada, we see a pattern: the greater the contact is with the majority language, the greater the decline in the use of these verbal suffixes. As the Cree language changes, words – in particular verbs – seem to become increasingly less complex. This trend toward simplicity is fuelled by the habit of code switching into English or French, both languages which lack the powerful word-building rules that Cree, as it is still spoken, has.

There are some choices speakers of Cree can make with respect to code switching. There is a strong tradition of bringing English words into Cree, but “wrapping them up” in Cree inflection (adding Cree prefixes and suffixes). This makes the borrowed word more Cree-like; for example, *nicomputerim*, a mixture of English and Cree within a single word, means “my computer.” Speakers should nonetheless be aware that they are in one sense contributing to the erosion of their language when they engage in this kind of linguistic behaviour. Above all, speakers should be aware of what they are doing whenever they step outside of Cree, and of what alternatives exist that may be more protective of the language. This brings us to the option of using Cree word-building rules to make up an entirely new Cree word, to talk about a new concept (such as a computer).

The technical term for the coining new words is “neologism” creation, and all languages have ways to create neologisms, to talk about new things. There are some noticeable sectors of life in which a decision appears to have been made to implement the creation of Cree neologisms (e.g., in the broadcasting of hockey games on the CBC). But Cree people should decide if they are going to promote neologisms in all sectors of life, or if code switching will be the default strategy. If a policy to create new Cree words is decided on, then linguistic training should be provided to streamline the process, and a

road map should be laid out in order for each speech community to know the direction in which the language is going. Currently, neologisms are being made up all the time, “on the fly”, so to speak. What is needed, however, is a mechanism for having them recognized officially and promoted for community-wide use.

What is worrying, in terms of language decline, is when we find a gap in a speaker’s vocabulary, the case where someone does not know an existing Cree word (especially if it is a common word). This is the scenario we referred to earlier, where children were found to be missing common Cree words from their vocabularies. So here we are not talking about the need to name something new, something for which no Cree word exists, but rather the need to fill a gap in speaker knowledge. Let’s consider the speaker’s options in dealing with this gap. He or she can (i) borrow the word from English or French (code switching), (ii) borrow the word but wrap but up in Cree inflection (partial code-switching), (iii) make up a new word using Cree word-building rules (use a neologism), or (iv) find someone to tell them the Cree word they need. They might not have time to find someone to fill the gap for them, though hopefully, when there is time, they will do that, so we set aside option (iv). As for the other three options, arguably (iii) is better than (ii) which is better than (i). Using a neologism has two advantages over pure code switching: the speaker is using Cree word-building rules to make the new word, so they are still using Cree; and they would not disadvantage a monolingual Cree speaker conversation participant by switching to another language. Applying the same logic, partial code switching is preferable to pure code switching.

In what other ways can a language be eroded? Words can be lost because the need for the word has disappeared. This happens as lifestyles change. Word loss most obviously affects vocabulary associated with aspects of a traditional lifestyle, an issue which is of significant relevance to Cree people. The very rich and detailed vocabulary associated with life on the land – words to describe animals and parts of animals – tends to reside in the memories of elders, less so in the minds of the younger people who spend less time in pursuit of a traditional lifestyle. With the passing of the generation who used these words, the words are lost if they are not recorded. Having no word for a concept that has disappeared is problematic – of course, recording words along with the contexts in which they were used (in a dictionary, for example) is essential. But perhaps it is also important not to lose knowledge of how to do the activity for which a particular set of vocabulary was required.

Older speakers also report that younger Cree people are making errors in adding endings to verbs. Cree has many verbal suffixes – in part this is what makes it a rich and expressive language. Intransitive verbs (verbs which don’t have an object, like *nipaau*) have a small set of endings, while transitive verbs (verbs which have an object, like *waapahtam*) have many more endings, making this type of verb more difficult to use correctly. Older Cree speakers report hearing young people wrongly add the simple intransitive endings to transitive verbs. This suggests that the language is being simplified, reduced in complexity. While language change is a natural process that affects every language in the world, we know that rapid language change is one of the linguistic red flags warning that language decline may be occurring (Crystal 2000). Is rapid language change happening in the East Cree-speaking community? We don’t have an

objective answer to this question, as the linguistic research has not been done. What we can say is that people are talking about language change taking place in the communities, and that is something to take into account along with everything else we have discussed here. Finally, and, given all we have said about the importance of passing along the language to children, perhaps most disturbingly, Cree teachers report that an increasing number of Cree children are arriving in school speaking English or French, but little Cree. Again, there are no statistics available to back this up, but the teachers, with all their experience of children and their language skills, are a good source of information.

### **Why does it matter if a language goes into decline?**

We now turn to the question: Why does it matter if a language goes into decline? There are many answers to this question, not the least of which being no one wants to lose their native language, as decline unchecked inevitably leads to language death. But even language decline has very tangible negative consequences.

When a language changes rapidly, one of the signs of language decline, it becomes difficult for older and younger generations to communicate with each other. The language of people in their 70s or 80s, for example, may be so different from the language of teenagers that communication becomes difficult. Grandparents and their grandchildren, and even more so great grandparents and their great grandchildren, can encounter communication difficulties. Clearly, this is a very distressing situation for any family or community to experience. With such a gap in communication, there becomes even less opportunity to fix it, as communication between younger and older people becomes more effortful.

The decline of any language also goes hand in hand with the gradual loss of all the knowledge that has been accumulated and stored in that language. If we take the case of East Cree, if there is less time for Cree people to spend time out on the land in pursuit of the traditional Cree lifestyle, fewer people will retain the vocabulary associated with the natural world. In this case there is a danger of losing the knowledge that was encoded by the lost words, knowledge of the natural world: the names and characteristics of trees and plants; the names and characteristics of birds, insects, fish and mammals; information about place names, geographical features such as rivers, mountains, lakes, and so on; descriptions of climactic conditions. There is even no guarantee that a lost Cree word can be replaced by an English, French or Latin word, as the wealth of knowledge captured by the Cree language has been acquired across thousands of years of occupying the same territory and may well reflect information as yet unrecognized by western science. In this case the loss of vocabulary equates with the loss of information.

Language can also serve as the vehicle through which a people's distinct identity and worldview can be expressed and transmitted. While this is not to say that Cree people who do not speak the language are any less Cree than those who do, knowledge of the language plays a role in forging identity. In his book "Language Death", linguist David Crystal, who himself has been much involved with the successful revival of the ancient British language, Welsh, eloquently voices why, in his opinion, every language is important: "Identity and history combine to ensure that each language reflects a unique

encapsulation and interpretation of human history.” (Crystal 2000:44) Based on having listened to speakers of many languages express what their language means to them, Crystal (2000: 48-49) goes on to observe: “Many statements testify to the way a community’s elders, leaders, and educators explicitly acknowledge the importance of their language as an expression of their whole society and history. They see language as a means of transmitting the story of the great journeys, wars, alliances, and apocalyptic events of their past; it is the chief mechanism of their rituals; it is the means of conveying ancient myths and legends, and their beliefs about the spirit world, to new generations; it is a way of expressing their network of social relationships; and it provides an ongoing commentary on their interaction with the landscape.” Language is very much a part of who we are and how we see the world; the decline or loss of a language is likely then to impact community and personal identity.

### **East Cree is well-situated to survive**

We have said that each language exists within its own special set of circumstances, or, to put it another way, has its own unique habitat, and that this habitat plays an important role in determining the future of the language. We now provide a brief overview of the habitat in which East Cree, a small language by world standards (one with a small number of speakers), exists. And here we are pleased to end on a positive note, as we believe that in many respects East Cree is very well situated.

Unlike many small languages whose speakers are scattered across a wide geographical area over which they have no more political power than speakers of the more dominant languages with whom they coexist, East Cree is spoken predominantly within Iyiyuuschii, a clearly-defined territory within which speakers of the language have autonomy over a range of issues including, crucially, language and education. Cree people have the power and the means to legislate protective language laws as they see fit. A clear example of this is the freedom the Cree School Board has to implement Cree Programs in the school system. In his survey of endangered languages, Crystal (2000) points to this level of autonomy as being a major positive factor for the survival of a small language. Another positive factor he identifies is found in the East Cree speech community: the Cree language and the distinctive culture of the Cree people are externally recognized, which is to say governments at the provincial as well as federal level recognize the importance of the language and culture of the people of Iyiyuuschii. East Cree also ranks highly in another important protective factor recognized by Crystal: the community of speakers has a strong sense of pride in their identity as a people, and in their language.

Cree is also used in numerous contexts in the communities and is not restricted to the home. This is an important factor in protecting the language. It is used in commercial and administrative settings, as well as in the schools as a language of instruction. Finally, and as we have stressed in this essay, very importantly, East Cree is spoken by people of all ages, including children – it remains the mother tongue of a relatively large number of people. This must continue in order for the language to survive, and this is why it is of the utmost importance that well-informed decision-making be made with respect to language(s) and education. There isn’t time to get it wrong.

### What more needs to be done

In conclusion, we offer some brief comment on what we as linguists feel are areas that speakers of East Cree can explore in order to strengthen and protect their language.

- Effective bilingual school programs – children need to be introduced to the languages they need in an orderly fashion at school. This must include Cree – research has shown that, contrary to popular belief, having the language at home is not enough to produce good speakers and safeguard the future of the language.
- Effective teacher training for native speakers of Cree – children can't learn if they are not taught well, and teachers can't teach if they do not receive effective training.
- Provide more training for Cree teachers in the structure of the language give them the tools (resources) to better teach the language.
- Distribute the Cree language books created by Cree School Board personnel to homes so that written Cree has a stronger presence.
- Encourage Cree speakers to be trained in Linguistics so that they can advise about language issues.
- Establish a *Community Language Specialist* program to train Cree School Board and other personnel to do linguistic research and language planning. This program was offered in the 1980s through the Université du Québec à Chicoutimi (UQAC) as the *Techno-linguist Certificate Program* and is still on the books there. The few speakers who have completed this program have made major contributions to documenting the Cree language so far. This program trains speakers beyond the courses provided through the *Cree Literacy Certificate*, enabling them to understand in detail how Cree grammar works and how language can be managed in multi-lingual communities. There are a number of professional linguists who are interested in providing this kind of training and have the skills to undertake it. Their goal in providing a *Community Language Specialist* program would be to enable Cree people to take over the on-going task of documenting their language.
- Encourage Cree people who are interested in their language to take a BA in Linguistics and to consider graduate work (an MA in Linguistics) as well. There are a number of Linguistics departments, in universities all across Canada, which specialize in Cree and related languages. A special fellowship for studying the Cree language could be set up.
- Involve the whole speech community – whatever decisions are made with respect to language, the whole community must be involved. This means that there must be education of the community (both Cree speakers and non-Cree), especially decision-makers in the Cree political and administrative entities. People need to be informed about how a language can decline, and how it can be maintained. Perhaps the most effective way to do this would be through a series of short radio programs (on community radio).

- Strengthen the contexts in which the Cree language can be used. Be aware of situations where Cree is not used, and find a way to make these contexts Cree-speaking. The chances to speak Cree in Iyiyuuschii should be increasing in the 21<sup>st</sup> century, not decreasing. The following may be of some help in this regard:
  - Maintain use of the Cree language when non-Cree speakers are in the minority at meetings, and so on. It is polite to switch to French or English if a non-Cree speaker is present, but the non-Cree speaking guest will understand that the Cree language now needs to be given a special priority. Provide an interpreter to translate for the guest(s), and maintain Cree as the language of communication. Adopting this as a policy will also provide employment for Cree speakers.
  - Offer Cree language instruction for non-Cree community residents and employees of Cree entities outside of Iyiyuuschii. Not only will this create employment opportunities for speakers of Cree, it changes the status balance of Cree with respect to English and French, placing Cree centre-stage in Iyiyuuschii. Cree people have had to learn English or French to interact with non-Cree people; it is quite reasonable to expect non-Cree people to learn the language of the Cree if they are working and/or living with them.
  - Raise awareness of the value of oral Cree speaking skills through more emphasis on speech-making skills,
- At the level of regional government, establish a Cree Language Institute which involves all Cree entities. In particular, use the existing high level of expertise at the Cree School Board to oversee language planning. This would include, but not be restricted to, conducting research on the Cree language and how or when it is used in the community. (More information should be available, for example, on the subject of bilingualism.) Much can be done to raise awareness and concern about the issues facing the language but the entire Cree Nation must be involved. Existing research partnerships with linguists and educators can be supported and new ones established so that the results of up-to-date research can be brought to the decision-making level.

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