

Adult Attitudes Towards Dene Yati/Zhatié: A Community Questionnaire

by

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Abstract

A comparison of language attitudes in adults from two Dene-speaking communities in Canada's Northwest Territories describes attitudes which are broadly homogenous, with some variation dependent on demographics and beliefs regarding the language and language vitality. The results of the study show overall low attitudes among respondents in both communities, affected by the rating of the use of the language in workplaces and despite strongly positive attitudes in the affective dimension. Positive attitudes in an individual are associated with strength of Dene identity and proficiency in the language, with these conditions promoting one another. Concerns about language vitality are reflected in both communities' focus on the importance of generational language transfer occurring in the home. The fact that the majority of survey respondents rate themselves as emergent speakers of the language may be indicative of low rates of language use, in turn contributing to concerns about vitality. However, the broad base of support for the language and language learning in the communities shows awareness of the situation and a keen understanding of the value of the language to cultural revitalization and its potential contribution to wellness amongst young learners.

Keywords: language attitudes, Dene Yatie, Dene Zhatié, Northwest Territories, adult attitudes

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1. Introduction

1.1. Study overview

Understanding attitudes to Indigenous Languages (ILs) in Indigenous Canadian communities is a complex issue, shaped in part by the experiences Indigenous peoples have had with government policies that affect their education and the integrity of families and communities. In current times, communities continue to call for Indigenous-led education to help restore the link between language and culture (Deer, 2022), a fact which shows investment in language maintenance and preservation.

Research into attitudes to both heritage languages and ILs shows the strength of the integrative dimensions of attitudes in motivating speakers at all levels of proficiency to learn or support others' learning. This study examines the relative importance of integrative and instrumental aspects of attitudes towards the Dene language in the communities of Fort Providence and Kátł'odééche First Nation Reserve in the Northwest Territories (NWT).

Attitudes held by community members to heritage languages and language learning have been shown to be a potential factor in the formation of young learners (Melo-Pfeifer, 2015). Understanding more about how adults feel about the Dene language and the experience of young learners in their community will help draw a clearer picture of what is going on in each community regarding language maintenance, and why. Though several studies into Indigenous community language attitudes have been done in British Columbia (Sachdev, 1998; Sachdev & Hanlon, 2000), Newfoundland and Labrador (Thorburn, 2005; Andersen, 2009) and Manitoba (Nikkel, 2006; Kelleher, 2017), to date, no significant sociolinguistic study has been conducted into language attitudes among any of the non-European language communities of the NWT.

1.2. The Communities

The focus of this study are the communities of Fort Providence (Zhati Koe) and Kátł'odééche First Nation in the Northwest Territories of Canada. As of the 2021 national census, there has been a 4.3% drop in the number Indigenous language speakers in Canada since 2016, the largest overall drop since relevant data was first collected by census in 1991. While that number may paint a bleak picture, the figures show that not all Indigenous languages spoken in Canada have diminishing rates of speakers. The three territories combined saw the largest drop in speakers in the country (-23.4% since 2016), but no figure is provided for the NWT alone (StatsCan, 2023c). The census provides a combined figure for speakers of the “Slavey-Hare” (Dene) languages in the region, showing a drop of 26.4%, slightly higher than the ‘territorial’ average. At the same time, the report notes that the NWT is home to the largest proportion of people reporting they speak an Indigenous language (at 34.3%) and that the Slavey-Hare language group accounts for the second most-spoken group of languages, after Tłıchʔ, across the territories.

Territorial official language status has been afforded to Indigenous languages since 1988 in the NWT of Canada (GNWT, 1988), however, English remains the primary language of instruction in the region, and to a lesser extent, French. Political support for Indigenous-led education has been growing in the NWT since the 1990s. The Dene Kede (ECE, 2004), originally published in 1993, was the first formalized Indigenous language curriculum in the NWT and one of the first of its kind in the country (RCAP, 1996). Most recently, under the auspices of the Department of Education, Culture and Employment (ECE), communities produced the Our Languages Curriculum (OLC) placing emphasis on the “shared responsibility” of “student, educator, parent and community” (ECE, 2020, p.3) to support language maintenance. The OLC (ECE, 2020)

town is home to the Our Lady of Providence Roman Catholic church, the Mackenzie Days festival in the summer and a well-known beaver fur business, Dene Fur Clouds.

The town has a population of a total 655 people (StatsCan 2021). According to census data, 93.5% of people in Fort Providence identify as Indigenous (StatsCan, 2021). The population has a slightly higher average age of 42.5 years compared to the average age for the NWT (36.4) and Canada (41.9), with 17.7% of people under the age of 19 and 16% over the age of 65.

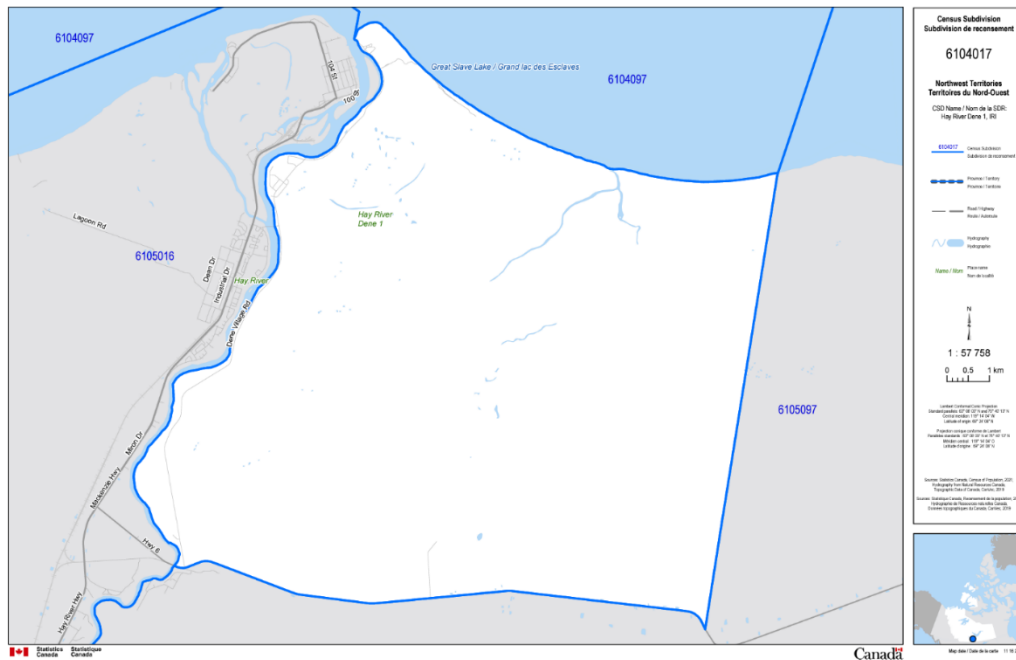
Deh Gáh elementary and secondary school teaches Dene Zhatié through immersion from kindergarten, with English language instruction introduced in grade 4 (Deh Gáh School website, 2019). The immersion program began with one kindergarten class in 2013. In addition to the language program, the school also promotes cultural practices through on-the-land activities, including sporadic summer language programs open to parents as well as students. Fort Providence falls under the Decho Divisional Education Council (DDEC) and receives funding from the Deh Cho First Nations Tribal Council (Indspire, 2018). Dezoah Undaa Etleh Koke Aboriginal Head Start program is run for pre-Kindergarten age children in the community.

According to current national census data (Statistics Canada, 2021), 55.3% of the community declares English as their first language ('mother tongue'), while 39% declares an Indigenous language as their first language. When residents were asked if they have "knowledge" of an Indigenous language, the percentage of speakers increases from 39% to 53.7% or 330 of the 615 respondents. English is the language most spoken at home for 74.8% of respondents, with 21% saying an Indigenous language is spoken the most.

Kátł'odéeche First Nation Reserve, NWT (60.48.0° N, 115.44.5° W)

Kátł'odéeche First Nation (KFN) is a community located on the western shore of the Hay River (Kátł'odéeche) which flows north into the West Arm of the Great Slave Lake (Tucho), seen across the top of Figure 2. The reservation itself extends over an area of 134.7 km² (StatsCan, 2016).

Figure 2



Adapted from *Statistics Canada, Census of Population, 2021*; Hydrography from Natural Resources Canada, Topographic Data of Canada, CanVec, 2019 (<https://www12.statcan.gc.ca/census-recensement/2021/as-sa/fogs-spg/page.cfm?topic=1&lang=E&dguid=2021A00056104017>). In the public domain.

As of 2021, the on-reserve population of KFN is 259 (StatsCan, 2021), while the nation has a “Band Membership of 600” (Katlodeeche.com, 2021). Of those living on reserve, 100% identify as Indigenous (StatsCan, 2021). The population has a slightly lower average age of 36 years compared to Fort Providence, the average age for the NWT

and Canada, with 28.9% of people under the age of 19 and 15.4% over the age of 65.

KFN is home to several businesses, the Dene Cultural Institute (destroyed by fire in 2022), and the K'amba Festival which draws people from around the North for dog sledding, Dene hand games and other cultural activities and arts (Katlodeeche.com, 2021).

The community is also home to the Chief Sunrise Educational Centre which provides on-reserve K-12 education for children, where the Dene language is taught as a subject. In 2019, school principal Deborah Reid said that students have up to forty minutes of Dene language instruction a day. Every three weeks, students are invited to a cultural camp at Sandy Creek (on reserve) to receive on-the-land instruction aimed at building vocabulary. The school is governed by the South Slave Education District Council (SSDEC). Children are eligible to attend school in the nearby town of Hay River, where Dene Yati is also taught as a school subject. An Aboriginal Head Start program is available, free for families of pre-Kindergarten age children, and is staffed by Dene speakers.

According to census data taken by Statistics Canada in 2021, 76.4% of the community declares English as their first language, while 17.7% declares an Indigenous language as their first language. When residents were asked if they have “knowledge” of an Indigenous language, the percentage of speakers increase from 17.7% to 31.4% . English is the language most spoken at home for 94.1% of respondents, with the remaining 5.9% saying an Indigenous language is spoken the most.

1.2. Research context

“Right from the start, I had trouble learning, because I was always distracted by thoughts of my family and the things we used to do together...”

Anthony Apakak Thrasher, Skid Row Eskimo (1976), p.4.

The current state of ILs and language education is marked by the opposing pressures of European colonisation and the determination and perseverance of Indigenous peoples. Prior to European colonization, an estimated 300 to 500 languages were spoken by the First Peoples of North America (McCarty et al., 2006). Today, more than 70 recognized distinct Indigenous languages are spoken in Canada according to Statistics Canada (2023b), however, the Assembly of First Nations (2017a) recognizes that the exact number and their endonyms is not known. Of these presumed 70, only three are considered sufficiently vital to survive over the next few generations: Inuktitut, Anishinaabemowin and the Cree languages (Andersen, 2009).

The findings of the Truth and Reconciliation Commission (TRC) in 2015 formally established what Indigenous people had been talking about for years (RCAP, 1996; Vowel, 2016a): the perspective that the residential school system resulted in a “cultural genocide” (Truth and Reconciliation Commission, 2015, p.1; Vowel, 2016a, p. 172). The prohibition of language use was one part of this genocide, resulting in the “destruction of those structures and practices that allow the group to continue as a group” (Truth and Reconciliation Commission, 2015, p.1). The philosophies underpinning the school system had long roots in the Christianizing and nationalizing efforts of churches and school systems in Europe (Khleif, 1976; Mendel, 2004; Jones, 2010; Baker, 2011b) from where elements of government, clergy and their mindsets were drawn.

Curricula was designed to “break down the transmission of culture and language from generation to the next” (RCAP, 1996, p.406) while failing to provide adequate quality of education (Paquette & Fallon, 2012b). The churches, who ran the schools on behalf of the state, viewed children living with their parents as “the greatest impediment” to imposing “European values and ways of being on [Indigenous] students” (Paquette & Fallon, 2012a, p. 5). The schools’ deliberately low operating budgets (Paquette & Fallon, 2012a) permitted horrendous treatment of children to become commonplace, contributing to the deaths of approximately 42% (Paquette & Fallon, 2012a) of all children taken into the system. These abuses and poor educational standards had a compound effect on the young speakers of Indigenous languages. Silenced by trauma, they suffered continued alienation from their families and cultures, now deprived of the means to communicate with them.

Following the closure of most residential schools in the 1960s Indigenous education policy may be viewed as an attempt to style assimilation as a pathway to equal participation in Canadian society (Paquette & Fallon, 2012a). Delivery of education largely passed from the churches to the government who took the view that inclusion of Indigenous children into mainstream provincial education would produce better outcomes (Paquette & Fallon, 2012b). This policy was highly influenced by the Hawthorn report (1966) which assumed a direct link between low education levels and the high rate of poverty among Indigenous Canadians, adding that community “kinship ties” impede individual success in an “industrial society” (Hawthorn, 1966, p.121). This philosophy was present when the government took responsibility of child welfare services in the same decade (Vowel, 2016b). The term ‘Sixties Scoop’ (Johnston, 1983) describes the results of cultural bias in child protective services in this era: the gross overrepresentation of Indigenous children adopted out or placed in foster care. Further, in 2012,

a Supreme Court ruling found that on-reserve children were funded at a rate of 78¢ to the dollar spent on every off-reserve child, leading to higher rates of poverty and with it, greater rates of state intervention in the lives of Indigenous families (Vowel, 2016b). In 2021, 53.8% of children in foster care aged 14 and under were Indigenous, while they represented 7.7% of children in Canada (Fallon et al., 2021; Indigenous Services Canada, 2023).

Canada's history of undermining familial and cultural ties and underfunding Indigenous education within Indigenous communities has not only contributed to the decline of Indigenous languages in the country, but also to the way that Indigenous languages have been used, viewed and taught.

1.4. Outline of the thesis

The structure of this thesis is as follows: chapter 2 presents the review of the literature; chapter 3 describes the study methodology; chapter 4 presents the results of the demographic and attitudinal data; chapter 5 presents the discussion of results and chapter 6 recommendations forward by this study and suggestions for future research. Finally, chapter 7 presents the conclusions of the study.

2. Literature review

This chapter will review the following contributing factors in relation to their effect on the formation of attitudes under the headings of community attitudes (2.0.); attitudes and proficiency (2.1.); identity and attitudes (2.2.); and finally, language policy and attitudes (2.3.). Community attitudes is subdivided to address the importance of parental attitudes within a community (2.0.1.); how age may play role in language attitudes (2.0.2.). The second section will review how self-assessment of proficiency in community members may affect language attitudes in Indigenous communities (2.1.1.); and the relationship of identity to proficiency (2.1.2.). Continuing on in this vein, the third section will review literature related to the role of identity in the formation of language attitudes (2.2.). This section will be subdivided to discuss the importance of identity to the well-being of learners (2.2.2.). The fourth section of the review will discuss the relationship of language attitudes and language policy (2.3.), from two directions of influence, attitudes to policy (2.3.1.), and policy to attitudes (2.3.2.). The final section presents an overview of the literature (2.4.).

2.1. Community attitudes

Community attitudes is a broad term for the beliefs and feelings that community members and stakeholders have towards the language traditionally spoken in or associated with the ethnicity of their community. Community attitudes are an important area of study in the understanding of language vitality and language shift (UNESCO, 2003). Further to this, “Community Members’ Attitudes” or in-group attitudes “towards Their Own Language” (UNESCO, 2003, p.14) is considered one of six evaluative factors in determining language health. This is underpinned by

the assumption that all community members hold a potential stake in the collective life of a community and therefore can express attitudes to a language used in that community.

If we acknowledge the relationship between a community member and the health of a community language, we must also acknowledge that a person is rarely neutral or indifferent to that language. They “may see it as essential to their community and identity” (UNESCO, 2003, p.14) and may promote the use of the language. Yet, even with these apparently positive attitudes, community members may also “view their language as a hindrance to economic mobility and integration into mainstream society” (UNESCO, 2003, p. 14). In this way, attitudes are multifaceted and able to change over time, affected by diverse factors such as language education, language shift, changes in government or community composition (Baker, 2011b).

The relationship of community attitudes to language vitality hinges on the formation of attitudes in the next generation of speakers. The argument for study of whole-community attitudes is underlined by Melo-Pfeifer’s (2015) understanding of the effect of extended familial connections on children and the target language, concluding that without this network of support, “[language] erosion is said to be quicker” (p.29). A study of a community’s attitudes casts the net wider, beyond the family, to understand if parents or elders who are speakers are the sole ‘gatekeepers’ of language knowledge, or if more complex and varied patterns of intrafamilial relationships have a role to play in language learning and maintenance.

2.1.1. Parental Attitudes

The attitudes of parents, grandparents, or care-givers is of particular importance when discussing community language attitudes, especially in the context of Indigenous languages. There are several reasons for this, not least is acknowledging that the generations who are most-

fluent in their languages, or who speak the language the most, learned it at home and not in mainstream educational contexts (Sachdev & Hanlon, 2000; Thorburn, 2005; Anderson, 2009).

Secondly, community values and involvement have been placed at the centre of language revitalization efforts through education in the NWT (ECE, 2020), a trend seen in Indigenous communities across the country, as exemplified by various emerging pieces of legislation, including the composition of Bill C-92 (Article 9(2), 2019, Government of Canada), federal legislation composed in response calls to address child welfare in part through providing adequate funding for cultural continuity between generations (Yellowhead Institute, 2019) and the Indian Residential Schools Day Scholars Class Action Settlement (CIRNAC, 2022) which addresses the centrality of the relationship between people and languages to “cultural revitalization” (Deer, 2022). And thirdly, there is evidence to suggest that the “affective” nature of family influence in language learning is particularly important for those learning a language as a second language, when that language is related to and expressive of their ethnic and cultural heritage (termed, heritage language learning) (Kondo-Brown, 2005; McCarty et al., 2006; Kelleher, 2010; Melo-Pfeifer, 2015).

A heritage language (HL) label for Indigenous languages (ILs) in Canada is often appropriate due to the high average age of fluent speakers in the communities in question and the interruption of generational transfer instigated by the practices of the residential school system (RCAP, 1996; Paquette & Fallon, 2012a; Truth and Reconciliation Commission, 2015a, Kesselman, 2017). Investigation into heritage language learning in schools has shown that intergenerational support for the learning of the language, often stemming from elders, extended family members or care-givers, should be considered when creating language policy that applies to Indigenous communities (Nikkel, 2006). Elders have an impact on the outcomes of heritage

language learning in the classroom, by boosting the solidarity dimension in learners (that is, the student's sense of personal connection to the language) as well as student proficiency by providing supplementary learning experiences in and outside of school hours (Melo-Pfeifer, 2015). The current thinking recognizes that learning HLs in the way that foreign languages are taught "is inappropriate for HL learners as they fail to build effectively upon the linguistic and cultural competencies that HLs have gained outside of formal schooling" (Enns-Kananen & King, 2018, p.2). In other words, opportunity to build on speaker knowledge is lost by ignoring the importance of extracurricular learning and the networks of support and knowledge they stem from.

Further to this, in a study looking at the relationship of young heritage learners of Portuguese in Germany, Melo-Pfeifer (2015) states that the influence of a broader family support network can be effective in "fostering the wish to further engage with its acquisition and use" (p.29) outside of school. In this example, it was found that even light and sporadic HL use amongst family members incrementally reinforces and contributes to greater learning and usage. Beck & Lam (2008) note a situation within a Totonac and Spanish-speaking family where parents of one generation only use Spanish with their child, while the grandmother, who "looked after [the child] more than," (p.6) the parents, succeeded in teaching her grandchild some Totonac. This reiterates the importance of taking broader family structure into account- as well as the language usage and behaviours within it- when considering the impact of parental attitudes on children's acquisition of the heritage language. This point is further reinforced in the conclusions of Kondo-Brown (2005) and Lee (2009), suggesting that affective motivations may play a crucial role in understanding the attitudes of heritage language learners, thus making community and familial attitudes of primary importance in assessing Indigenous language vitality.

Parents -those raising the children- can be understood as having the greatest influence on young learners in their earliest years (Day, 1980; Melo-Pfeifer, 2015), before being somewhat relegated in importance by peer relationships in the adolescent years (Eckert, 2003). However, parental/family attitudes remain positively linked to language maintenance overall. In one study of perceptions of Welsh language vitality, proficiency was linked to positive views of language vitality. Those proficient speakers of Welsh prioritise speaking the language “in the family” (Coupland et al., 2006, p. 366), suggesting that the home is a forum in which usage is most linked to positive attitudes.

Studies examining pre-adolescent children and their parents’ attitudes towards heritage ILs in school programs have pointed out that parents’ attitudes towards programs often differ from their attitudes towards the languages themselves. Positive attitudes associated with languages and language learning typically centre around the potential language learning has to facilitate and build family relationships (Nikkel, 2006; Lee, 2009; Flynn Haynes, 2011), build self-esteem and consequently, support learning (Flynn Haynes, 2011), and teach culture to the child (Nikkel, 2006). This translated into parents supporting language learning in the home (Flynn Haynes, 2011) and supporting their and other children attending the program (Nikkel, 2006).

In a study of a nascent Cree immersion program in Thompson, Manitoba, Nikkel (2006) describes a community which is in flux. The program itself is the result of a community questionnaire which expressed considerable interest in introducing such a program, yet the community is “somewhat divided or ambivalent about the value of maintaining the Cree language and culture” (Nikkel, 2006, p.6). Despite this, the parents of children involved in the program who were interviewed for the study expressed positive feelings towards Cree. Parents

often cited the importance of the language to communicate with older generations and a belief that language and culture are codependent, with one parent describing the “importance of revitalizing the language in order to preserve the Cree culture” (Nikkel, 2006, p. 52). Some parents expressed a desire to learn the language themselves to support their children’s learning at home and to communicate with elders. Attitudes to the language program itself were generally positive, though some parents were reluctant to pass judgement overall, as the program was so young. However, they showed approval by attesting that they would be willing to encourage other parents to enroll their children.

Flynn Haynes (2011) interviewed parents after the closure of an IL after-school program in Oregon, USA. The author notes parents spoke about the heritage IL in terms of a regretful loss to themselves, while wishing the opposite for their children, showing the deeply affective nature of the relationship of the language to families in the speech community. One parent used a metaphor to describe the language as nourishing to life and culture: “It is important, it’s our life, just like our food, it’s our life” (Flynn Haynes, 2011, p.146). Other positive attitudes extended to the program itself, with some parents expressing a belief that their children were motivated to learn the language, which created a work ethic which “carried over to other subjects” (p.147).

While negative attitudes in parents to the heritage IL is frequently associated with the perception of the language’s utility (Nikkel, 2006; Flynn Haynes, 2011) or its association with a negative identity in the broader, majority-language speaking community (Lee, 2002; Beck & Lam, 2008). Positive and negative attitudes may not be mutually exclusive due to the compositional nature of attitudes (Baker, 1992). An individual can rate a language highly for integrative reasons while rating it lower for instrumental reasons, or vice versa. For example, Flynn Haynes (2011) found that a minority (two of 15) of parents made comments about the

perceived lack of utility of the language, asking rhetorically “who else” would learn the language, while being generally happy that their children attend the program.

In more extreme circumstances, parents may make decisions regarding IL learning for their children based on negative attitudes. Beck & Lam (2008) propose the term ‘language suicide’ to describe where speakers raising young and emergent speakers of an endangered or at-risk language “choose not to teach this language to their children” (p.1) opting to use the majority language in the home; or a “deliberate choice of parents to ‘kill off’ their language” (p.4). Beck & Lam (2008) found that for speakers of Upper Necaxa Totonac, a language of East-Central Mexico, current language policy is not an inhibiting factor in their use of Totonac, as the language is not prohibited in private or public life. However, the authors suggest that these parents choose not to speak to their children in Totonac due to a form of internalized racism.

2.1.2. Older versus younger community member attitudes

Significant differences in attitudes towards a language can be seen depending on age (Thorburn, 2005), though there is no single reason for this, or a simple generational divide governing differences. However, certain generalizations may be seen across the literature, anticipating characteristics of older and younger community member attitudes, and in Indigenous Canadian contexts (Andersen, 2009).

Evidently, young adults in the community are more likely to be individuals who have had recent experience of the community schooling available. They may also be parents, considering raising children in the future, or may still be living with younger, school-aged siblings. This places this age group in direct contact with the next generation of learners (Norris, 2007) and also, more likely to have overlapping experiences with school-aged children. Young adults’ attitudes may also be affected by life experiences specific to their age cohort, experiences which differentiate them

from other community members. To take a broad, contemporary example: adults who are 21 years old in 2024, spent their final years in high school in Canada between 2020 and 2021 coping with homeschooling and remote learning as a result of the COVID-19 pandemic.

Older adults in Indigenous communities in Canada may have attitudes that are deeply marked by contact with the residential school system (Thrasher, 1976; RCAP, 1996; Truth and Reconciliation Commission, 2015; Joseph, 2018), while those younger than them may have attitudes towards both language and language learning that indicate a level of generational trauma, or “historic trauma transmission” (Vowel, 2016a, p. 172) stemming from the experiences of their elders.

Increasingly, those elders who did not experience English-language medium schooling as a result of federal government policy are no longer with us, being followed by the next generation of elders who survived the residential system. Demonstrating this diversity of experience within a single speech community, age groupings within the data of Andersen’s 2009 paper demarcate historical turning points in Labrador that affected education. Participants over the age of 59 in 2009 would “have been educated principally in the Inuttitut language through the Moravian Church” (p.31), while those in the 39-58 category would have been educated in residential schools, in English. Those in the younger category (born between 1970 and 1990) would have been educated in the provincial system or its equivalent (Paquette & Fallon, 2012c), while that system would have varied in its approaches across this period.

While not explicitly describing age as a variable, the way that Haida-Gwaii (British Columbia) and Fisher Cree First Nation (Manitoba) community members acquired their language (the degree to which it involved formal schooling) was an independent variable used by Sachdev & Hanlon (2000) that divided by age. The authors examined the type of schooling in the two speech

communities to determine their affect on “ethnolinguistic behaviour, identity and perceptions” (p.74). This resulted in a divide by age between at-home learning of the languages in older community members and in-school, formal learning for younger adults and adolescents included in the study. The impact on attitudes contributed to more positive attitudes in older community members than in those who had attended school, with proficiency also correlating with this cohort.

Finally, the interaction of older and younger people within the speech community can also affect the language behaviours and attitudes of younger learners, as Lee (2009) discovered in a study of the attitudes of youth and young adults in Diné (Navajo) and Pueblo communities. Amongst younger learners, respect for the language was also associated with respect for elders and the desire to be able to speak to elders in the heritage IL. Many, however, described negative experiences with being corrected and admonished by adults for their speech, which in turn normalized teasing by their peers. At the same time, the results of the study show that shame builds up around lack of ability, with young people often blaming themselves for not being able to speak better. In some students, alongside this sense of shame is one of anger and of feeling let down by their community for having not been taught the language.

This touches on the theme of language ‘purity’, which can be both a source of pride in speakers (Blair et al., 2002) while also placing a heavy burden on younger learners (Hoare, 2003; Baker, 2011d). The attitudes of older learners towards the language, and then towards younger learners and their perceived lack of proficiency, create not only a ‘generational gap’ in knowledge between fluent older community members and younger (Kesselman, 2017), emergent learners but may also reinforce negative associations with learning the language in the latter (Lee, 2009).

2.2. Attitudes and proficiency

Proficiency in speakers, particularly heritage language speakers, has been shown to play a role in constructing and perpetuating attitudes towards a language. Language proficiency is linked to usage and schooling. Schooling, in turn, is supported by the wider speech community in which it takes place and from which students are drawn (Canadian Heritage, 2005). Community language attitudes, in turn, may help to structure school programs, support them or detract from them. This places attitudes as a potential input and output of changes in proficiency (Baker, 1992).

Proficiency is an important element of understanding language attitudes as it correlates with patterns of usage, particularly those with whom speakers use the language. Higher levels of language usage are associated with higher levels of proficiency (Coupland et al., 2006), while the domain of usage and the discourses in which the language is used are descriptive of language attitudes held by speakers (Sachdev, 1998; Thorburn, 2005; Andersen, 2009).

Higher rates of proficiency relate to positive experiences of learning in a positive feedback loop, and therefore tend to affect the degree of confidence speakers have in learning the language on a continued basis (MacIntyre et al., 1997). The inverse is seen in speakers who have had difficult experiences with learning, whether that be related to the learning environment or model (Thrasher, 1976; RCAP, 1996; Sachdev & Hanlon, 2000; Lee, S., 2002; Joseph, 2018), or experiences with other speakers (Lee, 2009). In this sense, speakers assess their own speech in part based on their attitudes to the language, drawn from experiences in learning (Giles & Billings, 2004).

Overall, when using self-assessments of proficiency, it may be important to remember that confidence and self-assessment also exist in a positive or negative feedback loop, creating a polarizing effect in learners' self-assessments of proficiency. That is, the more confident the learner

the more likely they will positively assess their own proficiency, while less confident speakers will have more negative assessments of their proficiency (Kondo-Brown, 2005).

Those less confident learners, Lee (2009) notes, may see their proficiency affected by prescriptivism and social shaming (subtle or otherwise) via the impact of the latter on their self-esteem. This is analogous to ‘language anxiety’ in HL learners from other backgrounds (MacIntyre et al., 1997; Kang & Kim, 2012). Language anxiety refers to anxiety experienced by people relative to learning a language. This may affect the reliability of their self-assessments, deepening negative views of their competence and creating a disparity between self-professed levels of proficiency and actual proficiency (MacIntyre, et al., 1997). However, this does not mean that language anxiety creates a self-fulfilling prophecy in terms of long-term learning outcomes, or indeed, to language attitudes. This is particularly relevant to the learning experiences of older children and adults, who are more self-aware and so have already developed a self-identity which they must negotiate in relation to the identities available to speakers of the language they are learning (whether it be heritage, or simply *another* language).

A stronger relationship is predicted between language anxiety and self-assessed proficiency than actual proficiency. Some research suggests that anxiety is not the only factor mediating between self-perceptions and learning outcomes, but that also, “the belief that one can control desired outcomes” (MacIntyre, et al., 1997, p. 268) which can raise or lower a person’s expectations of outcomes in their own learning. Therefore, “If expectancies are high, then one will expend greater effort, with greater likelihood of success. If, on the other hand, expectancies are low, one expends less effort, with concomitantly less success” (MacIntyre, et al., 1997, p.268) creating this overall polarizing effect.

2.2.1. Self-assessment of proficiency in Indigenous speakers

Self-assessment of proficiency was used in this study, as in many others (Noels et al., 1996; Kondo-Brown, 2005; Andersen, 2009; Kang & Kim, 2012). How speakers of different ability levels perceive their proficiency is salient in understanding survey participant responses relative to their age and the type of schooling likely experienced (Sachdev & Hanlon, 2000; Andersen, 2009). While more data is needed to understand the issue of confidence and self-assessment of proficiency, this polarizing effect may be particularly salient in the context of Indigenous speech communities due to the often difficult relationship Indigenous learners have with language and language learning as a legacy of colonization and the residential school system (Paquette & Fallon, 2012a). For example, what may appear in data at first as a relationship between age and proficiency is more likely the finding that proficiency correlates with the generation most likely to have learned the language in the family context, sometimes termed ‘in the home’. The self-assessments of speaking proficiency in Andersen’s (2009) study of Inuttitut showed overall that proficiency correlates strongly with age, with the oldest group of speakers self-reporting the highest levels of proficiency. Of those who reported low proficiency (self-assessment) (roughly 50% of respondents) 95% were under 58 years old. Note that those between the ages of 39 and 58 at the time of publication, would have spent time in residential school, making their self-assessments potentially coloured by the negative impacts of direct abuse in school and of monolingual schooling policies.

The same effect was seen in Sachdev’s 1998 study of language use and attitudes in the Fisher Cree First Nation of Manitoba. Adults were more likely to have learned the language at home, while teenagers were more likely to have learned it at school. Age correlated with greater rates of Cree usage, proficiency in Cree, and positive attitudes surrounding Cree usage. The author

notes that the quality and quantity of in-school Cree instruction was poor due to “large class sizes, meager financial resources, insufficient curriculum development, little sheer time spent learning... inadequate teacher training, and insufficient community and elder involvement in school programs” (p.113), further disadvantaging acquisition in younger generations, long after the closure of the residential schools.

2.2.2. Proficiency and identity

While confidence in one’s own abilities may reinforce proficiency, proficiency is found to correlate not only with more frequent linguistic contact with speakers of the target language, but also “better quality of contact” with speakers (Noels et al., 1996, p.256). This establishes a possible ternary relationship between social context of learning, expressions of identity, and degree of proficiency. This is reminiscent of the core principles behind Māori language nests, which focuses on recreating a ‘home-away-from-home’-style environment for young learners, with the participation of multiple generations of speakers (Smith, 2012d); and the findings that those who learn at home have better learning outcomes and higher usage rates of a minority language than those learning in school (Sachdev, 1998).

In a study into the relationship between identity and learning outcomes in a group of heritage language learners, Lee (2002) concludes that speakers’ “proficiency in the heritage language...was correlated to strength of bicultural identification” (p.282). The study shows that the most proficient group who spent more time with a network of family and friends and who also identify with and speak the language, had more positive attitudes towards both the HL and were more comfortable with a bicultural identity.

This conclusion is echoed by Noels et al. (1996) in an investigation into the experiences of Chinese migrants learning English in Canada, where results show a relationship between shifts

in identity, higher rates of proficiency and stronger interpersonal relationships. Noels et al. (1996) posit that acculturation- the process of loss of one culture or homogenization of two or more cultures in contact-may result in changes in a person's self-conceptualization in relation to their original culture. This demonstrates that identity is not fixed, but fluid and multi-faceted, a fact which allows an individual to "negotiate [the] identity that provides the most benefits with regard to self-esteem in a given situation," (p.247) which may be a driver behind shifts in identity. One way that this manifests is in "ethnic behaviors", such as "language preference or participation in the cultural community" (p. 247) whether part of their heritage or not. This in turn indicates that linguistic behaviours which boost proficiency may also be positively linked to identity.

Proficiency, however, may not be a compulsory equal partner in the relationship between identity and the contexts of learning suggested above. In a study of the relationship between attitude and perceptions of language vitality, Coupland et al. (2006) state that while higher competence relates strongly to commitment to practise the language, low competence groups with a strong ethnic identity also displayed a high rate of commitment to the future health of the language, or readiness to act, in terms of language usage and other behaviours. This confirms that while proficiency in a language relates strongly to other elements which affect an individual's attitudes, it is a distinct component that does not drive the formation of attitudes alone.

2.3. Identity and language attitudes

Speaking a language is considered a key marker of ethnicity and group membership (Hoare, 2003; Joseph, 2004b), while language acquisition plays a role in the construction of personal and group identity (Baker, 2011d). Speaking a language is a social event that we share

with others and “is often about joining a social group (e.g. a target language community or network) and finding an accepted voice [within it]” (Baker, 2011d, p.132). Likewise, learners and speakers with a greater sense of attachment to the associated speech community may be said to have an identity informed by that community (Lee, 2002; Melo-Pfeifer, 2015). The choice to speak a language at a given moment reflects a person’s desire to be part of a community or distance themselves from one. The relationship of identity to language attitudes rests in the negotiation of that identity between the individual speaker and the speech community. This may take place in the home, in the school environment, or anywhere the language is used, or indeed, not used (omitted or suppressed).

Indigenous communities have spoken at length in various fora since the Indian Act (1876) of the importance of language to the construction and communication of identity and culture (RCAP, 1996; Canadian Heritage, 2005; Truth and Reconciliation Commission, 2015). The Our Languages Curriculum (ECE, 2020) currently in place in the NWT states in its introduction that “the basic concepts contained within each language make no separation between language and culture; these remain a unified whole” and that therefore “learning an Indigenous language...means absorbing the very foundations of Indigenous identity” (p.2).

The Truth and Reconciliation Commission’s Calls to Action, nos. 14 to 17 also underline the role that Indigenous language restoration may play in a more equitable Canadian society, through reclamation of culture. The document lays out specific steps to reach this goal, that emphasize the central role of Indigenous “peoples and communities” (p. 2). Further to this, a heritage language in the life of an Indigenous person is described as a medium through which a person can express their identity and that of their community, while simultaneously strengthening ties with family and community (Norris, 2007). These understandings underline

the need to further investigate the role that identity plays in the formation of attitudes, as a factor in strengthening language acquisition and maintenance.

2.3.1. Relationship of identity to attitudes

Any group identity “to which you stake a claim” plays a role in the development of one’s “‘deep’ personal identity” (Joseph, 2004a, p.5), while “group identities tend strongly to correlate with shared linguistic features” (Joseph, 2004b, p.38), indexing them in the way individuals speak and use their language. Further to this, taking an ‘evolutionary’ view of language Joseph (2004b) posits that in many species, one function of language is to put identity on display, so it may be communicated and honed within a group context. In this sense, the importance of language to the individual is the relationship it has to a community; shaping and reinforcing bonds within a group through communication in the same language. This may help to explain the importance of identity to language attitudes where language is associated with group identity.

Greater group affiliation within the speech community has been shown to correlate with more positive attitudes towards the language (Lee, 2002; Melo-Pfeifer, 2015) and motivation to learn it (Baker, 2011d). Conversely, when younger community members do not perceive language as necessary for building an identity in the community, this attitude is associated with a decline in the numbers of speakers (Hoare, 2003; Thorburn, 2005; Andersen, 2009). This phenomenon correlates with a situation where older community members tend to be monolingual or fluently bilingual speakers, yet are not transferring the language skills to younger generations (Kesselman, 2017).

Where community members do not associate their personal identity with the language, a similar effect is seen in language attitudes and beliefs, and proficiency. While competence in Breton and Breton identity correlate, according to Hoare (2003) where “...those who reported

good/perfect comprehension of Breton, 78 percent [of those] said that they felt at least half Breton” (p.78). The author concluded that the younger, less proficient and more female a community member was, the more likely they rated the Breton guises in the matched guise test as being older, rural and uneducated. Likewise, in younger, less proficient groups of Cree speakers, Sachdev (1998) found that while they held positive attitudes to Cree for solidarity characteristics, stating that it was important to their “in-group identity” (p.112), overall their attitudes were overwhelmingly more favourable to English than to Cree. In addition, younger community members felt that English was the more appropriate language of use in all contexts, compared to Cree.

Taken a step further, a ternary relationship may be observed in some populations between identity, proficiency and language use, and positive attitudes. Coupland et al. (2006) found in a questionnaire of 1,162 residents of Wales that a strong sense of Welsh identity correlated most with higher language proficiency and at-home use. Respondents were divided into six subgroups defined by a spectrum of Welsh to non-Welsh identity and asked questions about their language proficiency, attitudes to Welsh, definitions of “Welshness” and perception of the vitality of Welsh. This was also observed in both Haida- and Cree-speaking communities compared by Sachdev & Hanlon (2000), while community members identified as majority Indigenous, strongest in-group affiliations were seen in those who were most proficient in their respective language, suggesting “that language use and identity are related reciprocally: language use influences the formation of group identity, and group identity influences patterns of language attitudes and usage” (Sachdev & Hanlon, 2000, p.72). This group was also the most likely to have learned and to speak the language at home.

In the examples given above the reciprocal and overlapping relationships between proficiency and usage; proficiency and identity; and the two former pairings and attitudes, is evident. Surrounding and supporting all of these elements is community. The role of the community in supporting language use is analogous to the role of family in the home, wherein the communication of cultural values, beliefs, customs and the part these will play in the child's negotiation of personal identity takes place in and is informed by the dialogue within the family (Baker, 2011d).

2.3.2. Relationship of identity to well-being and language proficiency

Language acquisition and use are available as components of a group identity which foster close connections with culture (Norris, 2007). Likewise, where close connection with culture is fostered within an individual identity, improved acquisition (Flynn Haynes, 2011; Baker 2011d) and greater usage of the language may be observed (Hoare, 2003). Sachdev & Hanlon (2000), in assessing language attitudes and use in two distinct Indigenous communities in Canada, suggest that 'ego-centric' beliefs, such as how a person identifies and their personal goals are "more predictive of linguistic behaviour than 'exo-centric' beliefs about vitality" (p.71) to the extent that "ethnolinguistic identity and vitality perceptions may directly (and reciprocally) affect the quantity, quality and composition of contact networks" (p.71) with the language. This is echoed by Noels et al. (1996) who posit that how people present their identity is to "attempt to negotiate that identity that provides the most benefits with regard to self-esteem in a given situation," (p. 247). Baker (2011d) refers to this as "integrative motivation" (p.128) to learn or use a language, a type of motivation which mirrors integrative attitudes, and which are the most likely to promote language learning, especially where underpinned by "personal relationships that may be long lasting," (p.128).

This form of motivation may be reflected in adult attitudes to their children learning a heritage IL. Where parents and caregivers see benefits to their children's well-being stemming from their children's learning, this affective component of positive attitudes appears to outstrip an interest in their child's proficiency (Nikkel, 2006; Flynn Haynes, 2011). Specific advantages of learning an HL in the school that were mentioned included seeing their children acquire "greater cultural awareness and self-esteem" (Nikkel, 2006, p.52) stemming from pride in who they are and being proud of what they've learned in the program (Nikkel, 2006). This, again, suggests that learning a heritage language informs a sense of "identity and self-esteem" (Flynn Haynes, 2011, p.147). The benefit of this self-knowledge stems from a collective identity informed by the speech community, which in turn, parents believed would lead to a greater likelihood of success in life (Flynn Haynes, 2011).

The sense of identity and pride fostered in children in the Ichishkin after-school program was also observed as an outcome of learning by non-Indigenous school staff, who saw pride developing in the children as a result of sharing their culture with people from outside of the community, as well as inside (Flynn Haynes, 2011). This underlines the binary nature of identity construction examined by Sachdev (1998), wherein in-group construction of identity is constantly in contact with out-group interpretation of identity. This scenario indicates greater likelihood of acculturation in the heritage language community, resulting in poorer rates of HL acquisition.

To this point, the Royal Commission on Aboriginal Peoples (1996) expressed that "a common concern of parents is when schooling becomes a threat to their developing child's identity, primarily when the values and world view that prevail at school contradict or ignore the existence of a different perspective the child lives with at home.... the result can be that the child

experiences serious conflict and doubt about the validity of his or her own identity,” (p.423).

This threat to a child’s identity results in poorer learning outcomes and overall academic achievement:

“When an Aboriginal child’s identity has been threatened, they will withdraw into themselves...as a means of protecting themselves from criticism and rejection; attempt to abandon their previous identity and mould themselves to the culture which they perceive as more valid or acceptable; they may take on non-productive and rejecting attitudes which generally culminate in failure or dropping out” (RCAP, 1996, p.423).

These passages describe the assimilatory effect of education which fails to acknowledge or uplift the cultures of its students. As noted earlier, such learning environments promote poor academic outcomes in Indigenous students, seen year on year in graduation rates in Canada and the United States (RCAP, 1996; McCarty, 2008; Paquette & Fallon, 2012c; Layton, 2024). Conversely, where curricula and learning environments respect the identity and culture of the student, inviting it into and fostering it in the classroom, academic outcomes are generally improved (Flynn Haynes, 2011; Baker 2011d). Greater inclusion of the heritage language in schooling in Indigenous communities may promote positive effects in terms of learner/speaker self-esteem with the outcome of boosting overall academic achievement in students for in whom the HL is a marker of identity (McCarty, 2008; Nikkel, 2009; Flynn Haynes, 2011) as well as higher proficiency rates in the IL. However, language learning must be adequately resourced and supported by communities for proficiency to be achieved (Sachdev & Hanlon, 2000).

The classroom environment could be viewed as analogous to the use of an IL in the broader community. Positive attitudes may be regarded as an output of any situation where high self-

esteem is fostered by a supportive environment where in-group identity is promoted. A strong community identity in the individual boosts self-esteem, which in theory, lessens the inhibitory effects of learner anxiety (Kang & Kim, 2012), emboldening speakers to use the language more. Use of the language promotes proficiency, as discussed above, and gives the individual access to social networks, which, in turn, further promotes the ability of families and communities to maintain language health amongst themselves. In other words, language learning and usage as a reaction to a sense of belonging enrich our relationships, affecting their quality and in turn, deepening positive attitudes to a language.

Hence, it may be more urgent in the context of Indigenous communities to regard identity as a central factor in determining language attitudes, for both those interested in preservation of the languages and in the health and well-being of the community (Canadian Heritage, 2005).

2.4. Language policy and attitudes

Language policy is an umbrella term for multiple layers of community and intercommunity coordination designed to address the specific needs and priorities regarding language use and teaching in a given community. Language policy in the NWT is as complex as in any Indigenous community in Canada, being subject to both federal and territorial directives (Paquette & Fallon, 2012c; ECE, 2020).

Indigenous communities have long sought autonomy in language policy as an essential part of reclaiming control of educating their children, and cultural reclamation (RCAP, 1996; UNESCO, 2003; Canadian Heritage, 2005). Indeed, language use and revitalization have played a role in and continue to play a role in the fight for civil rights for Indigenous communities around the globe (UNESCO, 2003; Smith, 2012d) with UNDRIP (United Nations, 2007) enshrining the

protection and revitalization of Indigenous languages as a cornerstone of the declaration in recognition of this fact.

Language policy, or indeed, whole language programs can be brought about at the behest of parents (Potowski, 2007), their support for any program for their children being key to its composition and on-going success. However, as investigations into planned or contemporary language programs (in whatever form) show, programs are more often successfully brought into existence and maintained with the support of a broader speech community (Blair et al., 2002; McCarty, 2008; Lee, 2009). Indeed, Baker (2011b) stresses that even well-funded initiatives are likely to go to waste without the input of the community in the planning stages, while, conversely, programs that lack consistent political support will struggle to take root or sustain themselves (RCAP, 1996; Canadian Heritage, 2005; Paquette & Fallon, 2012c).

However, attitudes to a language should not be equated to attitudes to language policy, such as language schooling. This is a significant consideration amongst Indigenous peoples in Canada, as “cultural alienation is a major factor in the continuing ambivalence of many [Indigenous people] towards public school education” (Nikkel, 2006, p.1).

Numbers of those who report being able to speak an Indigenous language remain low (Statistics Canada, 2023c) however, significant efforts being made to revitalize languages through school programs means that the majority of Indigenous children who participate in programs will learn an Indigenous language as a second language at some point in their school career (Norris, 2007), making community support for language programming all the more crucial to language health.

Behaviours linked to attitudes towards schooling can vary widely. Lee (2009) recounts contrasting examples of the impacts of community attitudes on schooling. . The paper begins

with an anecdote about the case of a Navajo school where, within a generation (here, 10 to 15 years), language shift has taken place away from 90% bilingualism in the students entering the school, to English being the dominant language in 90% of children entering the Navajo-immersion school. The study examines the role of parents in not reinforcing or supporting Indigenous language maintenance and other factors affecting revitalization efforts.

By contrast, in a Pueblo tribal community in New Mexico, in 1996, the loss of the language in the public sphere caused “the community to call on the [community] school to provide a bilingual program...” (Lee, 2009, p.308). This contrasted with the traditional view amongst many community members at the time that “their language belonged in the home and village, not in school” (p.308). Despite these conflicting attitudes, when faced with language loss, communities may react by calling for more resources allocated to schooling and public life to remediate the loss.

There are two perspectives from which to view the relationship of language attitudes and language policy: the first, where attitudes are predictive of behaviours and actions which propel the creation of language policies and consequently shape language programming in a community. The other is where language policy affects attitudes in community members over time. These two different directions of influence can be described as ‘bottom up’ and ‘top down’, respectively (Baker, 2011b).

2.4.1 Relationship of attitudes to language policy

As noted above, language attitudes can deeply affect the formation of language policy, as well as other social movements (Smith, 2012d). Where the broader community is engaged with language policy, any language programs will have the best chance of success (Baker, 2011b). For

this reason, attitudes to language programs within the target speech community can have direct and indirect influence on the sustainability and success of the program.

Programs can be the direct result of community requests (Nikkel, 2006; Flynn Haynes, 2011), yet community members may have mixed or ambivalent feelings towards the programming itself once they have experienced it. Attitudes may be difficult to measure because of the specific circumstances of the programming. For example, Nikkel (2006) interviewed parents in the early stages of the program and received comments which showed reluctance to pass judgement on the program while in its infancy. Flynn Haynes (2011), by contrast, interviewed parents and teachers after the after-school IL program had been terminated, a fact which itself may have coloured attitudes towards the program. However, both programs were originally, at least in part, the result of community initiative.

In a survey of language behaviours and attitudes towards the Inuttit language in Nunatsiavut, Andersen (2009) noted that, alongside generally positive attitudes towards Inuttit, “most respondents believed that [the] Inuttit immersion education was good and that primary and secondary education does not need to be mainly in English” (p.101). This is despite the high use of English amongst younger community members, and over 50% of respondents expressing their belief that the school was the best environment for preserving the language (p. 102), showing a generally positive attitude to the IL-medium schooling available overall. Under further investigation, however, concerns about language teaching in the community emerged. The significant remaining minority who disagreed that school was the best milieu for supporting the Inuttit language instead stated that the home was the best environment. This, in turn, was amended with the belief that although home was the best place, “in a lot of cases it has to be the school because home doesn’t know” (Andersen, 2009, p.102). Hence, negative views about

language schooling may not translate into negative views about the programming available, but rather, provide valuable commentary regarding a lack of intergenerational language use and transfer outside of the school environment.

Further to this, community members interviewed about schooling or language policy for their children may also have views regarding how language policy that affects them directly, for example, in expressing a desire for adult classes (Flynn Haynes, 2011); or indirectly, suggesting expansion of the school program (Flynn Haynes, 2011), or for classes for newcomers to the community (Andersen, 2009).

Outside of North America, grassroots minority community movements have placed language at the centre of efforts to gain greater autonomy in their public and private lives. In the Māori communities of New Zealand in the 1980s, the Te Kohanga Reo (language nest) movement was birthed in the wake of the Waitangi Tribunal (1975) (Baker, 2011e; Smith, 2012d) which sought to redress inequalities embedded in New Zealand's founding document, the Treaty of Waitangi (1840). The language movement was grounded in the extended family unit (or whanau) and "was...a process that committed parents to thinking... about education and the relationship between schooling and society" (Smith, 2012d, p.175), specifically whanau. In the inverse of the Māori language movement stemming from the battle for land rights, support for Plaid Cymru, or the Party of Wales (1925-), formed with the express purpose of fighting for the protection of Cymraeg (Welsh) alongside other civil rights for the Welsh, was significantly bolstered by land rights issues, notably, protests against the militarization of the Pen Llŷn in 1935, and against the flooding of the Tryweryn valley in the 1950s and '60s (Charlot, 2006). In the case of each movement, significant community support bore the fruit of wresting political and social control, specifically over the education of children, back from the English language political majority.

2.4.2. Relationship of language policy to attitudes

The inverse relationship may also exist, with language policy amplifying or reinforcing positive or negative attitudes in the speech community. The long shadow cast by the residential school system plays out in apathy towards education, lower relative graduation rates in Indigenous Canadian youth, and in relation to language vitality, in language attitudes. In a comparative study of youth and adult attitudes to Cree (Fisher Cree First Nation, Manitoba) and Haida (Haida-Gwaii, British Columbia), Sachdev & Hanlon (2000) found that in both communities, usage and proficiency in the ILs was highest amongst those who had learned the language informally, or outside of school. These same speakers tended to be older, more closely identified with their communities and placed higher value on the IL than English, overall. The same was true of members of the Inuttitut speech community in Nunainguk, Labrador, where Andersen (2009) found a split in attitudes to the language between older and younger learners who had been subject to different language-learning policies. This points to the way that participants acquired their language (the degree to which it involved formal schooling) being an independent variable which can be used to analyse the extent to which schooling affects “ethnolinguistic behaviour, identity and perceptions” (Sachdev & Hanlon, 2000, p.74), which in turn, support language attitudes and language vitality.

Those who learned in school may still have positive views of their heritage language, but it is a question of degree, relative to others in the community and their experiences. For example, younger community members in Fisher Cree First Nation had positive attitudes towards Cree, yet

considered English to have greater utility than Cree (Sachdev & Hanlon, 2000). The exception to this is that Haida community members who had received formal language teaching in Haida perceived Haida vitality more favourably than other members of the Haida community who had not. This finding indicates that the type of schooling and quality of programming received should be examined closely to understand what aspects of schooling nurture positive language attitudes and which do not.

Another relatively contemporary example of the negative impact of language education policy on attitudes appears in the mixed attitudes of teachers who had been involved in the after-school Ichishkin language kindergarten to grade 6 after-school program in Oregon, USA (Flynn Haynes, 2011). While seeing the value of teaching the language, and despite outside-school community support for the program, the non-Indigenous teachers did not see a benefit to expending resources on integrating the program into the mainstream curriculum. While this suggests a covert attitude that Indigenous language education is second to English-language medium education, it may also express strain on resources and a lack of agency in teachers within the education system, shaping this belief. When asked directly about the contemporary Bush-era No Child Left Behind (NCLB) policy and its impact on programs such as these, teachers involved in the study replied that the NCLB policy and others like it detracted from the viability of Indigenous language programming because teachers were under increased pressure to teach material for the purposes of testing, which the IL was not subject to, making it difficult to sustain funding for the program.

Attitudes to language policy may be negatively affected by the perception of having been ‘forced’ to learn a HL. Lee (2002) sought to ascertain if ethnic identity had an impact on acquisition and maintenance in the Korean American population, a community with a high rate

of acculturation. Within this study, a significant minority of adult participants appeared to have negative attitudes to their heritage language classes taken as children which centred on the feeling that they had no choice in going to weekend classes, as well as doubts over the efficacy of the programming. However, when researchers suggested the hypothetical choice of taking Korean classes in their own high schools, a much greater percentage (85%) of respondents said that they would have opted to learn Korean in school if it were integrated into the regular school week in that way. The participants also expressed that if Korean language learning were accepted into mainstream education, this may have had a positive impact on their attitudes to the HL schooling. This suggests that a lack of choice in how and when to learn contributed to negative attitudes towards HL schooling in this population, as well as the perceptions of the mainstream English-speaking school community having an effect on language attitudes in HL students

The importance of acceptance of the HL into mainstream education speaks to the role that top-down policy plays in building a language's prestige amongst a community. Where government-level support exists for language education, it may be a driver in community and learner support for language policy. Looking outside of North America, many examples exist of language attitudes improving towards language policy, such as bilingual education programs, as a result of national or local language policies which support language learning and lend prestige to the language itself. In the context of Breton-language and bilingual French/Breton schooling, Hoare (2003) notes that demand for bilingual programming is high, aided by the raising of prestige of the language, driven by the ability to take Breton-only undergraduate degree at the universities of Rennes and Brest. So, while the total number of Breton speakers is in decline (UNESCO, 2023) and has been for generations (Mendel, 2004), bilingual education options,

change in regional and national policy, and sustained levels of funding for developing teaching, have worked to bolster positive attitudes to bilingual education, if not to the language itself.

Language policy can also have a direct impact on specific domain of life in a jurisdiction, producing attitudes which reflect the perceived role (and therefore value) of the language in that domain. The instrumental dimension of attitudes can differ greatly from the affective dimension of attitudes within a minority language community for just this reason. In Canada, as described above, waves of education policy in Canada have worked to frame Indigenous languages as having limited economic value (Hawthorn, 1966) resulting in a disassociation of Indigenous culture from modern Canadian ideas of work (Paquette & Fallon, 2012b). Despite the creation of official status in the NWT for Indigenous languages under the Official Languages Act (OLA) (GNWT, 1988), school funding for Indigenous language education and services in Indigenous languages continues to lag behind funding the same for the Francophone community impacting the number of the growth of Indigenous language-medium positions in the Territories. Under the current Canada-NWT agreement (GNWT, 2020), in effect until 2025, funding for all nine Indigenous languages included in the OLA, including language programs, is 47% of total allocated funds. The remaining 53% is allocated to French language services. This places per capita funding for Indigenous languages at approximately 30% less for a community of speakers that is 125% the size of the francophone community of the NWT (GNWT, 2020; Census, 2023).

In the context of heritage language attitudes, assessments of the instrumental value of the language plays out in favour of the heritage language where that language is considered a majority language in the global sense, for example, Spanish (Gibbons & Ramírez, 2004). Where the heritage language is considered a minority language by community members themselves (Beck & Lam, 2008; Lee, 2009; Flynn Haynes, 2011), the instrumental value of the language is

also perceived as low. Likewise, the perception of its minority status at the national level may not be the deciding factor in influencing instrumental attitudes. If community members have experience of the utility of the heritage language at the local level, the instrumental value accorded to the language may be high, as with Inuttitut in the Nain region of Nunatsiavut (Labrador) (Andersen, 2009).

2.5. Conclusion

Understanding community language attitudes in a contemporary, Indigenous Canadian context is a complex task. This is in part due to the lack of studies which address this specific question, but also because of the diversity of Indigenous communities and experiences. While the historical context of Indigenous language learning in Canada is important to take into account, it is equally important to understand how younger generations, who have not experienced residential schools first-hand, feel about their heritage language and why.

As the majority of Indigenous language learners in Canada are now learning an IL as a second language, it may be appropriate to categorize this population as heritage language learners, but with some caveats. As affective aspects of attitudes may be more relevant to studying HL learners, the relationship of identity to language attitudes and behaviours in Indigenous populations is an important one. Both positive experiences of Indigenous people learning their language and negative experiences reflect the same conclusion in different ways: that identity provides a strong link to language and vice-versa. At the positive end of the spectrum, a strong identity associated with the IL appears to be mediated through strong community relationships, which in turn, produces confident learners who are more likely to view their language and their own linguistic abilities positively.

Focusing on self-assessment of proficiency rather than external assessments of proficiency allows for discussion of the former as a product of language learning experiences. This reveals a close relationship between self-perception and confidence, and actual achievements in learning. It also helps to establish a connection between good at-home learning and positive in-school experiences with positive language attitudes. However, the type of language programming available to students is essential in developing and supporting these positive attitudes, especially where parents and care-givers do not feel able to support continued language-learning at home.

Finally, attitudes to language programming can be ambiguous amongst Indigenous and heritage language learners if not regarded as a distinct component of language attitudes. Both learners and parents of learners feel more positively about language programming when it is integrated into the mainstream of the learner's schooling. This suggests that the place language learning occupies in a learner's life is important to lending prestige to the language thereby promoting positive attitudes to both programming and the language.

3. Methodology

The methodology chapter gives an overview of the background and current theory regarding Indigenous methodologies. This is followed by a statement of my positionality as a researcher. The third section describes the study materials; the fourth section briefly describes challenges faced during data collection and their impact on the study and the fifth section describes how participants were recruited and the data was collected.

3.1. Indigenous methodologies: *Nothing about us, without us*

Adapted from Ecclesiastes, 1:9, this phrase was first recorded in the political sense in 1505 as the title of the constitution of the parliament of Poland (Uruszczak, 2005), and has been intertwined with community movements against abusive powers ever since (UN, 2004). The Polish document established that “nihil novi” (nothing new) which concerns the community may be done without “commune consensu” (common consent) of that community. Deer (2022) employs this phrase to describe the importance of Indigenous-centred research that is driven by Indigenous involvement and agency, stating, “Indigenous people must have an adequate voice, influence and control in regard to issues, initiatives and policy that affect them” (Deer, 2022, p.1).

A Māori scholar, Smith (2012a), recounts the historical reasons this voice is so important now, describing how Western societies long saw “indigenous peoples as not fully human” (p.27) and further, that “indigenous societies...were not literate, their languages and modes of thought were inadequate” (Smith, 2012a, p.29). Over centuries, these ideas have permeated the mainstream, giving weight to political ideas which form objectifying policies, which in turn work to deny Indigenous peoples their basic freedoms (UN, 2007).

Today, we may define Indigenous research as that which “privileges indigenous concerns, indigenous practices and indigenous participation as researcher and researched” (Smith (2012c, p.111). Nikkel (2006) notes that for centuries, the “expert outsider” perspective (p. 13) was considered the most ‘objective’, but that modern research models now reflect the most desirable values in community-based research, specifically, “flexibility, subjectivity, interpretation and negotiation” (p.14). While there may be no one way to conduct collaborative research that satisfies all needs in all contexts the “emerging collaborative models call for a shift beyond advocacy research done *for* community members” (Yamada, 2014, p. 329) and towards research which empowers community members to be involved in meaningful ways.

Though the involvement of the outsider perspective remains inherently problematic, Smith (2012c) describes Indigenous research as able to include working with other groups. Indigenous groups, however, must seek and be resourced to structure these alliances to fit their needs (Yamada, 2014), while researchers must be able to balance an understanding of linguistics as an “ ‘objective’ science” (Czaykowska-Higgins, 2019, p. 113) with the ethical imperative of recognizing the centrality of human contribution to linguistics and therefore, of adopting a human-centred approach (Czaykowska-Higgins, 2019). Yamada (2014) addresses how research can provide resources in a study assessing a linguistics training program, delivered as part of the Community Partnerships Model (CPM). The study tested the hypothesis that for community-led research to be a true partnership, any training for community members must enhance the possibility of “balanced collaboration” at every stage (Yamada, 2014, p.329). Similar to Lee’s (2009) discovery of Indigenous youth agency in the course of conducting research, Yamada (2014) points out the importance of even a single community member’s interest to any collaborative model.

Collaboration also addresses outsider bias. Nikkel (2006) says that building a team of evaluators of which stakeholders are part allows for biases to be “neutralised” (p.15). To the same end, the involvement of trained and knowledgeable “speech community linguists” (Yamada, 2014, p.333) in fair collaboration should be embraced by academics to address their own Western biases.

The direct involvement of skilled community members is not only an ethical issue (Nikkel, 2006; Smith, 2012c; Yamada, 2014; Deer, 2022) and a practical concern (Andersen, 2009), but central to the outcomes of research. Yamada (2014) observes that one advantage of a collaborative, Indigenous-led approach is more salient data and a richer understanding of it. Nikkel (2006) concludes that “when people with an interest in a program have influence over the object and scope of a study, the study [is] more likely to be of value to the community” (p.15). The need to work with the community with the aim of eventually replace myself with someone local has governed my involvement in community work, and now linguistics research for many years. I have learned, as both a youth worker and educator, and as a researcher, that I am able to improve and should constantly seek to improve my approaches to working with any community, including my own, while I seek to deepen my own knowledge of language and the communities which form it.

3.2. Researcher’s positionality

As a White European newcomer to Canada, I am aware that my physical appearance, accent and presence may have several effects on the study, from conception to data collection. I carry within me inherent bias stemming from early years education in Euro- and Anglo-centric learning models, histories and ways of knowing.

My interest in this study stems from my time in Hay River (2012-2014) working as a special needs assistant at Harry Camsell Elementary and as coordinator of the Hay River Community Youth Centre. Witnessing the pride with which high school students in Hay River spoke the Dene vocabulary learned at school, and the dedication of language teachers in Hay River and Kátl'odééche, inspired me to pursue further education in linguistics, culminating in this study. My relationships from that time underpin those needed to forge a study that produces data that can be of use to the communities.

A background in youth work has informed how I interpret the works of scholars such as Smith (2012), who recall the history of Indigenous knowledge and its erasure from academia and the public consciousness. I believe in the strength of knowledge and self-knowledge; gifts which are the birthright of Indigenous youth. As such, it is my wish to become a partner in empowering the next generation of Indigenous language speakers in part by leaving behind more than I take from the communities, both in research outcomes and skills. Alongside this, it is my honour to work with Indigenous knowledge keepers, and to build relationships with them, my contribution to which I hope sustains their efforts in some way, as repayment for the kindness, patience and generosity many community members have shown me during my times in the North.

The need for the study to be shaped as a remote study due to the COVID-19 pandemic presented an opportunity to put community members and Dene speakers at the centre of the research not only as participants, but as researchers also. Being able to work with community linguists (Yamada, 2014) Ms. Violet Fabian (KFN) and Ms. Karalyn Menicoche (DGGFN, Fort Providence) as the study came together and receive their feedback from their experience of collecting data gave invaluable insight into the process that I would not have had without their involvement. I am extremely grateful for their patience, kindness and collaboration.

3.3. Description of materials

The materials for this study consisted of a single, two-page questionnaire, comprising sixteen questions designed to elicit information about attitudes towards the Dene language and language programming available in each community. The questionnaire was put together using a combination of language attitude methods to elicit quantitative and qualitative data, following Meyerhoff et al. (2015). The content of the questionnaire was influenced by Sachdev's (1998) survey of child and adult attitudes towards Cree in the Fisher River Cree Nation, Manitoba, by McCarty et al's (2006) investigation into youth and adult attitudes towards Navajo in Beautiful Mountain, New Mexico, and Andersen's (2009) sociolinguistic survey of Inuttitut-speaking community in Nunatsiavut (Labrador). The questionnaire was originally conceived as a pilot study for later research into adolescent attitudes in the same communities. As such it was focused on gauging the degree of community support for Dene language instruction; feelings about current Dene language education in their community; and to understand underlying motivations for their attitudes to the Dene language and Dene language education.

The questionnaire was drafted between 2019 and 2020 and was distributed to the communities for discussion with the band councils or any other body deemed appropriate internally, prior to the research contracts being signed between the University and the First Nations. Choices of wording involved first-hand knowledge of the communities and schools in question, community and school history, and community and Dene cultural traditions. Demographic definitions used reflected a combination of labels commonly used by Statistics Canada, and vocabulary used in the communities to self-identify. The materials and a brief description of the study also passed through the GNWT research ethics process with the Aurora Research Institute (ARI).

In 2019, I interviewed Deborah Reid (principal, Chief Sunrise Education Centre, Kátł'odéeche First Nation) to hear her account of the Dene language instruction in the community. The Deh Gáh Got'įę school at the time did not have a principal, however, I spoke with Evelyn Sabourin, Language Coordinator at the Deh Gáh Got'įę Band Council, regarding current language policy. As part of the ARI's community consultation process, a study synopsis was also sent to Angela James, then Director of Indigenous Languages and Education Secretariat, within the Department of Education, Culture and Employment (ECE) of the GNWT from whom it received positive feedback, but no specific questions or commentary.

Contracts were signed to ensure the correct handling of data, the employment conditions of the community linguists and ownership of data. After the contracts were signed, the community linguists were also able to review the questionnaire and suggest any further changes. For example, Ms. Fabian suggested that 'Dene', denoting the language, should be termed 'Dene language' to be more precise.

The final version of the questionnaire (see Appendix A) is divided into three sections, reflecting different areas of interest and question structure. The first section, 'About you' asks participants to give their age, gender identification, if they speak any languages other than English, and how they would describe their ethnicity, if they were born in the community, and if they have a first-person relationship with a young person in high school (6). This information was elicited to give context to answers given in the subsequent sections. For example, participants were asked whether or not (Y/N) they speak a language other than English, with a mind to assess their interpretation of the word "speak" and compare this with their self-assessments of Dene language proficiency. Participants assessed their overall proficiency in the

Dene language, later, in section 3, giving a rating on a scale of 1 to 4, with each level described by a phrase e.g. “I don’t know Dene”.

Questions in sections 2 and 3 were then further subdivided by whether they target the integrative (community-orientated) or instrumental (personal and social status-related) dimensions of attitudes (Gibbons & Ramírez, 2004). Section 2 attempted this by posing direct questions regarding opinions and feelings about Dene language use in the population. It consists of five Likert scale questions, with 1 representing ‘very important’ and 5 representing ‘not important at all’. These questions are designed to elicit the participant’s attitudes towards children and youth learning Dene, and a Dene person’s relationship to the language, specifically if “a Dene person” is a person who knows how to speak Dene, and in what spheres of life the Dene language is “important”.

Section 3 further targeted the different dimensions of attitudes by asking three multiple choice questions, the first of which looked at learning environments for the language; the second, asking participants to choose in which contexts they feel Dene language use is appropriate and finally, the participant’s self-assessment of their language proficiency.

Section four contained one open question which was used to elicit opinions about schooling, specifically.

Plenty of space was left on the page around the questions which allowed for participants to add extra information and comments, which some chose to do.

3.4. Challenges in data collection

When this study was conceived, the initial proposal included me travelling to the Northwest Territories and being involved in data collection. In early 2020, when I was discussing the study with the bands’ leadership, the COVID-19 pandemic began. At that point, it was the

directive of the University of Manitoba's Human Ethics Research Board (REB) that any research involving human participants that could be redesigned to be remote, should be. This necessitated the involvement of community members to perform all tasks within the communities.

While working with representatives of each band council on the research contracts, I was also searching for a Dene language speaker in each community who would be interested in working with me on the study. Ms. Violet Fabian (Kátł'odéèche First Nation) came on board after she was recommended to me by the band's Chief Negotiations Officer, Peter Redvers. Ms. Karalyn Menicoche (Deh Gáh Got'įę First Nation) agreed to collect data on my behalf after I contacted her through a member of her family, Doris Camsell, a friend and ex-colleague. Both Ms. Fabian and Ms. Menicoche took the TCPS2 Core ethics training and received their certificates before data collection began.

While working remotely was ethically important, it posed problems in the long term. The communities were closely following directives from the health department of the GNWT regarding social distancing between households as the pandemic continued. As principal investigator, I had to ensure, to the greatest extent possible, that the community linguists observed social distancing and health protocols mandated by both the University of Manitoba REB and the restrictions in place in their community. I did this by maintaining contact with the community linguists and liaisons throughout the dual data collection processes, and providing support where possible. During the two years between the beginning of data collection in Fort Providence at the beginning of 2022, to the end of data collection in Kátł'odéèche in August of the same year, the community liaisons and linguists both had to be comfortable with the linguists entering private residences to work on the questionnaire with community members. It therefore took a greater period of time than initially anticipated to collect data in either community.

In addition to the pandemic, each community experienced some unique challenges that placed even more stress on its members. For example, Kátł'odéche First Nation and the nearby Hay River Old Town experienced a flood in the spring of 2022 which wreaked considerable damage to homes and roads (CBC, 2022). During these times hastening the study into being was not an option. However, with the perseverance and dedication of Ms. Fabian and Ms. Menicoche, the full sample of data (30+ questionnaires) was collected in each community.

3.5. Participant recruitment and data collection

Participants were informed via the community Facebook groups about the study and who to contact to participate. Individuals qualified to participate so long as they were over eighteen years old, and able to fully consent to the process. Practically, this meant that an individual should be able to understand the information on the Informed Consent Form (ICF) before signing, including understanding their rights concerning data. Participants could withdraw from the study at any point up to the period of analysis (September, 2022) by contacting me directly.

Participants had the choice of collecting a questionnaire and ICF from the community linguist and filling it out independently, or liaising with the linguist to fill out the ICF and questionnaire, with the linguist scribing for them. The latter accommodates different comfort levels with reading and writing in English and allows for the participant to ask questions about the consent process and the treatment of their data.

For the reasons described above, the data collection process was necessarily staggered between the two communities, with Ms. Karalyn Menicoche beginning collection between the last week of February and mid-March of 2022, and Ms. Violet Fabian beginning in early August and ending at the end of August, 2022.

I kept a codebook in a secure encrypted file with the names of participants against the number of their questionnaire. This allowed for the data to remain anonymous, but for data to be destroyed should a participant contact me to withdraw from the study.

All data collected will be retained by the Kátł'odéeché and Deg Gáh Got'įę both in raw and summarized forms.

4. Results

In presenting the results of the study, the first section consists of demographic data elicited by the questionnaire, including analysis of age, self-identification of gender and ethnicity, self-assessment of proficiency and self-assessment of speaking a language other than English. The second section describes the attitudinal data taken from the Likert scale questions. The third section presents an analysis of the attitudinal data with self-assessment of proficiency data, and section 4 presents a thematic analysis of the open question data.

4.1. Demographic data

4.1.1. Age, gender, and ethnicity

As seen in Figure 3, the data for both communities (N = 61) skews to the ages 65 and under ($n=46$). The age groups used for the survey were drawn from the Canadian national census, 2021. The largest age group who responded to this question for Kátł'odééche First Nation are under 30 years old ($n=10$, 40%); while 24% ($n=7$) of participants in Fort Providence are under 30 years old, exceeded only by participants ages 51-65 years old at 27% ($n=8$). Those over 65 years old are divided into two groups, 66 to 75 years old and, reflecting a smaller cohort living over 75 years old, the larger division is 75-90 years old. Note that Kátł'odééche First Nation has a significant percentage ($n=6$, 19%) of no responses for age.

Also seen in Figure 3, participants were asked to choose to self-identify as 'male', 'female', 'non-binary' or 'rather not say'. All respondents answered this question. The results show a definitive majority of female-identifying participants in both communities with Fort Providence having 76% female participants versus 24% male and KFN having 81% female to 19% male.

Participants from Fort Providence used only three overlapping identifiers, with 7% describing themselves as ‘Métis’ uniquely, 7% describing themselves as both Indigenous and Dene, and the remaining 86% of the population describing themselves as Dene, only.

Kátł’odéeché First Nation, by contrast, was more broad. The largest identifier is Dene, with 71% of respondents using this word to describe their ethnicity, with a large minority, 29% of respondents, using Dene, only, to describe themselves. Only two other words were used alone to self-identify- ‘Canadian’ and ‘Indigenous’ both appeared once each, but otherwise appeared in a total of 42% of responses, each. The words ‘Asian’, ‘White/European’, ‘Cree’ and ‘Other’ were tied as the least-used identifiers with one response each, however, all appeared alongside other identifiers. No respondents to the KFN survey identified as Métis.

Table 1*Gender, age and ethnicity- both communities*

	Fort Providence n=30	Kátł'odéèche First Nation n=31
Gender identity		
Male	7	3
Female	23	27
Non-binary	0	0
Rather not say	0	0
No response	0	1
Age		
18-30	7	10
31-40	6	4
41-50	3	3
51-65	8	5
66-75	4	2
76-90	2	1
no response	0	6
Self-identification (ethnicity)		
Dene	27	23
Indigenous	3	13
Métis	2	0
Canadian	0	13
White/European	0	3
French	0	2
Cree	0	1
Asian	0	1
Other	0	1
no response	0	1

4. 1. 2. Self-assessments of proficiency (SAP) by age, and speaking a language other than English (LOTE)

Amongst participants from Kátł'odéèche First Nation, there is an even divide between those that consider themselves as 'speaking' another language, with a 48/48% split (one person did not respond). Of respondents to this question in Fort Providence, once again, an even split of 47/47% answered 'yes' and 'no' to this question, with a slightly higher percentage of non-responses (two people did not respond). Essentially, both communities are evenly divided between those who consider themselves bilingual, versus those that do not, regardless of whether or not they speak any Dene.

Participants were then asked to assess their own level of speaking Dene. They did this by selecting one answer that they feel best describes their level of proficiency in the Dene out of four ratings: SAP 1, 'I don't know any Dene'; SAP 2, 'I speak some Dene (a few words or phrases)'; SAP 3, 'I can speak a lot of Dene'; and SAP 4, 'I speak Dene as well as I speak English. Several participants selected more than one level, suggesting being 'in between'. In such cases, their rating was rounded up.

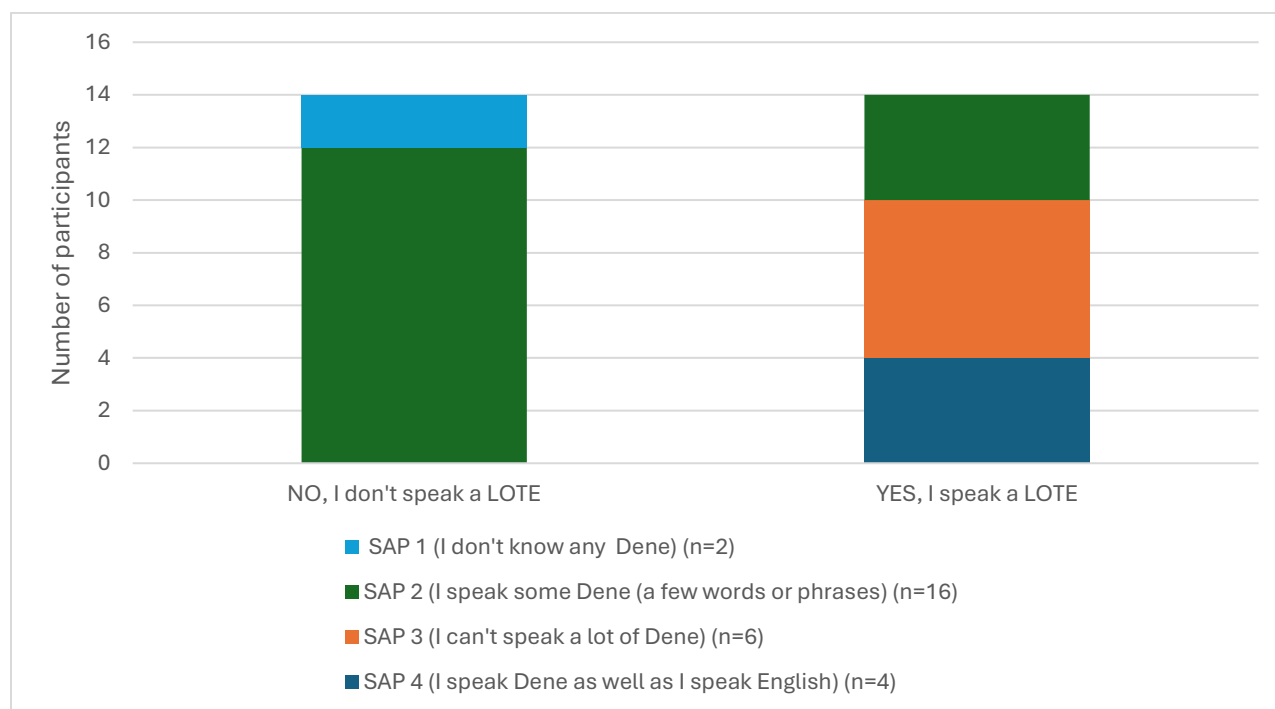
In KFN, 30 of 31 participants responded to the LOTE question, but 5 participants did not report their age. Average age is reported as the mean of reported ages, while percentage is calculated using the total number of SAPs reported. Most of these participants (60%, $n = 20$; avg. age 34.7, age range 18-62) selected SAP 2, while 20% ($n = 6$; avg. age 64.6, age range 43-79) reported speaking the Dene language to a level above 2. Those who reported speaking Dene to the same level that they speak English (SAP 4) represent 19% ($n = 5$; avg. age 64.6; age range 60-79) of all responses, while only three participants (10%; avg. age 32, age range 28-41) assessed their language proficiency at the lowest level (SAP 1).

In Fort Providence, 29 of 30 participants responded to the question. As among KFN respondents, the largest group of speakers overall among Fort Providence respondents is SAP 2, 'I speak some Dene...', with 58.6% ($n=17$; avg. age 37.5, age range 19-54) of responses to this question. Those who say they can 'speak a lot of Dene' (SAP 3) number 20.7% ($n=6$, avg. age 63.8; age range 50-76) of participants. The final category, those who describe themselves as speaking the Dene language to the same level that they speak English (SAP 4), count for 13.7% ($n= 4$; avg. age 66.3; age range 63-69) of respondents. It should be noted, however, that the one respondent who did not give an SAP is aged 89 years, making them the oldest Fort Providence respondent by 9 years.

Figure 3 displays the LOTE data against the SAP data for Fort Providence respondents. Respondents who describe themselves as not speaking a LOTE are exclusively in the SAP 1-2 categories, and represent 50% ($n = 14$) of participants who answered this question. Another 50% ($n = 14$) of respondents to the LOTE question answered ‘yes’, with two non-responses.

Figure 3

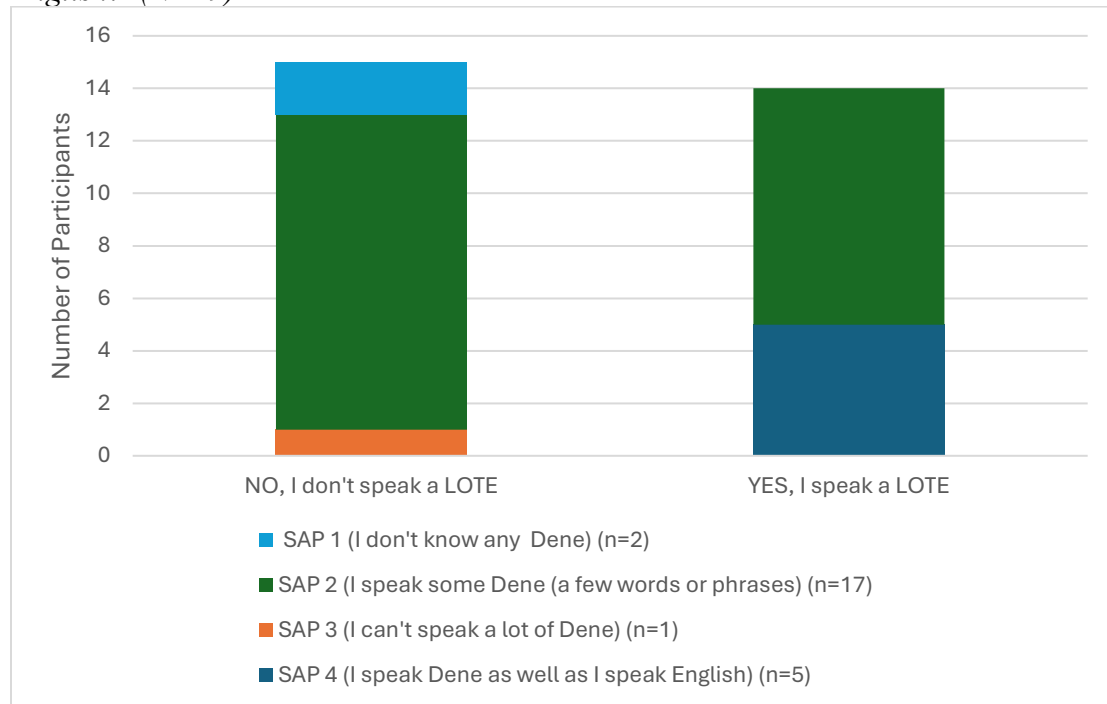
Fort Providence: Self-assessments of proficiency compared to ‘Do you speak a language other than English?’ (N=28)



A slightly different trend was seen in Kátł'odéèche respondents, as seen in Figure 4. While all participants who gave themselves the lowest rating as Dene language (DL) speakers did not consider themselves speakers of a LOTE, SAP 2 speakers assessed themselves as speakers of a LOTE at a rate of 57% ($n = 11$) for ‘no’ and 43% ($n = 9$) ‘yes’, still showing variation in the interpretation of ‘speaking’ at this level.

Figure 4

KFN: Self-assessments of proficiency versus answer to ‘Do you speak a language other than English?’ (N=29)



The greatest difference in the two communities is seen in speakers who assessed themselves at SAP 3, as not speaking a LOTE. Consistent with SAP 4 speakers in Fort Providence, all respondents ($n=2$) of KFN SAP 4 respondents consider themselves speakers of a LOTE.

To gain insight into a possible relationship between how community members view their personal identity and their level of confidence as speakers (represented by their SAP), the data from these two demographic questions were cross-analysed.

Figure 5

Fort Providence, identity by SAP group (N= 29)

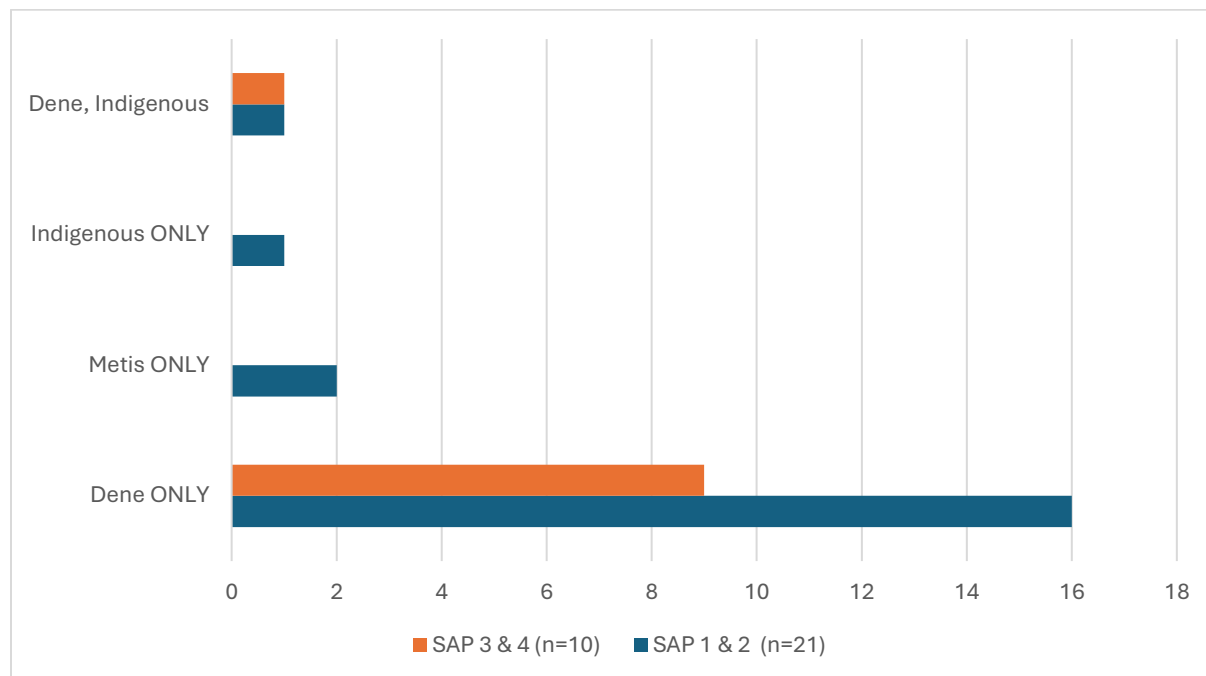
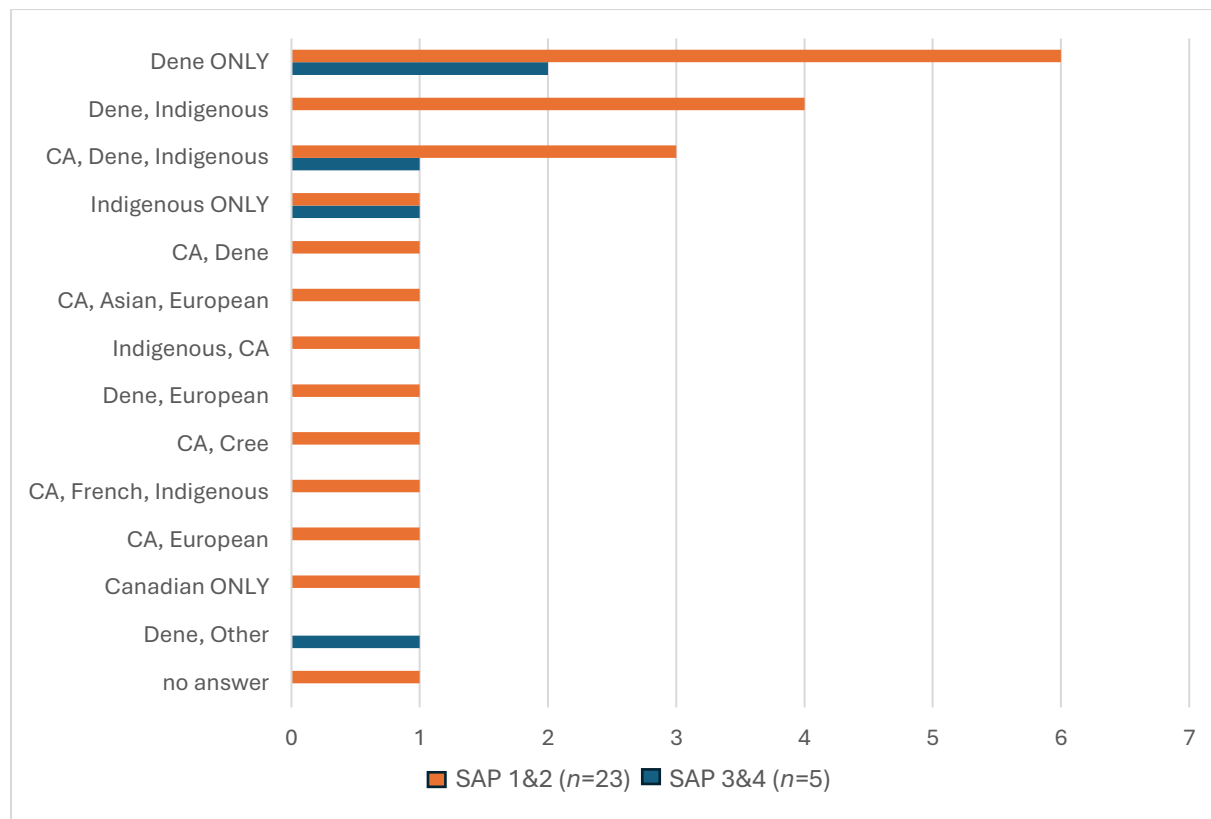


Figure 5 displays a comparison of identifiers by SAP in Fort Providence. It shows that the lower two SAP categories (1 and 2) have a majority of respondents using the term ‘Dene’ to describe their identity at 84% ($n=16$). Respondents also selected the terms Indigenous ($n=2$) and Métis ($n=2$). Of the overall number of responses for SAP 1 and 2, some single-identifier responses were given. Of the total responses for this group, 79% ($n=15$) used chose the term ‘Dene’ alone, one respondent used the term Indigenous alone, while two respondents used Métis on its own. One participant in each group describes themselves as ‘Dene, Indigenous’, hence the total of 31 responses from 29 participants.

While there was a much smaller percentage ($n=10$, 30%) of overall respondents to this question who rated themselves as either a 3 or a 4 in terms of proficiency in the Dene language, there was also less diversity in their answers regarding identity. Repeating the trend shown in SAPs 1 and 2, respondents in this group identified themselves as ‘Dene’ at 90% ($n=9$), with 10% choosing ‘Indigenous’ ($n=1$), while none described themselves as Métis. as shown in Figure 7. All responses in this group were single-identifier responses.

Figure 6*KFN, identity by SAP group (N=28)*

As shown in Figure 6, in KFN, the largest number of identifiers selected were in SAP categories 1 and 2. Those selecting the term ‘Dene’ represent 66% ($n=16$) of all responses. The second-most selected terms are ‘Indigenous’ (42%, $n=10$) and ‘Canadian’ (42%, $n=10$). White/European was chosen by 2 respondents in this category. ‘Cree’ was chosen by one respondent and French by one respondent. The terms used in isolation were ‘Dene’ by 25% ($n=6$) of respondents and Indigenous by one respondent.

In the combined SAP 3 and 4 ratings for KFN, the chosen identifiers were much less diverse (shown in orange, Fig. 4). ‘Dene’ was chosen by the majority ($n=4$) and ‘Dene’ was chosen alone by two of five participants. ‘Indigenous’ was chosen as the sole identifier by one

participant, while another selected 'Canadian', 'Dene' and 'Indigenous' together. The fifth participant identified themselves as 'Dene' and 'Other'.

Across both communities, SAP 3 and 4 ratings correlate with a smaller range of identifiers chosen, and more specifically, with a greater proportion of 'Dene' labels chosen compared to the 1 and 2 groups.

4.2. Attitudes Towards the Dene Language

As Figure 7 shows, a majority of participants from both communities agreed that it is very important for a Dene person to know the Dene language, with 74% ($n = 23$) in KFN and 87% ($n = 26$) in Fort Providence supporting this view. Similarly, when asked to think of how important the Dene language is to them personally (Figure 8), most participants agreed that it is very important, with 68% ($n = 21$) of KFN respondents and 83% ($n = 25$) of Fort Providence respondents selecting this response. Although a small number of participants ($n = 7$ in KFN and $n = 3$ in Fort Providence) responded that it is not important at all for a Dene person to know their language, no respondent from either community felt that the Dene language is not at all important to them personally.

Figure 7

Should a Dene person know their language? Both communities

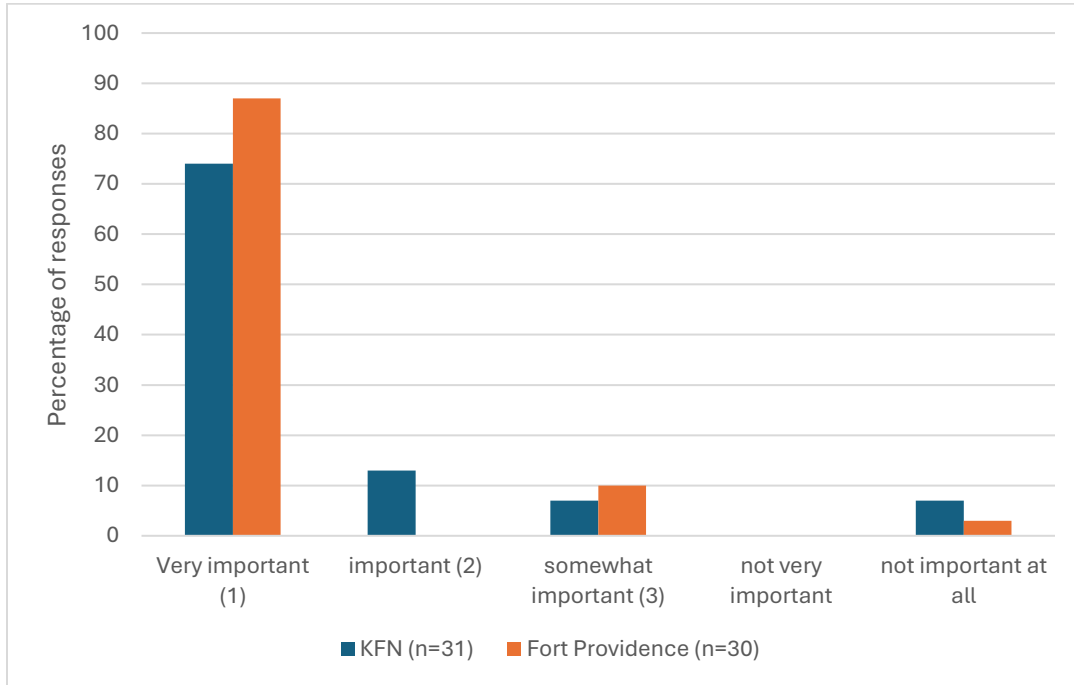
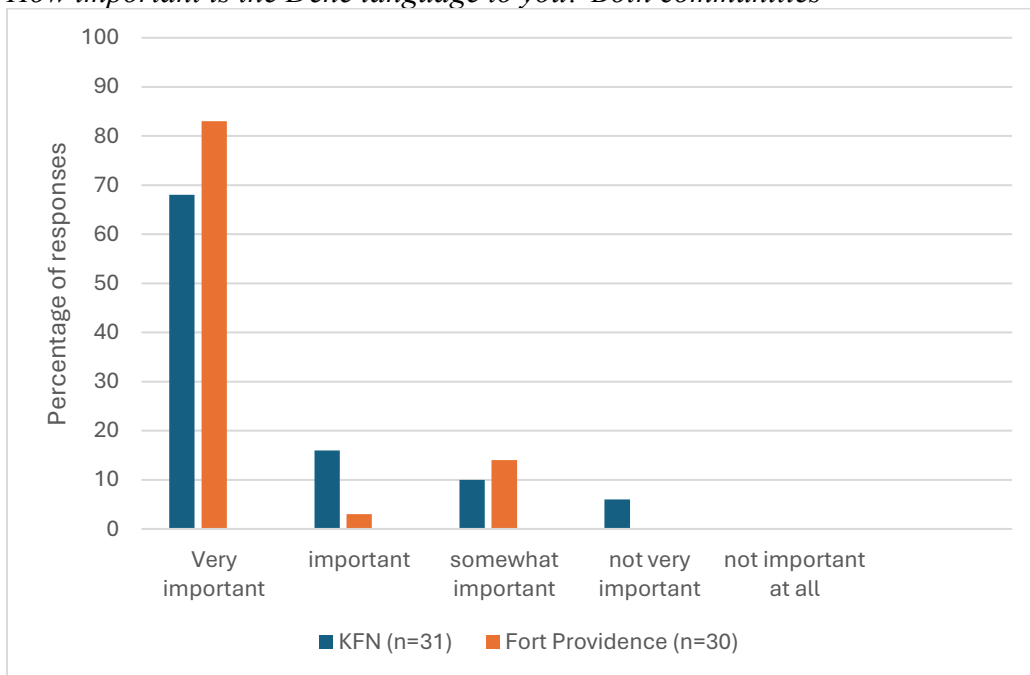


Figure 8

How important is the Dene language to you? Both communities



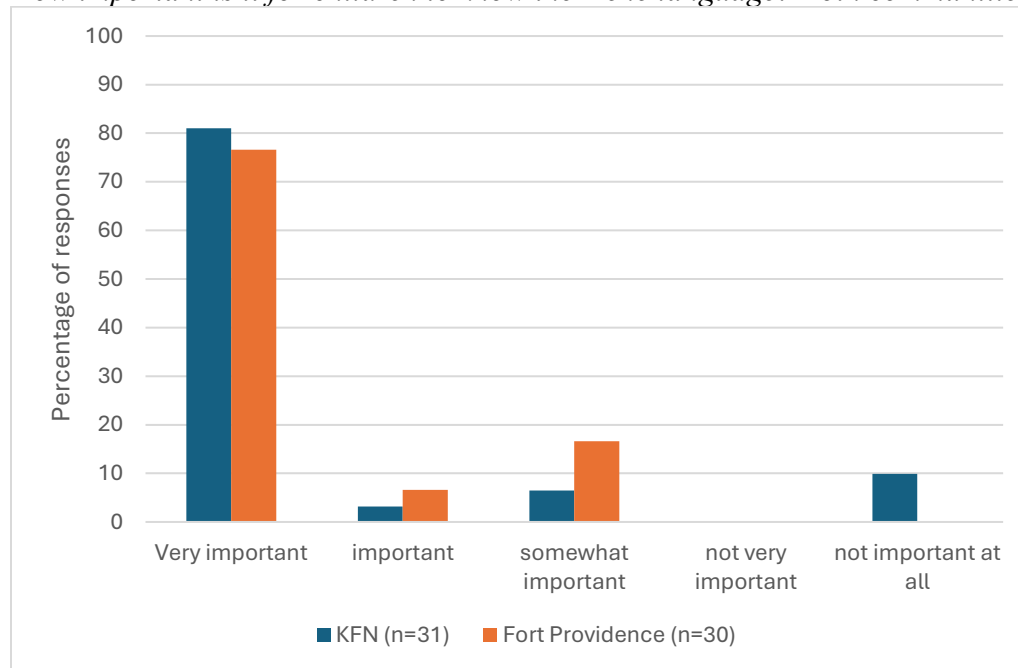
As shown in Figure 9, most participants in KFN and Fort Providence believe it is very important or important (81% and 3.2% in KFN; 76.6% and 6.6% in Fort Providence) for children

to know the Dene language, while only a small number of participants felt that it was somewhat important or not important at all.

While KFN responses are more definitive in responding to ‘very important’, with 81% ($n=25$) compared to Fort Providence’s 76.6% ($n=23$), answers for Fort Providence are weighted more heavily towards the ‘positive’, with all responses appearing within the range of answers ‘very important’ to ‘somewhat important’.

Figure 9

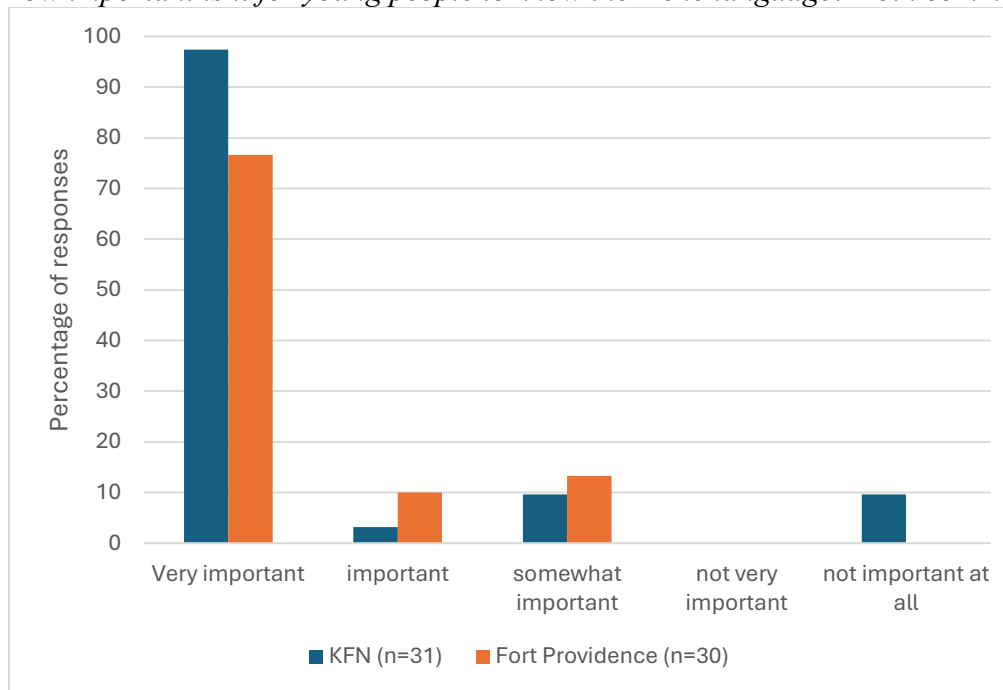
How important is it for children to know the Dene language? Both communities



As shown in Figure 10, when considering ‘young people’, 77.4% ($n= 24$) of respondents from KFN felt that it was very important for them to know the Dene language; one respondent felt it was important; three participants (9.6%) felt that it was somewhat important, and the remaining three (9.6%) felt it wasn’t important at all. Similarly, 76.6% ($n=23$) of respondents from Fort Providence felt that it was very important for young people to know the Dene language, four participants felts that it was somewhat important, while three participants felt it was important.

Figure 10

How important is it for young people to know the Dene language? Both communities

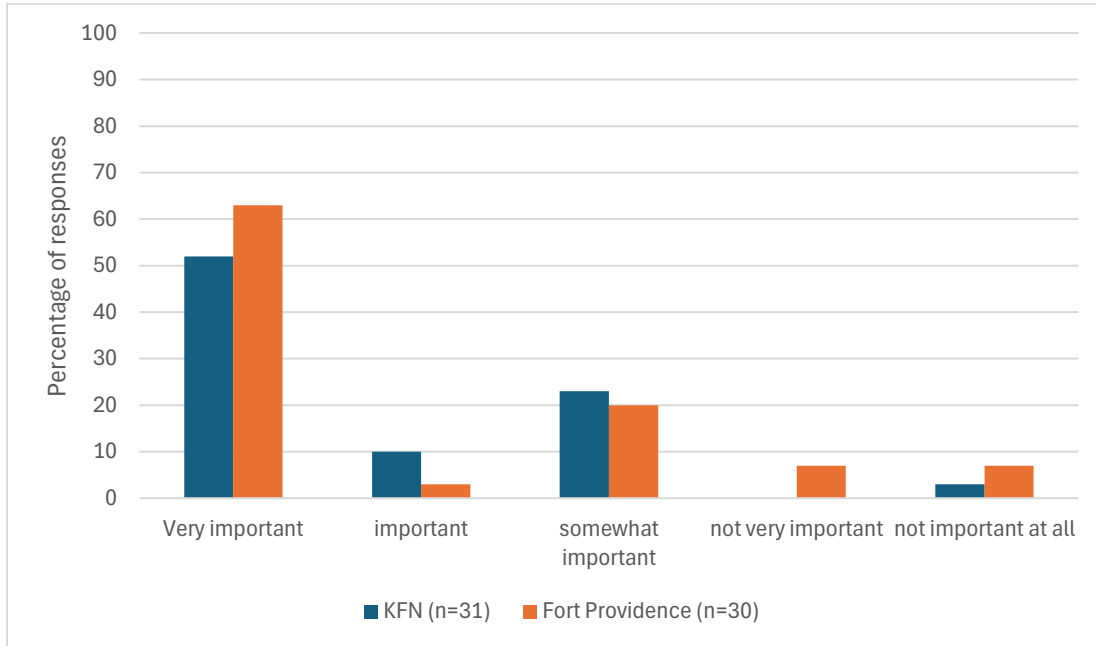


The data displayed in Figures 11 and 12 shows responses from each communities regarding two language use contexts which juxtapose the integrative and instrumental aspects of language attitudes: speaking a language amongst family members, and speaking the language as a skill relevant to the workplace.

As seen in Figure 11, the majority of participants in each community, 52% ($n = 16$) in KFN and 63% ($n = 19$) in Fort Providence, felt that speaking the Dene language with their family is very important. However, a significant minority in each community, 23% ($n=7$) in KFN and 20% ($n=6$) in Fort Providence, held moderate feelings (“somewhat important”) about speaking the language with family, with a small minority not considering speaking the language with family as important at all.

Figure 11

Is the Dene language important for talking with your family? Both communities



As seen in Figure 12, the responses regarding the importance of Dene for getting a job show the most variation from in-community and between-community trends. Specifically, KFN responses show a broader spread of opinion than in previous questions, yet stands out as more strongly positive than Fort Providence, where respondents show the highest degree of ambiguity to this question compared to others, with more than twice the number of Fort Providence respondents (50%) to KFN respondents (23%) feeling that the Dene language is only somewhat important for getting a job. Across all Likert scale responses, this question has the lowest scores in both communities.

Figure 12

Is the Dene language important for getting a job? Both communities

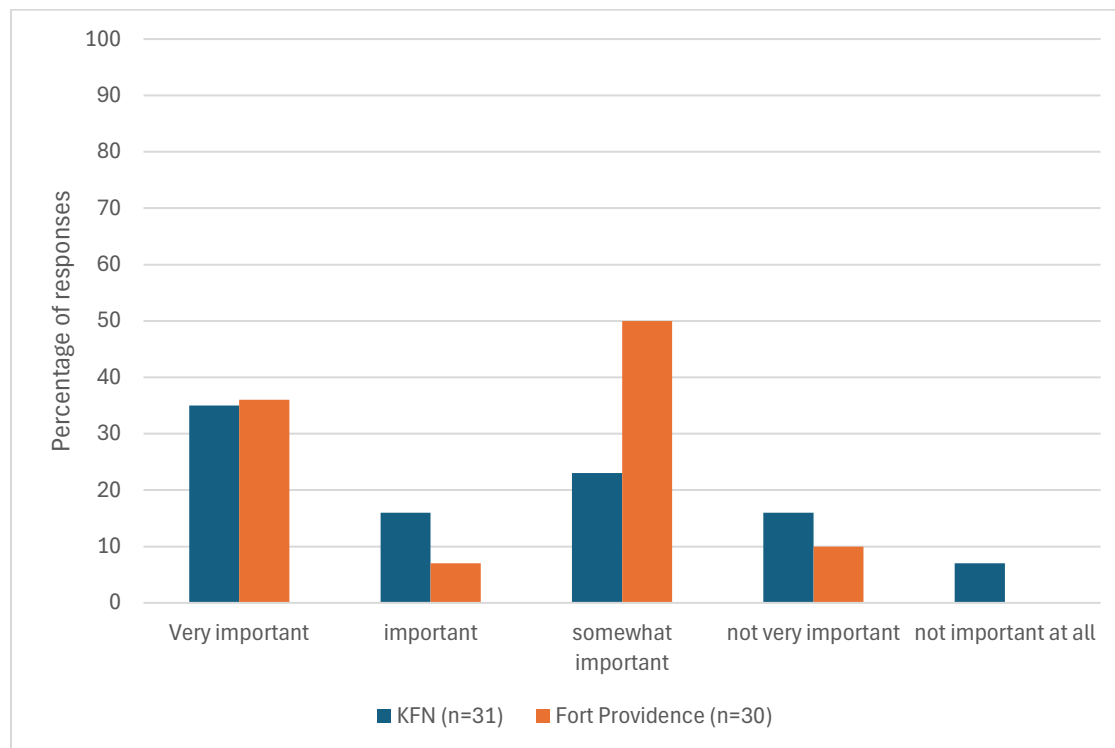
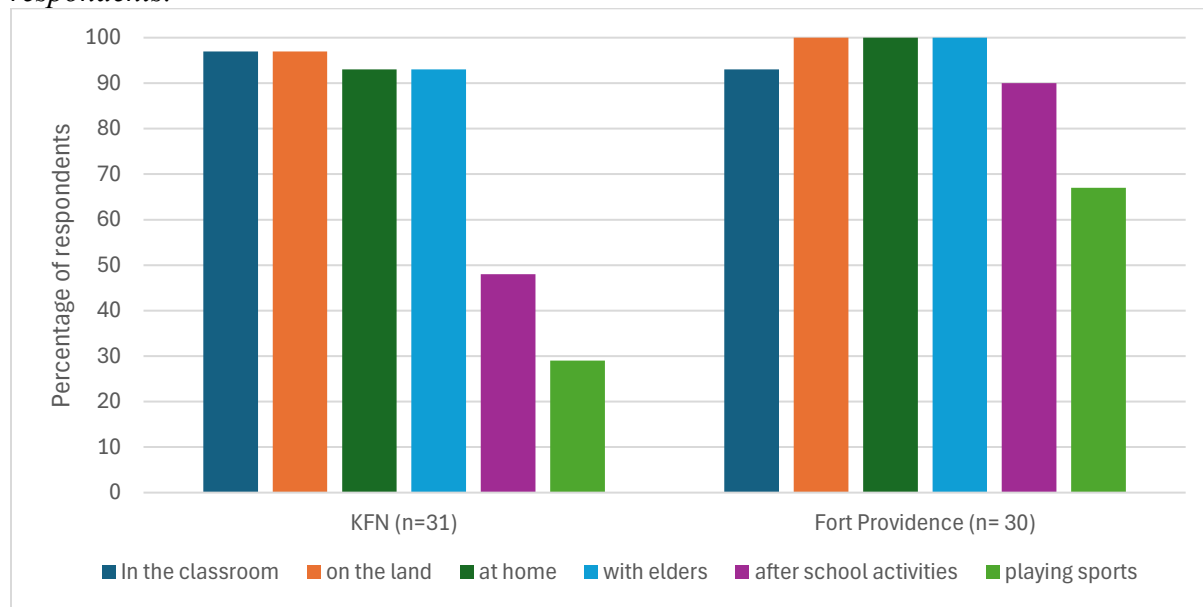


Figure 13 shows that KFN respondents prioritized children learning the Dene language in the classroom (97%), versus Fort Providence (93%) whose respondents felt that children and youth should be learning the Dene language at home. In fact, the classroom was rated lower than ‘at home’, ‘with elders’ and ‘on the land’, all of which garnered 100% of respondents selecting this answer. However, both communities place high value on learning language ‘on the land’ value ($n = 30$ selections representing 100% of participants for Fort Providence and 97% for KFN, respectively). When compared within-community, both sets of responses show comparatively less importance placed on children learning the Dene language through playing sports (67% for Fort Providence and 29% for KFN) or after school activities (90% for Fort Providence and 48% for KFN), however both contexts are still rated highly amongst Fort Providence respondents.

Figure 13

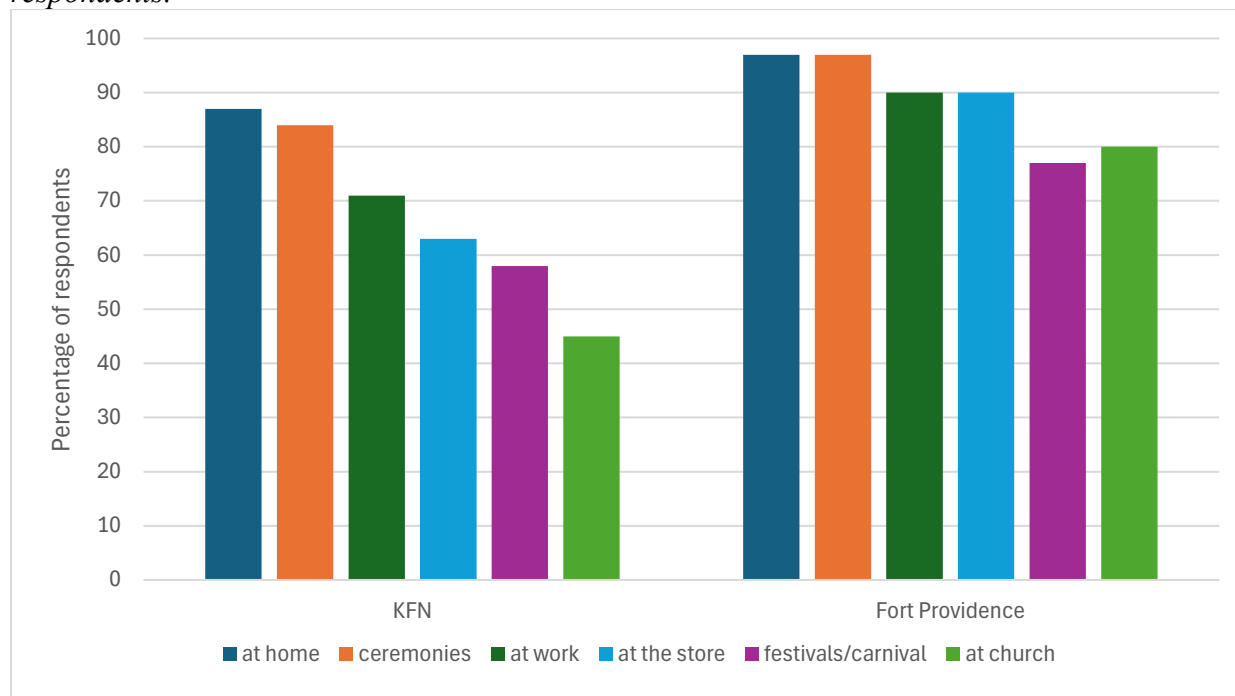
Where should children learn the Dene language? Comparing community data by percentage of respondents.



When considering ‘Where should you hear the Dene language spoken?’ (Figure 14), once again, Fort Providence has a higher rate of responses for places or contexts where the Dene language should be heard, scoring over 20 responses (more than 60% of respondents) for every context. Across communities, ‘at home’ scores the highest rates of responses for both communities (97% for Fort Providence and 87% for KFN). KFN respondents also selected all contexts, however, ‘at the store’, ‘at festivals/carnivals’ and ‘at church’ all scored below 60% (or $n=19$, $n=18$ and $n=14$ selections, respectively). The greatest divergence between communities is seen in the response to ‘at the store’, with KFN selecting this context $n=19$ times (61%) compared to $n=27$ (90%) times for Fort Providence.

Figure 14

Where should you hear the Dene language spoken? Comparing community data by percentage of respondents.



4.3. Cross-tabulation of individual Likert scale ratings and SAPs

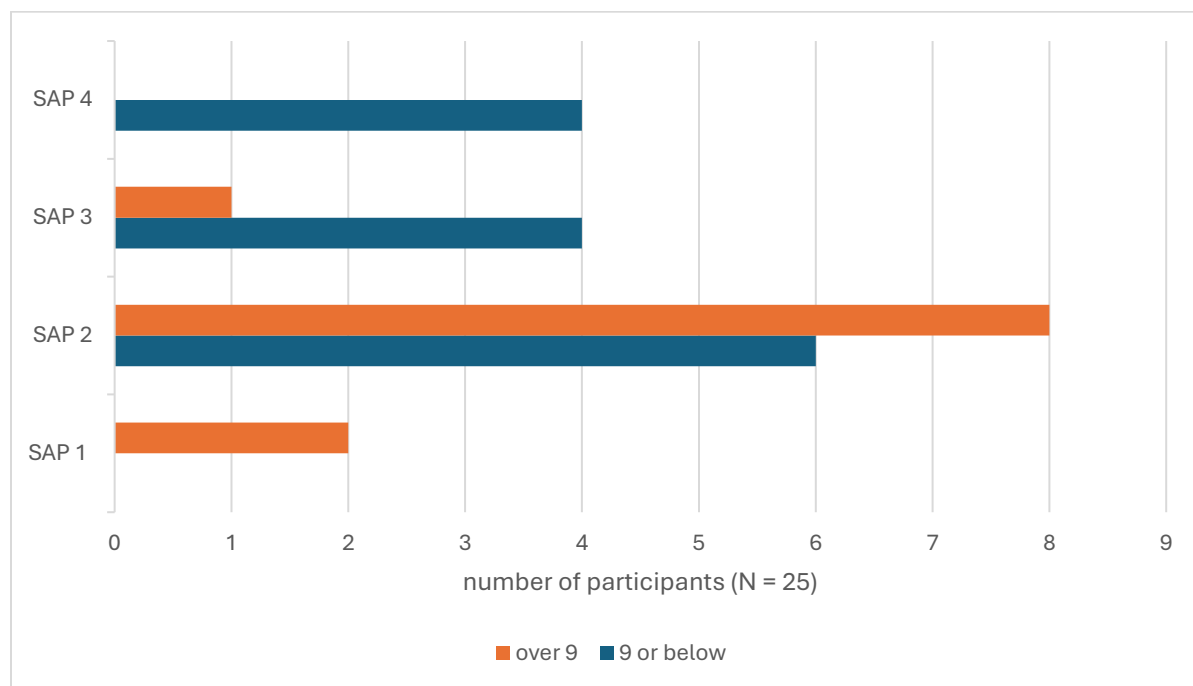
In order to establish a base-line quantity for ‘positive’ versus ‘negative’ attitudes, the scores from the Likert scale questions, being discreet, were adapted for this purpose. Likert scale question ratings (seen in Figures 7 to 12) were added up to produce a single score for each individual participant, producing a positive/negative rating depending on where that individual score falls on either side of the community average. Scores were out of 30, with the most positive being 6, representing a participant selecting ‘very important’, or (1), the most positive rating, for each question, and the most negative being (6) ‘not important at all’. I then cross-tabulated these scores by SAP rating for each participant allowing me to query the possible connection between self-confidence as a learner/speaker and individual attitudes.

The median Likert scale score in Fort Providence is 9.7, however, the mode is 6, answering ‘very important’ for all questions, representing exactly one third of all participants

($n=10$). Scores below 9.7 represent 46% ($n=14$) of participants, which means that almost half of the Fort Providence participants analysed here ($n=25$) have overall positive attitude scores. As seen in Figure 17, 50% of participants in SAP groups 2-4 ($n=23$) have positive attitude scores (9 or below), however the largest group, SAP 2 ($n=14$), is split between positive and negative scores at a rate of 43% ($n=6$) to 57% ($n=8$). In Fort Providence, the higher a person rates themselves as a speaker, the more positive their overall attitude score is. However, speakers who assessed their Dene language skills at the lowest level of (1) did not have the most negative attitude scores overall. Rather, they had the same scores as some participants in SAP 2.

Figure 15

SAP ratings by Likert scale scores, community average of 9, Fort Providence



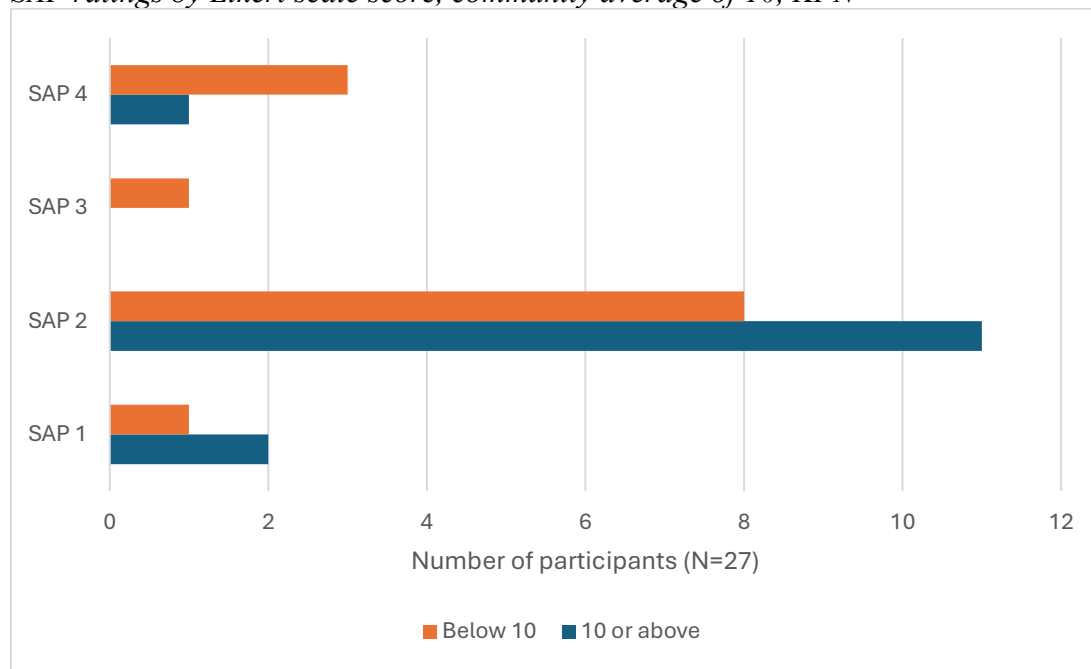
Though also having a mode of 6, the median Likert scale score for KFN is more negative than Fort Providence, at 10.3¹. Figure 16 shows that among KFN respondents analysed ($n=27$),

¹ Two Likert scale scores in the KFN data showed that the respondents may have misconstrued (5) as the most positive rating rather than (1), as the Likert scale answers were inconsistent with

scores below the average Likert scale score (10/30) represent 50% ($n=14$) of participants, making respondents split evenly between positive and negative attitude scores. Participants in SAP groups 2-4 ($n=25$) skewed to positive attitude scores, with 52% ($n=13$) scoring 10 or below in the Likert scale questions. However, negative (scores of 10 and above) are present in all groups with more than one participant, and the largest SAP group, SAP 2, is more negative (53%; $n=10$) than positive (47%; $n=9$).

Figure 16

SAP ratings by Likert scale score, community average of 10, KFN



4.4. Open question analysis by attitude dimensions

The open question- “It is important for young people to learn Dene in school because.....”- produced data which was parsed according to a set of eight attitude dimensions, adapted from six, from Lewis (1975), discussed in Baker (1992). This allowed for each participant statement to

the rest of their attitudinal data. However, as this could not be verified at the time of analysis, I omitted their scores.

be categorized by any of the dimensions, according to language used and ideas expressed.

Having first analysed the data, I adapted the original six dimensions to better reflect the concerns present in the data. Specifically, to ‘commitment to practise’ I added ‘activist stance’ in line with references to vitality, language maintenance and moving away from the history of language loss.

1. General approval

This dimension serves to categorize general statements of approval towards the language or language schooling, such as ‘[it’s] awesome’, ‘great’, ‘good’ etc., where no finer detail is given.

2. Commitment to practice, or activist stance (vitality)

Terms such as ‘revitalize’, ‘bring back’, ‘keep’ reflect concerns about maintaining or revitalizing the language, and the future of the language.

3. National culture and tradition

National culture and tradition encompasses any aspect of a response which shows concern for culture, tradition, or identity. Terms such as ‘the land’, ‘their heritage’, ‘their language’ reflect this dimension.

4. Economic importance

This dimension reflects the instrumental value of the language to economic gain. Terms such as ‘job’, ‘work’, ‘career’ would fall under this dimension.

5. Social communication

The use of terms such as ‘communicate’, ‘talk’, ‘understand’, ‘speak to’ etc. reflect preoccupation with the utility of the language for communicating and facilitating social bonds.

6. a) Family and community considerations (elders)

Any mention of ‘elders’ falls under this category. References to ‘home’ appeared to be exclusive of references to elders, but overlapping with references to parents, suggesting that in the least, ‘elders’ should be considered separately of the other concepts. This was seen in the data for both communities.

b) Family and community considerations (home, parents and others)

This dimension encompasses concerns regarding the use of the language in the home, with parents and other family members or caregivers. Terms such as ‘home’, ‘parents’, ‘friends’, ‘peers’ fall under this dimension.

7. Personal, ideological

Where respondents expressed personal or ideological beliefs about the language, its use and how it should be taught, they often used statements containing a modal (‘should’, ‘must’, ‘have to’), or ‘it’s important to’, ‘the language needs to be spoken’. Dimension 7 frequently appeared with Dimension 2, Commitment to practise.., as respondents might suggest a strategy or belief around what might promote language vitality.

8. Well-being of self or others

This dimension is an addition to the original as several responses in each community demonstrated an interest in young people learning the Dene language for reasons that promoted wellness, personal achievement or strong relationships.

The unique expressions used were categorized by dimension and a total number by community was counted for each dimension. Certain terms were not counted as they are considered implicit information in the answers. Terms are considered implicit if they refer to something heavily implied by or explicitly used in the question, or placeholders and obvious synonyms for that information. For example ‘youth’ and synonyms ‘children’/’child’/’kid’ (and equally, ‘they’/’them’/’their’ unless referring explicitly to someone else referenced in the

answer); ‘Dene’ and ‘language’; ‘school’, and ‘learn’. This allowed me to focus on the themes that the respondents connect with the central idea in the question. Phrasal terms, such as “they should learn [the language] at home” (not a direct quote) were categorized by ‘should’, as a personal ideology (Dimension 7), and ‘home’ as representing family (Dimension 6b).

Word clouds were produced using all individual terms (single and phrasal). This enabled me to produce a detailed picture of community concerns as well as the priority of dimensions in each community.

Figure 17

Most-frequent terms from open question responses, Fort Providence



Figure 17 displays the most frequently used terms across all dimensions in Fort Providence. The data has 29 unique expressions in total across 7 of the 8 categories from responses from 30 participants, with no expressions falling under Dimension 4, economic communication. The largest number of expressions in one category is 17 in Dimension 3, National culture and

and ‘relationships’ at five mentions, under Dimensions 6a and 6b, respectively. The third-most recurring term is ‘loss’ with four instances.

4.5. Conclusion

Overall, the results show a skew in both communities towards positive attitudes to the Dene language in most aspects, however, averages of Likert scale scores for both communities are negative, weighed down by attitudes to the utility of the language. Across categories, Kátl’odéèche First Nation participants showed slightly more negative responses compared to participants in Fort Providence, due to a wider range of responses than Fort Providence participants. Fort Providence respondents demonstrated higher rates of positive attitudes, with some marked areas of ambivalence. Across community comparisons showed subtle differences in priorities and preferences regarding language use and learning.

Demographic data reveals that the majority of people across communities identify primarily as Dene, however, KFN participants are more diverse in the number of identifiers used by an individual, versus a more homogenous community in Fort Providence, with a higher rate of Dene and Dene-only responses.

Identity appears to correlate with self-assessments of DL proficiency, meaning, the higher the SAP rating, the more Dene a person is likely to consider themselves, across both communities.

The largest SAP group in both communities considers themselves as speaking a few words or phrases of Dene (SAP 2); the smallest group is those who say that they do not speak any Dene. The second-smallest group overall are those who speak Dene to the same level that they speak English (SAP 4).

The large age range of people in both communities who assess their language abilities as at SAP 2 prevents me from making any conclusion regarding the co-influence of age, and

proficiency and identity, and therefore of all three factors on attitudes. However, median ages in the most fluent group (SAP 4) are higher than all other SAP groups, in both communities.

Data regarding context of DL learning and use shows that the communities differ somewhat in their views. KFN participants show a slight preference for 'in school' over other contexts, however, when asked where the language should be spoken, both communities preference 'at home'. The home is the context most prevalent in open question responses where the concepts of home and family were associated with the dimension of culture and identity.

Analysis of individual Likert scale scores against self-assessments of Dene language proficiency (SAPs) showed that in both communities, the higher the SAP or the more confident a speaker is in their own abilities, the more positive their overall attitudes are to the Dene language. However, highly positive or more negative attitudes were not exclusive to one group of the other. In both communities, SAP 2- 'I speak some Dene', has a wide spread of Likert scale scores. In KFN, at least one participant in every SAP group had highly positive Likert scale scores. In Fort Providence, this was less true, as those who professed to not speak any Dene (SAP1) had the most negative spread of Likert scale scores.

Open question data shows more participants directed their responses to personal ideology regarding language learning policy, as well as the reasons that the DL should be important to Dene youth, than criticism of the contemporary community schooling. These include the connection of language to culture and identity, as mentioned above, but also to well-being and to family.

Despite these trends in the data, across all questions, some ambiguity appears around the issue of speaking the Dene language 'at home', 'with family' and with 'parents', requiring further investigation. However, both communities clearly see language use as tied to specific

functions and contexts- both social and spatial- with emphasis on Dene language use and learning in private life, traditional activities, and with support from schooling, while workplaces, socializing outside of the home and other public spaces and functions are less associated with the language.

5. Discussion

Overall, results show a broad spectrum of attitudes within Fort Providence and Kátł'odééche First Nation, conform with the understanding that language attitudes are typically multifaceted (Baker, 1992; UNESCO, 2003). This chapter first discusses the importance of demographic factors to language attitudes (5.1.), focusing on the connection between identity, self-assessments of proficiency (SAP) and confidence in DL speaking skills; identity and its relationship to DL skills (5.1.1.); and personal and shared beliefs about the language (5.1.2.). Secondly, I discuss attitudes to the contexts of DL language learning and use (5.2.), at home (5.2.1.), at school (5.2.2.) and in public spaces (5.2.3.). Finally, I discuss the different aspects of attitudinal data in its instrumental and integrative aspects (5.3.) and how combined analysis of demographic and attitudinal data may be compared to recent Census results to give insight into possible future directions that research and language learning in the communities may take (5.4.).

5.1. Language attitudes, identity, and assessment of proficiency (SAP)

5.1.1. *Dene identity and Dene language proficiency*

While we cannot draw a direct line between identity and language attitudes, previous research supports the view that speakers with a strong language-associated identity are more likely to both be motivated as learners (promoting confidence in their abilities) and hold more positive attitudes towards the language (Lee, 2002; Gibbons & Ramírez, 2004; Kondo-Brown, 2005; Kelleher, 2010; Kang & Kim, 2012; Ennser-Kananen & King, 2018). When identity associated with a language is felt strongly in a community, bilingualism (to whatever degree) is viewed more positively as a personal trait than monolingualism by the majority, even if the monolingual people speak a socially dominant language, such as English (Giles & Billings, 2004). This allows for a strong language-associated identity in individuals to be a potential

contributor to positive language attitudes, something seen in both Fort Providence and Kátl'odéèche First Nation community members. Further to this, where language is a recognized component of communal identity, community adherence is then a motivating factor in learning and using the language in one's everyday life (Joseph, 2004a). In turn, an "emotional attachment to the [Indigenous language]" produces stronger "self-identity and ethnicity" (Baker, 2011c, p.74), an important association that further contributes to the health of the language by encouraging usage (Baker, 2011).

When considering attitudes in heritage language learners, the importance of identity to language proficiency is particularly relevant (Noels et al, 1996; Gibbons & Ramírez, 2004). Having a personal connection to the language supports the affective aspect of language attitudes (Lee, 2002; Melo-Pfeifer, 2015) and bolsters positive attitudes (Baker, 2011d). Assuming, then, a correlation between Dene identity and attitudes to the Dene language, an analysis of self-identification by ethnicity is relevant to understanding language attitudes in the communities.

An analysis of participants' SAP alongside self-identification data shows that the rate of Dene-only identity increases with higher self-assessment of proficiency. Across communities, those with the two highest SAP levels combined (3 and 4) identified themselves as Dene, Indigenous or Canadian, while in the two lower SAP groups (1 and 2), the rates of Dene-only responses drop from 90% to 79% in Fort Providence and from 63% to 25% in KFN, a fact which suggests a relationship between strength of Dene identity and self-assessed level of proficiency in the Dene language, conforming with findings in the literature (Hoare, 2003; Coupland et al., 2006; Flynn Haynes, 2011).

A higher SAP was also shown to largely correlate with positive individual Likert scale question responses, although not all those with lower SAPs in the data have less positive

language attitudes. This confirms that strong in-group identity can be developed without proficiency in the language (Hoare, 2003; Giles & Billings, 2004). The implication of largely positive scores may be that a minimal level of Dene language proficiency is a potential driver of positive attitudes amongst community members (Thorburn, 2005), mediated by strong Dene-related identity (Hoare 2003); or that ethnic identity, where available to community members, is a compensatory factor in promoting positive attitudes along affective lines, where proficiency is lacking (Coupland et al., 2006). The degree to which ethnic identity is a driver for positive attitudes where proficiency is lower warrants further investigation in heritage Indigenous language speakers.

5.1.2. SAP and beliefs about proficiency

To better understand how respondents may have attitudes to their own proficiency, the SAP data was cross-analysed with whether or not participants consider that they “speak a language other than English” (or LOTE). Wording of this survey question was chosen to elicit information about interpretations of fluency without using terms such as ‘fluent’ or ‘bilingual’ which could bias results. Accordingly, results showed that exactly half of the respondents to this question in each community consider themselves as speaking LOTE, however, when compared with individual SAP ratings, the SAP groups did not divide evenly. Predictably, those with the lowest and highest SAP ratings in each community corresponded with not speaking and speaking a LOTE, respectively. However, the largest SAP group in each community, SAP 2, ‘I speak some Dene...’, was split in both communities². The majority of Fort Providence SAP 2 respondents do

² Seeing that the largest SAP group is more complex than the lowest and highest SAP groups, I cannot assume that everyone in this group is downplaying or exaggerating their proficiency in the language. It is important to note that self-assessments of proficiency have been found to correlate with objective assessment of proficiency (Kondo-Brown, 2005), and for the purposes of this analysis, SAP2 assessments are taken at face value.

not believe that speaking a few words or phrases constitutes speaking another language (75%, $n=17$), while in KFN responses split more evenly with a larger proportion considering that they speak another language (43%, ‘yes’ to 57%, ‘no’). This suggests the existence of a slightly dominant attitude in both communities in which speaking a few words or phrases is considered inadequate to be a speaker of the DL, a specific belief about the language and, or bilingualism. This belief may be absorbed through the attitude that to be “bilingual” we must speak our second language to the same level that we speak our first (Baker, 2011a). This is an attitude that speakers can hold which may be informed by a monolingual ideology about bilingualism and language proficiency (Baker, 2011a). A high expectation of what being a speaker means in terms of proficiency can lead to an individual assuming that some proficiency- anything below native-like fluency- is insufficient, as opposed to a starting point, or a tool in its own right (Baker, 2011a). Additionally, the fact that a large proportion of SAP 2 level speakers lack confidence in their abilities at a greater rate than those with higher SAP 3 and 4 ratings, supports the view that proficiency and self-confidence as a learner are mutually inclusive (Noels et al., 1996; MacIntyre et al., 1997; Baker, 2011d).

5.2. Context of language learning and use

Rates and patterns of language use have a close, reciprocal relationship with language vitality (Sachdev, 1998; Sachdev & Hanlon, 2000), mediated by positive attitudes (Baker, 2011b). While rates and patterns of language use were not measured by this study, attitudes to where and in what contexts DL use is important to adults in the communities are indicative of personal beliefs, which can be a predictor of future language behaviours (Sachdev & Hanlon, 2000). Where community members feel the DL should be used, heard and learned was an important theme in the results of this survey. The communities differed slightly in the emphases

they placed on specific contexts for language learning and where they feel language should be heard in everyday life. They were similar to one another in associating the DL most strongly with a narrow range of contexts, while demonstrating the belief that the language should be used in most contexts.

While participants from both communities felt that the DL should be heard in all contexts given, the full picture painted by all attitudinal data shows a narrower view of actual DL learning and use. In both communities, the clearest perspective is that the home is heavily associated with DL use and is the preferred locus for language learning. This picture, however, contrasts with the rates of at-home DL use in both Fort Providence and KFN documented in the most recent Canadian national census (2023).

In terms of the physical foot print of Dene language use in the communities, language use is more heavily associated with private spaces and ceremonial use in both communities, than with public spaces or non-‘traditional’ activities. Work and commerce both appear to be activities that fall into the latter category. Learning the DL does not appear to be explicitly associated with many specific day-to-day activities, leisure or work-related, in either community, despite some support for hearing the Dene language in workplaces. Rather, the focus appears to be on learning and using the language in the most conventional spaces of the home and school.

5.2.1. Learning and using the Dene Language at home

A theme seen throughout the communities’ responses is the importance that the home holds as an environment for language learning and use. Survey respondents appear to believe that parents and care-givers should be involved in teaching Dene to the next generation. In the open-question data across communities, the majority of statements associated with speaking the language at home or with parents were also accompanied by a value statement, for example, that it is ‘important to’, or that someone ‘should’ be using the language at home with their children;

or the belief that the language is not being taught in homes in the community. Speaker numbers are greatly supported by “transmission of the language from grandparents to the parents of children in [the] present-day” (Hoare, 2003, p.82), highlighting the key role of those raising children in language maintenance. However, the express importance of Dene language being spoken in the home and throughout the community shown in the communities’ responses contrasts with the rates of actual Dene language use in the home shown in the most recent national census data (Statistics Canada, 2023a, b). In Fort Providence, English is the language most spoken at home for 74.8% of respondents, with 21% saying an Indigenous language is spoken the most (Statistics Canada, 2023a). In KFN, the effect is stronger, with English being the language most spoken at home for 94.1% of Census 2021 respondents (Statistics Canada, 2023b), with the remaining 5.9% saying an Indigenous language is spoken the most (Statistics Canada, 2023b). This finding conforms with previous studies into language attitudes and language use in Canadian Indigenous communities (Thorburn, 2006; Andersen, 2009), where overt attitudes can embrace the idea of language use everywhere while not translating into similarly high rates of language use. Being that most adults speak English at home in both communities, it is perhaps unsurprising that concerns for language vitality combine with the ideology that the home is the best or near-best environment for learning the heritage language.

Concern regarding language vitality is seen in the data for both communities, but most prominently in KFN responses. The largest theme in KFN data refers to language maintenance, focusing on the important role that youth learning the language plays in preventing language loss. Culture and tradition appeared to be the themes largely associated with inherent value of the language to young people in Fort Providence. While this dimension outstrips any others in Fort

Providence data, the Dene language as an asset for future generations also appears three times in Fort Providence responses, with terms related to language vitality appearing nine times overall.

Speaking with family did not appear in open-question responses at high rates, although both communities rated the importance of learning the Dene language for speaking with elders at higher rates than speaking with parents. The status of elders in the community as knowledge keepers and extended family members, if not grandparents, allows for these references to be considered alongside references to family and the home. By contrast, when the connection of language to family is queried directly by the question “Is the Dene language important for talking with your family” (Fig. 13), responses show the second-lowest rate of positive responses across all six Likert scale questions (after ‘Is the Dene language important for getting a job?’, Fig.14). Again, while responses are positive in the majority, this shows a discrepancy with the emphasis placed on DL use with community members, peers (KFN) and with elders (Fort Providence and KFN) seen in the open-question data. This suggests some ambivalence in community attitudes to using the DL to communicate and spend time with family, or in the perceived necessity of speaking Dene in order to communicate with family. Indeed, there is a distinction between wanting and needing to speak Dene with family/elders, and further inquiry is needed to clarify this point.

5.2.2. Learning the Dene Language at school

Learning a language at school creates opportunities for children who do not have access to learning in the home (Flynn Haynes, 2011; Baker, 2011d) and community members may be aware of this. In the context of heritage languages, parents who may not provide or be able to provide learning experiences for their children at home may support language programming because its perceived value rests in bridging a generational gap in transferral of language and cultural knowledge (Lee, 2009; Flynn Haynes, 2011). To this point, one KFN participant

expressed the belief that a lack of DL skills amongst parents resulted in the need for children to learn the language in school, showing approval for in-school learning to compensate for, rather than to replace or enhance DL language learning in the home. While the school was highly ranked as a place where the Dene language should be learned in both communities, Fort Providence most consistently ranked the home as the place where the languages should be both taught and heard, and KFN ranked the home most highly after the school. No participant in either community referenced the school environment in detail in the open-ended question, though one KFN respondent gave general statements of approval before refocusing their answers on other concerns.

Being that the majority of adults speak English at home in both communities, it is perhaps unsurprising that concerns for language vitality combine with the ideology that the home is the best or near-best environment for learning the heritage language both communities. Seen in this light, this suggests that the relative ambiguity in responses to speaking the DL with your family may be a reflection of individual participants' experiences on a day-to-day basis, where the DL is effectively not necessary as a mode of communication in their own households.

The Canadian national Census 2021 data may also be helpful in reflecting on the involvement of community members such as those in the SAP 2 group in language learning and the importance of the home as a learning environment. The SAP 2 group can be characterized in each community as encompassing a broad range of people who are less confident in themselves as speakers, but who are within the age range to be currently birthing and, or raising children. Strong associations of language to the home and culture necessarily suggests the need for Dene language use among the generations raising children to promote language transfer to the next

generation of speakers, a view echoed by explicit statements in the open question responses in both communities.

The tension between the importance of the home as a language-learning environment, and the necessity of in-school learning where rates of speaking at home are low, may be expressed as an understanding that the “school experience alone is rarely sufficient to develop students’ second language skills” (Nikkel, 2006, p. 3). This is seen in the importance of elders in both sets of responses, as well as an equal number of mentions of the community in general, for both communities, or with peers in KFN responses. Indeed, these two key environments can intersect to co-promote language use through peer relationships. KFN respondents cited the importance of language to relationships between children and youth. After the language’s importance as a general communication tool in the community, community members spoke of the need for school-aged youth to be able to communicate with each other, at greater rates than the need for youth to speak with elders. An understanding of the importance of peer relationships to language maintenance is an important part of promoting language acquisition (Baker, 2011b). Further to this, language use at school and amongst peers carries over to support of at-home learning as children raised in the same home can aid one another in “[language] development and usage in the home” (Baker, 2011b, p.50).

In short, both environments hold importance when considering intergenerational language transfer, though adults in Fort Providence and KFN favour the home as a domain both central to and symbolic of language, family and cultural learning.

5.2.3. Dene Language use in public spaces

The relatively low support for DL use in public contexts seen here is similar to findings in other language minority contexts in Canada (Sachdev & Hanlon, 2000; Andersen, 2009), where the heavy association of the majority language with commerce and trade (e.g., shopping,

going to the gas station), as well as work, narrows the number of public spaces where minority language use is dominant. This coincides with a general loss of public spaces in most Western societies since the Second World War (Oldenburg, 1999), as well as the perennial association of colonial languages with commerce and trade (Beck & Lam, 2008). Therefore, Indigenous language use in public spaces is disadvantaged by a lack of third spaces which are not primarily associated with commercial activity (e.g., a public library). Fort Providence respondents ranking the store as a context on par with the workplace for hearing the DL may be related to geography, as well as the kinds of businesses in the community. Fort Providence may find it easier to nurture DL use in public spaces, as it is further away from larger, English-dominant communities than Kátł'odééche is from Hay River (where the nearest supermarket is).

Effective language planning and revitalization policy targets multiple facets of community life and demographics (Blair et al., 2002; Baker, 2011b) with the understanding that it is not the 'job' of any single demographic within a community to teach, to revitalize language or to drive language use. Correspondingly, attitudes which associate the DL with a variety of contexts for learning and everyday use would be reflective of a broad commitment to practise (Coupland et al., 2006). While there is a broad base of positive responses for language use in all contexts given in closed questions, in both communities, there is little explicit mention of language use outside of a narrow set of milieux.

Although the home and school are both seen as important environments for Dene language learning and use, other than 'on the land', there is no conceptual overlap in the data between personal and public life such as leisure time outside of the home, where children and youth might regularly practise the language. Rather, little support is shown for activities that youth and community might take part in that could be associated with the school community,

such as sports or after-school programs, as places where the DL could be heard. One exception to this was seen where a KFN respondent described the importance of youth learning to use the language in order to speak to their peers in other communities as well as their own. Another KFN respondent noted that children and youth should learn the language so that they can speak it out on the land, an environment that is so emblematic of relationship building (Canadian Heritage, 2005). Further analysis of contexts of language use is needed, in which place and specific use are investigated separately to understand patterns and expectations of use in each community.

5.3. Instrumental value of the Dene Language and language vitality

The importance of investigating the instrumental value of a language is to gauge the overall contribution it makes to language attitudes in individuals. While many community members may promote the use of the language and see it as an important part of their identity and “cultural core value”, they may also “view their language as a hindrance to economic mobility and integration into mainstream society” (UNESCO, 2003, p.14).

When asked directly if the DL is important for getting a job, respondents answered in the majority ‘somewhat’ (or rank 3 out of 6) making this response the least positive of scaled questions across both communities, which may simply reflect the realities of the many available jobs and workplace standards in Fort Providence and KFN, and the NWT as a whole. Fort Providence, did, however, support hearing the DL spoken ‘at the store’, which is arguably, a workplace and a public space.

Additionally, while the wording of the open question focuses on school and the concept of formal education in the language, no respondents in either community expressed that learning the DL in any context would improve a young person’s chances of getting ahead in life financially, achieving career goals, or in finding or retaining employment. However, ‘traditional’

activities or contexts included in the survey, such as being on land and taking part in ceremony, achieve higher rates of association with DL use than getting a job. This conforms, also, with the devaluation of traditional activities within the modern Canadian economy as a function of colonisation and therefore, of divorce of the language from economy (Smith, 2012a; Paquette & Fallon, 2012b). Sachdev and Hanlon (2000) saw this division of attitudes between ‘traditional life’ in community and culture on the one hand correlating with affective motivations for heritage language learning and use, and economic activities on the other, which correlate with English use in two culturally distinct Indigenous Canadian communities.

Once again, the relative lack of instrumental value accorded to the DL should not be surprising, given that English is the dominant language in both communities, and Indigenous language services are not legally required in any setting outside of the administering of government services (GNWT, 1988; CBC, 2024). Using the DL may also be out of reach for most adults in the community due to specific attitudes surrounding using Indigenous languages in mixed-ethnicity workplaces. In short, a lack of first-hand experience of using the DL in their working lives, combined with norms defined by history and Canadian mainstream culture may affect attitudes among community members which in turn, may reflect the belief that the DL does not have as much value as an economic tool as the English language.

5.4. Conclusion

The results of this study drew a picture of slightly negative attitudes to the Dene language in Fort Providence and KFN, despite highly positive attitudes demonstrated in many aspects.

Less positive aggregate scores of the Likert scale questions, while not indicative of every participant’s attitude, have an effect of making the overall attitudinal data across both communities more negative than positive. At the participant level, attitudes appear to correlate

with both strength of Dene identity and self-assessment of proficiency (SAP) in the language. Less positive attitudes are associated with the demographic of participants in each community with the lowest Dene language fluency and, or lower confidence in their abilities.

Some complexity in attitudes to speaking a LOTE amongst intermediate (SAP 2) adult speakers of the DL, however, demonstrated that KFN was more positive overall than Fort Providence participants in their attitudes to their own SAP. This suggests differing ideologies between the communities regarding bilingualism and language fluency that warrants further investigation.

Regarding usage, the Dene language appears to be mentally ‘corralled’ in a few key places: Children, the home and school are of primary concern for both communities, with Fort Providence prioritizing the former, and KFN the latter. Although the language is strongly associated with culture and community, it does not appear to be associated with the workplace or any context outside of the home associated with daily activities. The importance of the home as a locus for language transfer reflects a concern that Dene language skills in the general population are not available or sufficient to support language learning in the home, however, it also reflects a narrow set of associations of place and usage with the language.

Analysis of the open-question data allowed for a deeper understanding of participant views of Dene language vitality. Both communities share an evident concern for the future of the language and its relationship to the perpetuation of culture and identity. However, nuances appear when viewing the data across communities, showing differing emphases on priorities and the interpersonal relationships that may be involved in DL use. Participants in both communities almost exclusively expressed positive attitudes towards DL schooling, however, responses to the open question concentrated on the home rather than the school when discussing both the future

of the Dene language and motivations to learn, leaving no explicit commentary on schooling in either community.

6. Recommendations

These recommendations stem from my understanding of the concerns and interests raised by participants in this study in Fort Providence and Kátł'odééche First Nation, as well as my experience of putting together the study with the help of community members. These recommendations include an understanding that stable, multi-year funding for many projects within-community is difficult to obtain, and so focus on existing resources that may be used to respond to the stated interests revealed by this study. These recommendations overlap as they reflect the need for sustainable solutions that engage as many community members as possible, in as many ways and domains as possible, by drawing on the resources already available in each community. The first recommendation is to renew support for adult language learning (6.1). The second recommendation (6.2.) builds on the first: to expand language learning for all community members through the use of public space. The third recommendation is to further integrate the involvement of adults into language learning in their children's schools and extra-curricular activities (6.3). Finally, the fourth recommendation is to introduce a framework for community-led research that seeks to address each community's priorities, while building language skills in the next generation of speakers (6.4). Each section discusses how this study supports the recommendation, and the theory behind it, followed by suggestions of practical steps for consideration.

6.1. Continued support of adult language programming

Given the stated concerns in both communities surrounding language vitality, and use, particularly in the home, support of continued adult learning should be considered. Specifically, a model to address low opportunity to learn in adults will acknowledge and be built around

pressures and potential conflicts that adults face. Increased casual contact with the Dene language, community-wide, will best facilitate a low-pressure, supportive environment where quality of relationships serves to bolster confidence in emergent speakers, without fear of failure. Focusing community efforts on practise, rather than proficiency, diminishes the impact of anxiety on language learning and associates learning with community and fun. By creating a lower-stakes, welcoming and non-assessment-based learning environment, more individuals will feel able to enter into learning spaces and contexts, serving to expand the pool of speakers using the language (both teaching and learning) in the community. Such a situation serves to create and spur on a positive feedback loop between usage, confidence and attitudes, which has as one of its outcomes, an increase in proficiency.

The confidence of individual learners is as important to learning outcomes as having the time and external resources to do so (Noels et al., 1996). Confidence in oneself as a learner, and a lack of anxiety around learning itself can result in better language learning outcomes (MacIntyre et al., 1997). Further to this, when people are confident using their second language when and where they want to, this is related to a higher rate of well-being in general, including “a greater sense of personal control” (Noels et al., 1996) over their learning. As learner anxiety is reduced, adult learner-speakers are more able to engage with the relationships that come with language learning, as well as engage with the language itself.

Creating opportunities for adults to continue learning Dene focuses on efforts which allow flexibility and initially, at least, low-stakes environments where speakers are not formally assessed or pressured to attend, such as drop-in activities or sports. Sewing circles, hand games, drumming, cards, or even just having a cup of coffee are all activities that communities are probably already doing which can be adapted to language learning. To facilitate language

learning, the events must be truly open to everyone, and a clear indication is given that Dene language use is welcome and encouraged. The presence of fluent speakers at these events is crucial, however, reduced anxiety around learning as large a factor in supporting greater and broader community participation. Focusing on having fun and socializing is more likely to build confidence in speakers and encourage language use than being corrected and assessed, either formally or informally.

While the present study addresses community-wide attitudes, it does not focus on willingness and interest in adults to learn the language themselves. To address this gap in information, communities could undertake a survey of adults on this point, with an eye to addressing language learning and use.

In addition to these measures, further examination of attitudes, specifically towards what constitutes bilingualism or ‘speaking’ Dene in each community, will help community members understand how best to encourage and support one another in using their language.

6.2. Expansion of community-based learning

The results of this survey show that Fort Providence and KFN respondents understand the importance of exposure to the language in order to learn, particularly the importance of parents speaking Dene to their children. Addressing gaps in generational language transfer necessarily involves supporting adults in learning and using their language, especially those adults who are raising children. Community members also understand, through generations of experience, that children grow in confidence as individuals and as learners as their language skills increase (ECE, 2020). Developing language learning opportunities in the community that are inclusive of all ages and levels, while casual and frequently available, will best facilitate the sharing of language between generations.

Informal language learning is a gateway to wider and more frequent use of the language at the community level. If we regard the question of language vitality as a community-wide concern, wherein community attitudes affect community rates of usage, we should also look at how opportunity for language use can be expanded into all spaces in the community. This recommendation follows similar recommendations already made in a variety of literature both inside (GNWT, 2018; ECE, 2020) and outside of the NWT (Baker, 2011e). The contexts of language usage discussed here have potential to play a crucial role in encouraging adults with lower confidence in their proficiency to speak their language, capitalizing on the significant levels of interest and pride in the language in the communities. Adults may not want to engage with formal learning at first, or at all, based on their experiences with schooling, external stressors, their impression of their own abilities, or fear of failure. However, these ‘negatives’ can be deemphasized by a shift in focus to universal positives, like enjoyment, relaxation and the warmth of community and friendship.

Studies show that language learning is facilitated by a range of usage (in many contexts, with as many different speakers as possible), while heritage language learning, specifically, is facilitated by “better quality of contact” with speakers (Noels et al., 1996, p.256). This “quality” referred to is present in interactions in the language with someone with whom we have a social connection. Though it is safe to assume that the stronger the connection to the speaker, the better, in fact, a range of connections across a broad social network can support language learning cumulatively. This can mean speaking with a family member (Kondo-Brown, 2005; Lee, 2002; Lee, T.S., 2009); elders (Lee, T.S., 2009), and even extended or honorary family members have a contribution to make (Melo-Pfeifer, 2015) in the lives of learners. In addition to this, the support and interest of our peers in learning alongside us, also contributes to our investment in learning

(Hoare, 2003). In sum, “quality” of contact with the language is assured by positive and co-supportive interactions with an entire support network, not only people with specific family titles or job descriptions.

Since community members feel that the DL should be heard and spoken in all contexts given, then learning could, in theory, take place everywhere. The focus on language learning in the home and in school shown in the results of this study, while understandable, may also have the effect of preventing community members from perceiving the potential of other language learning contexts. Such contexts may take the whole community’s footprint and its resources, both in community and locally, into account. Places outside of the home, workplace and school should be considered as offering new opportunities for informal learning for both adults and children. The importance of these ‘third places’ (Oldenburg, 1999) is the effect they can have on the quality and cohesion of community life. While the Internet and online spaces have become the fourth dimension of our lives (Scott, 2017), third places facilitate face-to-face socializing, an experience which appeals to our senses, and in so doing, create meaningful connections in the language. In other words, the search for place and community is inextricable from language use.

A network of third places offers support to in-community language learning that, while informal, has benefits drawn from its distinction from the home and workplace. The character of the third place is “inclusively sociable, offering both the basis of community and the celebration of it” (Oldenburg, 1999a, p.14). Oldenburg’s (1999) definition of third place lends itself to the idea of increasing frequency of opportunity to interact in a language in a relaxed environment, as well as the opportunity for social contact with speakers of all ages and levels (Noels et al., 1996; Melo-Pfeifer, 2015). Third spaces provide opportunities for arranged or incidental social contact which opens up the number of potential Dene language speakers we have contact with, and the

number of opportunities to practise speaking ourselves (GNWT, 2018). This definition excludes events or meetings that might be held in the same spaces, as these have specific goals, memberships, or a list of invitees.

Third places that are best adapted to language learning will be inclusive and welcoming in nature; accessible and available to all, at a variety of times of day; and adopt an ethos that all speakers have a contribution to make to the conversation. Successful third places allow people to socialize, relax and feel connection to the space in question, encouraging a sense of buy-in and responsibility to respect it. Ensuring all people feel welcome in third spaces also benefits the variety and frequency of language use: the more diverse the crowd, the more diverse the language used will be. Examples of third places are coffee shops and diners, general stores and gas stations, sports events and facilities, the community hall, the waterfront, the harbour- in fact anywhere where people of the same community may congregate without specific plans other than to spend time with others. The idea of defined ‘places’ does not exclude multi-use spaces. Both Fort Providence and Kátł’odééche are blessed with a number of spaces that already fill this description or can be adapted for this purpose.

Both communities will be well-served by private businesses showing public support for Dene language use. This can be signalled by providing Dene language signage and labelling, or displaying signs which indicate when a staff member speaks the language or are trying to learn themselves. Businesses can support Dene language learning by hosting or making in-kind donations to drop-in events. The use of privately-owned spaces also serves to engage more business owners, whether Dene speakers themselves or not, with the processes involved in language maintenance. Kátł’odééche First Nation would also benefit from partnering with

businesses and institutions in Hay River on extending the network of support for Dene language use across the closely neighbouring communities.

The benefits of developing places where every speaker is welcome to hear and use their language are mutually felt by the individual and the whole community. Individuals benefit from increased interconnectedness with others (Baker, 2011d) while the community benefits from greater collective ‘ownership’ of the language (Smith, 2012a). The third place adapted for community language learning is, in essence, a home away from home; an extension of the idea of community itself; a central space, like a campfire. The dimensions or locations of these places may vary, but the goal is the same: to draw people together to share language and culture.

6.3. Community involvement in children’s learning

The inclusion of elders as teachers is already a cornerstone of Indigenous language education in the Northwest Territories (GNWT, 2018; ECE, 2020). The inclusion of family and community members is also strongly supported by policy (ECE, 2020). Given the pertinence of the affective dimension to heritage language attitudes (Melo-Pfeifer, 2015), building on the already strong foundation of support for the language in both communities is only made more possible by the inclusion of more community members in school life (Nikkel, 2006).

Parents who are not confident speaking the language themselves at home with their children can still have a positive effect on student outcomes in a range of ways. Children who are able to learn their heritage language around people who love them are more likely to engage with the language in a meaningful way, boosting learning outcomes (Melo-Pfeifer, 2015), meaning that a parent or carer’s presence during language learning activities has a positive impact on their children’s learning. Further to this, parents of children involved in Indigenous language classes

are likely to be aware of the effects the classes are having on their children's language skills and overall academic performance (Nikkel, 2006; Baker, 2011d; Flynn Haynes, 2011) and more likely to encourage their children to use the language as a consequence (Nikkel, 2006) even if they do not speak the language themselves. In addition to the effect parents can have on their children's learning, language programming can have a positive impact on parents, too. Previous studies have shown that parents who engage with their children's heritage language learning begin to feel motivated to learn themselves (Flynn Haynes, 2011). Later on in school life, youth who sense that their family and carers support their learning, are more likely to persevere with learning the language through adolescence (Lee, 2009; Baker, 2011d).

Volunteerism is one way that parents may come into contact with language learning alongside their children. Normalizing the presence of parents in the classroom as volunteers is something that schools may have some legal and practical barriers to. However, activities that involve language use outside of school hours and premises present more opportunities, if infrequent, such as the language camps held in Fort Providence which are open to parents as well as children. Learner-mentor programs for Indigenous languages are widely touted as an effective learning tool (Canadian Heritage, 2005; Baker, 2011b). These programs can, however, be dependent on the consistent commitment of a select few people, which again, places pressure on a small number of human resources, rather than sharing the weight of that responsibility. Rather, programs which enable multiple generations to interact in a single space allow for flexibility in programming and attendance and as such, can play host to a variety of informal student-teacher relationships.

To bring together adults and children on a more regular basis, school buildings can be adapted to pre- or after-school programming that invites parents into the space as language

learners, alongside their children. With sufficient supervision and resources, the blending of adult and child experiences can reinforce the affective aspect of language learning that is basis for support of speaking the language at home and eliminates the need to cover the cost of additional childcare. Activities can surround skills-learning, themes or services that attract parents to come in, for example, a swap shop, craft circle, cooking or fitness class.

6.4. Community-led research

The results of this study suggest a broad base of support for Dene language learning in Fort Providence and Kátł'odéèche First Nation, specifically with regards to preservation of culture, ways of life, and the gifts that the language can convey to the next generation of speakers. The concerns regarding children not learning their language at home heard from respondents in both communities, as well as an awareness of the benefits of language learning to well-being of children and youth, may be indicative of a willingness to act and advocate for the vitality of the Dene language. Engaging community members early in the process of research and program-building not only ensures that funds can be matched closely with identified needs and interests, but that community members are empowered to get involved in language revitalization in the long run. Understanding that consistent multi-year funding for language initiatives is often unavailable, initiatives that combine resources across communities will also benefit from the stability and sustainability of sharing duties, information and achievements as well as increasing opportunity for students to use their language.

In addition to what the study results show about community language attitudes, the execution of the study itself is one example of how community members may engage in linguistic research. The community linguists involved in this study undertook training, collaborated with open minds, took care in their work and gave feedback to their external partner

where it was needed. Research models for community-led research, such as The Community Partnerships Model (CPM) Yamada (2014) designed with linguistic research in mind, is a formalization of such partnerships. The CPM partners external researchers and trainers with fluent and non-fluent community members to work towards research skills training in support of a community's language goals. Such models may easily be adapted by a community for future community-led research.

Alongside adult involvement, engaging the next generation of learners in linguistic research is a key recommendation of much research into Indigenous language vitality (Canadian Heritage, 2005; Linguapax, 2015; First Nations Child & Family Caring Society of Canada, 2019) and consultations with Indigenous youth across Canada (First Nations Child & Family Caring Society of Canada, 2019). Research done by Indigenous Youth Voices and published by the Caring Society (2019) identified barriers to youth involvement in research conducted by non-community members, a norm that strips them of their voice and opportunity to learn as they participate.

Empowering youth in this process can be achieved by integrating research into the skills taught at school or even through the language program-building process. The LinguaPax (2015) multi-national investigation into the roles that youth can play in language revitalization documents a range of projects conducted by youth from language minority communities across three continents. The results of these studies show that youth are sensitive to “local, national, regional and even global” factors which combine to create distinct and dynamic modes of linguistic expression. Engaging youth in understanding their own language use (e.g. When and where do they use English or Dene?) provides a key insight into what influences affect language vitality. Youth-led research has the equally important goal of empowering youth in reclamation

of cultural identity, something which is linked closely to both general educational outcomes (Flynn Haynes, 2011) and wellness (RCAP, 1996; Barker et al., 2017; Whalen et al., 2022). Combining youth-led research with community-led research enables more community members (parents, care-givers, elders) to act as mentors as well as researcher-participants. This activity, combined with adult-focused language learning activities, works to broaden the base of community language skills, similar to shoring up stores of any other community resource. A multi-generational approach to language revitalization empowers all community members of all language skill levels to shape their own research and learning goals, with the result of producing high quality (i.e. reliable) data to underpin effective policies in the future.

7. Conclusions

Conform with previous research into Indigenous and heritage language attitudes, the investigation into two distinct, Dene-speaking communities of Canada's Northwest Territories shows that dominant themes in language attitudes across both communities are all solidarity-stressing traits of the language. Participants in both communities, however, showed lower attitudes towards the status-stressing aspects of the language.

The most important demographic factors affecting the positivity of attitudes are the individual's self-assessment of their proficiency as a speaker (and thereby, self-confidence as a learner) and strength of personal ethnic identity associated with the language. Beliefs about the language are centred on the community, meaning that respondents in both communities appear to view the language as something that is a shared entity. Exactly how that entity is viewed varies between communities; however, the importance of the language as a component of group identity is evident in the amount of data linking the Dene language to culture, heritage, and usage with family and friends. Despite this strong link between language and communal identity, it does not appear that the language is used by everyone in the communities with confidence. The largest proficiency group in both communities rates their own proficiency at the lower end of the scale, while still professing to speak the Dene language to some extent. This correlates with the most recent national census data on speaker rates and language use in each community (Census, 2023). Insufficient evidence was found to support age as a factor in positive attitudes and further study would be needed to ascertain to what extent gender identity affects attitudes. The participant pools in each community were diverse in terms of age and language proficiency, but did not sufficiently capture enough gender diversity to be able to make conclusions regarding this aspect of the communities' demographics. This may, however, be addressed in subsequent surveys, should the communities wish to do so.

Despite the communality of the language, participants associate the Dene language with two spaces the most: the home and school. The importance of speaking the Dene language in the home is grafted to concerns about vitality and concerns that parents are not speaking the language at home with their children. Likewise, support of language teaching in the schools is viewed as a compensatory effort towards language maintenance. While emphasis on the home is in-line with cultural and historical norms, a lack of Dene language association with work and generally, with varied uses outside of the home, may result in narrowing opportunities available to community members to learn and use the language when it is not spoken at home. In this sense, public space presents a gap of Dene language usage in the communities, in terms of time, physical space and opportunity. Establishing contexts in which DL use is deemed appropriate by the adult population can serve as an important baseline in understanding language shift in these communities, if compared with future survey results or comparisons with similar data in younger age groups.

The importance of affective dimensions of attitudes to the Dene language in the adult population in these communities is typical of heritage language populations and should be regarded as a positive, as research shows a direct correlation between affective attitudes and motivation to learn in heritage learner groups of diverse backgrounds (Milo-Pfeifer, 2015). The cross-examination of attitudinal and demographic data demonstrates the strong association of the Dene language to family, identity and well-being, and supports the conclusion that both communities place high value overall on the affective dimensions of language.

The lack of any attitudes expressing the instrumental value of the language is perhaps indicative of two things: the broad scope of the survey questions, which would not produce much 'work'-specific data, and the realities of the job market for community members in their region.

Further inquiry is needed to better understand the instrumental dimension of language attitudes in Fort Providence and Kátł'odééche First Nation. Specific negative attitudes held by community members cannot be inferred from the data present in this study, as negative attitudes are more reliably elicited through studies which target covert attitudes, such as the matched-guise test (Lambert et al., 1960). The results of this study indicate that covert attitudes are likely to correlate with status-aligned aspects of the language, such as economic prosperity (Nikkel, 2006). It is worth investigating covert attitudes on the basis that negative attitudes significantly impact motivation to learn (UNESCO, 2003).

The results of this study also demonstrate the growing awareness of language learning as part of a holistic approach to community well-being. The mention of well-being and self-esteem in the open-question data was raised independently by participants in both communities. Such interest in the well-being of youth in the communities, for its own sake, as well as for potential positive language learning outcomes in this demographic, could be an important focus for future research.

7.1. Limitations of the study

It is my view that heritage language learning is still the most useful perspective from which to regard emergent Indigenous language speakers who espouse an identity informed by the associated culture. That said, further review of the attitudes of Indigenous language learners in both rural, urban, on- and off-reserve contexts is needed to further understand the complex challenge of language maintenance and linguistic reawakening (Whalen et al., 2022) currently being undertaken by these communities. Such a review would enable external researchers to approach this problem with more targeted and nuanced responses that may be of greater use to

Indigenous communities than sweeping generalizations of ‘Indigenous’ or ‘heritage’ learners, alone.

Future research on Indigenous community language attitudes in Canada would have to also integrate an understanding of attitudes in the growing urban Indigenous communities, where IL learning may be taking place in ways distinct from on-reserve and Northern communities. Being able to describe language attitudes across the diversity of Indigenous communities in the national context would further aid community and non-community linguists in predicting language shift in Canada.

Research with and into Indigenous Canadian realities is also impeded by a lack of funds which support doing research in rural and Northern Canadian locations. While research grants exist for research into topics that affect Indigenous communities, the funds are either insufficient in the gross amount or are structured in a way that shows a misunderstanding of the realities of life in the North (for example, elevated costs associated with travel, accommodation, food, communication, and expected rates of remuneration for local expertise). The NWT is particularly hampered by its geography, in this regard.

This study faced a number of practical obstacles as it took place in the context of the COVID-19 pandemic, alongside the disadvantages of conducting the study ‘remotely’ in a location far from the University of Manitoba. The pandemic also posed several complex challenges that the University had not met before, which made the various practical and legal processes involved in such a study difficult for a first-time field researcher to navigate, and therefore, lengthy. Beyond this, the communities themselves were subject to lockdowns and shelter-in-place policies necessary to safeguard their health in that difficult period, then followed by severe wildfires and floods in successive years. It speaks to the tenacity of everyone involved

that this study has come to fruition, and I am endlessly grateful to everyone who participated in and facilitated this study for their time and their work.

In this context, some challenges did arise in interpreting the data where it appears from the answers to the questions that the participant may not have understood the question or read it fully before answering. This created some ambiguity which I compensated for by omitting this data. This did not, however, impoverish either data set to any great degree.

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Appendix A
Community Questionnaire

Section 1: About you

1. Age
2. Gender - Male, Female, Non-binary, Do not want to say
3. Do you speak a language other than English? Y/N
4. How would you describe yourself? (tick any that apply)

Canadian	Non-Canadian
Métis	White/European
Dene	French
Cree	Indigenous
African	Asian
Other	

5. Were you born in this community? Y/N
6. Are you a school staff member, care-giver/ relative to a young person at [insert name of school]? Y/N

Please circle any that apply.

Section 2: About Dene Yatie/Zhatié (Slavey)

[5 point Likert Scale Qs]

2.1 How important is it for children to know Dene?

Very important <1 2 3 4 5> not important at all

2.2 How important is it for young people to know Dene?

Very important <1 2 3 4 5> not important at all

2.3 How important is Dene to you?

Very important <1 2 3 4 5> not important at all

2.4 Should a Dene person know their language?

Yes, they should, it's important <1 2 3 4 5> No, it doesn't matter

2.5 Is Dene important for getting a job?

Yes, for sure <1 2 3 4 5> No, it doesn't matter

2.6 Is Dene important for talking with your family?

Yes <1 2 3 4 5> No

Section 3: Multiple choice

2.7 Tick all the places that children should learn Dene:

School-- in the classroom	At home
School-- playing sports	With elders
School-- after-school activities	When they're out on the land
Other: (please describe)	

2.8. Tick all the places in your community where you should *hear* Dene spoken:

At the store	At home
At festivals/carnival	At church
At ceremonies	At work
Other: (please describe)	

2.9. Tick the ONE answer that describes you:

I don't know Dene
I speak some Dene (a few words or phrases)
I can speak a lot of Dene
I can speak Dene like I speak English

Section 4:

Complete this sentence:

2.10 It is important for young people to learn Dene *in school* because.....