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First Nations English dialects in Canada: Implications for speech-language pathology

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Abstract
The current study reports preliminary information gathered about First Nations English dialects in Canada and considers implications for speech-language pathology practice. Information was gathered from literature searches and forums of First Nations and non-First Nations speech-language pathologists, developmentalists, and linguists. The exploratory findings suggest that First Nations English dialects are shaped both by transference of features from the ancestral languages and by cultural patterns of communication. The dialects likely represent late stages of depidginization and decreolization. Examples of phonological and syntactic dialectal features illustrate the importance of recognizing non-standard varieties of English when assessing speakers of First Nations communities and setting up goals and strategies for treatment. Research is urgently needed to identify features of First Nations English dialects both for linguistic documentation and to help speech-language pathologists and other educators to distinguish between language impairments and dialect differences and to develop culturally relevant assessment and intervention practices.

Keywords: *First Nations English, dialects, cultural appropriateness, speech-language pathology*

Introduction

The 700 000 First Nations[1] people in Canada comprise ~2.2% of the Canadian population (Statistics Canada, 2006). Approximately 60% of First Nations children live in urban settings, 35% live in rural, remote, or on-reserve settings, and 5% live in rural off-reserve communities (Statistics Canada, 2006). Practitioners in First Nations infant development programmes and early childhood education and parents of First Nations children have increasingly expressed concern about the lack of knowledge to guide programmes of speech-language assessment and intervention for First Nations children (Ball and Lewis, 2004). Some practitioners and First Nations leaders have suggested that First Nations children may be disproportionately diagnosed with speech-language impairments, which in turn may stem in part from misinterpretations of features of children's home English dialects as evidence of speech-language deficits or delays (Ball, Bernhardt, and Deby, 2006). Speech-language pathologists (SLPs) and other practitioners need to be able to

distinguish between language difference (dialect) and language impairment in order to provide culturally relevant service where it is needed.

Despite the importance of these issues, to date there has been virtually no research on First Nations English dialects in Canada. Because of the lack of systematic research on this topic, the purpose of the current paper is to ask questions, stimulate dialogue, and make initial recommendations about directions for research and clinical practice, rather than to provide hard data about varieties of English among First Nations. Information for the current paper was gathered from literature searches and two forums of First Nations and non-First Nations SLPs, developmentalists, and linguists in British Columbia. As background, First Nations English dialects are first situated within the overall status of First Nations languages in Canada, referring to the patterns of language loss and processes of pidginization and creolization that appear to have shaped the development of First Nations English dialects. A brief discussion of potential interactions between two First Nations phonologies (Plains Cree and Dene Suline) and English serves to illustrate how the phonology of First Nations languages may influence the speech patterns of First Nations English dialects. Following the introduction, findings of the exploratory project are presented, concluding with implications for future research and speech-language pathology.

First Nations languages in Canada

First Nations English dialects are situated within an overall context of language loss and language revitalization in Canada. Approximately 50 different First Nations languages from 11 major language families or linguistic isolates are spoken in Canada today (see Figure 1).

Algonquin, Athapaskan, and Inuktitut are the largest language families, accounting for 93% of the Indigenous languages learned as first languages (Norris and Jantzen, 2002). According to the 2001 Census (Statistics Canada, 2001), Cree, Ojibway, and Inuktitut are the largest and most widespread of the 50 Indigenous languages spoken currently, with 72 885, 21 005, and 29 010 speakers, respectively. British Columbia, home to approximately half of the Indigenous languages spoken in Canada, has the greatest linguistic diversity. However, most Indigenous languages spoken in British Columbia are considered endangered due to the small numbers of (primarily Elder) speakers (Norris and Jantzen, 2002). For instance, there are only 810 remaining speakers of Chilcotin (Athapaskan family), 400 speakers of Thompson (Salish family), 410 speakers of Nootka (Wakashan family), 150 speakers of Haida (a language isolate), 105 speakers of Tlingit (a language isolate), and 125 speakers of Kutenai (a language isolate) (Statistics Canada, 2001).

Language loss, pidgins and creoles and the Canadian context

Language loss can occur for many reasons, including modernization, the pressures exerted by a dominant language, and a historically oral culture (Norris and Jantzen, 2002: 12). In Canada, the loss of First Nations languages is the result of several interacting factors, the greatest of which is a historical policy of assimilation that has interrupted the inter-generational transmission of language. Indigenous scholars have chronicled the devastating effects of colonial government policies over the last century that were aimed first at segregating Indigenous peoples from colonial society through a land reservation system, and, subsequently, at forcing them either to assimilate into colonial society or to subsist on its margins (Royal Commission on Aboriginal Peoples, 1996; Lawrence, 2004). Systems of

Figure 1. Indigenous language families and languages in Canada and Northern US. Adapted with permission of Ives Goddard (author) and Paula Cardwell (handbook coordinator) from Goddard (1967) map of 'Native languages and language families of North America' in the *Handbook of North American Indians*, 17.

tribal community governance and extended family life were broken down and the transmission of cultural knowledge, including language, was disrupted (Chrisjohn, Young & Maraun, 1997; Smolewski and Wesley-Esquimaux, 2003). Colonial efforts to sever ties

between children and parents included the Residential Schools, where over half of the Indigenous children in Canada were confined by 1960 (Miller, 1996), and widespread placement and adoption of Indigenous children in English and French speaking families (First Nations Child and Family Caring Society of Canada, 2005). In Residential Schools, use of Indigenous languages was generally prohibited and often punished. Forced relocations of villages and dispersions of clans, along with urbanization, have further disconnected Indigenous people from their heritage language, culture, and clans (York, 1990; Newhouse and Peters, 2003; Jantzen, 2004; Lawrence, 2004; Brown, Higgitt, Wingert, Miller, and Morrissette, 2005).

Within this context, First Nations English dialects rest on the uneasy margin between language loss and language revitalization. On the one hand, First Nations English dialects reflect a historical situation in which English has been, and remains, a major colonizing language; on the other hand, the dialects are important linguistic markers of Indigenous identity and solidarity. First Nations English dialects likely represent the late stages of a process of depidginization and decreolization. Pidgins develop in situations of language contact, when speakers from two or more mutually unintelligible language groups develop a grammatically simple system of communication that exhibits properties of the substrate languages (Wardhaugh, 2002: 67). Pidgins are necessarily second languages. However, when a new generation learns a pidgin as a first language, the pidgin develops into a creole, a grammatically more complex language that exhibits properties not found in any of the parent languages (Wardhaugh, 2002). First Nations English dialects likely developed as *lingua francas* following contact between English and Indigenous populations. Over time, the various dialects have increasingly converged with standard English (see Flanigan 1985; 1987, for a discussion of this process in Lakota English).

First Nations English dialects are shaped by cultural patterns of communication, by phenomena associated with languages in contact, and by the linguistic features of Indigenous languages. Dialects are distinguished from the standard variety of a language by a range of phonological, syntactic, lexical, and discourse-based features. It is important to note, however, that not all patterns in a dialect are attributable to transfer from the heritage languages. Leap (1993: 45) states that both Navajo (citing Cook and Sharp, 1966) and Isleta Englishes contain vowels that are present in both standard English and the Native American language; however, they are rearranged in a novel pattern in the Native American English. Alford (1974) observes that speakers of Cheyenne English replace certain standard English consonants not found in Cheyenne with other consonants not found in Cheyenne or English.

Based on existing research on English dialects among Native Americans (Leap, 1993), it is likely that First Nations English dialects share many features, possibly reflecting historical periods in which speakers of the different dialects found themselves forced to live together. In the US, there were two occasions when this happened on a large scale: when tribes were relocated to the Indian Territories, and when children were taken away to government-run boarding schools. Craig (1991) reports that documents from these eras suggest a widespread inter-tribal dissemination of pidgins or creoles. Given the similar treatment of Indigenous peoples in Canada and the USA, some present-day First Nations English dialects may reflect this history.

Dialect formation: Phonological examples based on Plains Cree and Dene Suline

The following brief comparison of the consonant inventories of Plains Cree, an Algonquian language, and Dene Suline, an Athapaskan language, with English, suggests several ways in

Table I. Plains Cree consonant inventory.

	Bilabial	Alveolar	Palatal	Velar	Glottal
Obstruents	p	t	c	k	
		s			h
Resonants	m	n	j	w	

which First Nations dialects of English may differ phonologically from standard Canadian English and lead to dialect formation (see Tables I and II).

Plains Cree is a language with fewer phonological contrasts than English. Plains Cree has no voicing contrast: the stops /p/, /t/, and /k/ are generally voiceless, lenis, and unaspirated, but may be fortis in emphatic contexts, and may vary freely in most phonetic environments from voiceless to voiced (Wolfart, 1996). Furthermore, Plains Cree does not contain liquids or several fricatives found in English (/f/, /v/, /θ/, /ð/, /z/, /ʃ/, and /ʒ/). Consequently, speakers of Plains Cree English may show a smaller phonetic inventory than in standard English. The fricatives /f/ and /v/ may be replaced with stops [p] and [b], respectively; the fricatives /θ/ and /ð/ may be replaced with [t] and [d]. Alveolar and post-alveolar fricatives such as /z/, /ʃ/, and /ʒ/ may be neutralized to [s]. The distribution of voiced and voiceless stops may be influenced primarily by the phonetic environment; for example, voiceless stops may be voiced only intervocalically, neutralizing the contrast between pairs such as *bobbed* and *bopped*.

Dene Suline is a language with more phonological contrasts than English, a factor that may result in use of features not found in standard English. Dene Suline has 39 phonemic consonants, including a contrast between unaspirated, aspirated, and glottalized stops and affricates (Cook, 2004; Table II). Two particular features that may be considered 'disordered' if not identified as non-standard English dialect features, are creaky voice and lateralization of sibilants. Speakers of Dene Suline English may produce a higher proportion of glottalized consonants than speakers of standard English. Further research is necessary to clarify the phonetic environments in which such consonants might occur, and/ or whether glottalization is transferred as a segmental or suprasegmental feature (i.e., a 'creaky' voice quality, Hargus and Rice, 2005). Dene Suline has a high proportion of lateralized consonants; consequently, speakers of Dene Suline English may also produce

Table II. Dene Suline consonant inventory.

		Bilabial	Interdental	Dental Central	Dental Lateral	Post-alveolar	Velar Plain	Velar Labial	Uvular Plain	Uvular Labial	Glottal
Stop	unaspirated	p		t			k	k^w			
	aspirated			t^h			k^h	k^{wh}			
	ejective			t'			k'	k'^w			ʔ
Affricate	unaspirated		tθ	ts	tɬ	tʃ					
	aspirated		$tθ^h$	ts^h	$tɬ^h$	$tʃ^h$					
	ejective		tθ'	ts'	tɬ'	tʃ'					
Nasal		m		n							
Trill				r							
Fricative	voiceless		θ	s	ɬ	ʃ			χ	$χ^w$	h
	voiced		ð	z	lʒ	ʒ			ʁ	$ʁ^w$	

more English phones (particularly sibilants) as lateralized (a factor seen as disordered in production of English phones other than /l/).

Language revitalization and First Nations English dialects

Many First Nations communities in Canada are now engaged in a process of cultural and linguistic revitalization. In British Columbia, the First Peoples' Cultural Foundation raises awareness and funding for Indigenous language revitalization (First Peoples' Cultural Foundation, 2007). One major initiative of the foundation is First Voices (http://www.fpcf.ca/language-index.html), an online language archive. The persistence of First Nations English dialects might seem to conflict with the revitalization of First Nations language revitalization; the existence of these dialects and their use within First Nations communities is powerful evidence of the cultural hegemony of English and of the dominant culture's disruption of the intergenerational transmission of First Nations languages. However, these dialects may, paradoxically, play an important role in language revitalization and the enhancement of Aboriginal identity. For some of the dying or extinct heritage languages, the First Nations English dialects may in some respects echo the heritage languages in form and content; in the case of an extinct language, the dialect may be the only remaining trace of the ancestral language. In these cases, fluency in the First Nations English dialect can provide speakers who want to learn or re-learn an ancestral language an easier point of entry into language learning. There may be other benefits to being bidialectal. By preserving not only the grammatical aspects of the dialect, but also the unique discourse and narrative features that are often an integral part of First Nations English dialects, the dialect can play an important role in the ongoing transmission of Indigenous cultures and identities. Over time, First Nations English dialects may evolve in independent directions, reversing the process of depidginization or decreolization that linguists such as Flanigan (1985; 1987) and Craig (1991) have hypothesized as the historical origins of a least some present-day First Nations English dialects. If assimilation of language is seen as assimilation of group identity, then a conscious or unconscious process of repidginization or recreolization may occur as a way of reinforcing cultural distinctiveness.

While some work has been done in the US to document American Indian dialects (Leap, 1993), there are few studies of First Nations English dialects in Canada (Mulder, 1982; Tarpent, 1982). There is a pressing need for more documentation and greater awareness of the cultural and linguistic significance of First Nations English dialects in Canada. The exploratory project described below is one step in this direction.

Project overview and methodology

The exploratory project on First Nations English dialects and implications for speech-language pathology had two major facets: (1) exploration of perspectives regarding the nature and prevalence of problems related to lack of knowledge about First Nations English dialects, and (2) construction of elements of a research programme for communities and university investigators to gain and share knowledge about First Nations English dialects and children's language development. The project involved two main activities: (1) a literature review of English dialects of Indigenous peoples in Canada, the US, Australia, and Aotearoa/New Zealand, and (2) two forums in British Columbia. The first forum explored the relevance of First Nations English dialects for education and recommendations

for future research and included Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal SLPs, linguists, early development specialists, and Aboriginal community members. The second forum explored the implications of First Nations English dialects for First Nations children's language development, and included Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal SLPs, early childhood care and development specialists, and community-based First Nations programme leaders.

The current article highlights some of the commentary from the literature and project forums, and provides some initial insights about how community and university researchers and SLPs can participate in creating new knowledge and approaches for assessment and intervention informed by an awareness of First Nations English dialects.

Features of First Nations English dialects

General background

To our knowledge, there are only two published research studies on First Nations English dialects, both on Tsimshian English (Mulder, 1982; Tarpent, 1982). While other exploratory research may have been conducted on First Nations English dialects, this research has not been published (e.g. Pye, 1985, on Chilcotin English, cited in Leap, 1993). In the US, it has been documented that many Native Americans speak non-standard Englishes with distinctive grammatical features. These features have been described for Lakota English (Flanigan, 1985), White Mountain Apache English (Liebe-Harkort, 1983), Ute and Isletan Englishes (Leap 1977; 1993), Lumbee English (Wolfram, 1984; Dannenberg, 2002), and Kotzebue Inupiaq English (Vandergriff, 1982). Some research has concentrated on cultural differences in the use of English by specific Native American groups. For example, Basso (1970) has described cultural norms for silence among the Western Apache. Phillips (1983) has studied children's classroom and community use of silence, attention-paying behaviour, and participation frameworks on the Warm Springs reservation in Oregon. Leap (1993) has examined silence, questioning, continuity of discourse, and turn-taking options among the Ute.

Leap (1993: 112) has identified four features that are largely shared among Native American Englishes. The first is a phonological restriction on consonants at the ends of words. The second identified feature, unmarked past tense, is morphological. The final two features are syntactic: copula deletion and multiple negation. Although these general phenomena may occur across groups, the exact manifestations vary from group-to-group. While there may be similarities among various Indigenous communities, Native American Englishes do differ in grammar and use. Furthermore, there may be more than one variety of English spoken in a single community, as observed by Leap (1993: 193) at Isleta Pueblo. Some researchers have reported that, among some Native American communities, members can distinguish their own people from those of other Native American groups in the area solely by the way they use English (Penfield-Jasper, 1977: 25, on Mohave; Blu, 1980: 247).

The following discussion presents key points from focus groups and literature reviews conducted on First Nations English dialects among young children. This review may help draw readers' attention to relevant features of Aboriginal English dialects that they may have noticed, and to highlight areas that can be pursued in future linguistic studies. The dialect features discussed below for phonology, morphosyntax, vocabulary/usage and discourse were identified by participants in the two forums as warranting further study and consideration in practice with First Nations children.

Phonology and phonetics

A variety of phonological and phonetic characteristics of First Nations languages may affect First Nations English dialects, producing 'accents' that may be interpreted as mispronunciations of standard English. Forum attendees identified several general features for possible future study.

First, depending on the use of airflow in various First Nations languages, the production of standard English may be affected, for example, in the production of voicing and glottalization in stops, as was noted above for Plains Cree and Dene Suline. Secondly, the overall position of the oral and laryngeal articulators may be different for some First Nations speakers, affecting the production of individual consonants and vowels, and speakers' overall voice quality settings. Instrumental observations may help to clarify individual and group differences in this respect. For example, laryngoscopic observations (e.g. Carlson, Esling, and Harris, 2004; Esling, Fraser, and Harris, 2005) could shed light on the use of laryngeal features such as pharyngealization and glottalization in First Nations English dialects that are rooted in ancestral languages that employ pharyngeal(ized) and/or glottal(ized) consonants. Two-dimensional ultrasound (e.g. Gick, 2002; Bernhardt, Gick, Bacsfalvi, and Adler-Bock, 2005) could help to clarify differences in tongue position in various dialects.

Forum participants also highlighted several specific phonological features of First Nations languages that may be transferred to First Nations dialects. Several examples follow.

Given that Kwak'wala is a language without rhotic consonants or vowels, it is possible that in Kwak'wala English, /ɹ/ may be pronounced as [l]. Even children who do not speak Kwak'wala may adopt this feature from other speakers in the community. Similarly, given that the consonant inventory of Kwak'wala does not include /θ/, this phone may be absent in Kwak'wala English (Ball et al., 2006: 99). Mohawk and Cayuga languages do not have bilabials. In addition, both languages employ nasality distinctively in their vowel systems. In Mohawk and Cayuga dialects of English, these characteristics may result in the substitution of other phones for bilabials and/or nasal variants of vowels (Ball et al., 2006: 99). In Haida English, /ʃ/ is frequently realized as [s], likely reflecting the absence of /ʃ/ in Haida. This pronunciation pattern may also be reflected in the substitution of [ts] for the affricate /tʃ/ in Haida English, although possibly to a lesser degree, given the presence of the highly similar palatal affricate /c/ (and possible substitution) in Haida (Ball et al., 2006: 99). Other features for further investigation are (Ball et al., 2006: 100): (1) the presence of lateralized sibilants (where the Indigenous language, e.g. Dene Suline, has a prevalence of lateralized consonants), and (2) the substitution of [n] for word-final /ŋ/ (also common in other non-standard dialects of English and in standard English in casual speech). Finally, suprasegmental features of First Nations languages may affect First Nations English dialects. Differences in rhythm, stress (see Czaykowski-Higgins and Kinkade, 1998), tone, intonation, speech rate, and voice quality can all contribute to the characteristic 'accents' of First Nations speakers. Forum participants reported having observed an overall slower rate of speech, differences in vocal quality and differences in overall positioning of the articulators. A vocal quality of 'creaky voice' may be observed as possible transference from glottalization in the heritage language, for example, in Athapaskan languages such as Dene Suline (Hargus and Rice, 2005).

Although there is little published research on First Nations English dialects, Mulder (1982, as discussed in Leap, 1993: 48) described several phonological features of Tsimshian English at that time. Labiodental fricatives /f/ and /v/ were sometimes realized as

[b]. The alveolar stops [t] and [d] were often substituted for the interdental fricatives /θ/ and /ð/ (both of these patterns reflect what was projected earlier from interactions of another language, Plains Cree, and English). The /ɹ/ was often pronounced as [l]. The affricates /tʃ/ and /dʒ/ were often realized as [ts] and [dz], respectively. Word finally, the velar nasal /ŋ/ was often realized as [n] (e.g. [θɪŋkən] for *thinking*), although, as observed above, this is a common pronunciation in casual use of standard English and other English dialects.

The literature review conducted for this project highlighted phonological features observed in Native American English dialects in the US that may also be found in Canada. For instance, restrictions on syllable- and/or word-final consonants in ancestral languages may be carried over into First Nations English dialects. Leap (1993: 114) has observed that standard English *hunt* is often pronounced as *hun* in Isletan English. Flanigan (1987) reports similar patterns for Lakota English. In Cheyenne English, word-final /t/ is deleted or pronounced as /ʔ/ (Leap, 1993: 114–115).

Morphosyntax

Forum participants highlighted a number of syntactic and morphological features observed in First Nations English dialects that need to be further documented and analysed. Participants noted the distinctive use of pronouns, tag questions, and conjunctions. The literature on Native American English dialects also highlights morphosyntactic features such as a lack of nominal and verbal inflection, deletion of copular *be*, pronouns, and prepositions, non-standard uses of tense and multiple negation. Further research is necessary to determine if these features are also present in First Nations English dialects in Canada.

During elementary school, many First Nations children were observed by forum participants to use pronouns in non-standard ways. The nominative pronouns *he* and *she*, and the accusative pronouns *her* and *him*, may be used as possessive forms, as in the following sentence reported by one participant: *him bouncing that ball on him nose* (Ball et al., 2006: 101). Innovative plural pronoun forms such as *theirself* and *theirselves* have also been noted in the speech of young First Nations children. At this point, it is unclear whether such variants reflect dialectal differences or delays in language development; further examination of adult speech in the children's communities is necessary to explore this issue. Research by Mulder (1982) and Tarpent (1982) highlights the influence of the ancestral language in some innovative plural pronoun constructions. For instance, Tsimshian English *them* constructions, such as *Don't play with them John* and *Them Fred's having a party tonight* (Tarpent, 1982: 118), appear to have their source in the Tsimshian plural marker *dim*. In Tsimshian English, this marker is used to refer both to the specified individual and to others who are associated with that individual.

One forum participant noted the use of the tag question *init* (original source probably *isn't it*) in a particular community. In standard English, the tag question *isn't it* refers back to the person in the main clause. However, in the examples presented in the forum, the use of *init* was more akin to the French phrase *n'est-ce-pas*, which is neutral in relation to the main clause. Hence, in this particular First Nations English dialect, the sentences *It's raining hard, init?* and *I'm hungry, init* were both equally acceptable (Ball et al., 2006: 101). (The 'init' tag has been observed in other non-standard English varieties, suggesting that the source might have been colonial English initially heard by the local communities.) Finally, one participant observed a tendency among First Nations children in her

community to string together phrases without the use of conjunctions such as *and* where they might be expected in standard English, relying instead on gestures and vocal emphasis to highlight new information (Ball et al., 2006: 101).

The observations of forum participants are complemented here by features reported in the literature on Native American English dialects and these may or may not appear also in First Nations English dialects in Canada. In a large survey of literature on Native Americans, Fletcher (1983) reported that when speaking English, Native Americans show a strong tendency not to inflect nouns and verbs, a feature also highlighted in Leap's (1993) literature review. More specifically, Flanigan (1987) notes a lack of plural marking and number agreement in Lakota English. This characteristic may be related to the more general Lakota English tendency to omit morphemes indicating grammatical function, such as articles, a phenomenon that has also been described for Navajo English (Cook and Sharp, 1966: 25) and Ute English (Leap, 1993: 55). Even certain prepositions may be deleted if they are contextually recoverable; for example, Lakota English *they live Ø New York* or *he go Ø town* (Leap, 1993: 75).

Grammatical features of First Nations languages may influence verbal inflection in First Nations English dialects. For example, Cheyenne English marks a manifest/non-manifest distinction on verbs (Alford, 1974: 6). Actions that are considered to be speculative, hypothetical, or otherwise non-manifest are expressed with uninflected verb forms. By contrast, actions that the speaker considers to be part of the 'real' or manifest world are marked with verb inflection, usually with the past tense *–ed* suffix, regardless of whether the action takes place in the past, present, or future. Other non-standard uses of English tense markers are attested in Kotzebue Inupiaq English (Vandergriff, 1982: 130–138), Apachean English (Bartelt, Penfield-Jasper and Hoffer.), and Cheyenne English (Alford, 1974).

In many Native American English dialects, copular *be* is optional. Leap (1993: 70) reports this feature in Isletan English (e.g. *She a Red Corn people*). He observes that there is some variety in when copulas are deleted, citing Penfield-Jasper's (1980) finding that, in Mohave English, the absence of copulas was much more common in passive and perfective constructions than elsewhere. Leap shows that in Isletan English, it is not only copular *be* that may undergo optional deletion, but also auxiliary forms of *be*, as in *They Ø just goin' by the old ways* (Leap, 1993: 70). Other auxiliaries may behave similarly, including auxiliary *have* (*They are just illegitimate. They Ø no father*) and auxiliary *get/be* in passive constructions (*The people knew Robert will Ø paid*).

Pronoun deletion is also a common syntactic phenomenon in Native American English dialects. Leap (1993: 58) goes so far as to say that 'evidence of [pronoun] deletion shows up in every variety of Indian English for which documentation is now available'. Although this practice is common in languages where verbal endings indicate grammatical person and number (e.g. Italian, Ukrainian), it also happens in languages with no such verbal markers (e.g. Japanese). In the latter case, if the pronoun is recoverable from the discourse context, then it is a candidate for deletion. Penfield-Jasper (1980: 137) demonstrates that this is the case for Mohave English. However, there may be dialect-specific factors that favour the deletion of pronouns in certain grammatical contexts. Leap (1993: 61) suggests that grammatical case is an important factor: in both Mohave and Ute Englishes, subject pronouns are deleted much more frequently than object pronouns.

Multiple negation is reported in many Native American English dialects, as it is for non-standard Englishes in many non-Indigenous groups. This double marking of negation may have a syntactic (and even obligatory) basis in the grammar or a more functional basis in

conversation (i.e. serving to emphasize the negation). No research has yet clarified this issue.

Vocabulary/usage

Several forum participants reported differences in vocabulary usage in the English of First Nations children. Many SLPs noted that it is difficult to assess children's vocabulary accurately, given the lack of assessment tools that reflect the range of children's vocabulary, based on community norms. However, several vocabulary features were noted for future study. In particular, some participants noted First Nations children's lack of words for spatial location. One participant proposed that the relative absence of terms for spatial location might be due to language transfer from usage norms in the ancestral language with which she was familiar. For example, some children may be inclined to say *It's there* or *It's over there*, possibly in combination with facial and other gestures, rather than use spatial vocabulary to describe the exact location of an object or event (Ball et al., 1996: 45). Another participant concurred, noting that in another First Nations language, explicit locations or times were less important than the events being described. One forum participant stated that some First Nations children with whom she has worked have been unable to follow oral directions consisting of three or more steps. It is unclear whether such comprehension issues reflect cultural differences in time marking, or children's individual memory constraints (Ball et al., 2006: 89). In summary, as with other domains, there is a lack of information about First Nations' children's vocabulary development. Further investigation is warranted, and, in particular, concerning cultural focus and use of spatial, time, and sequence marking.

Discourse

Based on the foregoing examples, it seems likely that future research will confirm that First Nations English dialects are distinct from standard Canadian English in terms of their phonology, morphosyntax, and lexicon. Discourse-related features are also key to dialect description. Forum participants noted several features of First Nations discourse, including differences in the use of silence, listening, and eye contact behaviours, turn-taking, and topic development in narratives (Ball et al., 2006: 101–103).

First Nations children may learn very different participation frameworks from those of non-Indigenous children. Participation frameworks are the expectations underlying who can acceptably say something, when, and about what. Some forum participants commented on the use of silence by First Nations children, which may be interpreted by mainstream teachers as shyness or even lack of knowledge. One First Naitons forum participant related the use of silence to a different cultural attitude about language:

> We're taught *[that]* our voice is a sacred gift. And there is a lot of power in words: when we speak, we're taught that our words go around the world forever. So people who are traditional don't engage in idle chit-chat and talk about tiny little things, because they really do believe that their words are very, very sacred and important and powerful (Ball et al., 2006: 48).

Thus, First Nations children may be silent and/or may not engage in casual conversation about obvious everyday matters (e.g. the weather) in an effort to be respectful to other people, particularly adults. One First Nations forum participant commented:

I think in general, if I'm talking to someone who's older than I am, if they come to visit me or I go to visit them, I tend to listen a lot. I value what they have to share with me, I listen to their stories. (…) If, though, you're observing me when I'm talking with a peer, someone my age, or with a younger sibling, it's going to be totally different. I would probably be doing a lot of talking, a lot of sharing of experiences, a lot of input about a topic, and it all has to do with the kinship relationship and also the age of the people who are interacting (Ball et al., 2006: 51).

In addition, First Nations children may take a long time to respond to questions or to take up a turn in conversation, because they have been taught the importance of weighing their words carefully before speaking. This contrasts with mainstream Canadian society, where interjections and short pauses between turns are the norm. Thirdly, in an effort to listen carefully to what is being said to them, First Nations children may not make eye contact with their interlocutors, a practice which may be seriously misunderstood, as the quote below from a First Nations forum participant attests:

I think I tend to look at someone in the eyes initially, as we start the interaction, because when you look in someone's eyes, right away you get the sense of honesty and truthfulness and openness. Then as they're talking, I tend to look away, and I'm visualizing what they're saying. I'm also visualizing in order to process, and take meaning from what they've just shared, so that I can respond. But you know it can be seen as a disorder these days with all the focus on PDD *[Pervasive Developmental Disorder]* and autism. I have seen preschool children who've been referred to me by a paediatrician because they think they might have some symptoms of autism because they do not look at them when they're spoken to (Ball et al., 2006: 49).

Many of the discourse features noted above are also highlighted in the literature on Native American English discourse. Phillips (1983), in describing such practices in the community and at the on-reservation school in Warm Springs, Oregon, links such practices to her observation that in Warm Springs culture, young people (under 35) are expected to be good listeners, not good speakers.

Other researchers have also emphasized the importance of silence in various Native American communities. Neha (2003), a Navajo SLP working in a Navajo community, informs us that silence is generally valued among the Navajo. Basso (1970) concludes that among the Western Apache, silence is the appropriate course of action whenever speaker relations and behavioural expectations are uncertain, for example, in courtship, when children return home from boarding school, in interactions with strangers or with people who are drunk, angry or mourning. Silence may last hours or even days until speakers have observed the other party enough to feel comfortable conversing with them.

In general, greater tolerance for silence interacts with cultural preferences regarding questioning and answering practices. In many Native American cultures, greater time lag is allowed and expected in responding to questions. Damico (1983: 13) observed that 37% of Cree students he studied showed such delayed responses.

Certain questioning routines that are common in mainstream, especially middle-class, Canadian society are not shared by some Native North American cultures. For example, it is common for adults in mainstream Western society to engage children by asking display questions, in which the questioner does not seek the information requested, but rather wants to find out whether the addressee knows the answer (e.g. the questioner points at an object and asks 'what's that?'). Neha (2003) remarks that assessing language skills by using display questions is likely to fail with Navajo children. A cultural dislike of direct questions has also been noted for the Ute and Lakota people (Leap, 1993), and the White Mountain Apache (Liebe-Harkort, 1983).

Storytelling is a large part of First Nations oral traditions. However, there is cross-cultural variability in what kinds of stories, and what ways of telling them, are valued. Leap (1993: 252–254) describes how among the Ute, traditional stories are often retold to audiences who are already familiar with them. Elaborate scene-setting openings are unnecessary, and usually absent. To engage the audience, the teller must show originality, creativity, and an ability to tailor the telling to the particular audience in a particular context. It is uncommon for Ute storytellers to recount the 'whole story'; instead, they select a focal segment or segments as appropriate for the specific storytelling event. Listener involvement is further increased by the way in which elements are connected in the story. The Ute tell stories in such a way that connections are implied, but not explicit, requiring the listener to make the mental connections themselves. This is further achieved by a non-linear, non-chronological style of topic development—features that would likely cause mainstream American listeners to find the story confusing or pointless, or to see a child as having problems with story grammar. The preference for not stating the obvious is even more pronounced among the Dene in Alaska, according to Scollon and Scollon (1981: 119). They report that, according to the norms of the community they studied, 'the best telling of a story is the briefest'. Detailed explanations of events, or motivations of the characters, are assumed to be understood and therefore left unsaid. Such assumptions of shared knowledge perform the added function of increasing solidarity among participants (Brown and Levinson, 1987).

Discussion

Future research: Principles and topics of investigation

The preceding sections have outlined phonological, syntactic, lexical, and discourse-related features that have been observed informally by forum participants and through research by various authors, and have emphasized need for in-depth investigations of First Nations English dialects in Canada. The literature review and forums conducted for this project helped to identify methods and principles to guide future research into these features.

Further exploratory research on First Nations English dialects needs to be carried out in collaboration between language researchers and First Nations in ways that respect the communities' culture and goals. There is a growing call to decolonize research methodology (Apffel-Marglin and Marglin, 1996; Smith, 1999; Mutua and Swadener, 2004), a perspective that was echoed by many forum participants (Ball et al., 2006). In addition to the general principles of good research, decolonizing research calls for investigators to step down from the role of 'expert' on aspects of human behaviour and social life that they are seeking to understand, and to recognize that important knowledge and perspectives are held by the people whose behaviour the university-based researcher wishes to understand. A decolonizing perspective calls for mutual recognition of the different kinds of expertise brought by investigators and participants in research. In addition, decolonization in research calls for research to be identified as a priority for the well-being of the people participating in the research. Thus, First Nations communities need to be centrally involved in defining and conducting the research, with clear written agreements or contracts at the beginning of a project that specify research ethics, methods, data ownership, researchers' accountability, project control, outputs, and dissemination of findings (Canadian Institutes for Health Research, 2007). Face-to-face contacts need to be made to enable trusting relationships and reciprocal learning about language, culture,

knowledge systems, and practices. Also, research needs to yield direct benefits to the participants, in addition to possible indirect or altruistic outcomes. The practical goal of improving supports for children's optimal development should be measured in relation to the community's own goals for supporting children's development (Ball, 2005). Finally, research products need to be in plain language and readily accessible to the community.

In line with these principles, to conduct effective research about First Nations English dialects, it is important to identify First Nations community members' perspectives on their English dialect. Naturally occurring language situations could be observed and recorded to identify potential dialect features of grammar and use. To develop hypotheses, it may be helpful to use non-representative samples of narrow scope. Researchers could then ask explicit questions about apparent distinctive features of the dialect from the observations made. Finally, purposive sampling from a variety of contexts could be conducted, including variation in speaker demographic characteristics; number, demographics, and relationship of listeners, and physical contexts (event types, discourse genres).

Clinical implications

Several national associations of SLPs have developed position statements and policies to promote sensitivity to cultural differences and the recruitment of students from diverse ethnic and linguistic backgrounds into SLP programmes (e.g. Canadian Association of Speech-Language Pathology and Audiology, www.caslpa.ca; American Speech-Language Hearing Association, www.asha.org). Implementing these principles does, however, pose a challenge for the SLP. Lack of valid methods for assessment of speakers using non-standard dialects can result in both over- and under-identification of language impairment. Further, very little is known about how to implement language intervention in First Nations communities in ways that resonate with community and family communication and cultural patterns. The fact remains that the vast majority of screening, assessment, and intervention programmrs are based on standard English and mainstream North American culture (Taylor and Pane, 1983; Washington, 1996; Stockman, 2000; Laing and Kamhi, 2003).

What is available for SLPs at the current time in terms of assessment? A recent assessment tool, the Diagnostic Evaluation of Language Variation (Seymour, Roeper, and DeVilliers, 2003), attempts to differentiate between language difference and language impairment by highlighting the elements shared by different varieties of English. This tool focuses primarily on distinguishing African American English from General American English, however, and may not yet sufficiently differentiate language difference from impairment for children from other cultural or linguistic backgrounds. Dynamic assessment is another promising approach (Feuerstein, Feuerstein, Falik, and Rand, 2002). Dynamic assessment is rooted in Vygotsky's (1978) notion of the 'zone of proximal development', the difference between the level of language development a child can reach unassisted vs that which he or she can reach when adult assistance is provided (Gutiérrez-Clellen and Peña, 2001). This assessment method, which is based on a 'test–teach–re-test' protocol, highlights children's learning strategies and styles rather than their knowledge of any specific variety of English, and has been shown to be effective in working with speakers of non-standard English in the US (Lidz and Peña, 1996; Ukrainetz, Harpell, Walsh, and Coyle, 2000). Language sample analysis can help to develop standard reference criteria for First Nations language communities (see Stockman, 1996, for a discussion of the strengths and weaknesses of this technique in assessment contexts). As a basis for such analysis,

speech samples can be collected by SLPs or community members from a range of naturalistic discourse contexts of adults (for community norms) and children, including play, conversation, and story-telling. While samples may be audio- or videotaped, ideally, they will be videotaped to allow for a better understanding of the many contextual factors that may influence speech, and to allow for the analysis of verbal and non-verbal communication, both of which are integral aspects of language use. Such samples will provide a strong foundation for culturally sensitive assessment and language intervention (Oetting and McDonald, 2002).

Forum participants made additional recommendations for clinical practice: (1) inclusion of primary caregivers directly in assessment and intervention; (2) allowing up to half an hour of non-verbal play before engaging in conversation, testing, or treatment; (3) starting with language comprehension tasks rather than language production tasks; and (4) altering the context of the task. For example, one forum participant described an assessment situation in which a child gave minimal detail while describing objects. The SLP then asked the child to pretend that he was describing the objects to his younger brother. The child then gave detailed descriptions of many objects. The child may have found it unnatural to describe objects to the SLP who, as an adult, was known to be familiar with those objects. In an imaginary context in which he had to provide detail to a less knowledgeable listener, the child showed himself capable of the task.

Finally, and most crucial to the development of culturally sensitive methodologies for practice, SLPs 'must learn to recognize their own invisible cultural curricula while learning the cultural dimensions of their clients' and students' communication patterns and language use' (Crago, 1992: 36). Forum participants in the present project identified a number of steps that may be helpful in meeting this challenge (Ball et al., 2006: 104–108). For example, one of the first steps SLPs can take in their local environment is to learn about First Nations communities and cultures by talking to community members (e.g. Elders, cultural workers, family support workers, public health nurses) and by attending community events (e.g. preschool gatherings or community dinners). Another important step is for SLPs to talk to First Nations families in their communities (including the extended family) about their opinions about language and culture, recognizing that there will be considerable diversity in these opinions. Some families may be concerned that treatment or education in standard English will contribute to the loss of the community dialect, language, and culture. Others may wish to have their children learn standard English dialects and ways, in order to navigate more easily in the mainstream, either some of the time (bicultural/bidialectal) or most of the time. Finally, speech-language associations and university training programmes can play in role in developing research, coursework, and service-learning opportunities concerning speech-language pathology practice with First Nations people. (The University of British Columbia School of Audiology and Speech Sciences is currently developing a course concerning practice with Indigenous people for both speech-language pathologists and audiologists.)

Conclusion

The observations and findings brought to bear on a consideration of First Nations English dialects require substantiation and interpretation through a comprehensive and focused programme of research. Collaborative research with First Nations community members to document features of First Nations English dialects in Canada is particularly urgent given the ongoing, rapid loss of Indigenous languages, and as a complementary enterprise to

language revitalization projects underway across Canada and the US. The development of community–researcher–practitioner partnerships will foster collective learning about linguistic and cultural similarities and what kinds of research and clinical practices might work best in a given community (Cheng, 1999). For speech-language pathology practice, research is crucial for helping SLPs identify true language deficits, in order to know when intervention is needed, what it should entail, and how it should proceed. Accommodations in a linguistically diverse society are often in the direction of the mainstream standard; however, this perspective hastens the process of assimilation, and promotes monoculturalism. SLPs can help support the maintenance of cultural diversity through practice which honours and supports each family's and community's goals for children's language development, and acknowledges and supports the system of cultural signs and forms of interaction.

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Note

1. First Nation is an ethnic identifier that can apply both to individuals and to communities on or off of reserve lands, and in urban or rural/remote settings. In contrast, a 'First Nation' is a culturally distinct, federally registered entity comprised at least in part of registered, Status Indians living on lands reserved for them by the Canadian federal government.

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