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9 Standard English as a Second Dialect: A Canadian Perspective

During the years I spent kayaking along the coast of British Columbia and Southeast Alaska, I observed that the local raven populations spoke in distinct dialects. Ravens from Kwakiutl, Tsimshian, Haida, and Tlingit territory sounded different from one another, especially in their characteristic ‘tok’ and ‘dik’. (Dyson, 2006: 136)

Introduction

Over 40 per cent of Aboriginal¹ children in Canada do not receive a secondary school diploma (Gilmore, 2010; Mendelson, 2006), and dialectal variation may play a key role. Combined with significant gaps in quality of life for First Nation² children in Canada, dialect differences between some First Nation children and mainstream educators likely contribute to inequitable outcomes for First Nation youngsters on many dimensions, including education, health and social inclusion (Ball, 2008; Salée, 2006). High rates of identification of First Nation children as ‘at risk’ for difficulties in school and teacher referrals of these children for assessment and treatment

¹ In Canada, the term Aboriginal refers to three groups of original inhabitants: First Nation, Métis and Inuit peoples. Many original inhabitants now prefer to be called Indigenous when not referred to by their specific cultural community.

² 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.
of perceived speech and language delays and disorders (Sterzuk, 2008) may reflect, in part, a pervasive lack of understanding that these children’s first language is a nonstandard dialect of the language used in school.

Despite the importance of these issues, little research has investigated the nature, acquisition or implications of nonstandard English dialects among Indigenous people in Canada. At the prompting of several First Nation leaders in the Canadian province of British Columbia, Ball, Bernhardt and Deby (2007; Ball and Bernhardt, 2008; Bernhardt, Ball and Deby, 2007) explored this topic. Their project gleaned anecdotal evidence through two forums involving Indigenous educators, school-based clinicians and investigators who have explored dialect variation and its implications through their applied practice in schools and speech-language service settings in Canada. Insights were also gained from a survey of speech-language pathologists (Ball and Lewis, 2005) and an interview study of First Nation parents and Elders (Ball and Lewis, 2005).

Because of the lack of systematic research on this topic, this chapter is intended to raise awareness, stimulate dialogue and promote considerations of the implications for children who enter school speaking a nonstandard variety of the school language. Ideas are explored for providing these children with a welcoming, culturally safe transition and supporting them in learning the standard dialect while respecting and recognizing the value of their home dialect.

The Canadian context of language loss

Three groups of original inhabitants of the land now called Canada are recognized by the federal government as Aboriginal: First Nation, Métis and Inuit. In the 2006 census, 1,172,790 people self-identified as Aboriginal,

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3 There is scattered interest in these phenomena among Native Americans in the US and a growing body of work of an ethnographic and anecdotal nature on Aboriginal English in Australia.
representing 3.8 per cent of the total population. Of these, 700,000 self-identified as First Nation (Statistics Canada, 2006). Although a minority of First Nation people live in French-speaking areas of Canada, this chapter focuses specifically on what is known about First Nation English dialects because this is the population where at least some research effort has been directed. About one-third of First Nation children live in rural, remote or on-reserve settings, and 5 per cent live in rural off-reserve communities (Statistics Canada, 2006). It is generally believed that non-standard English dialects are most likely to be the first language these youngsters learn.

First Nation English dialects in Canada are situated within an overall context of language loss and revitalization. About fifty different First Nation languages from eleven major language families are spoken today.4 Sociohistorical and linguistic conditions have resulted in steadily declining intergenerational transmission of Indigenous languages. Today, only about 16 per cent of Aboriginal children in Canada learn their Indigenous language first (Bougie, 2010; Norris, 2007), and this number is decreasing (Norris, 2007).

Language loss is a global crisis; over half of the world’s 6,000 languages have been lost (Crystal, 2000; Dixon, 1997; Moseley, 2010). The losses occur for many reasons, including the pressures exerted by a dominant language. In Canada, the loss of First Nation languages is the result of several interacting factors, beginning with colonial government polices over the past two centuries that aggressively interrupted the intergenerational transmission of language. The most disruptive interventions were the forced removal of Indigenous communities from their traditional territories to designated (reserve) lands, which often congregated culturally and linguistically different populations together, and the forced removal of Indigenous children from their families to be raised by the staff of Indian

4 Algonquin, Athapaskan and Inuktut are the largest language families, or linguistic isolates, accounting for 93 per cent of the Indigenous languages learned as first languages (Norris and Jantzen, 2002). According to the 2006 Census, Cree, Inuktut and Ojibway are the largest of the fifty Indigenous languages currently spoken, with approximately 70,000, 29,000 and 21,000 speakers respectively.
residential schools. Children in the schools were compelled to learn English or French and were punished for speaking their own language (Lawrence, 2004; Miller, 1996; Royal Commission on Aboriginal Peoples, 1996). An ongoing practice of removing First Nation children from their homes and placing them in foster or adoptive care with English- and French-speaking families also contributes to First Nation language loss (First Nations Child and Family Caring Society of Canada, 2005).

Some Indigenous scholars and communities have declared a major collective push to end oppressive policies and practices that keep Indigenous cultural knowledges and languages in the shadows (e.g., Fettes and Norton, 2000). They see a linguistic renaissance as an integral part of the evolution toward Indigenous self-governance and the restoration of spiritual and physical health to First Nation communities (Assembly of First Nations, 1990, 1992; Canadian Heritage, 2005; Crawford, 1996; Fishman, 2001). This renaissance includes more choices for Indigenous parents in regard to their children’s education either in mainstream schools or in Indigenous-controlled school settings.

The persistence of First Nation English dialects might seem to conflict with Indigenous language revitalization; the existence of these dialects and their use within First Nation communities is powerful evidence of the cultural hegemony of English and of the settler society’s disruption of the intergenerational transmission of First Nation languages. Paradoxically, however, because a dialect may be the only remaining trace of an Indigenous language, dialects may play an important role in language revitalization (Ball and Bernhardt, 2008). By preserving not only grammatical aspects, but unique discourse and narrative features, First Nation English dialects may contribute to transmission of Indigenous cultures and identities. Fluency in the dialect might provide speakers who want to learn—or relearn—an

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5 In British Columbia, for example, the First Peoples’ Cultural Foundation raises awareness and funding for Indigenous language revitalization (First Peoples’ Cultural Foundation, 2007). A major initiative of the foundation is First Voices, <http://www.fpcf.ca/language-index.html>, an on-line language archive.
ancestral language an easier entry point. And, over time, dialects may evolve in independent directions, reinforcing cultural distinctiveness.

First Nation English dialects reside uneasily in the space between language loss and revitalization, and between Indigenous calls for more Indigenous control of education for their children and a nationwide concern with improving Indigenous children’s success in mainstream education and the economy. On one hand, First Nation English dialects reflect a history in which English was – and remains – the primary colonizing language. On the other hand, they may be seen as important linguistic markers of Indigenous identity and belonging.

Pidgins, creoles and dialects

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). At the point of origin, pidgins are necessarily second languages. However, when a new generation learns a pidgin as a first language, the pidgin typically develops into a creole, which is a grammatically more complex language with properties not found in any of the parent languages (Wardhaugh, 2002). Depidginization and decreolization take place when pidgins and creoles come into renewed or closer contact with their original source language (Trudgill, 1996, cited in Kwary, n.d.).

A dialect is a particular form of a language that is peculiar to a specific region or social group. First Nation English dialects likely developed as lingua francas – common languages – following contact between English and Indigenous populations. They appear to represent a late stage in processes of depidginization and decreolization (Ball and Bernhardt, 2008; Craig, 1991; Flanigan, 1985, 1987). Dialects are shaped by cultural patterns of communication, phenomena related to contact and linguistic features of the primary or source language(s). A particular dialect is typically associated
with speakers who variously share historical events, geography, ethnicity, socioeconomic status, education, first language background or other social factors. Based on research on English dialects among Native Americans (Leap, 1993), it is likely that English dialects among Indigenous peoples in North America share many features, possibly reflecting historical periods in which speakers of the different dialects found themselves forced to live together, for example, on shared reserve lands or in Indian residential schools (Ball and Bernhardt, 2008; Leap, 1993). Documents from these eras indicate widespread intertribal dissemination of pidgins or creoles (Craig, 1991). Over time, the various dialects may have increasingly converged with standard English, resulting in nonstandard English dialects that vary only slightly between communities and regions, and to only a minor but nevertheless significant degree from standard English. Flanigan (1985, 1987) describes this process with reference to Lakota English.

**Dialects and social status**

Because dialects of the same language have slightly different grammars, grammatical errors in one dialect might be correct in another. Linguists do not view any dialect of a language as inherently more correct than others; they often use the term variety instead of dialect to emphasize this equality (Ball and Bernhardt, 2008). However, certain dialects (or varieties) are accorded greater social status by their association with groups that hold power in the dominant culture’s social institutions, for example, royalty, colonial government bodies, universities and the upper class. A dominant culture’s high-status dialect is often enforced within institutions and

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6 Another term, register, has sometimes been used to refer to varieties such as Indigenous Englishes (e.g., Eagleson, 1982). However, linguists define register as referring to a variety that is associated with a specific occupation or activity, for example, legal, air traffic control or religious registers (Schiffman, 1997; Wardhaugh, 2002). Perhaps the most appropriate term for Indigenous varieties is ethnolect, that is, a language variety that is associated with a specific cultural group. An ethnolect is a social, rather than a regional, dialect (Wardhaugh, 2002).
formal discourse through standardization, whereby one set of grammar and usage rules is sanctioned by the groups with political power for use in education, government and mass media. Dialects associated with more marginalized or lower status social groups are often stigmatized within these institutions (Wardhaugh, 2002). However, developmentalists and linguists have discounted earlier assertions by some scholars (e.g., Bernstein, 1972) that dialect use reflects intelligence and that only standard dialects can support advanced cognitive development and academic performance. Stigmatized dialects may hold covert prestige (Trudgill, 1972) in a social group that lacks formal power in the dominant groups' institutions, such as rap music artists, street gangs, members of an ethnic neighbourhood, a rural community or a sexual minority group (Hawley, 2005). And many nonstandard varieties of English have become well known (Lee, 1998), including Cockney English, African American Vernacular English (AAVE), Hawai'i Creole English (HCE), Spanglish, Singlish (Singapore English) (Lim, 2004), Tanglish (Tamil English) and Manglish (Malaysian English). Most recently, Globish, a global pidgin English for trade and cultural exchange, has emerged (McCrum, 2010).

**Dialects and the colonial project**

A basic Canadian value is that, wherever children live and irrespective of their ethnicity or home language, programmes for promoting their optimal development should be accessible and linguistically and culturally appropriate (Canadian Centre for Justice, 2001). At the same time, centuries of colonial policies and values in education have excluded Indigenous histories, cultures and languages from public school pedagogy and curricula in Canada (Battiste, 2000; Philipson, 1992). Regardless of linguistic and developmental theory – and evidence that dialects are not substandard versions of the 'real' language – negative social attitudes about language difference can have negative social sequelae, including discrimination and social exclusion (Milroy and Milroy, 1999). Persistent low academic achievement and early school leaving among Indigenous and ethnolinguistic minority children are outcomes that are likely attributable, in
part, to language-in-education policies that disregard, actively disparage or even pathologize the language or dialect with which children enter formal schooling (Ball, 2010). For example, some educators and speech-language pathologists, along with First Nation leaders, have suggested that First Nation children may be disproportionately diagnosed with speech-language impairments, which may stem in part from misinterpretations of features of children’s home dialects as evidence of speech-language deficits or delays (Ball, Bernhardt, and Deby, 2006). In the American context, Keulen, Weddington and DeBose (1998) and Wolfram (1993) have made the same observation.

Smith (2010) reflects on the insistence of dominant English culture on a singular identity; as a person moves into higher levels of education and, by association, into higher socioeconomic brackets, individuals must sacrifice their lower status first dialect while wholly adopting the high-status standard dialect. Smith argues that this assimilative pressure is part of the colonial agenda, and asks why it could not be possible for individuals to have plural selves, with plural dialects, to be used flexibly to meet the communication needs and goals of varied situations. In a post-colonial world, would it not support optimal social adjustment to promote children’s capacities for bi- or even multidialectism?

**Bialectism**

In jurisdictions around the globe, many children’s home language or dialect differs from the language(s) of instruction used in schools. Research confirms that children can learn both more than one language (Cummins, 2000; Lightbown, 2008) and more than one dialect of the same language (McConvell, 2008). Whether they successfully retain their home language (or dialect of a dominant language) depends on the interaction of several factors, including the extent and effectiveness of efforts from speakers of a different dialect of the language aimed at motivating the child to eliminate features of their first dialect and assimilate features of the dialect to which they are newly exposed, and the extent and effectiveness of efforts from speakers of their first dialect aimed at motivating the child to retain
their first dialect fluency, while adding a second dialect. A child may consciously or unconsciously select which dialect of a language to speak, and which variants of phonemes, words or grammars to use. These selections may arise out of a desire to fit in or succeed in their home community, the preferences of their family, peer groups or linguistic community, or their educational context. For example, if a child lives in a community where a large number of speakers use [f] for [T], the child may use [f], unless for some reason that child encounters someone or some group who suggests (or taunts) that [f] is wrong or of low prestige. The child may start to use [T] for all words where it is used in the standard variety, or only in those social contexts where use of [T] avoids discrimination and ensures acceptance; that is, the child may become unidialectal (standard variety) or bidialectal. Within families, individual children may differ in their degree of bidialectalism (Bernhardt, Ball and Deby, 2007).

Illustrative observations of First Nation English dialects

Nonstandard dialects of a dominant language are distinguished from the standard dialect by a range of phonological, syntactic, lexical and discourse-based features. Some of these features are discussed below in relation to First Nation English dialects.

Phonetic, syntactic and morphological features

In the Canadian project conducted by Ball, Bernhardt and Deby (2007), language specialists working with First Nation children made similar observations about First Nation children’s speech as have been made by investigators of Native American English dialects in the US. With reference to phonological features, for example, restrictions on syllable- and/or word-final consonants in indigenous languages may be carried over
into both First Nation and Native American English dialects (Flanigan, 1987; Leap, 1993). A variety of phonological and phonetic characteristics of First Nation languages may affect First Nation English dialects, producing ‘accents’ that may be interpreted as mispronunciations of standard English.

Participants in the Canadian project frequently observed a number of syntactic, morphological and pragmatic features in First Nation English dialects that have also been reported in the literature on Native American English dialects, including morphosyntactic features such as a lack of nominal and verbal inflection, omission of pronouns and prepositions, nonstandard uses of tense and multiple negation. For example, First Nation children in elementary school were reported as using pronouns in nonstandard ways, such as using the nominative pronouns he and she, and the accusative pronouns her and him, 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 First Nation children’s speech. It is unclear whether variants such as these reflect dialect differences or delays in language development. Further examination of adult speech in the children’s communities is necessary to explore this issue.

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7 In the American context, Leap observed that standard English hunt is often pronounced as hun in Isletan English (1993: 114). Flanigan (1987) reports similar patterns for Lakota English. In Cheyenne English, word-final /t/ is deleted or pronounced as /ʔ/ (Leap 1993: 114–115).

8 Research in the Canadian context 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.
Lexicon

Participants in the Canadian project reported differences in vocabulary usage in the English of First Nation children as compared to non-Indigenous children. Speech-language specialists stressed the difficulty of assessing these children's vocabulary accurately, given the lack of assessment tools based on community norms that reflect the range of children's vocabulary. In particular, participants noted First Nation children's lack of words for spatial location, speculating that this absence might be due to usage norms in the child's Indigenous language. 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). In many First Nation languages, explicit locations or times are less important in reporting experiences than the events being described. One project participant stated that some First Nation children with whom she has worked as a speech-language therapist were 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). These examples are cited here to emphasize the possibility of both important language differences that have implications for teaching and learning, and the need for more investigation, in particular concerning cultural focus and use of spatial, time and sequence marking.

Discourse

Canadian project participants noted several features of First Nations discourse, including silence, listening, eye contact behaviours, turn taking and topic development in narratives (Ball et al., 2006). First Nation 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. Project participants commented on the use of silence by First Nation children, which mainstream teachers may interpret as shyness or even lack of
knowledge. Sharla Peltier, a First Nation speech therapist and educator, explained silence and a characteristically parsimonious use of language in cultural terms:

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)

Peltier explained that First Nation children may be silent and/or may not engage in casual conversation about everyday matters (e.g., the weather) in an effort to be respectful to other people, particularly adults, whom they presume already have the information. As well, First Nation children may take a long time to respond to questions or to take a turn in conversation because they have been taught the importance of weighing their words carefully before speaking. This contrasts with European-heritage society in Canada, where interjections and short pauses between turns are the norm. In an effort to listen carefully to what is being said to them, First Nation children may not make eye contact with their interlocutors, a practice which may be misunderstood as not being able or willing to pay attention. Peltier noted that preschool children had been referred to her by paediatricians who thought the children might have symptoms of autism because they did not look at the speaker when spoken to (Ball et al., 2006). These and other discourse features observed by participants in the Canadian project are also reported in the literature on Native American English discourse (Basso, 1970; Damico, 1983; Leap, 1993; Liebe-Harkort, 1983; Neha, 2003; Phillips, 1983).

**Storytelling**

As Gutiérrez-Clellen and Quinn (1993, p. 4) describe, ‘storytelling is a social event governed by cultural norms and values. These extralinguistic rules dictate appropriate narrative behaviour.’ Peltier (2010) explains that storytelling is an important life skill valued in First Nations’ traditional
practices of oral histories and languages; insights into First Nation orality can be gained by understanding aspects of narratives generated by First Nation children. Since activities revolving around stories (e.g., storytelling, reading, writing) are key pedagogical components in preschool and primary education, this knowledge can guide educators in creating culturally sensitive and appropriate bridges between storytelling and literacy areas of the language arts curriculum (Peltier, 2010).

A study by Erasmus (1989) of narrative and the storytelling process among the Athabascan (Dené language group) illustrates differences in narrative and storytelling processes between some First Nations and non-Indigenous groups. Erasmus notes that because First Nation children use unfamiliar manners of narrative presentation such as rhetorical style, mainstream teachers often do not hear the logic in the telling:

People from the dominant English-speaking culture often perceive the discourse of nonmainstream speakers to be incoherent, disconnected, rambling, illogical and untruthful. When a person's discourse is devalued, so too are the meanings, experiences and knowledge to which that discourse refers ... Thus, the 'ways with words' which are part of the Aboriginal child's lived cultural experience become an impediment to achievement in schools. (273)

Erasmus calls for teachers to 'learn to listen and listen to learn' (1989: 274) in order to understand, validate and build upon First Nation learners' culturally based capacities for storytelling. Similarly, First Nation scholars Piquemal (2003) and Simpson (2000) stress the importance of being aware of cultural rules regulating oral traditions when interpreting stories told by First Nation people.

Piquemal (2003), Mader (1996) and Pesco and Crago (1996) describe a common, circular structure in traditional First Nation narrative as a story unfolds (e.g., events within events and meaning piled upon meaning). Unlike Euro-Western stories, the form and structure of First Nation stories may not be tied to any particular timeline, main character or event, and may not have a clear ending or resolution. Similar observations have been offered by earlier scholars in the US. For example, Leap (1993) describes how, among the Ute, traditional stories are often retold to audiences who are already familiar with them; therefore elaborate scene-setting openings
are unnecessary and usually absent. Ute storytellers rarely recount ‘the whole story’; instead, they select a focal segment or segments as appropriate for the specific storytelling event. Connections among elements within the story are often implied, but not explicit, requiring the listener to make the connections themselves. This is further achieved by a nonlinear, nonchronological style of topic development – features that often cause European-heritage listeners to find the story confusing or pointless, or to see a child as having problems with story grammar. According to Scollon and Scollon (1981), the preference for not stating the obvious is conspicuous among the Dené in Alaska, where ‘the best telling of a story is the briefest’ (119). Detailed explanations of events or characters’ motivations are assumed to be understood and are therefore left unstated. Such assumptions of shared knowledge perform the added function of increasing solidarity among participants (Brown and Levinson, 1987).

Many studies have evaluated European-heritage children’s narratives with reference to components of meaning and structure and performative aspects that are considered important from the perspective of Western literacy (see Johnston, 1982), dominant cultural ideals about goals for children’s early education (Peltier, 2010), and standardized approaches to measuring children’s speech and language development (Petersen, Laing Gillam, and Gillam, 2008). Following an exhaustive search of current literature, Peltier (2010) found an absence of emic, or culturally localized, approaches to evaluating First Nation children’s storytelling specifically, and their speech, language and literacy development in general. She commented on the attendant risks of underappreciating, misinterpreting and even pathologizing First Nation children’s language-mediated productions.

Supporting bidialectal language learning

Little understanding exists of the extent to which Indigenous or ethnolinguistic minority children use nonstandard varieties of the school language, or the extent to which their language difference may contribute to their
lack of sustained educational engagement and success relative to children whose first language is used in school. Children may be seen as intellectually deficient and develop low expectations for their own achievement (Adger et al., 2007). They may be extracted from the regular stream of instruction to receive learning assistance based on false positive diagnoses of learning disabilities or speech-language pathology. Children who are criticized and corrected for speaking in the dialect of their home and community may develop low self-esteem or oppositional attitudes toward school (Delpit, 2006) or the dominant culture (Ogbu, 1999). Those who fail to replace their home dialect with the dialect used in school may face ridicule by teachers and peers and discrimination when they become adults (Grogger, 2009; Purnell et al., 1999).

**Parental attitudes and behaviours in regard to dialect**

The primacy of a child's home environment in determining a wide array of child development outcomes, including education and lifelong learning, is well understood. Less understood is the role parental attitudes and behaviours play in children's bidialectal language learning. Little research has been conducted in Canada on the effects of parental beliefs and behaviours in regard to First Nation children's mono- or bidialectal language learning. In the Australian context, investigators have noted that some speakers of a nonstandard dialect may believe they speak a deficient version of the dominant language and encourage their children to speak 'better' (Kaldor, Eagleson, and Malcolm, 1982), for example, by adopting standard pronunciation. In their discussion of Aboriginal Australian English, Kaldor and Malcolm (1991) observe that parents may indirectly value the home dialect. They may want their children to learn standard English in school, but at the same time ascribe it a lower value than the home dialect in the home context. Some families may be concerned that education or treatment 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 to navigate more readily in the mainstream, either some of the time (bicultural/bidialectal) or most of
the time. Based on research findings, Baker (1992) cautions against the assumption that a parent’s stated attitudes about their child’s language acquisition necessarily relate to the parent’s language behaviour with the child.

The growing field of research on cross-cultural differences in language acquisition reveals different beliefs, values and expectations about language development that appear to motivate different patterns of caregiver-child interactions across cultural and linguistic groups (e.g., Crago, 1990; Edwards, Gandini and Giovaninni, 1996; Heath, 1989; Johnston and Wong, 2002; Schieffelin and Ochs, 1986; van Kleeck, 1994; Watts Pappas and Bowen, 2007). Gardner and Lambert (1972) characterize parents’ language attitudes as either instrumental, focusing on utilitarian goals, or integrative, focusing on social goals. Kemppainen, Ferrin, Ward and Hite (2004) identify four types of parental language and culture orientation: mother tongue-centric, bicultural, multicultural and majority language-centric. Of course, in many situations, parents have no choice about the language of instruction. In these situations, De Houwer’s (1999) conceptualization of impact belief is helpful, referring to the extent to which parents’ behaviour is motivated by a belief that they can exert direct control over their children’s language use.

Just as children’s individual differences in eagerness to learn, susceptibility to peer influence, self-esteem and sensory capacities, including hearing and vision, may significantly affect their speed of learning the standard dialect and their capacity or willingness to retain their first, nonstandard, dialect, parents’ willingness to use the standard dialect is also a variable. In the Australian context, Eagleson (1982) observed that Aboriginal individuals who used the standard English dialect in informal situations among other Aboriginal community members could be condemned as snobbish and self-aggrandizing. This observation was also noted by First Nation participants in the Canadian project on First Nation English dialects, and in related research (Ball and Lewis, 2005; Ball, 2005).
Preparing educators and other practitioners to provide culturally safe programmes

There is an urgent need to develop new approaches in education, assessment and early intervention services to understand, support and assess Indigenous children’s oral language. Speech-language pathologists and other specialists need to be able to distinguish between language difference (dialect) and language impairment to provide appropriate supports for language and literacy development for those children who need them. In Canada, a growing number of teachers and service practitioners have been seeking better preparation through pre- and in-service training so that they are more confident and effective in their work with First Nation children (Ball and Lewis, 2005).

Additionally, educational and health professionals need to be knowledgeable about the languages and language varieties in their region and respect the family’s, child’s and community’s wishes regarding language use. The School of Audiology and Speech Sciences at the University of British Columbia, and several teacher education programmes in Canada, have taken steps to ensure that teachers and speech-language pathologists and audiologists receive pre- and in-service opportunities to learn about the general historical, social, cultural and linguistic contexts of Indigenous learners. Steps are also being taken in the province of British Columbia for primary health care providers to become more knowledgeable about Indigenous histories, cultures, languages and social conditions, and more aware of how their own cultural values, beliefs and practices may affect the ways they perceive, interpret and respond in interactions with Indigenous people.

The relationship between language, culture, well-being and educational achievement is complex. It is generally understood that respect for a child’s self-concept, family and community is foundational for a child to feel safe and socially included at school (Ogbu, 1999; Peltier, 2009; Sterzuk, 2008). Other key components in preparing educators and other practitioners to provide programmes for Indigenous and ethnolinguistic minority children are explored below.
Awareness raising

Strengthening the perceived validity of nonstandard language requires public education about the equality of dialects in an effort to teach tolerance (Trudgill, 1995). Efforts have been made in this regard in Australia, where language activists argue that bidialectal awareness must be cultivated among all members of society, not just among Indigenous people (Kaldor and Malcolm, 1991; Simpson and Wigglesworth, 2008). Lack of general awareness and education can be felt acutely by Indigenous people, as evidenced by one woman's words:

Well they garra [gotta] djidan [sit down] an' prepared to learn. How come we prepared to sit down and learn about their ways and culture, from li'l kid up to y'know ... Whatrong, the kaan kamdan [come down] to our level too; learn; sidan an' learn these things, learn about our way of life. Or are they too superior? Health sister ought to be learning about our traditions and ways; and the teacher should be learning about customs and language and the way people live. Teacher should go down and look at the situation; where that kid come from, y'know, what type of lifestyle the kid is living. It's got to be both ways, cooperation, you know. (Thies, 1986; cited in Kaldor and Malcolm, 1991: 78)

Some high school programmes have been developed to teach Australian students about dialect diversity (Eades and Siegel, 1999). Non-teaching professionals in the education system have also been targeted for awareness raising. For example, the Australian professional organization for speech-language pathologists has developed a pamphlet for clinicians working with very young Aboriginal children (Speech Pathology Australia, n.d.). Outside the education system, training has been improved in some situations where non-Aboriginal workers interact frequently with Aboriginal clients, for example, doctors, parks officers, museum workers, social workers, employment service providers and other public service sectors (Eades and Siegel 1999). The legal system has been a particular focus, which is especially important given the serious consequences of dialect misunderstanding in trials of Aboriginal defendants (Eades, 1996, 2000). Following a particularly notorious case, the Queensland Law Society funded and published a handbook on Aboriginal English for
legal professionals (Eades, 1992), and legal organizations have sponsored workshops on the topic.

Cultural sensitivity and cultural safety

One of the most crucial steps to the development of culturally sensitive programmes is for educators and other practitioners to recognize their own invisible cultural biases and implicit cultural curricula (López, 2005; McIntosh, 2002). Personal blinders may hinder their receptivity and responsiveness to children who come to school speaking a nonstandard dialect of the language of instruction and lead to misinterpretations and an overly prescriptive approach to correcting children’s speech productions. In Canada, efforts to encourage children to express themselves in their nonstandard dialect and introduce the standard dialect later, once the children have adapted to the school environment, are being made under the increasingly well-accepted rubric of cultural safety for Indigenous and other ethnolinguistic minority groups (Ball, 2008; Smye and Brown, 2002).

Cultural safety is a concept that originated in Aotearoa/New Zealand in a training programme for Maori nurses (Papps and Ramsden, 1996). It refers to service recipients’ experiences of having their cultural identity and culturally based values, goals and preferences respectfully acknowledged by a service practitioner. Cultural safety depends in part on the practitioner being culturally self-aware and willing to acknowledge different cultural outlooks and forms of interactions as valid and not inherently more or less worthy of consideration (Ball, 2008). As Eades (1991), Harkins (1990) and Malcolm (1999) point out with reference to Australia, non-Indigenous teachers may assume a worldview that is not shared by Indigenous children, with a resulting mismatch in general expectations about communications that can leave both teachers and students feeling frustrated and confused. Addressing this situation requires changes in attitudes and understandings, as well as in curriculum and methodology.
Culturally and linguistically sensitive assessment strategies

Implementing principles of cultural sensitivity is challenging. In regard to language assessment, a lack of valid methods for assessing speakers of nonstandard dialects can result in both over- and underidentification of language impairment (Ball and Lewis, 2003). Further, very little is known about how to implement language intervention in First Nation communities in ways that resonate with community and family communication and cultural patterns. The vast majority of screening, assessment and intervention programmes are based on standard English and mainstream North American culture (Laing and Kamhi, 2003; Peltier, 2010; Stockman, 2000; Taylor and Pane, 1983; Washington, 1996). To address these barriers, both the Canadian and American professional associations for speech and language pathologists have developed position statements and policies to promote sensitivity to cultural and linguistic differences and to recruit prospective practitioners from diverse ethnic and linguistic backgrounds into professional training programmes (e.g., Canadian Association of Speech-Language Pathology and Audiology, <http://www.caslpa.ca>; American Speech-Language Hearing Association, <http://www.asha.org>). The Canadian Association for Speech and Language Pathology and Audiology has used their annual national conference as a forum to introduce professional development opportunities for diagnosticians and therapists to educate themselves about historical and contemporary factors that affect oral language trajectories of many Indigenous children, and to become aware of the need to differentiate between oral language differences, delays and deficits. A similar effort has been made by the Australian professional organization for speech-language pathologists (Speech Pathology Australia, n.d.).

All of these efforts are elementary and general in nature, in part to keep pace with the degree of readiness of professionals and the public alike. Needed reforms are impeded by a lack of linguistic and educational research on Indigenous dialects, processes that support bidialectism, and strategies to ensure unbiased interpretations of Indigenous children’s speech and language performances.
Education policies to support children who speak nonstandard English dialects

Effective education policies regarding support for teaching and learning in various languages and dialects must be informed by a careful reading, not only of the research, but also of the social ecology in which the child is an active participant, to avoid inadvertently co-opting the child into language practices that could alienate them from their primary social group and to counter the prevailing tendency for educators to presume and impose what is in a child's best interest, irrespective of parents' preferences or understandings of the options and likely outcomes available to them. With respect to First Nation children in Canada, educators and other practitioners need to learn all they can about the First Nation communities and cultures in their local practice environment, for example, by attending community events or talking with Elders and other community members, as well as with community-based practitioners such as family support workers and public health nurses. Practitioners need to recognize that in no country are all Indigenous peoples exactly the same, that a variety of cultures and languages may distinguish Indigenous learners and their families from one another, and that parents may exhibit a spectrum of language socialization practices, attitudes, goals, concerns and degrees of readiness regarding the use of nonstandard and standard dialects of the dominant language. This point has also been emphasized by Eades (1991) with reference to the heterogeneity among Australian Aboriginal cultures and families. The individual educator or other practitioner does not have to wait for research to be done before making changes in practice that reflect cross-cultural sensitivity. Teachers and learning specialists can form partnerships with community members from various cultural and linguistic groups to develop useful, sensitive methodologies.

A first step that schools and other institutional settings (e.g., health care, recreation programmes) can take is to acknowledge the validity of children's particular English dialect. This acknowledgement can promote children's sense of being capable learners and of belonging in the mainstream school setting. Other recommendations for teachers and practitioners found in the literature, especially from Australia (Galloway, 2008;
Gould, 2008; Jones and Nangari, 2008; Moses and Wigglesworth, 2008), and offered by participants in the Canadian project (Ball, Bernhardt, and Deby; 2007; Peltier, 2016) include the following: (1) employ Indigenous teacher assistants who speak both the children’s nonstandard dialect and the standard dialect; (2) provide opportunities for peer play before engaging in conversation, assessment or structured language arts activities or interventions; (3) start with language reception and comprehension tasks rather than language production tasks; (4) avoid correcting children’s language production while they are storytelling or engaging in other spontaneous and creative speech; and (5) avoid teacher domination of classroom discussion; instead use a preponderance of peer-to-peer discourse and guided participation of less skilled learners by more skilled learners.

Several scholars note that Indigenous children whose home language is a nonstandard variant of English need some kind of bridging or transition support to prepare them to succeed in school (Phlipott, 2004; Simpson and Wigglesworth, 2008; Walton, 1993). Most promising in this regard are efforts to help Indigenous children add a second English dialect – in the words of Smith (2010), to be allowed the complicated gift of being many-voiced rather than merely replacing their home dialect. This additive, rather than subtractive, approach can support children’s cultural identity and pride in their family and community origins. Efforts in the United States, Australia and Canada are explored below.

A ‘linguistically informed’ approach in the US

African-American students in the US have long been misdiagnosed as having language impairment, erroneously labelled as handicapped, and inappropriately placed in limited English proficiency classes (Baugh, 1993; Wolfram, 1983, 1993). While no national policy exists, some highly visible efforts have been made to acknowledge African-American Vernacular English (AAVE), most notoriously an attempt by the Oakland Unified School District in California to recognize and teach AAVE as a distinct language (Morgan, 1999). This effort was an explosive failure, sparking the acrimonious ‘Ebonics debate’ (Perry and Delpit, 1998; Keulen et al., 1998).
Rickford (1999: 331) refers to ‘massive educational failure’ in supporting the academic success of African-American learners, citing evidence that attempts to stamp out or ignore AAVE have been unsuccessful as strategies for teaching standard English to AAVE-speaking children. Correction tends to have a detrimental effect by damaging student’s self-esteem, decreasing their interest in reading, and even increasing their use of nonstandard forms.

However, Rickford (1999) cites examples of what he calls a ‘linguistically informed’ approach in which language arts programmes validate AAVE in the classroom. In some jurisdictions, teachers are educated about AAVE and trained to distinguish between errors that are due to dialect difference and those due to reading difficulty. They are then better equipped to give appropriate feedback and decide when such feedback is necessary. Another method, contrastive analysis, focuses on raising students’ awareness of dialect differences and code switching; it has been successfully in programmes in Tennessee, Chicago and Atlanta (Rickford, 1999).

Some programmes advocate teaching African-American children to read and write in AAVE using dialect readers and then gradually transitioning to standard American English. In this way, the task of literacy acquisition is separated from the task of learning the standard. This approach, which Rickford calls ‘using the vernacular to teach the standard’ (p. 340) has been shown to produce dramatically better results than submersion in the students’ non-native variety. Rather than a panacea, dialect readers should be considered one of many possible resources for bidialectal education (Rickford and Rickford, 1995).

‘Two-way’ bidialectal education in Australia

Pioneering work has been done in Australia on English as a Second Dialect, where Aboriginal English dialects have been recognized as valid at the federal level (Malcolm et al., 1999). A ‘two-way’ bidialectal approach (Harris, 1991) comment that a continuum of Australian Aboriginal English exists, with a creole at one end and an almost standard variety at the other.
1990; Malcolm, 2001) recognizes the bidialectal and bicultural realities of many Aboriginal learners. Both Aboriginal and mainstream dialects, cultural practices and worldviews are incorporated into the classroom, in proportions that the community sees fit.

The success of a bidialectal approach depends on appropriate teacher training, curricula and methodologies, and the inclusion of more Aboriginal and ethnic minority teachers and teaching assistants in the education system. Researchers of nonstandard English dialects in North America can learn from the Australian experience (e.g., Berry and Hudson, 1997; Cahill, 2000; Eades, 1995; McRae, 1994; Simpson and Wigglesworth, 2008). The ways in which Australian educators have addressed Aboriginal students' norms of silence, directness and inhibition about being singled out may be relevant in other Indigenous learning contexts and could stimulate development of culturally appropriate curricula. It may also be worthwhile to examine Australian approaches to teacher education, especially regarding how to support teachers in doing ad hoc dialect research and assessment relevant to their community.

Standard English as a Second Dialect (SESD) programmes in Canada

Several provinces in Canada now have policies and funding to support school-based Standard English as a Second Dialect (SESD) programmes. Not much is known about these programmes, with the exception of a little research attention in British Columbia. A policy framework in this province provides substantial supplementary funding to school districts to support students who speak variations of English that differ significantly from the English used in the broader Canadian society and in school (British Columbia Ministry of Education, 2009). Over the past decade, the number

They note that Australian Aboriginal English typically arises from exposure to educational situations. In contrast, creoles develop in the absence of formal training. Because creoles are more clearly differentiated from standard English and have distinctive phonemic writing systems, they are often more readily accepted as separate grammatical systems, and therefore enjoy a relatively higher status than Australian Aboriginal.
of school districts to access this funding has increased rapidly. About 9% of primary school students in BC are identified by their parent or guardian as Aboriginal, and most of the students who benefit from this funding are Aboriginal, although the policy is not restricted to Aboriginal learners. The programme’s goal is to improve learners’ literacy skills. Criteria for a district to receive SESD funding are broad. The district must conduct an annual assessment of proficiency in standard English and design an annual instruction plan that lists specific services each student in an SESD programme will receive to improve their proficiency. Districts are expected to provide services using culturally relevant resources. An English as a Second Language specialist must participate in planning and delivering the programme (British Columbia Ministry of Education, 1999). Flexibility is provided for districts to use the funds in a variety of ways. A qualitative study conducted in five school districts in British Columbia showed that districts vary considerably in their definition of Standard English as a Second Dialect, assessment methods, personnel involved and approaches to dialect training (Campbell, 2011).

A systematic study to determine learning gains attributable to participation in SESD programmes was conducted by Battisti, Friesen and Krauth (2009). Although they did not conduct an analysis of pedagogical components used in SESD programmes, information they gathered indicated that strategies included specific pedagogical strategies for vocabulary development, specialized oral language instruction on a weekly basis, acquiring reading materials with Aboriginal content, and integrating strategies for oral language development into regular literacy programmes. Early findings indicate that the SESD funding has been highly effective at improving the reading skills of Aboriginal students, as measured by a foundation skills assessment exam administered to all students in grades 4 and 7. This benefit is concentrated among students in the lower end of the distribution of reading test scores gains (Battisti, Friesen, and Krauth, 2009).

These findings suggest the promise of initiatives to improve Aboriginal learners’ language skills. However, without programme ethnographies or other analysis of what the teachers do to secure students’ success, it is not known whether teachers are helping children to add a second dialect or merely replacing their home dialect with the school dialect. Nevertheless,
as a first step in evaluating the effectiveness of initiatives that recognize and somehow build on Indigenous learners' existing oral language, it warrants attention. It should also be noted that in British Columbia, a lack of consensus exists among Indigenous scholars about whether code switching should be encouraged. Some scholars argue that the goal should be policy support and public investment in Indigenous-language-mediated instruction. Other scholars argue that leaving their 'village English' behind and becoming singularly versed in standard English allows students to improve their chances for success in mainstream education, employment and civil society. Still others advocate a vision of plural identities and multilingualism that includes learning to use more than one dialect of the dominant language and to code switch from one to another depending on one's purpose in varying social situations.

Conclusion

Accommodations in a linguistically diverse society are often in the direction of the dominant cultural standard. However, this process reduces the heterogeneity among social groups that derives from our diverse histories and ecologies, just as the distinctive calls of the ravens in various parts of British Columbia may identify them with their respective places of origin within the region. The relentless pressure to relinquish the vestiges of one's distinctive origins in order to access the resources and privileges of the dominant social group with its dominant cultural education perpetuates processes of discrimination and minoritization associated with colonialism, hastens the process of assimilation, and promotes linguistic and cultural loss. Educators and other practitioners can help to sustain linguistic and cultural pluralism, even within individuals, through pedagogical, assessment and intervention practices that honour and support each family's and community's goals for children's speech and language development and educational success.
To support such linguistic and cultural pluralism, documentation is urgently needed of the linguistic, educational and cultural significance of nonstandard dialects of English in Canada and around the globe. Research with Indigenous community members on Indigenous dialects of English could be particularly useful as a complementary enterprise to language revitalization projects underway across Canada, the US, Australia, Aotearoa/New Zealand and elsewhere. Additionally, research is crucial to help teachers and speech-language specialists to identify children’s true language deficits in order to know when intervention is needed, what it should entail, and how it should proceed. Research is also needed that will guide educators in developing effective, culturally safe educational programmes for nonstandard dialect speakers. Much can be learned in this latter respect from the innovative work in Australia over the past decade to support Aboriginal children to learn ‘two ways.’

The practical goal of improving supports for children’s optimal development must always be measured in relation to communities’ own goals for the same (Ball, 2005). Culturally safe, decolonizing approaches to research emphasize central roles for Indigenous community representatives in defining and conducting the research, with clear written agreements regarding the conduct of a research project, including ethical principles that will guide the project, methods, data ownership, researchers’ accountability, project control, outputs and dissemination of findings (Apffel-Marglin and Marglin, 1996; Ball, 2005; Ball and Janyst, 2008; Canadian Institutes for Health Research, 2007; Mutua and Swadener, 2004; Smith, 1999). As a Lil’wat First Nation grandmother, Marie Leo, expressed in an interview about Indigenous goals for children's language and literacy (Ball and Lewis, 2005):

We are like Argyle socks, all intertwined and diamond. Our children have to cross over and back like the threads in those socks. To know how to do that they need to be able to listen to the voices of our ancestors which they can hear in our stories, telling them how to move in this world. They need to listen and learn from the voices of their friends who nowadays are from every part of the world living in this land people call Canada. And they need to listen and learn from the words of their teachers and textbooks. That's how they'll come to know how to live in the world still to come. One voice, one way to listen, one way to speak, is not enough for our
children. To know who they are and where they are going, they need to be able to hear many voices, listen to many peoples’ stories, and learn to speak with many different people about how they are moving forward and intertwining with the things and people – the other diamonds – that are part of their world.

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