

Ojibwe Revitalization at the University of Minnesota



BRENDAN FAIRBANKS
UNIVERSITY OF MINNESOTA



Ojibwe Language



- Southwest: *Ojibwa, Chippewa, Otchipwe, Ojibwe*
- Minnesota: *Ojibwe*
- East: *Nishnaabemwin (“Odaawaa”)*
- Northwest: *Saulteaux, Soto*

Minnesota Ojibwe Reservations



Ojibwe Language



- Polysynthetic language (“sentence words”)
- *Indaaggiowaabamaanaanig*
- ‘We should have went and seen them’

Morphemes:

- *in-daa-gii-o-waabam-aa-naan-ig*
- I-should-PAST-go.and-see-DIR-we-they

Longest Ojibwe Word



- 'Blueberry Pie'



- Miinibaashkimasiganibadagiin....

Longest Ojibwe Word



...wesijigananimoshiwibiitoshki...

Longest Ojibwe Word



...ganibakwezhigan.

Longest Ojibwe Word



- *miin* 'blueberry'
- *baashkimasigan* 'jam, preservers'
- *badagiinwesijigan* 'pie'
- *animosh* 'dog'
- *biitooshkigan* 'underwear'
- *bakwezhigan* 'bread'

Ojibwe is an Endangered Language



Minnesota Ojibwe (Treuer 2009)

- Red Lake: 400 speakers
- Leech Lake: 90 speakers
- Mille Lacs: 150 speakers
- White Earth: 15 speakers
- Fond Du Lac: 0 speakers
- Nett Lake: 20 speakers
- Grand Portage: 3 speakers
- St. Croix: 10 speakers

Total: **688** speakers in Minnesota

Initiatives at the University of Minnesota



- The university is not the usual place where language revitalization movements are hosted.
- Language revitalization movements tend to be grassroots efforts in tribal communities and reservations.
- The University of Minnesota is a “land grant” university.
- The university was built on land belonging to the Dakota nation until US government annexed their land for the use of farmers and settlers.

Initiatives at the University of Minnesota



- The Department of American Indian Studies at the University of Minnesota-Twin Cities currently teaches both Ojibwe and Dakota languages.
- There are three years of Dakota language instruction.
- There are four years of Ojibwe language instruction.
- **BA in Ojibwe degree program** created to give heritage students (and non-heritage students) an opportunity to gain a high proficiency in the Ojibwe language.
- Goal of the language program is **fluency**, NOT exposure.

Initiatives at the University of Minnesota



BA in Ojibwe Degree Program

<http://cla.umn.edu/ojibwe>

Initiatives at the University of Minnesota



Ojibwe is the language of the classroom

- The Ojibwe language classes are primarily taught in Ojibwe with some use of English when teaching about Ojibwe grammatical/linguistic concepts.

Underwear ball

- Students who want to ask or make a comment in English must hold the “underwear ball”.



Initiatives at the University of Minnesota



Weekly Immersion Lunches

- Instructors have lunch once a week with the students in the program so that students get an opportunity to either listen to the language being spoken, practice what they have learned, or both.
- Students hear the language in use.
- Students learn new vocabulary on a variety of topics.
- Reinforces their overall language learning.
- No underwear ball used.
- No particular topic.
- No planned activities.

Initiatives at the University of Minnesota



Ojibwe Immersion House “Ojibwewigamig”

- We created this program so that students can live together in an environment that is entirely in Ojibwe.
- NO ENGLISH rule in effect.
- Bathroom is the English room, in case students get too frustrated and need to communicate.
- Classes are not enough. The immersion house allows students to experience using Ojibwe in a variety of contexts, e.g. washing clothes, going shopping, daily chores, cooking, cleaning, arguments, etc.

Initiatives at the University of Minnesota



Ojibwe Immersion House “Ojibwewigamig”

- “Foreign” language houses such as this are effective in helping students become highly proficient in the target language.
- Foreign Language Housing at Brigham Young University - students report that they felt it helped their learning better than being in the country of origin.
- Normally, a native speaker of the target language lives with the students.
- We cannot do that because most of our fluent speakers are older or elderly.

Initiatives at the University of Minnesota



Ojibwe Immersion House “Ojibwewigamig”

- In BYU Foreign Housing, meals are eaten together so that conversations can be held in the target language.
- We plan to have instructors and natives speakers do a rotation for meals with the students since students will not be living with a native speaker of Ojibwe.
- We plan to have a good mixture of advanced student-to-beginning students. The BYU Foreign Language Housing program found that when there were no advanced language speakers in the house, learning was hindered.

Initiatives at the University of Minnesota



Ojibwemotaadidaa Omaa Gidakiiminaang 'Let Speak Ojibwe in our Own Country'

- We partner with an Ojibwe adult immersion academy on the Fond du Lac Reservation in Cloquet, Minnesota.
- NO ENGLISH rule in effect.
- Immersion combined with grammar instruction.



Miigwech!



Brendan Fairbanks
fair0061@umn.edu

Questions?

