

*Theme: Indigenous Languages: An important key to protecting the Arctic environment*  
0905 to 1045  
Tromsø, Norway

## A. Introduction

1. *Said without powerpoint*: Nakhweenjit doonch'yàa? Shoozhri' Hishinlai' oozhii ts'à' Alaska nahkat gwats'an ihłji. Shahan Katherine oozhii ts'à' shiti' Stiifin oozhii. Gwich'in ts'à' Koyukon Athabaskan ihłji. Shitsuu Soozan oozhii ts'à' shitsii Peter Shajol oozhii.
2. I will say the same thing I said in my language, but with the use of powerpoint.
  - PP 1: "cover sheet"
  - PP 2: Saying "how are you" to a bunch of people.
  - PP 3: Picture of self with name below.
  - PP 4: Map of Alaska.
  - PP 5: Picture of my mom and dad.
  - PP 6: Map of Gwich'in and Koyukon territories.
  - PP 7: Postcard of grandma "Soozan" and grandpa "Peter Shajol".
  - PP 8: That's it!

## B. Two key messages

As some of you may know, how I have introduced myself is a basic way in which to introduce yourself in an Indigenous language because it situates you into a family and Indigenous group.

The first point is what I have just said to you in the language I speak, Gwich'in, is the content learned over five days, one hour per day, in my university language classroom by adult language learners. Some of you may think this is a lot of language for students to learn, especially when they are expected to give a presentation after only five days. However, this "presentation" can be made in any way in which the student feels comfortable. For instance, through the use of technology, drama, pictures, use of real props, dyads, etc.

Many students come into my university language class with preconceived ideas about learning an Indigenous language. For instance, I have found from data analysis of my master's thesis that they think they will learn only *about* the language, i.e. grammar, such as the sounds of the language, word order, writing, etc. These are historical ways in which many language teachers teach a language. If you want your students to make progress in learning an Indigenous language, as a language instructor or teacher, you need to set high language learning expectations which are taught in context by using, for instance, props or pictures.

The second point I would like to make is that because Indigenous languages have historically been taught through the learning of grammar, it is really difficult to break out of that mode of thinking. The reason for this is because many language educators have been led to think that if they teach grammar, the learners will be able to speak. I have found that is not an effective way of teaching or learning a language.

C. Recommendations to symposium for consideration

As a result, my recommendation for consideration at this symposium is that Indigenous peoples who want to teach their ancestral language must do so by teaching it as a second language. My experience has been that teaching a language in the classroom needs to be done as real as if you were learning your language at home or in the community. Creating critical awareness of this phenomenon is of utmost importance as a part of a concerted effort if Indigenous peoples, not only of the Arctic, want to maintain or revitalize Indigenous languages. Knowing and understanding our languages is key to the survival of our cultures

\*The author refuses to capitalize the e in the spelling of english as a form of resistance to the dominant language.

D. Short Biography (forward to [csimon@inuitcircumpolar.com](mailto:csimon@inuitcircumpolar.com).)

Hishinlai' "Kathy R. Sikorski" is Gwich'in and Koyukon Athabascan (Dene) from Alaska, who is working simultaneously on her Master's and Ph.D. at the University of Alaska Fairbanks. She teaches Gwich'in at the university level, but has the current academic year off to write through a fellowship through the Second Language Acquisition Teacher Education (SLATE) grant (US Department of Education #S356A060055). Her 2008 master's thesis is called "Classroom Culture and Indigenous Classrooms", which sheds light on how to create a classroom culture that is conducive to Indigenous language learning, barring a more holistic way of Indigenous teaching and learning. Her dissertation will focus on language learners who are adamant about learning their ancestral language, despite the histories that have been placed on them in the form of ideology, identity and politics.