

Invitation to support reawakening pentl'ach

Mat Andreatta, Sarah Kell, Sarah Quinn, Bill Recalma, Jessie Recalma, Lisa Recalma, Michael Recalma, Suzanne Urbanczyk
 Qualicum First Nation, Ministry of Indigenous Relations and
 Reconciliation, University of Victoria
urbansu@uvic.ca

The last fluent speaker of pentl'ach passed away in the 1940's, and recent work has been undertaken by pentl'ach descendants to reawaken the language. This paper discusses how the reawakening pentl'ach team invited participants in LING 431/531 (Researching) Community-based initiatives in language revitalization, to develop projects to support their work.

Keywords: pentl'ach; experiential learning, community-based research

1 Background

Language reclamation is a multi-faceted endeavor, especially when there are no fluent first language speakers. The last fluent speaker of pentl'ach (Central Salish) passed away in the 1940's. Recently, a core team of pentl'ach descendants have begun to do work to reawaken the language. pentl'ach was a widely spoken language on the east coast of Vancouver Island, with early maps indicating three dialect regions from Cape Lazo to Nanoose (Duff, 1964). While many sources describe pentl'ach as extinct, there has never been a time when nobody knew pentl'ach. Since 2017, Qualicum First Nation has been building a team to support reawakening pentl'ach – more information about the pentl'ach team is discussed in §4. This paper discusses how the pentl'ach team (sometimes referred to as we below) invited participants of two University of Victoria courses to undertake projects in support of reawakening pentl'ach.¹

1.1 LING 431/531

The University of Victoria linguistics program has a number of experiential learning courses, that provide opportunities for students to work on projects to develop a number of research skills. One set of project-based courses is related to gaining experience in Indigenous language reclamation: LING 431 –Community-based initiatives in language revitalization and the graduate level, LING 531 – Researching community-based initiatives in language revitalization. The central

¹ We are grateful to the students in LING 431/531 for undertaking this work, and to First Peoples' Cultural Council for providing funding to support language planning to reawaken pentl'ach. We are using the current writing system to spell the language.

goals of these courses are to identify and understand issues in community-based language revitalization (CBLR), to actively engage in a critical examination of resources and literature relevant to CBLR, to locate oneself and identify how one can contribute to CBLR initiatives, and to actively engage in developing a plan or contributing to a CBLR project. In the context of a course, it isn't always possible to fully engage in projects, and a variety of options are often made available to the class, so that learners can find a project that is meaningful to them, as well as to a relevant community or community member.

One of the pentl'ach team members [Urbanczyk] was scheduled to teach these courses in January 2022 and approached the rest of the team about whether the class could work on projects to support reawakening pentl'ach. The pentl'ach team supported this and identified a number of potential project ideas that would benefit from linguistic expertise. In discussing the potential for projects, we noted that this would be the first time that non-community members would be invited to do research on pentl'ach by the Qualicum First Nation.

The pentl'ach team came to the class to invite the students to work on projects to support reawakening pentl'ach. As many team members live outside of Victoria, and there were concerns about the health of team members with a new wave of COVID-19 sweeping the region, the team members participated via Zoom. We prepared a slide presentation to introduce ourselves and the history of how this work started, as well as how linguistics students could fit into the work to reawaken pentl'ach. Students then had the opportunity to ask questions and get input and feedback for their projects and thanked the team for sharing their knowledge with the class.

2 Projects

Much of the groundwork required to awaken a sleeping language relates to engaging with documentation on the language and to have that documentation be available and accessible to community members to be able to learn from it (Lukaniec, 2022; Spence, 2018). One major source of documentation on pentl'ach comes from Franz Boas's field trip to the region in 1886. At that time, Boas worked with a speaker and transcribed a list of words and phrases and stories. These materials are part of the Boas collection at the American Philosophical Society (APS) and are available to the public to download. Prior to the start of the course, the instructor contacted the APS curator to gain access to the materials in the Boas collection that were related to pentl'ach and to let him know about the coursework. Two archival files (from the ACLS collection – Item S2j1 Comox and Pentlatch texts and S2j3 Pentlatch materials – Boas ca. 1890; ca. 1910) were made available to the class. A document outlining the materials, including information about pentl'ach and some initial project ideas identified by the pentl'ach team was prepared and shared with the class. A pentl'ach channel was created in Microsoft Teams for students to access the files and also to share resources as they were working on projects collaboratively. Relevant documents to support the work were also shared in the pentl'ach channel, including Galloway's (1988) article on Proto-

Central Salish sound correspondences and modern publications of the pentl'ach stories (Boas, et al., 2006; Kinkade, 2008).

Some class time was set aside for students to get into initial groups to discuss their interests and coordinate with each other. Thirteen students chose to work on pentl'ach projects. We had initially hoped to set up regular meeting times to share ideas outside of class and to discuss aspects of working with the archival materials, but no time was identified that worked for everyone. This meant that there were no shared times together to discuss language patterns found in Central Salish languages. The students did most of the work among themselves and some came to office hours with questions about things related to Central Salish language patterns and deciphering the handwriting in the Boas materials. Because most of the class time was spent learning about the work in CBLR in general, this also meant that there was very little class time or guidance on how to work with the materials. The students ended up working together to support each other and made significant progress in typing out the Boas materials and undertaking initial analyses. Having an accurate electronic representation of Boas file materials was identified early on as an important first step in the work, as there are no audio recordings that we are aware of to learn accurate pronunciation.

The kinds of projects students worked on covered a wide range of topics. The class created an electronic representation of all five of the texts collected by Boas from which they analyzed the patterns found (see Hashimoto, this volume) and developed spreadsheets of the two pentl'ach word lists. These aimed to represent Boas's orthographic system as close as possible to the original archival documents. Almost all the research papers conducted comparative work to compare what Boas documented on pentl'ach with some of the neighbouring Central Salish languages. This comparative work was identified as preliminary and focused on understanding a range of different constructions. This included understanding verb syntax and morphology by looking at motion auxiliaries (Hashimoto, this volume) and verbal suffixes (see Srikanth, this volume). One paper focused specifically on learning about reconstructing a syntactic phrase identified by the pentl'ach team: 'that man there' phrases. Other students compiled information about syntactic categories of determiners and adjectives. And two students worked together to learn how plurals are expressed in the two different corpora (word/phrase lists and stories).

Two projects involved working directly with the two word lists in the Boas materials, and prepared spreadsheets: one student typed up the entire English-pentl'ach word list and another worked with the German-pentl'ach word list to translate the German into English and provide numbers that corresponded with numbers in the wordlist, to make searching for information easier. In terms of lexical comparison, one of the students compiled a comparative spreadsheet using a word list developed by Morris Swadesh, which includes 200 common words; the aim of this project was to support understanding the sound correspondences among some key Central Salish languages better. One paper developed some work in reconstructing pentl'ach animal terms, while another paper looked at terms for

flora. And one paper compared some of the reduplicative patterns in pentl'ach with some of the patterns in ʔayʔajuθəm.

In some cases, the projects involved creating stand-alone projects, and in others, the research is embedded in their final papers. Students are being given the opportunity to revise their projects and papers with input and feedback from the instructor. They will then share their projects with the pentl'ach team, to support the work in reclaiming pentl'ach.

3 Summary

This project-based course provided the opportunity for a great deal of preliminary work to be done that can serve the community and future generations. All five texts and one complete word list were typed up, in an electronic format of Boas's handwriting. This means there are searchable documents that can be used to look for sentences and constructions as Boas originally transcribed them. Having these documents' representations of Boas's handwriting complements the work already done by one of the team members who has prepared spreadsheets of the two wordlists using a keyboard-friendly writing system to represent pentl'ach.

4 About the Authors

The pentl'ach team has a wealth of wisdom, knowledge and skills that complement each other to reawaken pentl'ach. This work started with a vision from the elected Chief of Qualicum First Nation (QFN), Michael Recalma. In 2017, he shared this vision with an Assistant Deputy Minister from the BC Ministry of Indigenous Relations and Reconciliation, who was able to resource the first stage of the project through seed funding and staff support. Sarah Quinn (BSc and MA), a settler of European ancestry, works for the Community and Social Innovation Branch of the Ministry of Indigenous Relations and Reconciliation and participates in this work as a project supporter. Around the same time, QFN member and Coast Salish artist Mat Andreatta conducted a research project with the First Nations and Endangered Languages program at UBC on pentl'ach following a similar and coinciding vision, yielding tangible results of specified pentl'ach language documentation. He soon began working with Chief Michael Recalma and Sarah Quinn and, in 2020, they received funding through First Peoples' Cultural Council to develop a language plan. This funding led to expanding the team to include Qualicum First Nation members Bill Recalma and Jessie Recalma in 2020. Bill is a pentl'ach knowledge keeper who worked as a fisherman up and down the coast. Jessie is a Contemporary Coast Salish artist and language worker, focusing on pentl'ach and related languages. Sarah Kell, a settler of English descent, then joined the team as the language planner; she has been working as an ally in Indigenous language communities in BC and Washington since 2002, supporting linguistic research and curriculum development. Sarah holds a BA in linguistics and an MEd in Indigenous Language Revitalization, and is interested in how linguistics can support Indigenous language education and reclamation. Su Urbanczyk joined the

same time and is a settler linguist, who has studied Central Salish languages and worked with several communities to support language reclamation work for over 30 years. She is a faculty member in Linguistics and was the instructor for the two courses. Once the funding was in place we were able to hire a project manager from QFN – Lisa Recalma, an accountant working for Saa'men Economic development, the pentl'ach language team, and Qualicum First Nation Indian Registration Administrator.

References

- Boas, F. (ca. 1890). *Pentlatch materials*. American Council of Learned Societies Committee on Native American Languages, American Philosophical Society (Item S2j.3), American Philosophy Society, Philadelphia, PA, United States.
- . (ca. 1910). *Comox and Pentlatch texts*. American Council of Learned Societies Committee on Native American Languages, American Philosophical Society (Item S2j.1), American Philosophy Society, Philadelphia, PA, United States.
- Boas, F., Bouchard, R., Kennedy, D., & Bertz, D. (2006). *Indian myths & legends from the North Pacific coast of America: A translation of Franz Boas' 1895 edition of Indianische Sagen von der Nord-Pacifischen Küste Amerikas*. Talonbooks.
- Duff, W., (1964). *The Indian history of British Columbia Vol. 1*. Memoir No. 5. Provincial Museum of British Columbia.
- Galloway, B. (1988). Some Proto-Central Salish sound correspondences. In W. Shipley (Ed.). *In honor of Mary Haas*. (pp. 293–343). Mouton de Gruyter.
- Kinkade, D. (2008). The Pentlatch myth corpus. In M. T. Thompson & S. M. Egesdal (Eds.) *Salish myths and legends: One People's stories* (pp. 84–103). University of Nebraska Press.
- Lukaniec, M. (2022). Managing data from archival documentation for language reclamation, In A. L. Berez-Kroeker, B. McDonnell, E. Koller, & L. B. Collister (Eds.), *The open handbook of linguistic data management* (pp. 315–325). The MIT Press. <https://doi.org/gnzrxm>
- Spence, J. (2018). Learning languages through archives. In Hinton, L., L. Huss, & G. Roche (Eds). *The Routledge handbook of language revitalization* (pp.179 – 187). Routledge Taylor & Francis Group.