

# Multilateral Collaboration toward CoLang 2020

## A Guide for CoLang 2020 Participants and Facilitators<sup>1</sup>

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This article is based on a presentation given at the 2019 meeting of the Linguistics Society of America in New York City, during the “Natives4Linguistics” panel. The panel was co-organized by Wesley Leonard, Megan Lukaniec, and Adrienne Tsikewa. The goal of the panel was to present findings from the Native4Linguistics meeting, a satellite workshop at LSA 2018 in Salt Lake City.

This writeup outlines themes for CoLang 2020 and the ongoing work of the local organizing committee members for CoLang 2020.<sup>2</sup> It is my hope that this will help prospective participants, workshop facilitators, and future hosts of CoLang with their own goals with respect to collaborative language research on endangered languages.

The Natives4Linguistics meeting was held as a 2018 LSA satellite workshop lead by Wesley Leonard, Megan Lukaniec, and Adrienne Tsikewa. The idea of the workshop was to guide the current linguistics field, which is heavily influenced by Western ways of studying languages, and expand linguistic science by broadening Native American participation by

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<sup>1</sup> I would like to acknowledge the organizers of the Natives4Linguistics, Wesley Leonard, Megan Lukaniec, and Adrienne Tsikewa, as well as CoLang co-director Susan Penfield, CoLang co-hosting collaborator Richard Littlebear, and the people from Indigenous communities I consulted with during the preparation period for the activities described here. I also acknowledge the Committee for Endangered Languages and Their Preservation at the Linguistics Society of America for their support. I also thank the CoLang 2020 sponsors: NSF DEL and NSF DEL/TCUP, ELF, and LSA. Finally, I would like to thank Mary Linn and CoLang Advisory Circle co-conveners Ewa Czaykowska-Higgins and Susan Gehr (2016-2018).

<sup>2</sup> The presentation also included a brief history of CoLang, which has been omitted from this article.

emphasizing that Native American intellectual traditions, needs, and epistemologies can guide the research questions, methods, products, and protocols of the field of Linguistics (Leonard 2019). Natives4Linguistics is an ongoing project, and members' activities can be viewed at [natives4linguistics.wordpress.com](http://natives4linguistics.wordpress.com).



Participants at Natives4Linguistics at LSA 2018 in Salt Lake City, Jan-4-7, 2018

I participated in this workshop so that I could reflect its guidance in the development of CoLang 2020. CoLang is an international Institute (i) for language activists, teachers, linguists, and students from language communities and academia (ii) for obtaining hands-on skills in technology, an understanding of basic linguistics, and information about various practices in language documentation and revitalization in collaborative contexts. The institute creates multi-dimensional networks among community language workers, teachers, researchers, and students. The next CoLang, in 2020, will be held on the campus of the University of Montana (UM), co-hosted by the UM and Chief Dull Knife College, a tribal college in Lame Deer, Montana.

### **THE CHALLENGES**

The goal of Natives4Linguistics includes increasing Native participation and creating a Native-friendly environment, and CoLang is known already as a place that brings scholars and language workers from Indigenous communities and academics together. Also, there has already been an increasing interest in incorporating Native perspectives in CoLang. Our challenge, therefore, is to find ways to enhance the environment and make it even more Native-friendly. This perspective invited us to revisit the original ideas of CoLang. Consulting with Susan Penfield, a co-director of InField (CoLang's earlier iteration) and CoLang, and former CoLang organizers and instructors, we were able to remind ourselves of the "CoLang Spirit."

### **CoLang 2020 Themes**

- Language reclamation
- Native perspectives
- Indigenous language pedagogy
- Interdisciplinarity
- Technology

The CoLang Spirit is not found in any publication, but rather was derived from experience attending earlier institutes and exchanging conversation with previous facilitators and

developers. We realize that modifications to our understanding of it may be necessary. Still, with this CoLang Spirit in mind, the question for us became: How Native-friendly has CoLang truly been? Should the next CoLang be more or less the same as the previous institute? I have been communicating with participants and organizers of previous CoLangs, and found that many feel that CoLang needs more Indigenous representation among scholars and participants to fulfill the CoLang Spirit.

### CoLang Spirit

- Collaborative teaching and learning
- Community involvement
- Indigenous scholar participation

Participating in Natives4Linguistics helped to remind us of this very important concept -- the importance of Indigenous voices in guiding the field of linguistics, and I believe that we can work to illuminate the CoLang Spirit! Revisiting the motivation of the Natives4Linguistics workshop, its core component is to “expand linguistic science by broadening Native American participation by emphasizing that Native American *intellectual traditions, needs, and epistemologies* can guide the research questions, methods, products, and protocols of the field of Linguistics” (Leonard 2019). The discussions in the 2018 LSA workshop have been distilled into this beautiful graphic:



Among the comments shown, those that stand out in the context of CoLang organization are:

- Languages help stay centered and connect to the land.
- We need to be sensitive to the colonial backgrounds and strive for more inclusion.
- Leaving the traditional classroom and going to local communities [is critical].

**TWO GOALS**

For us to successfully develop the institute, we set two basic goals:

1. Increase Native American and/or Indigenous participation at multiple levels: organizers, instructors, and participants.
2. Learn about local communities’ current language activities, concerns, and needs to shape the institute’s design.

**Goal 1** is to increase Native American and other Indigenous participation at multiple levels.

**ORGANIZER LEVEL:** It is important to represent *collaboration* at the level of institute’s organizers. Besides the co-directors – Susan Penfield and myself – the team consists of Richard Littlebear (Northern Cheyenne), who is the president of and a language activist at Chief Dull Knife College of the Northern Cheyenne tribe in Montana; Alyce Sadongei (Kiowa/Tohono O’odham), the project coordinator at the American Indian Language Development Institute (AILDI); and the linguistics faculty at the University of Montana (all non-Indigenous).

The slide features a title 'Increasing Native American Participation' in bold black text. Below the title, the text 'Multiple levels' is followed by a bulleted list: 'Organizers', 'Facilitators', and 'Participants'. To the right of the list are four colored boxes representing organizational partners: a blue box for 'Co-Directors', a green box for 'Chief Dull Knife College (Tribal College in MT)', an orange box for 'American Indian Language Development Institute', and a purple box for 'U of Montana Faculty'. Below these boxes is a group photograph of seven people with name tags. The names are: Tully Thibeeau, Irene Appelbaum, Leora Ben-el, Alyce Sadongei, Richard Littlebear, Susan Penfield, and Mizuki Miyashita. On the left side of the slide, there is a vertical red-tinted image of a snowy mountain landscape. Below this image are logos for AILDI, the University of Montana, and 'COLANG 2020'.

**FACILITATOR LEVEL:** CoLang 2020 will use the term “facilitator” for what has been called an “instructor” at previous institutes. This terminology shift was brought up during the CoLang Advisory Circle meeting at Florida’s CoLang in June 2018. “Facilitator” better represents the typical tasks of CoLang workshop leaders, who assist participants’ learning of workshop content, guide them in sharing their own thoughts, and enhance their overall CoLang experience. Montana CoLang has adopted this terminology, and we aim to increase Indigenous scholars’ participation as workshop facilitators. Ideally, every workshop will be facilitated by a pair of scholars, at least one of whom will be Indigenous.

**PARTICIPANT LEVEL:** Though CoLang has always been attended by both academics and community members, most participants have been non-Indigenous. We intend to increase the number of participants from Indigenous communities. As we are located in a state with seven tribal reservations, we are committed to encouraging people from these communities to attend CoLang. To pursue this goal at the participant level, we recognize the importance of making CoLang a useful place for potential participants. At present, we do not know whether it will be useful for community members, and we realize that some research needs to be done in this area – which connects to the second goal.

**Goal 2** is to learn about local communities’ current language activities, concerns, and needs to shape the institute’s design. To reach this goal, we have been working with Richard



Littlebear from Chief Dull Knife College, the co-host of CoLang 2020, and began conducting the Collaborative Language Planning Project (or CLPP), supported by NSF collaborative planning grants [BSC- 1800820 DEL] [BCS-1800617 DEL/TCUP]. This project's goals are to:

- Reach out to tribal colleges in Montana
- Create a state-wide collaborative group
- Exchange experiences, concerns, and ideas regarding local languages
- Identify needs from the communities and tribal colleges
- Incorporate the identified needs in CoLang 2020

### CLPP PROJECT

In the state of Montana, there are seven tribal reservations, and there is one tribal college on each reservation. These are represented on the map below. The resident tribal groups of the Flathead Indian Reservation (1) are the Confederated Salish, consisting of the Bitterroot Salish tribe, the Pend d'Oreille tribe, and the Kootenai tribe. The Blackfeet Nation is on the Blackfeet Reservation (2). The Rocky Boy's Reservation (3) is the home of the Chippewa-Cree tribe. The Assiniboine and Gros Ventre tribes reside on the Fort Belknap Reservation (4). The Fort Peck Reservation (5) is the home of the Assiniboine tribe and the Sioux tribe. The Northern Cheyenne tribe lives on the Northern Cheyenne Reservation (6). The Crow tribe lives on the Crow Reservation (7).



(Taken from Montana State Legislature 2016)

In addition to consulting with Richard Littlebear (our collaborator), we consulted many individuals from Montana tribal communities on and off campus to identify contacts who are active in language revitalization and may be interested in and willing to participate in the project.<sup>3</sup> We invited representatives from colleges, and people from six agreed to participate

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<sup>3</sup> Amanda Belcourt (Cree), Naatosi Fish (Blackfeet, UM), Michelle Guzman (Shoshone, UM), Salena Hill (Crow, UM), Kevin Kicking Woman (Blackfeet), Twila Old Coyote (Crow), Caroline Running Wolf (Crow), Corey Sangrey (Cree, Stone Child College), Shane Sangrey (Cree, UM), Kate Shanley (Assiniboine, UM), Aaron Thomas (Navajo, UM), Dustin Whitford (Cree), David Yarlott (Crow, Little Big Horn College).

in the CLPP project.<sup>4</sup> They included individuals with various experiences and statuses – such as a tribal college president, language teachers, program coordinators, recent graduates, native speakers, second language learners, and researchers (note that these roles overlap for some members). All shared similar goals to do with language preservation and revitalization.

On May 17, 2018, we had our first meeting on the campus of the University of Montana. The representatives from the Montana tribal colleges traveled to Missoula, and we had an all-day discussion meeting prompted by a collection of open-ended questions regarding, for example, their language course offerings, resources for language activities, teacher training, and so forth. At the end of the day, we created a wish list. Within the wish list, we found some items such as *language survey* and *teaching methods* that are closely related to what CoLang has been offering. In addition, there was something that all participants were very interested in – in fact, the room was filled with heated discussion when this topic was raised – that is not currently incorporated in typical CoLang curriculum. That topic was Class 7.

### **Class 7**

- A teacher licensure approved by the Office of Public Instruction in the State of Montana.
- Available for tribal “experts” on language and culture – to become state-approved teachers without having to obtain a regular education degree.

The CLPP team realized that we needed to incorporate Class 7 in the development of CoLang 2020. Susan, Richard, and I had online meetings to explore our options for learning more about community members’ needs. As a result, we developed the idea of offering a workshop on language pedagogy and related topics at Richard’s institution, Chief Dull Knife College on the Northern Cheyenne Reservation. We had this workshop approved by the Office of Public Instruction for Continuing Education Units (also known as CEU), which are required credits for teachers to obtain in order to renew their teaching license. In this way, by providing Class 7 teachers with teacher license renewal credits, we are also able to learn more about their interests and needs.

### **WORKSHOP AT CHIEF DULL KNIFE COLLEGE**

Susan and I drove to Chief Dull Knife College in Lame Deer, Montana. The core members (Susan, Richard, and I) had a meeting, offered a workshop, and had a debriefing all on Thursday, November 15, 2018. It was important to avoid holding the workshop on Friday, November 16, which was the

#### **Workshop at Chief Dull Knife College**

- Proficiency
- Assessment
- Language acquisition
- Training venues



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<sup>4</sup> Sean Chandler (Aaniiih Nakoda College), Iva Croff (Blackfeet Community College), Helen Parker (Stone Child College), Mina Seminole (Chief Dull Knife College), Steve Small (Chief Dull Knife College), Aspen Smith (Salish Kootenai College), Michael Turcotte (Fort Peck Community College).

day of a big basketball event in the community of Lame Deer. The local tribal members are huge basketball fans, and we expected very few participants if we had offered the workshop on that day. There were 20 participants attended the workshop and we felt this was a good turnout.

According to the evaluations we conducted at the end of the workshop, most participants thought it was useful for their teacher training. Scores indicated that the participants were

- Proficiency measurement tools (ACTFL, NILI's Benchmarks, age based assessment)
- Language acquisition (first language acquisition)
- **Teaching Methods** (Teaching infants and toddlers)
- **Curriculum development**
  - Classroom management/lesson planning
  - When writing/reading should be introduced
- Training venues for language teachers
- More open discussion among Class 7 teachers on language development
- History and culture (Respect for Identity, preparing students for adulthood)
- How it is really encouraged to teach at a young age
- Elderly teaching to young teachers
- Develop an area where the language would be used fluently around children

most interested in learning about how children and adults acquire languages in general. They were also interested in language proficiency and assessment. The participants also provided comments regarding what they want to learn more about. Some selected comments are shown below.

Besides the topics we covered in the workshop, participants were especially interested in learning about teaching methods and curriculum development. Through this workshop and the evaluation, we are beginning to learn about the needs of language teachers in the Northern Cheyenne community. We are excited to learn more about community language workers' interests by visiting other tribal colleges through CLPP.

#### **WHAT'S MORE: FUTURE COLLABORATIONS**

In planning CoLang 2020, we are actively seeking other opportunities to increase Native American perspectives and collaboration with Indigenous communities.

Natives4Linguistics led us to another exciting collaboration and implementation: CoLang 2020 will collaborate with the American Indian Language Development Institute (AILDI), which has been in operation for 40 years. Its mission is to (i) provide critical training in language revitalization, (ii) strengthen efforts to revitalize and promote the use of Indigenous languages across generations, and (iii) engage educators, schools, and Indigenous communities in transformative teaching and purposeful research. Details of the collaboration are still in progress; we are looking forward to developing this integration of institutes.

Also, the logo of CoLang 2020 was designed by Kaylene Big Knife, a member of the Chippewa-Cree nation in Montana. Ms. Big Knife graduated from the University of Montana and is a student in the Native American Linguistics MA program at the University of Arizona. The logo includes themes of bitterroot flowers and huckleberries, which are traditionally and geographically important natural resources in Montana.

Finally, some of the CoLang 2020 workshops will be held in the Payne Family Native American Center on the UM campus. The building houses the Native American Studies program, American Indian Student Services, and the Elouise Cobell Land and Culture Institute. The Cobell Institute space includes a planetarium and land-culture lab. We are planning to hold Native astronomy shows at the planetarium.

### **SUMMARY**

As the CLPP develops, we are starting to create a statewide collaborative environment. We are looking forward to integrating our findings in the design of CoLang 2020. In addition, the CLPP has implications beyond CoLang in that it will build long-term working relationships for effective teaching and purposeful research between the University of Montana and the tribal colleges involved.

One ongoing challenge is that balancing Native and non-Native participation must also enhance the incorporation of Native perspectives. We need to be careful to avoid Indian tokenism. CoLang should not be a place where Native students are trained in the way non-Native linguists are typically trained, including myself. It must be a place where Native students can participate as who they are, sustaining their cultural beliefs. All participants can learn from each other.

Reaching this goal is not something that I can do alone – not even with my organizing committee alone. It must be done through collaboration among all the organizers, facilitators, and participants – and anyone else who cares about this issue. The Natives4Linguistics workshop and this panel have given me a chance to re-visit the CoLang Spirit and to bring CoLang up to another level. In closing, I would like to invite the audience to think about what the real connection between linguistics and language revitalization is.

### **References**

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