

Beyond Bilingualism: Indigenous languages' place in the lands now called Kanata¹

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The road to the creation of language policy in Canada doomed Indigenous languages from the beginning, ignored from the time of Confederation in 1867 (Derwing and Munro, 2007). “Canada has been officially bilingual since its founding” notes Gourd (2007, p. 122). Colonial attitudes towards Indigenous people denied their involvement when language policy was being determined in Canada. The Royal Commission on Bilingualism and Biculturalism established in 1963, through both title and intention pre-determined the outcomes in relation to Indigenous languages as its focus was limited to the “two founding races” (Innis, 1973, Foreword). From this basis of cultural and linguistic imperialism, Indigenous languages were treated as if they did not exist. Hague & Patrick (2014) explain, “indigenous language interests continued to be marginalised in policy priorities shaped by the Canadian state's colonialist and racist underpinnings.... [and] little place for indigenous languages was recognised by those with the power to shape Canadian policy” (p. 28). After more than a century of exclusion, following decades of Indigenous advocacy efforts, the Government of Canada passed an *Act Respecting Indigenous Languages* (Bill C-91, 2019). Now, adequate implementation and long-term, stable funding for Indigenous language education to ensure language survival is needed.

With adequate resources – and efforts of both Indigenous and non-Indigenous people – Indigenous languages could be restored within three generations. A national project led by Indigenous language champions, educators, scholars, and non-Indigenous allies from across Canada came together in 2016 to engage in positive action through a federally-funded, Indigenous-led language revitalization research project, entitled *NEȪOLNEW* (*one mind-one people*). The name signifies the spirit of collaboration and unity towards the goal of Indigenous language revitalization and maintenance, embracing the diversity of languages across distinctive Indigenous communities and cultures. The overall goals of the project are to document successful language programs, strengthen leadership capacity, share knowledge, and create political pressure for federal, provincial and territorial action that provides meaningful support for Indigenous language retention, revitalization and recovery. This collaborative agenda across language groups and communities, together with settler-allies, is critical in the continuation and revival of Indigenous languages. These languages are “part of our shared heritage as Canadians” (FPCC, 2014) and therefore our shared futures and shared responsibility too. Together we must take a stand to restore Indigenous languages, the original of these lands, a place where languages should thrive alongside, not instead of each other.

¹ Huron-Iroquois word meaning “village” from which the name Canada was derived.