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Reclaiming Dákwanjè for my Family, for my People

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By

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“For language revitalization, the goal is language **use**, not language learning. Language **use** drives language learning” (Hinton, 2015, as cited in Zahir 2015)

Please let me begin with a personal introduction of my humble beginnings, my mother is from the Kwach'al area (around Champagne, Yukon) while my father is from the Bella Bella, Kimsquit area. My English name is Stephen Michael Reid, while my Lingit name is Khâsha. I am a father to five beautiful junena (children), a husband to my supportive wife, Krista Reid (nee Mudry). This has been the staging grounds of my masters project, my family, my home. Our family is nestled in Dákwanjè (Southern Tutchone) ancestral territory, Whitehorse, Yukon Territory Canada. There are four Dákwanjè nations that cite Dákwanjè as one of their nations languages: Champagne & Aishihik, Kluane, Taa'an Kwach'an, and the Kwanlin Dun First Nation whose combined populations number 2700 citizens, as of 2011 (Aboriginal Affairs and Northern Development Canada). The number of proficient speakers of Dákwanjè, from this membership is drastically low. UNESCO places our fluent speakers at 40, thereby categorizing Dákwanjè as a critically endangered language.

With this stark reality, I now bring you to my work through the University of Victoria's Master's in Language Revitalization Program. Though there are many components, the heart of my project is giving Dákwanjè a place to live in my home with my family. I was inspired and advised by Indigenous language scholars, ʔəswəli, (Zalmay Zahir) and Carson Viles who brought to life a methodology called, 'Reclaiming Language Domains'. In this methodology ones language, "...envisions the world as broken up into different places and activities" (Viles, p. 74). For example, one's 'home' could be a domain that could then be broken into smaller sub-domains. A

sub-domain under the home could be the kitchen, and a sub-topic under the kitchen could be making toast. So reclaiming a 'domain' becomes a, "multi-step process." (Viles, p. 74) My projects guiding question was: **How can using the, "reclaiming domains" model increase my use and my families use of Dákwanjè?"** While my second question was, **What makes this method successful in language regeneration?** To answer these questions I chose to focus my efforts to my kitchen, I put duct tape at both entrances to my kitchen. For six focused weeks whenever I stepped over that duct tape I only spoke Dákwanjè. The heart of this methodology is in the term 'reclaiming' - to reclaim my kitchen is to reclaim that space for Dákwanjè. Once reclaimed for the language you hold that line, never to revert back to english again. So while my efforts were focused within six weeks, my projects focus goes on indefinitely.

My greatest asset to draw from has been an amazing elder named, K'axhnuxh. This project allowed me to bring all his language teachings to life with my family, in my kitchen. It wasn't long before my labeling became more refined, instead of just 'butter' I soon started researching and compiling phrases around very specific domain activities, 'how to make toast', 'how to boil eggs', 'how to wash the dishes' which included a step by step vocabulary. Further to labeling my kitchen is the discipline to stick to your guns and never use English in that space again. This was not easy, to be honest there were many instances where I would hop out of the kitchen and spew forth what was on my mind in the english language. Even with this misstep,

don't hear speak our language, I hear them talk English." (S. Reid, video journal, February 8, 2016) Once I expressed these feelings I felt a rush of energy and my body warmed up. Though saddened by this realization, it was also liberating. Still, by the end of the school day I was exhausted. I couldn't quit though, I had to go get some groceries with my two young sons. I was tired and didn't want to talk to anyone, but realized I needed to exchange my toonie for a loonie.

