11.7: Speaking Mohawk and Reconciliation

In this unit, Dr. Kanatawakhon-Maracle shares his view that language will play a vital role in reconciliation efforts, and talks about some of the challenges of maintaining a language when English is so dominant in Canadian society.

A YouTube element has been excluded from this version of the text. You can view it online here:
https://ecampusontario.pressbooks.pub/essentialsoflinguistics/?p=233

Video Script

[CA: I mean I was thinking about your students, like, are, are they going to speak Mohawk to their kids when they have kids, do you think?]
I think it’s really up to, up to the student, I mean, they may have thought you know learning the language is difficult. Finding a compatible partner who also speaks the language is going to be the real test. And some of them have, have found partners who, and they have raised kids, they’re raising kids together.

[CA: So are there kids who are growing up who are learning to speak it as they’re growing up?]

Yeah.

[CA: That’s starting to happen more?]

Yeah.

People don’t realize that learning language is a lifelong… I, every now and then I’ll run across vocabulary — oh yeah, wow this word — and then just … learning new vocabulary, words I hadn’t heard before or words that I’d heard but I didn’t have time to figure out the context and so, always in a state of language learning you know even after you’re a speaker.

We need language. I don’t know how we function without language. And nowadays with Native people you know, so much of this, this reconciliation thing going on and that sort of thing. Years ago in my home community, a lot of farmers that lived around the territory also spoke Mohawk. Very minimal in a way and stuff like that because they hired a lot of people from the territory to work on their farms. So they learned Mohawk. They learned it to a degree — you could go into stores in Deseronto and shopkeepers would, you know, would deal with, with the people in Mohawk. Now, it was Mohawk that would be related to the whole buying and selling and this sort of thing that but they did that. Now, to me, that’s an aspect of reconciliation. That’s where two groups have reconciled with each other — okay you’re there, you speak your language but I will learn to speak with you mostly because I want your money — and … we, you know, we’ll speak your language because we need your goods. I mean there’s always a give and take on any, any two groups that have reconciled with each other but I think at the same time, too, when people take time to learn your language, they do have a certain respect.

[CA: That’s what I was thinking — it certainly shows respect, that I value interacting with you enough to do it in your language.]

Yeah, and the ones that want to interact more, learn more of the language.