

BNAS Board Report January 2024

The year of 2024 has started off on a high note for the BNAS Department. The first Indigenous recipient of a Golden Globe for best Actress in a feature film, Lily Gladstone, spoke niitsii•po´•sin in front of millions of people. Her positive actions on the big stage allowed many of our students to proudly translate her words for their families. These students were given the opportunity to display their proficiency in the Blackfoot language in front of their loved ones and, ultimately, in front of the world.

This department has taken great pride in our transparency with sharing the materials we have created with respect to our mother tongue. Surrounding schools De La Salle and East Glacier Public Schools, whose students feed into our beloved Browning High School, have received PD from our departments and use, to some degree, our curriculum. In addition, the Blackfoot Language Instructor at the University of Montana, Haley Jane Running, implements the BNAS curriculum, Kevin Kickingwoman winning being recognized the Montana Teacher of the Year, Lea Whitford creating a powerful relationship with the Montana Digital Academy, and Golden Globe winner Lily Gladstone mentioning Robert Hall in her AP interview has shining a statewide and national light on our department.

KRTV in Great Falls ran a story on the BNAS director (he combed his hair but didn't shave) ran on January 12, 2014. On January 18th and 19th journalist Karin Brulliard from the Washington Post, will be visiting our department and select BNAS classrooms. The BNAS praises Lily Gladstone for her trail blazing and the momentum and love she returned to the BNAS department and the entire Blackfoot Confederacy and all other Indigenous peoples.

Progress in curriculum development:

The Blackfoot writing system coupled with the color based curriculum has been a pivotal step ladder in progressing our instructors and student's proficiency. Blackfeet teachers have remarked on how the writing system has been "life changing" due to its stability to retain integrity with the oral production. The color coding allows the reader to see the different parts to a word, example: we spell the name 'Big Wolf' as $\bar{o}'m\tilde{k}\check{a}ko'iyii$. We break this down as $\bar{o}'m\tilde{k}\sim + \sim\check{a}ko'iyii \rightarrow \bar{o}'m\tilde{k}\check{a}ko'iyii$. The blue part translates to 'big' and the red to 'wolf'. Along with this method we must explain why the base word for 'wolf,' $m\check{a}ko'iyii$, is $\sim\check{a}ko'iyii$. The [~] symbol is used to show where a word will 'fix' on to another word. So, $m\check{a}ko'iyii$ is a free word we can turn it into a prefix, $m\check{a}ko'iy\sim$ (for 'wolf woman' $m\check{a}ko'iy\check{a}akii$), a suffix, $\sim\check{a}ko'iyii$ (as in 'Big Wolf' $\bar{o}'m\tilde{k}\check{a}ko'iyii$), and an infix, $\sim\check{a}ko'iy\sim$ (for 'big wolf woman' $\bar{o}'m\tilde{k}\check{a}ko'iy\check{a}akii$). (these are called 'affixes.' Blackfoot also has 'circumfixes,' an affix that surrounds another affix, the curriculum currently covers this). To make it clear, when a prefix is attached to $m\check{a}ko'iyii$ it loses the 'm' sound, therefore we write it as $\sim\check{a}ko'iyii$.

In developing a curriculum for a language that philosophically diverges greatly from the dominant language, English, we must accept the much is lost in translation. However, we are developing ideas on how to make the mitigate such loss. For instance, English does not of an affix that attaches to a word to denote a command, but Blackfoot does. if your English-speaking coach wants their entire team to run they simply scream 'Run' but in Blackfoot you attach the plural command suffix ~k', so you scream *ō'ksskāasi*k'. To retain an echo of the original Blackfoot our curriculum presents the English translation as 'run!!' (the singular command [~t'] will be represented as one exclamation points and the plural command [~k'] will us two, as seen in the example).

The more complex we go into the verbs the more complex the order of procedure becomes. In verbs that require an object and a subject (linguists call them 'transitive verbs' but we want to call them something less 'caddy' and simply refer to them as transfer verbs) a lot of the Blackfoot meaning is lost in translation. To combat this we have added layers to the translation. In the example sheet you see the example:

nitt~ _____ ~^wăa >>>	I _____ him/her >>>
nitt~ _____ ~^k' <<<	Me _____ s/he <<<

The red line indicates where a verb will go and the arrows below the red line is purple, corresponding with the purple morpheme. In Blackfoot those parts of the verb lets the listener know 'the direction' of the verb- whether the speaker is saying the they are performing this verb unto a 3rd person or if a 3rd person is performing the verb on them. Also, the [^] symbol is used to indicate a phonological rule. Example:

~^wăa
<u>_____c</u> ~^wăa → <u>_____c</u> ~ăa >>> >>>
Example:
nitt~ <u>aiksimătsim</u> ~^wăa → nitt~ <u>ăaiksimătsim</u> ~ăa → nittaiskimătsimăa >>> >>>

The curriculum will have explanations of all the symbols, in the box above the 'c' indicates a consonant. What we see with the line of progress is _____c~^wăa → _____c~ăa, or when a verb ends in a consonant and meets up with the ~wăa morpheme the 'w' is

eliminated. This is a phonological rule. It's the same as the 'm' being deleted in the example of 'Big Wolf.'

•—m/n~x—• → •—~x—•
ăakiiko'an + iiks → ăakiiko'aiiks

&

•—x~m/n—• → •—x~—•
ō'm'k + năapii → ō'm'kăapii

Ok, back the transfer verbs and a 'standard order of operation.' Rather than translating nittăanissîăa ninnă directly to 'I am telling the man' we have inserted another step in between the final translation:

nittăanissîăa ninnă

I saying to man

* The [\gg] arrows indicate that in the translation from Blackfoot to English, 'I' is the subject, and 'man' is the object.

≈ I am saying to the man

This becomes more noticeable in the next example:

nittăanikk' ninnă

me saying to man

*The [\ll] arrows indicate that in the translation from Blackfoot to English, 'me' is the object, and 'man' is the subject.

≈ a man is saying to me

We see that in the middle example the purple color morpheme is not represented on the translation but it still shows up to indicate to the *translator* that the must read 'me saying to man' from right to left! Then, we reach our final translation of 'a man is saying to me.'

This process will allow learners to see what exactly being lost when translating Blackfoot to English and, as a language revivalist, I am thrilled with this told we have discovered. Credit needs to be shared with BHS senior Tanner Iron Pipe for helping us discover this tool.

Lastly, Our BNAS assessments are coming along. Lea Whitford has been a champion in ensuring our staff not only administers the assessment but also acts as a lifeline whenever technical difficulties arise. Her skills in networking and building a working

relationship with the state has truly been critical to the BNAS department. The current analysis of the assessment is attached.

Thank you