

BNAS report for November 5, 2017

I have been collecting word lists and other Blackfoot Language materials from random places around the rez and Canada. I then transcribe such materials into the writing system I believe is the singularity of writing nītsī•pō'•sin, which is the Big Bull writing system. I have started with various lists that I have made available to our language teachers through email but will also start giving paper copies to the principals of the schools (I know how emails can get buried and/or accidentally erased). The lists thus far cover: animals, numbers, misc nouns, days of the week, months, commands, foods, and places. These lists total to 469 words. I have yet to do colors, mainly cause of the major differences in animate and inanimate forms but I am thinking of how to navigate this situation.

In addition, I have transcribed a story recorded by Earl Old Person called 'Turnip Woman' and have shared writing and audio via email to Blackfoot lang instructors. Transcribed the 'Good Road' prayer recorded at BCC by Diana Burd and Mike La Fromboise and shared audio and writing via email to same group. I have transcribed 'The Pledge of Allegiance' recorded by Earl Old Person in May 2015 and made that available. Again, if one wants these they merely need to contact the BNAS director. Further, I have transcribed a Năāpii story, "Năāpii and the mice" into a readable form but have no audio to accompany it.

I am still working to instill a consistent writing system into the schools, the Big Bull writing system. Part of this process is buying dictionaries from Mr. William Big Bull as a vendor to distribute to all the schools (btw, the William Buffalo Hide Academy bought this dictionary last year for their school to great success). This is the proper way to go about things. The BCC has adopted this writing system and for the BPS to do so would be wise. I have been making it clear to our Blackfeet Language instructors that we have a dire need for skillful writing of our language to facilitate literacy, which our language is capable of obtaining but rendered impossible by the styles we have in our schools- both currently and in the past.

I have collected examples from all the Language classrooms to showcase the variation of writing examples throughout the district. The input acts as a good random sampling of how we, the ūmsskāpiipiikūni have been writing our language in the past decades. Discussion about this situation is paramount and I would enjoy talking to the board about this situation we find ourselves in. to combat our 'orthographic delemma' we will use this year to transition into the new writing system and I have requested that I, the BNAS Director, write everything with respect to Blackfoot. There is some resistance to the writing system due to our cultural and historical relationship with the written word, those arguments have merit in a particular paradigm but those arguments (or concerns) have shown in the past thirty years to not work. This statement is not meant to chastise or criticize anyone but merely to showcase the phenomenon of reading and writing as derived from years of research in how reading and writing interacts with a humans' neurology. Also, the inconsistencies of writing, when taking into consideration the time and effort and lack of success of the past decades, and associated arguments to maintain inconsistent writing styles does not benefit out student or larger community. Again, if the board is curious and wants to explore this topic more I would be delighted to do so and would require no less than 15 minutes to explain what current research into reading and the brain suggests and implies.

Nevertheless, I am completely aware of the controversy and feedback we will received when implementing a writing system and I am prepared to accept the criticism. I don't make this statement in the voice akin to "bring it on" or "skoden" but merely from years of dealing with and working with trying to implement a uniform writing system. People have a writing style but we have not yet adopted a **system**. In this year, we are in the process of adopting a system and abandoning the many styles that our students are left with the burden of learning, relearning, and abandoning.

In mid-October, with help from Wendy Bremner, I secured a spot on our local radio show (one hour on Tuesday and one hour on Thursday, both at 11am-noon) to teach Blackfoot words and to showcase other positive aspects of our schools. I interviewed the senior football players and the head coach but plan on expanding the interviews. The main reasons why it is pertinent for the BNAS director to be on the radio is to enter into a partnership with the tribe through the BTBC in getting language materials for the schools and wider community. I have spoken to a few councilmen about the prospect of the tribe investing in the radio show to bring on a speaker to share words and to record such words. This is only been in one-to-one conversations with a few council members but I plan on bringing a proposal to the entire BTBC in early January. This way the schools can get materials from fluent speakers without having to burden the cost, I don't mean to say that in a way to be disrespectful but to emphasize that the NAS budget doesn't have much capacity to properly compensate our speakers so, I believe, a partnership with the tribe would alleviate such conflict and time and would also open up the content to be available by the entire tribe. Further, on a personal note, from my experiences working with the language I have realized that it is one of the most criticized roles in Blackfeet Country. By going on the radio we, the BPS, are being transparent with our direction of language and any criticism the community has can be turned to constructive criticism for the examples of the BNAS speech habits will be known to the larger community. Plus, any mistakes I make on the radio and in curriculum development can potentially be caught by our community.

For words of the day I have been sharing with the entire school district, the Tribe, East Glacier Schools, and De La Salle Schools. I have yet to reach out to Heart Butte Schools but I will do so in given time. The words of the day is me speaking into a camera and, in the email they are shared, are accompanied with how to write them.

For additional projects, I have reached out to the Kainai public schools to enter a partnership, they are still in conversations mode and nothing has officially started rolling. I plan on contacting schools in Northern piikūni and siksikā as well. Even contacting our border towns sounds like a good idea seeing that both Valier and Cut Bank will be a majority Blackfeet students in the coming years.

Lastly, I want to create a schedule for myself where I sit in and/or teach one class per-week in all the immersion classes to implement new words and showcase other strategies and methods for our class seven instructors. I will also be helping the Blackfeet Junior Academy once a week and conducting a pilot language class at the William Buffalo Hide school on Tuesday and Thursday mornings.

Talks about creating a puppet show are happening and will start filming asap. Movies would act as materials for younger grades and will enable all students to take home; so that language is in the home. I will ask the BHS shop to build us a small puppet show stand and present a plan for what we need.

Lastly, I have talked to the Principals at BES and KW/Vina about having a language class for faculty and staff and it is being planned. KW/Vina is scheduled for Tuesdays from 330-4 (and longer if participants are willing to stay), it will begin on Nov. 14. As for BES, the schedule is pending.