Respecting Dialectal Variations
in a Blackfoot Language Class[1]

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Linguistic variations such as dialects are natural part of human language. When a language is taught in a classroom, one version tends to be represented. This is especially true of commonly taught languages as they have a representative or standard variation that has a long history of being taught as first and second languages. Issues regarding language-instruction and learning become complicated regarding indigenous language teaching where there is no standardized variation determined. The Blackfoot language class represented here also provides an example situation of teaching a language without standardization. The general premise is that there will be a mix of variations utilized and introduced in class in written material and oral instruction. Such presentation invites questions on variations from learners. This paper describes Blackfoot variations in three types, reports a conflict occurred among language ideologies of learners and instructor, and demonstrates efforts of the course developers to promote respecting linguistic variations in the Blackfoot language class.
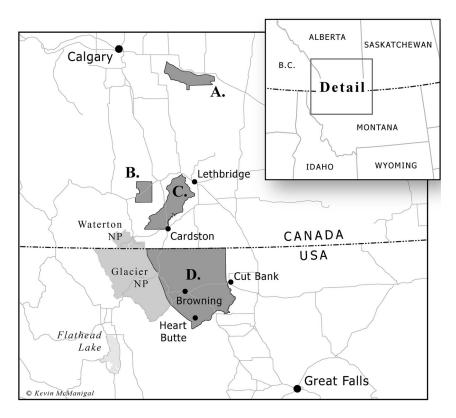
Developing an indigenous language course is a challenging task especially when its developers have less experience in language-teaching and the language is understudied with respect to language teaching and acquisition. At the University of Montana, we (authors) developed Blackfoot language courses, Elementary Blackfoot I and II, under the circumstance that the Chair of the Department of Native American Studies requested the authors to do so. This request occurred as a response to the diversity action plan initiated by the president and the diversity action plan committee at that time. Native speaker coauthor, Chatsis, had never taught her language or thought of becoming a teacher. Linguist author, Miyashita, was still in the beginning stage of her Blackfoot language research. We nevertheless strived to respond to this opportunity for Blackfoot to be taught on campus despite the challenges we faced, including lack of teaching materials, teacher training, standardized variant and time (Miyashita & Chatsis, 2013). The existence of variations and bringing these to class invited comments and questions from learners with mixed attitudes towards variations and the instructor especially when the phrases were not the same as heritage learner's grandparents' speech, and when the form of instructor's speech is different from what is in the grammar book and dictionary used by the students.

Blackfoot linguistic variations

Linguistic variation is usually referred to as a use of different sounds, words and/or structure to refer to express the same entity or thought. Here we catego-

rize Blackfoot variations in three types: regional, generational and colloquial. Regional variations are dialects or variations corresponding to geographic areas. As shown in the map below, there are four distinct Blackfoot speaking tribes who are all members of the Blackfoot Confederacy.

A: Siksiká (Blackfoot), B: Aapatohtsipikani (North Piegan), C: Kainai (Blood), D: Aamsskapipikani (Blackfeet). Cartography by Kevin McManigal.

In this case, while the instructor's dialect is Kainai, the majority of the students' dialect is Aamsskapipikani. Example differences are given below. The word for 'potato' in Kainai is *mataki*, and *pataki* in Aamsskapipikani, showing consonant differences. The difference here is the first sound of the word [m]~[p]. This does not mean there is a sound correspondence between the two dialects as shown by the fact that *moahksinaattsii* 'it is red' is the same in both dialects not **poahksinaatsii*.[2] The word for 'coffee' is also different. In Kainai, its literal translation is 'true black water,' and 'water being black' in Aamsskapipikani. In Kainai, 'tea' is literally 'black water' while it is 'being leaf water' in Aamsskapipikani. Thus variations may be shown in sounds and word construction. Examples of regional variations are given on the next page.

Instructor's dialect	Students' dialect	Gloss
mataki	*pataki*	'potato'
niita'psiksikimi	*aisiksikimi*	'coffee'
siksikimi	*aisoyoopoksiikimi*	'tea'

Geographic dialects are often associated with the political boundary (tribes), and if regional dialects are mentioned in the literature (e.g., Frantz, 2009; Frantz & Russell, 1995) these groups are referred to as the 'dialect groups'. Misunderstanding due to regional variation may occur occasionally, however these variations are not seen in every word, and most words are shared across tribes and their variations are mutually intelligible. In developing teaching materials for the Blackfoot course, we gathered information from various existing pedagogical resources created by members of various groups: Kainai (Russell, 1997), Aamsskapipikani (Weatherwax, 2007), and Siksiká (Ayoungman, 1994). Thus these course resources included regional variations. It also must be noted that although this article refers to 'regional dialects' as corresponding to these four groups, this is for its convenience and in reality multiple variations exist even within one tribe. Even in the Blackfeet reservation, how people speak may be different depending on where in the reservation they are from.

Generational variations are variations seen among different age groups. Here we divide age into two major groups: older speakers and younger speakers. Variations spoken by these groups are also known as Old Blackfoot and New Blackfoot respectively. Speakers of the former are usually in their mid seventies and the latter mid fifties and sixties. These may differ in grammar, word forms, and word choice. Examples of generational variations are given below:

Old Blackfoot	New Blackfoot	Gloss
nita'pai'siksikimi	*nita'psiksikimi*	'coffee'
nomohto'too	*nitohto'too*	'I arrive (from somewhere)'
aikiiwatsiksi	*aikiiwa*	'What is she doing?'
nitaakiiyi	*nistoowa aakiiwa*	'I am a woman'

Variations of Blackfoot are not extensively recorded in existing descriptions. Especially, variations due to generation are severely underdescribed. However, it has been reported (Frantz, personal communication) that forms spoken by current Old Blackfoot speakers are similar to the forms represented in the existing descriptions which are based on speakers from late 1800s to early 1900s. That is, teaching materials compiled from these existing descriptions are likely to be the forms in Old Blackfoot. Chatsis, a New Blackfoot speaker, is aware that her elderly relatives speak differently from how she and people in her generation speak, but she had no trouble comprehending Old Blackfoot although she produces only New Blackfoot. In other words, she is a passive speaker of Old Blackfoot and therefore it is by no means foreign to her. However, her speech is New Blackfoot which is used in class as an oral instruction. This coexistence of generational variations may bring a challenge to the class.

Colloquial variation is variation found across tribes and generations. These are forms which often occur in natural conversation and not in description. There are many aspects to this, but the one this article focuses on is a contracted form. A contracted form is shorter than its original form and thus morphologically less compositional than its original version. Examples of colloquial variations are given below:

Reference	Contracted	Gloss
tsa anistapiiwa	*tsistapii*	'what is it?'
kitaakotamattsinoo	*kiatamattsin*	'Good bye'
nitaakitapoo	*taakitapoo*	'I am going there'

For native speakers, it is natural to produce contracted *tsistapii* 'what is it' for formal *tsa anistapiiwa*,[4] often not conscious about which form they just used. For learners, these forms are different and need explanation that one is a shorter form for the other. Descriptions do not contain shortened forms, and students will not see them written unless their instructor presents them in her own materials. This creates a gap between what the students see and what they hear in instruction.

Variations in the classroom

We first did not include lectures on variations in the curriculum; as a result, students were forced to encounter these variations over a period of time. The Blackfoot language course (I and II) had diverse students. The two major groups were Blackfoot students and non-Blackfoot students. Blackfoot students included members of Blackfoot speaking tribes who knew a few phrases in Blackfoot, had some passive knowledge in Blackfoot and had some speaking skills. The few phrases they could use were usually names of objects and self-introduction sentences. Passive knowledge here means one's ability to understand the language to some extent without production skills. Students who have some speaking skills were former students of the Cuts Wood School (also known as Nizipuwahsin) at the Piegan Institute. These students were mostly from the Aamsskapipikani tribe and their parent(s) are Blackfeet. Their grandparents tended to be fluent speakers if they are still alive. Non-Blackfoot students included Native American students who are other tribes in Montana and neighboring states: Salish, Crow, Shoshone, etc. They have no knowledge in Blackfoot although they may have some passive knowledge in their languages of heritage. There was another non-Blackfoot group which is a group of non-Native American students in general including international students. They had no knowledge in Blackfoot, but had experience studying commonly taught languages as second language. The section below provides selected description of how variations occurred in the classroom along with the actual questions and comments given by the students.

1. "My grandma said this, why did you say it that way?" Generational variations emerged from differences between the instructor's speech and heritage

students' elderly family members' speech. A student had heard how her grand-mother used to say a phrase in Blackfoot, and she recognizes the differences. For example, *nita'psiksikimi* is the word for 'coffee' in Chatsis' variation, which is nita'paisiksikimi in the elderly's variation in her tribe, Kainai. This type of question can also reflect regional variation. Some students from the Blackfeet reservation have passive knowledge in the language in a range of proficiency. Some are quite knowledgeable with respect to naming objects in Blackfoot. For instance, in Aamsskapipikani, 'coffee' is *aisiksikimi.*

2. "I thought the Blackfoot I grew up hearing was how all of them spoke." This comment came from the heritage learners and it was surpris-ing to Chatsis because she had always known that there were dialectal varia-tions. It was not uncommon for her to recognize the differences among the Blackfoot variations. This showed that these students did not have an op-portunity to hear other variations than one that they grew up hearing. This may indicate that there is a misconception among tribal members that Black-foot is a language that has one form which all speakers say the same way.

3. "I found *isstoyííwa* for 'it is cold' in the dictionary, why did you say it differently?" There was no required textbook for the course but a grammar book and dictionary were suggested as reference materials. The dictionary provides headwords by roots and affixes with some example words, phrases or sentences. The entry for "cold" is given by the root *sttoyii* which is an inanimate intransitive verb root. This entry gives an example word (i)*sstoyííwa* 'it is/was cold" (Frantz & Russell, 1995, p. 230). Native speaker coauthor who was the instructor produces *iiksisstoyii* for 'it is cold.' This form shows two morphological differences. One is the use of prefix *iik-* and the other is omission of the suffix –*wa*. The prefix is known as an intensifier which adds a sense of "very" to the core meaning rep-resented by the meaning of the root. This may look like a syntactic difference, but the frequent use of this intensifier is becoming very common to be added without adding its original meaning over time. The affix–*wa* is an inflectional suffix which indicates 3rd person singular. The vowel is devoiced finally (Frantz, 2009) but often younger generations omit the whole thing (Bliss, 1999). These show co-occurrence of generational variations.

4. "This spelling is different from how it's written in the book." An orthography developed by Frantz (1978) has been used by language educators (mainly in Canada). There are other writing systems developed by other individu-als (Uhlenbeck, 1938; Taylor, 1969; Holterman, 1996). Frantz's orthography is recognized as standard and practiced mainly by Blackfoot language educators in Canada. This orthography is a phonemic system as, for example, a symbol *h* represents [x] [ç] and [xʷ] which are allophones of the same phoneme /x/; a digraph *ai* represents [ai] [ej] and [ɛ]. However, there is no spelling enforcement in any tribe. As a result, multiple ways of representing the same word can be observed: *kitaikiihpa* 'what are you doing?' vs. *kitaikiispa*. Furthermore, since

literacy is not a common practice among native speakers, those who learn the writing are influenced by English literacy at first. In this case, it is common to find lack of glottal stop, velar fricative, long vowels and geminates, e.g., *ita-miksistsiko* 'pleasant day' instead of *i'taamiksistsiko; omaksikimi* 'lake' instead of *omahksikimi*.

Two language ideologies in conflict

Language ideologies are beliefs or feelings about languages as used in their social domain. The questions and comments above may come from the co-occurrence of conflicting ideologies. Two major ideologies brought by Chatsis and her students were in conflict. For Chatsis, linguistic variations were part of her life. Having and visiting relatives across tribes, she had frequent opportunities to listen to and converse with Blackfoot speakers from outside of her own tribe. She had never questioned why people say or pronounce words differently. The only comments that she had encountered previously were types of teasing that characterized the language of particular groups. For example, people speak fast in Siksiká while slow in Kainai. It was also natural for Miyashita to accept the variation facts in Blackfoot partly from the research relationship with Chatsis and partly from her linguistics training. Thus the course developers brought the *Ideology of Variation or Variationism* (Kroskrity, 2009) to the classroom. On the other hand, students, including both types, brought the *Ideology of Standard ,* "one form should be taught" (Hill, 2008). All students were raised in a society (U.S.) where Standard English is the language of instruction. Those who have experience studying foreign languages also have seen one type of variation being taught. This is one of the "widespread misconceptions" many come to possess in today's society (Speas, 2009). The *Ideology of Standard* then was complicated by the situation when students have passive knowledge in Old Blackfoot but were unaware of existence of variation. The two major ideologies in conflict are:

Students' ideology
- There should be one form taught in class
- There is a standard variation just like commonly taught languages
- Their own community dialect (Blackfoot students) is the correct one

Instructors' ideology
- There should NOT be one form taught in class
- There is NO standard variation just like commonly taught languages
- Their own community dialect (Blackfoot students) is the correct one as well as others, and **all variations are respected the same way**

Solution and adjustments

The ideological conflicts occurred due to the difference between various ideologies that are brought by students and the one their instructor had.[3] At first, instruction did not include overt discussion regarding variations, and these ideologies clashed with each other and resulted in questions and comments raised

by the students. The authors then made an adjustment in the syllabus and the instructor provided a lecture on dialectal differences to the class the following semester. Then the instructor provided the facts that speakers from one area might speak the language differently from others, elderly speakers and younger speakers may speak differently, and there are phrases that are often used that might be written differently in printed materials. Examples of variations were brought up as much as possible throughout the semester. The instructor also welcomed students' knowledge of variations in their own communities. As a result, questions regarding dialects or choice of variations were not raised in subsequent semesters. Knowledgeable inheritor students only shared what they know from their family without prejudgment of variations' status. Students enjoyed learning about variations in Blackfoot.

Along with the above questions and comments, another type of question was raised in relation to their previous ones: "Which is the correct form? Which one should we remember?" This and similar questions were raised from majority of the students and also showed their assumption that there should be one variation selected for a class. Simultaneously, they provided an opportunity for us, the course developers, to revisit the course objective regarding variations and assessment (see Chatsis et al., 2013).

Conclusion

Teaching Blackfoot at an institution within a Western educational system invited language ideological conflict. Students brought the ideology of standard, and the instructor brought her ideology of variation to the classroom. There are multiple variations that function in the current Blackfoot speaking tribes (regional, generational, colloquial). It has been natural for the language to develop differences. Variations represent the dynamics of the language in social domains, cultural perspectives, values, traditions and innovations.

Therefore, the instructor strived to convey her ideology of variation, and presented variation examples as much as she could rather than to select one variation in course materials even though selecting one variation may have simplified the process of language teaching and assessment and the inclusion of variations seemed to complicate the process of language teaching. However, knowing about the existence of variations and different ways to express the same thought will help learners be ready for the "different" speech they will hear as well as for any comments they might receive on "non-native accents" or different dialects choices from older, native speakers. The "different" speech here refers to those variations discussed above. The comments could include elderly speakers' rejection of conversing with the learners. A similar situation is exemplified by the discussion given by Speas (2009) on Navajo elders emphasizing how important it is that a learner can speak (or pronounce) the language well. Knowing about the existence of variations could help students not to become discouraged. The important thing is that students are educated to respect variations and show appreciation and respect to the native speaker elders. Knowing that variations are the norm can help learners not to be disappointed and to keep their motivation

to learn the language. Respect for linguistic variations can emerge from a well-planned language class and being respectful to each other may help go one step further in language revitalization.

Notes
[1] We thank Deborah Cole for her feedback, students enrolled in the Blackfoot language class from 2009 to 2013, and the audience of the 20th SILS in 2013.
[2] The asterisk symbol * indicates that this word is incorrect.
[3] This is a form in New Old Blackfoot and it is *tsa anista'piiwatsiksi* in Old Blackfoot.
[4] For a more in depth treatment of the ideological variation and the ethnographic context of the Blackfoot language class, see Chatsis, et al., 2013.

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