



AHTAHKAKOOP

Cree Language Survey Report

A report on the language status of Ahtahkakoop Cree Nation

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AHTAHKAKOOP CREE LANGUAGE SURVEY REPORT

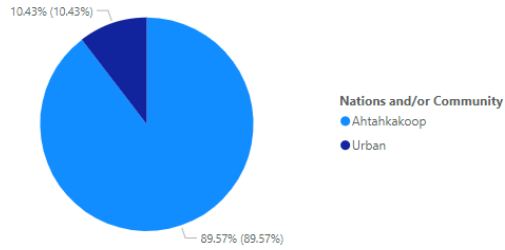
Abstract

The Ahtahkakoop Cree Language Survey was conducted to assess the current state of the Plains Cree language within the Ahtahkakoop Cree Nation, focusing on both on-reserve and urban populations shown in Figure 1. The survey collected data from 682 participants, aiming to understand language use, fluency, and community attitudes toward language revitalization. Key findings revealed that while Cree remains vital among older generations, with 29% of adults aged 50+ reporting fluency, the language is critically endangered among younger generations, with no school-aged participants reporting fluency. Only 3% of households primarily use Cree, and 76% of respondents indicated that English is the dominant language in their homes. Figure 2 represents graphically the Plains Cree language use at home.

Despite the decline in fluency, the community expressed strong support for language revitalization efforts. Over 88% of respondents favored making Cree the official language of the community, and 95% advocated for modern Cree learning tools, such as language apps. The survey also highlighted the need for enhanced Cree language education in schools, with 98% supporting teacher training and professional development programs. Major factors contributing to language loss included the legacy of residential schools, the lack of Cree language resources in schools and communities, and intergenerational trauma.

Based on the survey's findings, this report recommends immediate and comprehensive actions, including expanding access to Cree language resources, implementing Cree immersion programs in schools, and creating cultural initiatives to strengthen intergenerational transmission. These steps are critical for preserving and revitalizing the Cree language for future generations.

Surveys conducted in the communities, Ahtahkakoop and Urban



Count of Age group by Nations and/or Community

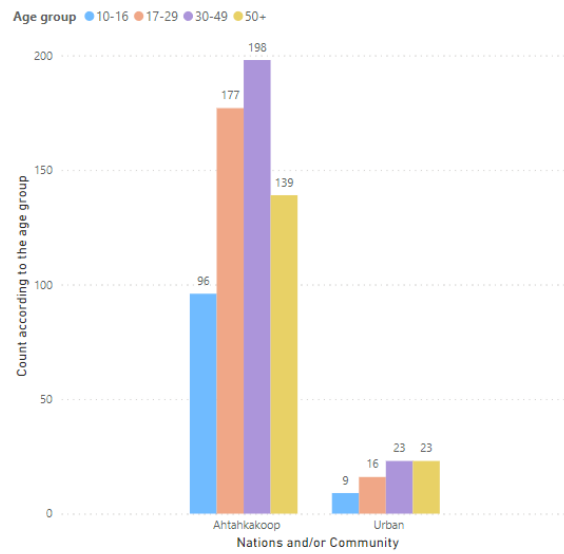


Figure 1: Survey conducted for Ahtahkakoop Community members residing on-reserve and off-reserve (Urban)

Language used at home

Lang at home: English, Cree;English, Cree, Other, English;Other, Cree;English;Other, Cree;Other

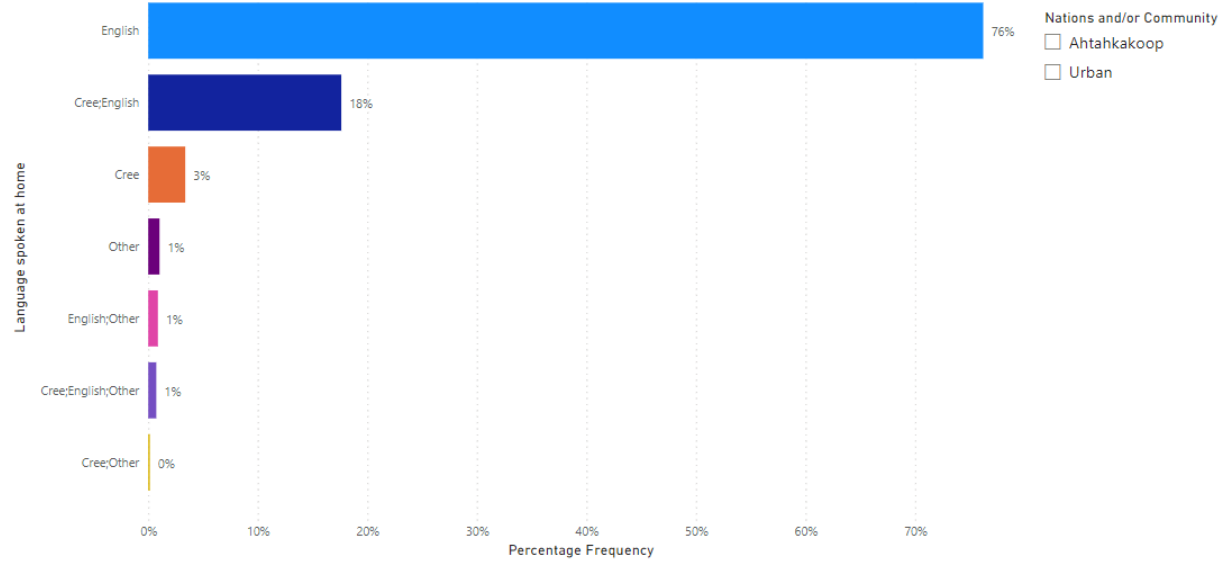


Figure 2: Language use at home

Introduction

The Cree language is a cornerstone of the cultural and linguistic identity of the Ahtahkakoop Cree Nation. With the rise of English dominance in education, community life, and households, the Cree language faces significant challenges, particularly in terms of intergenerational transmission and fluency among younger generations.

In response to these concerns, the Ahtahkakoop Cree Language Survey was initiated to provide a clearer understanding of the status of the Cree language in both on-reserve and urban communities. The survey was designed to assess the use of Cree in various domains, determine levels of fluency across age groups, and identify community resources and attitudes toward Cree language revitalization.

The Cree language survey was conducted in the Ahtahkakoop Cree Nation to assess the language health and vitality in the Ahtahkakoop Cree Nation community. A series of questions were asked in the questionnaire to determine the status of Cree for both the on-reserve (those residing on the Ahtahkakoop reserve) and off-reserve (those residing in the Urban region) population. The short language survey consists of 42 survey questions, mostly multiple-choice questions with a few requiring free responses, focuses on different aspects of Cree language. The questions in the survey are designed in such a way that individuals can answer about themselves or other members of their households.

This language survey will serve the following purpose:

- 1) **Understanding Plain Cree Language Use:** It will help researchers understand how people use Cree language in various contexts, such as in daily communication, formal writing, or professional settings.
- 2) **Language Diversity:** This survey will reveal the diversity of languages spoken in a community, as well as dialectical variations within a language.
- 3) **Language Policy:** This survey will inform language policy decisions by governments or organizations, such as decisions regarding language education, preservation of endangered languages, or promotion of Cree language for official use.
- 4) **Linguistic Research:** Linguists will use this language survey to study language change over time, language acquisition, sociolinguistics, and other aspects of language structure and usage.

5) **Community Engagement:** This survey will engage communities in discussions about language identity, cultural heritage, and linguistic rights.

This language survey will assist the language planners in getting a more detailed picture of the overall status of the language from the whole community, which in turn will support the development of language goals for the community.

The most important information from the survey is gathered and is used for analysis. Inconsistencies and repetition in data are addressed and missing values are removed from the data to make sure that the data remains consistent and accurate. One of the important aspects of the study is to observe the fluency of the Cree language divided age-wise into categories 10-16, grades 7-9 and high school students, 17-29, college/university students and young parents, 30-49, middle-aged adults, and 50+, older adults. Some information is not explicitly used in the report but is used in the conclusion to make recommendations.

This report summarizes the findings of the survey and outlines the steps needed to safeguard and revitalize the Cree language in Ahtahkakoop and beyond.

Survey Methodology

The survey was conducted across both the Ahtahkakoop reserve and in urban areas where Ahtahkakoop members reside. A total of 682 surveys were collected, with 610 surveys (90%) from the on-reserve population and 72 surveys (10%) from the urban population. The urban survey participants were mostly younger families and individuals who had moved off-reserve for educational or employment opportunities.

The survey was designed to be accessible to a broad audience, with a mixture of multiple-choice and free-response questions. This allowed for both quantitative data analysis and qualitative insights into the participants' personal experiences with the Cree language. The questions were categorized to gather information on language use, fluency, language learning resources, and attitudes toward revitalization efforts. Participants were divided into four primary age groups to better understand generational differences:

- 10-16 years (Grades 7-9 and high school students)
- 17-29 years (College/university students and young parents)
- 30-49 years (Middle-aged adults)
- 50+ years (Older adults)

By incorporating perspectives from various age groups, the survey offers a comprehensive view of the status of Cree language use across generations.

Key Findings

1. Language Use at Home

Language use within the home is a key indicator of the vitality of any language. When a language is spoken at home, especially to younger children, it has a higher chance of survival and continued transmission. Unfortunately, the survey results indicate a heavy reliance on English as the primary language in both Ahtahkakoop and urban households:

- 76% of respondents reported that English is the main language spoken at home.
- 18% stated that both Cree and English are spoken in their households.
- Only 3% of households reported that Cree is the primary language spoken at home.

These figures reveal a significant shift toward English as the dominant language within households, a trend that poses a threat to the long-term vitality of Cree. This shift is particularly pronounced in urban settings, where families are further removed from traditional Cree-speaking environments and cultural practices.

2. Plains Cree as the First Language

The survey revealed stark differences in the identification of Plains Cree as the first language across age groups. Overall:

- 47% of respondents identified Cree as their first language.
- 53% reported that Cree is not their first language, with the majority of non-Cree first language speakers found in younger age groups.

Among older adults (aged 50+), especially on-reserve, 65% reported Cree as their first language, compared to younger participants who overwhelmingly identified English as their first language. This generational gap highlights a critical loss of fluency and cultural transmission between older and younger generations. Figures 3(a) and 3(b) graphically shows the results according to ages and community.

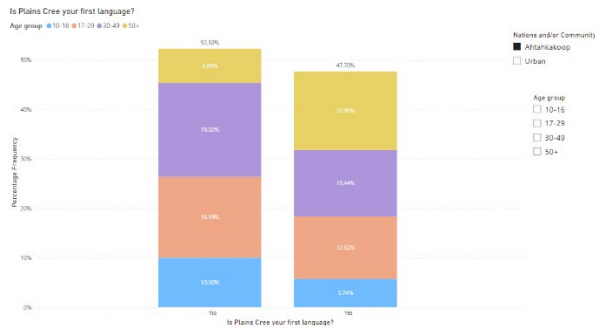


Figure 3(a): First Language Survey in Ahtahkakoop

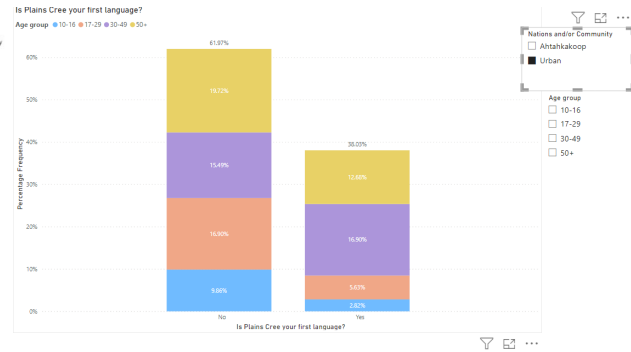


Figure 3(b): First Language Survey in Urban

3. Fluency in Cree

The fluency of the Cree language has diminished sharply, particularly among younger generations. Figures 4(a) and 4(b) show the fluency of Plains Cree Language in both Ahtahkakoop and Urban communities. Fluency rates were as follows:

- Only 8% of all respondents were fluent in Cree.
- Among respondents aged 50+ in Ahtahkakoop, 29% were fluent, while in urban areas, 13% of older adults were fluent.
- Among middle-aged adults (30-49), 3% in Ahtahkakoop and 13% in urban areas were fluent in Cree.
- Fluency was virtually absent among school-aged children, with 0% reporting fluency in Cree, indicating a complete shift toward English in this group.

This generational fluency gap is alarming, as it suggests that the Cree language is not being passed down to younger generations. The findings indicate an urgent need to address this issue to ensure the survival of the language.

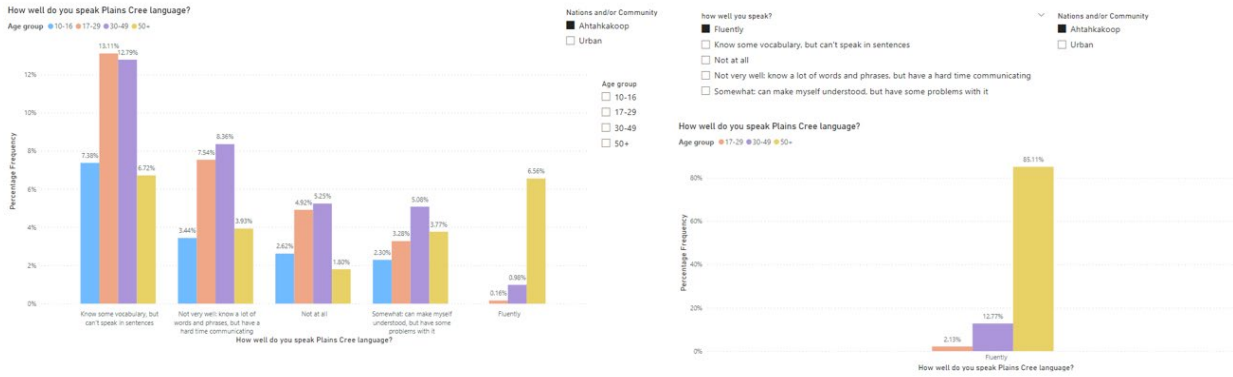


Figure 4(a): Fluency of Plains Cree Language in Ahtahkakoop

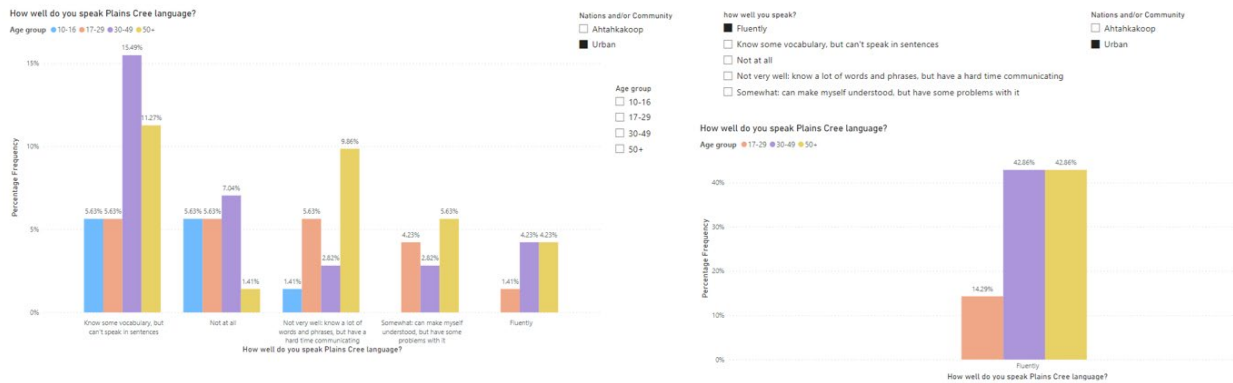


Figure 4(b): Fluency of Plains Cree Language in Urban Community

4. Reliance on Elders and Social Media for Learning Cree

The survey also explored how participants learn Cree. Figure 5 represents the responses of participants graphically. When asked whether they rely on family members, friends, and elders for language learning:

- 83% of respondents said they rely on family, friends, and elders for learning Cree.
- 17% did not rely on these sources, likely due to the loss of elders who spoke the language fluently or a lack of family members with Cree proficiency.

In terms of using modern technology for language learning, Figure 6 shows graphically the answers of participants:

- 63% of respondents said they do not rely on social media to learn Cree, citing the lack of adequate Cree language resources available online.

- 37% of respondents, particularly younger adults and urban residents, expressed that they use social media and other online platforms, such as TikTok, to learn Cree.

This split highlights both the importance of traditional sources of language learning, such as elders, and the potential for online platforms to play a larger role in language revitalization, particularly among younger generations.

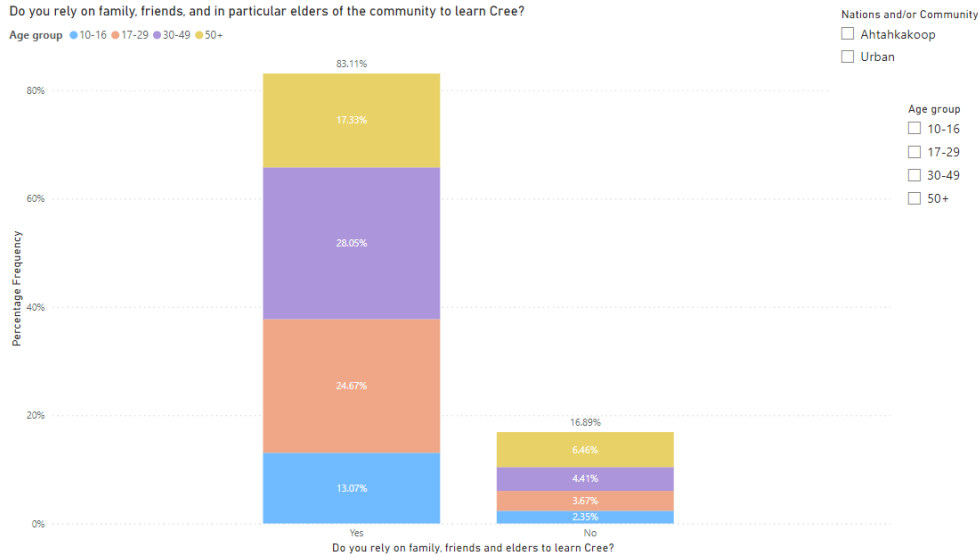


Figure 5: Reliance on family, friends and elders to learn Plains Cree (Age-wise)

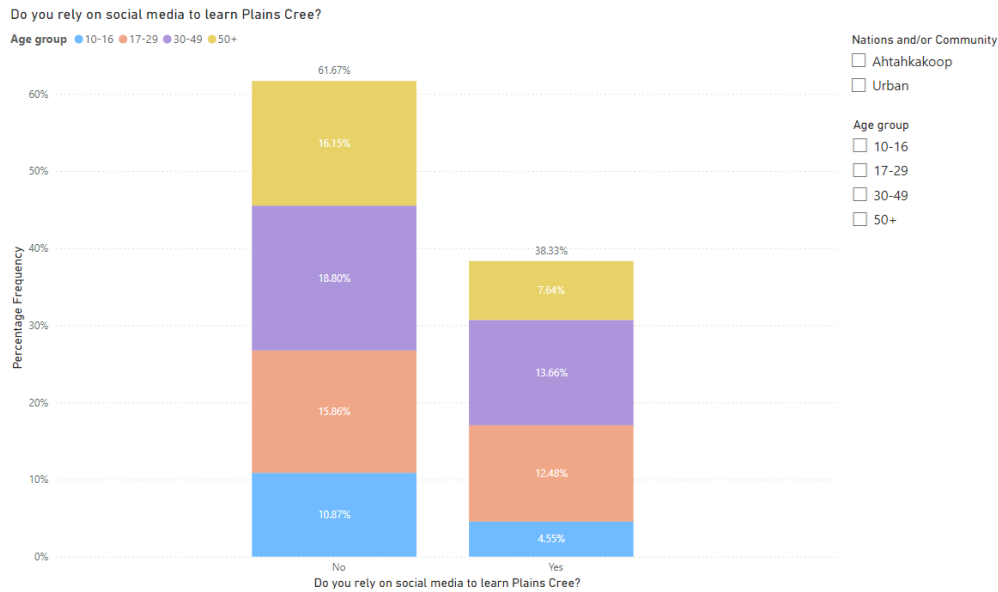


Figure 6: Reliance on Social Media to learn Plains Cree

5. Cree Language in Education

The availability of Cree language education varies significantly between the on-reserve and urban populations:

- 78% of respondents in Ahtahkakoop indicated that Cree is taught as a language subject in schools, compared to only 51% of urban respondents. Figure 7 shows the responses for participants from both Ahtahkakoop and Urban.

- However, only 29% of respondents stated that Cree is the primary mode of communication in schools or the community. This figure drops to 14% in urban areas, where English is overwhelmingly the primary language of communication. The results are summarized in Figure 8.

These findings suggest that while Cree may be taught in some schools, it is not the dominant language of instruction or communication. This contributes to the language's marginalization and underscores the need for more immersive Cree language programs in both Ahtahkakoop and urban schools.

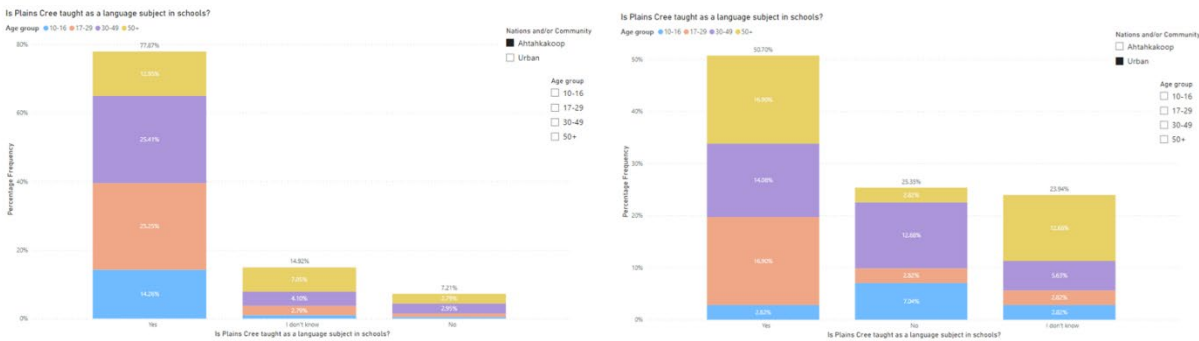


Figure 7: Plains Cree taught in schools as a Language subject in both Ahtahkakoop and Urban

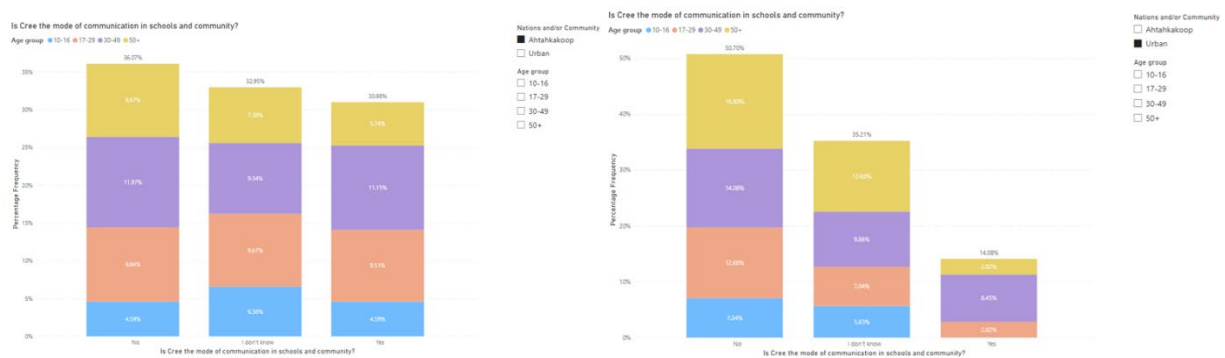


Figure 8: Mode of communication in Ahtahkakoop and Urban

6. Availability of Cree Learning Resources

Access to learning resources plays a crucial role in language revitalization. Survey respondents were asked about the availability of Cree language resources in their communities:

- 59% of respondents in Ahtahkakoop said that Cree learning resources, such as radio channels, cultural centers, and language classes, are available in their community.
- 51% of urban respondents indicated the availability of Cree resources, though many noted the lack of dedicated learning spaces or cultural centers.
- 87% of all respondents, regardless of location, stated that they do not use libraries or books to learn Cree, reflecting the scarcity of written materials available in public spaces.

These figures highlight the need for greater investment in creating accessible learning materials and resources, particularly for younger generations who may prefer digital or multimedia formats.

The following Figure 9 shows the results.

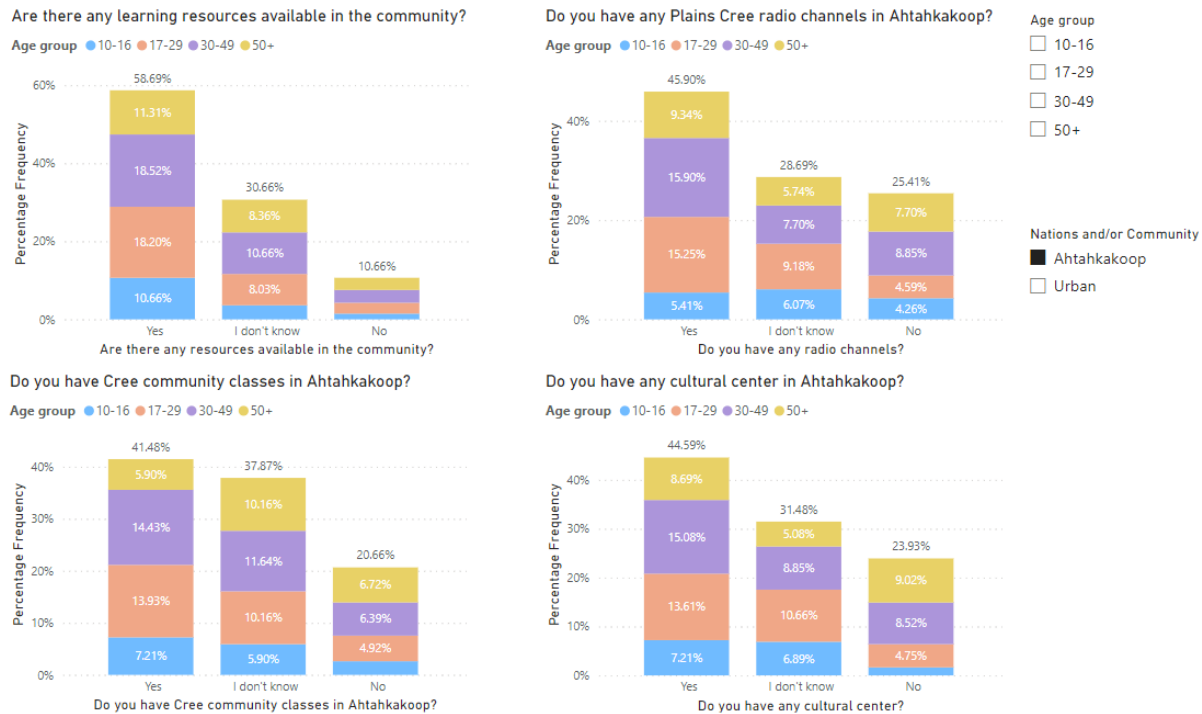


Figure 9: Learning resources in Plain Cree language

7. Community Support for Language Revitalization

One of the most encouraging findings from the survey is the overwhelming community support for language revitalization initiatives:

- 88% of respondents supported making Cree the official language of the community.
- 95% wanted to see Cree language apps and other modern tools developed to support language learning.
- 98% advocated for Cree language teacher training and professional development programs to ensure a steady supply of qualified educators.

Additionally, respondents expressed strong support for cultural initiatives, such as Cree language festivals, immersion camps, and elder interviews, as essential components of revitalization efforts.

Figures 10(a)-(d) show the responses of the participants regarding language revitalization ideas in both the communities.

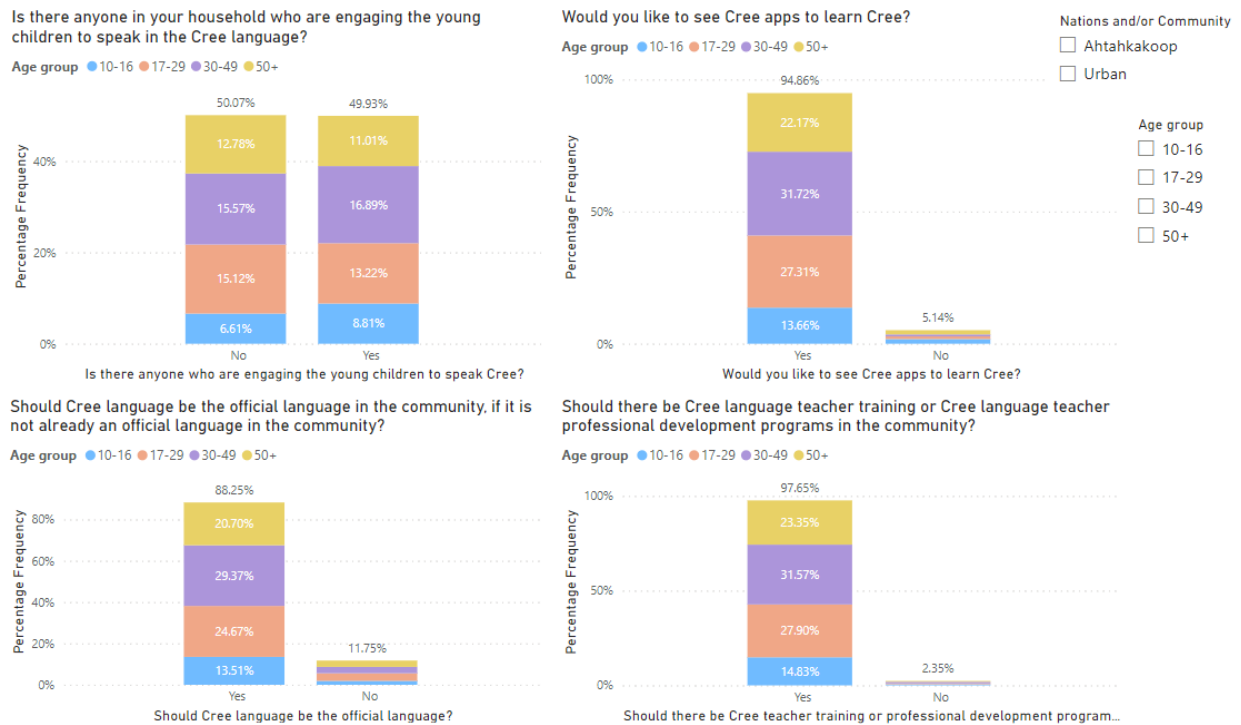
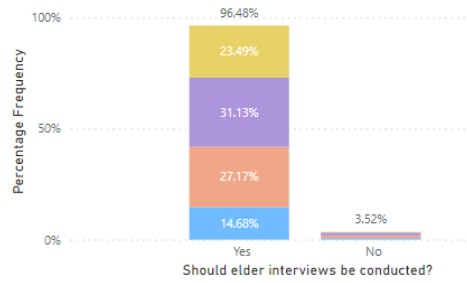


Figure 10(a): Revitalization Ideas by participants of the survey

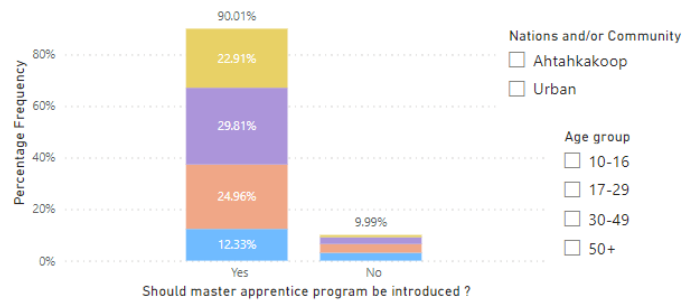
Should elder interviews be conducted as a part of Cree language revitalization?

Age group ● 10-16 ● 17-29 ● 30-49 ● 50+



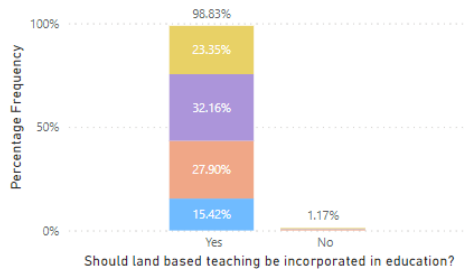
Should master apprentice program be introduced in the community?

Age group ● 10-16 ● 17-29 ● 30-49 ● 50+



Should land based teaching be incorporated in education as an essential part to preserve the Cree language and culture?

Age group ● 10-16 ● 17-29 ● 30-49 ● 50+



Should there be Cree nights (Cree BINGO, singing, storytelling, guest speakers, workshops, food etc)?

Age group ● 10-16 ● 17-29 ● 30-49 ● 50+

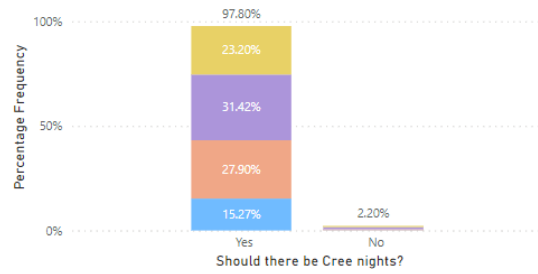
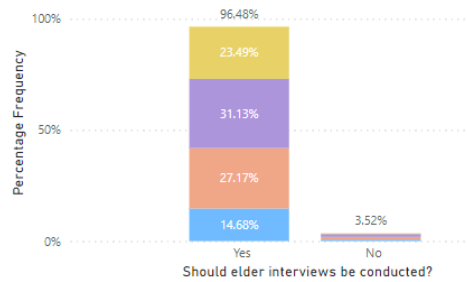


Figure 10(b): Revitalization Ideas by participants of the survey

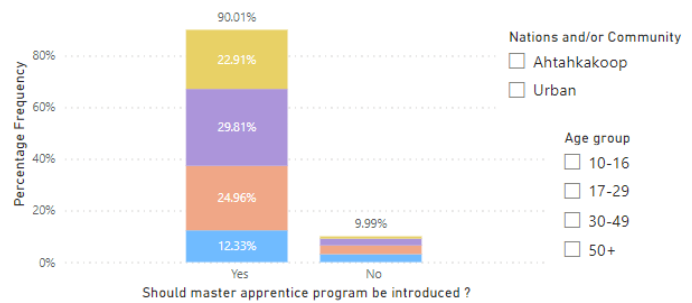
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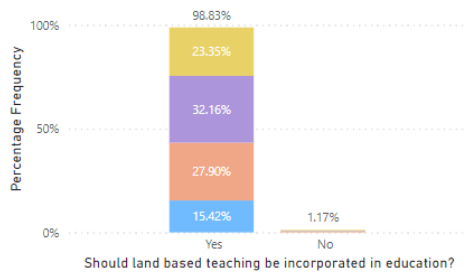
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Age group ● 10-16 ● 17-29 ● 30-49 ● 50+



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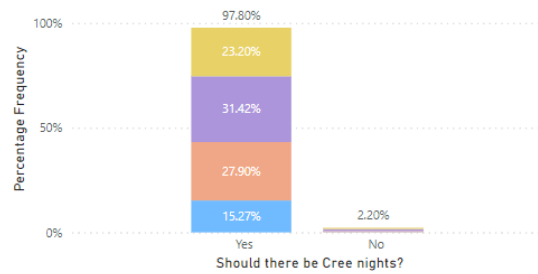


Figure 10(c): Revitalization Ideas by participants of the survey

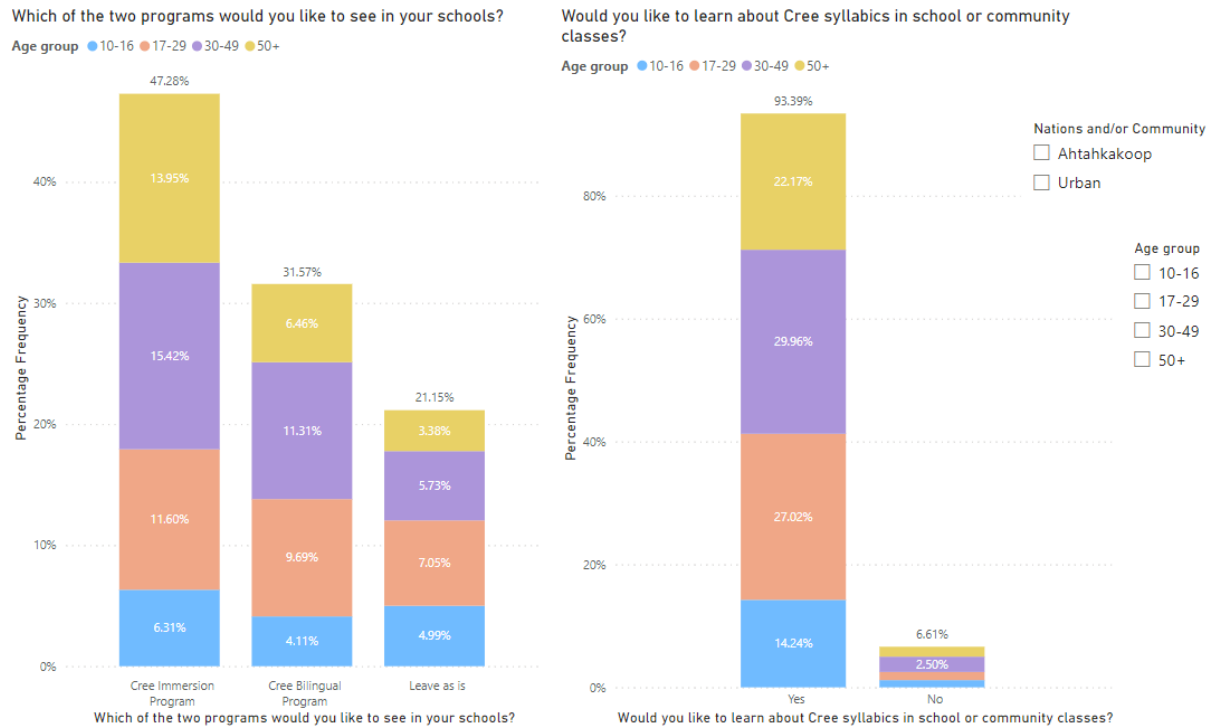


Figure 11(d): Revitalization Ideas by participants of the survey

8. Reasons for Language Loss

Participants were asked to provide their opinions on the key factors contributing to the decline of the Cree language. The following were the most common reasons cited:

- 62% attributed the loss of language to the residential school system, which forcibly removed Indigenous children from their homes and prevented them from speaking their languages.
- 42% pointed to the absence of Cree language programs and cultural curriculum in schools and communities.
- 31% stated that the loss of language was due to parents and grandparents not speaking Cree to younger generations.

Other factors included colonization, the shift to English, loss of elders, and a lack of community resources for language retention. This broad range of reasons reflects the complex historical and social forces that have contributed to the erosion of the Cree language over time.

Analysis of Language Endangerment

The survey results reveal that Plains Cree is critically endangered in both Ahtahkakoop and urban areas. Using Fishman's Graded Intergenerational Disruption Scale (GIDS) and UNESCO's Nine Factors, we can better understand the extent of language endangerment.

Fishman's GIDS Scale

Plains Cree is assessed at level 8 on the GIDS scale, which indicates that the language is primarily spoken by older adults, with little or no transmission to younger generations. This suggests that urgent action is needed to reverse this trend and ensure that the language is passed on to future generations.

UNESCO's Nine Factors

1. Intergenerational Transmission:

- Cree is severely endangered, with most fluent speakers belonging to the grandparent generation. Few parents are passing the language to their children, particularly in urban areas.

2. Proportion of Speakers within the Total Population:

- Only 8% of respondents reported fluency in Cree, placing the language at a critically endangered level.

3. Trends in Language Domains:

- Cree is not widely used in key domains, such as schools and public life. In urban areas, Cree is virtually absent as a mode of communication.

4. Materials for Language Education and Literacy:

- Written materials in Cree are limited, and literacy education in Cree is not widely available in schools. This results in a grade 2 for accessibility of materials, indicating that Cree resources are symbolic rather than practical for most community members.

5. Governmental and Institutional Support:

- The Cree language faces a forced assimilation context, where English is the dominant language, and Cree is not officially protected or promoted in most public institutions.

6. Community Attitudes:

- Despite the challenges, there is strong community support for Cree language revitalization, with 95-99% of respondents advocating for Cree language programs, cultural initiatives, and digital resources.

Recommendations

Given the findings from the survey, a comprehensive and multi-faceted approach is needed to revitalize the Cree language in Ahtahkakoop and the urban communities:

1. Increase Access to Digital Learning Tools:

- Develop and promote Cree language apps, websites, and social media channels to engage younger generations and urban residents in language learning. These tools can complement traditional methods of language transmission and provide accessible, on-demand learning options.

2. Strengthen Cree Language Education in Schools:

- Implement Cree immersion programs in schools, beginning with early childhood education and continuing through high school. These programs should focus on using Cree as the primary language of instruction for core subjects.

- Provide Cree language teacher training to ensure that there are enough qualified educators to meet the demand for Cree language instruction.

3. Promote Intergenerational Language Transmission:

- Encourage families to speak Cree at home, particularly targeting young parents to teach their children. Family-oriented language programs, such as master-apprentice programs, can facilitate this process.

- Organize language immersion camps and community classes to create safe spaces for individuals of all ages to practice and improve their Cree language skills.

4. Invest in Cultural Revitalization Initiatives:

- Host Cree language festivals, elder interviews, and Cree nights featuring storytelling, songs, and cultural activities to reinforce the connection between language and culture. These events should be open to all community members, with a focus on youth participation.

- Establish a Cree cultural center on-reserve to serve as a hub for language learning, cultural activities, and community events.

5. Advocate for Government Support:

- Push for government policies that recognize Cree as an official language and provide funding for Cree language revitalization initiatives. This should include support for language education, cultural events, and resource development.

Conclusion

The Ahtahkakoop Cree Language Survey has revealed both significant challenges and strong community support for language revitalization. The Cree language is critically endangered, with fluency largely confined to older adults. Without immediate and concerted efforts to reverse this trend, the language risks being lost to future generations.

However, the survey results also show that the community is deeply committed to revitalizing the Cree language. By investing in education, creating accessible learning resources, and fostering intergenerational transmission, the Ahtahkakoop Cree Nation can lead the way in preserving and revitalizing Plains Cree for generations to come.

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