



Family name, Given name

Gerds, Donna

Summary of Proposal

The summary of your research proposal should indicate clearly the problem or issue to be addressed, the potential contribution of the research both in terms of the advancement of knowledge and of the wider social benefit, etc.

Hul'q'umi'num' stories: The prosodics and pragmatics of performance

This project focuses on the language of the Hul'q'umi'num' people, who live along the Salish Sea in British Columbia. Hul'q'umi'num' culture is centered on oral performance---ceremonies, music, and storytelling. Over the last fifty years, many Hul'q'umi'num' Elders, because of their grave concern for the future of their language, have had their stories recorded, and we now have a collection of over one thousand texts in all genres, including folktales, legends, autobiographies, public speeches, how-to demonstrations, traditional cultural teachings, and conversations. Thanks to previous SSHRC funding, our experienced team of native speakers and linguists has transcribed and translated these, resulting in a text corpus of more than 12,000 pages. An objective of our project is to create a written literature for Hul'q'umi'num' by preparing these texts for publication---glossing, formatting, and indexing them---and at the same time updating our Hul'q'umi'num' dictionary to include any new words we discover. Also, we honor the legacy of the Hul'q'umi'num' storytellers by using digital media to share the audio or video files of story performances, together with their translations and transcriptions, thereby supporting the efforts of the younger generation to become fluent in their language.

The Hul'q'umi'num' Elders are very talented raconteurs, and another objective of our project is to develop an appreciation of stories as verbal art by studying aspects of their performance. We will research narrative and rhetorical structure, detailing the way storytellers use: framing devices such as introductions and conclusions; oral paragraphs to create coherence; parallelism, focus, and contrast to provide emphasis; dialogue to help bring the story to life; and song interludes to help anchor the main lesson of the story in listeners' minds. We will also examine the prosodics of the oral performance of stories, measuring intonation, rhythm, relative emphasis, and rhetorical lengthening, to learn how storytellers use their voices to help convey information and to hold listeners' attention. For example, we will undertake the linguistic analysis of a set of devices we call "enhancers", e.g. repetitions, echoes, lists, parentheticals, and vocatives. Because enhancers are not part of core syntactic structure (the subject, object, and verb), they have been largely ignored in the linguistic literature. Our research will thus make a contribution to the theoretical and typological analysis of such devices.

It is the goal of our project to make a thorough study of the performances of storytellers in order to gain a better appreciation of stories as oral literature. Capacity building is an important aspect of our project, which partners First Nations Elders and university scholars with First Nations graduate students. Our project adopts decolonized methodologies based on Coast Salish traditional learning models, encouraging students to draw on their cultural knowledge, language fluency, and oratory talents to become accomplished storytellers, while concurrently developing their skills in linguistic analysis and written communication.



Family name, Given name

Hedberg, Nancy

Summary of Proposal

The summary of your proposal should indicate the challenges or issues to be addressed; the overall goal and objectives of the proposed partnership; and the breadth of the partnership, and the meaningful engagement of the partners involved.

Coast Salish ways of speaking: Documenting discourse as a path to fluency

This project focuses on the language of the Hul'q'umi'num', a Coast Salish people who live along the Salish Sea in British Columbia. Today around forty fluent first-language speakers remain, mostly over the age of sixty, and thus Hul'q'umi'num' is considered an endangered language. Our team of First Nations knowledge holders and academic experts are actively engaged in research to document and analyze the language, with the goal of providing reference and teaching materials in support of language education. We have learned much about Hul'q'umi'num' grammar and lexicon over the last thirty years, thanks to SSHRC-funded research. However, as the work of teaching the language has fallen on the younger generation, all of whom have English as their first language, research is urgently needed on authentic Coast Salish ways of speaking.

By documenting the public speeches and conversations of the Elders and analyzing the language in use, we can provide insight into what Elders actually do when they are using Hul'q'umi'num' to speak to each other in a variety of natural situations. Fluency is a matter of not just what you say but how you say it. The tone of voice, discourse particles, interjections, vocatives, and other features of language in use are important for conveying information and opinion, expressing politeness or rudeness, and using language for emotional closeness or distance.

The objective of this project is to work toward the survival of the Hul'q'umi'num' language, and thus we seek to reach as many language learners as possible. Our hope is that by making the language accessible and entertaining, we will galvanize a new generation of language learners. We will publish the Elders' speeches and conversations on the web and in print and develop web-based lessons pointing out discourse features. The web is the preferred delivery method because it allows the presentation of audio and video files together with transcriptions and translations. Over the course of the project we seek to shift the balance from passive involvement, where our researchers record, listen to, transcribe, and analyze the Elders' words, to active involvement, where the researchers participate in conversations and speeches, becoming more fluent in the language. Sharing the results with teachers will assist them in integrating communication-based methods into their language classes.

Capacity building is an important aspect of our project, which partners First Nations Elders and university scholars with First Nations graduate students. Our project adopts decolonized methodologies based on traditional Coast Salish learning models, encouraging students to draw on their cultural knowledge, language fluency, and oratory talents to become more fluent in the language, while concurrently developing their skills in linguistic analysis and written communication, opening a path for employment in post-secondary education. Presenting our analyses of Hul'q'umi'num' discourse to linguistic audiences will help inform cross-cultural discourse typology, and explaining our collaborative model of research will help inspire other communities who are struggling to maintain their languages.