

Statement from Indigenous linguists and language scholars on Boarding and Residential Schools

June 26, 2021

Many, if not all, Native Americans and First Nations peoples have relatives who are survivors of boarding schools, residential schools, or day schools. Some were raised with stories of grandparents hiding from government officials who came to take the children away. Others were raised with their grandparents or parents not talking about their experiences at these places because doing so was too traumatic.

These boarding and residential schools are once again in the spotlight, as they were during the time of Canada's Truth and Reconciliation Commission (TRC), "shocking" the world with the truths Indigenous peoples knew all along. The atrocities committed at these sites are not news to those who come from these communities. We know that our histories are not being taught (or not being adequately taught) in schools, contributing to the continued violence and discrimination against Indigenous peoples and to our invisibility and underrepresentation in society, in academia, and elsewhere.

Over a decade after Canada's TRC began its work, there is finally some news that a similar process will occur in the U.S. It is also not surprising that it would take a Native American scholar such as Secretary of Interior Deb Haaland (Pueblo of Laguna) to call attention to these sites and advocate for the recently announced Federal Indian Boarding School Initiative. We are certain that it will confirm that these schools were the primary sites of our cultural and linguistic genocide.

<https://www.doi.gov/pressreleases/secretary-haaland-announces-federal-indian-boarding-school-initiative>

Support is best expressed through actions and changed behaviors. As Indigenous linguists and language scholars, **we call on members of the Linguistics discipline and related fields to:**

- Discuss the roles these sites had in cultural and linguistic genocide (Davis 2017, Leonard 2020).
- Discuss the problematic era of salvage linguistics.
- Educate yourself and your students on how to critically engage with texts about Indigenous languages and cultures written from outsider perspectives.
- Discuss exploitative, extractive research practices, past and present, that continue to harm Indigenous communities today.
- Reflect on your own research and teaching practices and how they may or may not reproduce harmful colonial ideologies and practices. Commit to ethical,

collaborative research practices. (Czaykowska-Higgins 2009, Leonard & Haynes 2010)

- If you have language materials (e.g. original audio recordings, field notes or other documentary materials) in your possession, return those materials back to the language community. Communities need those materials now, and there is no better time than the present to do this.
- Examine and discuss the impact that missionary linguistics groups had and continue to have on Indigenous communities.
- Educate yourself and your students on language revitalization and reclamation issues and practices and how they are often in conflict with research norms and expectations of Linguistics.
- Discuss in abstracts, presentations, and published materials how your research is of benefit to language communities. If your research is not of benefit to language communities, consider why and what you can do to change this.

We specifically call on the Linguistic Society of America (LSA) to:

- Include Indigenous scholars on the Bloch Fellows selection committee.
- Create a non-student position on the LSA Executive Committee for an Indigenous scholar.
- Develop a scholarship fund for Indigenous linguists and language scholars to assist with LSA membership and the cost of attending LSA Annual Meetings.
- Develop a fund for community-based language work that is not included in current funding sources (e.g. for community-based language revitalization and reclamation work by and for Indigenous scholars, with no requirement to archive or give materials to any outsider).
- Develop a policy to hold linguists accountable to return language materials created in linguistics research back to the heritage language community.

For our Indigenous members of Natives4Linguistics (N4L), we know that these last weeks have been difficult. Please take care of yourself as best as you can. Should you need support, please don't hesitate to reach out to one of the following resources provided below.

If you are in Canada:

Indian Residential School Survivors Society (IRSSS)

The Indian Residential School Survivors Society encourages you to take time to care for your mental and emotional wellbeing. Please contact the Indian Residential School Survivors Society 24/7 Crisis Line, if you require further emotional support or assistance.

<https://www.irsss.ca/>

Crisis line: 1.800.721.0066

If you are in the United States:

The National Native American Boarding School Healing Coalition

As an education and advocacy organization, we strive to find resources that help us understand and address historical and intergenerational trauma on a national scale and to make those available to others. However, we know that there are times when our trauma is triggered, and we need immediate assistance. To address these needs, NABS has compiled a list of resources for both immediate assistance (call or text lines where someone can talk with you immediately) and more long-term care (resources for finding care providers who specialize in treating traumatic stress, anxiety, and depression). While trauma has profoundly impacted our lives and families, we also know that these impacts CAN be reversed through trauma-informed support and care. If you are feeling triggered, panicked, or hopeless, **you are not alone and help is available.**

<https://boardingschoolhealing.org/self-care-resources/>

Phone: 612.354.7700

Respectfully,

Indigenous members of Natives4Linguistics Special Interest Group

References cited:

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