

Language

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Council is 100 percent behind this new push with the language.

“Everybody at this (Tribal Council) table knows our language will die if we don’t do something. We’ve been talking about how we’re not learning and our kids aren’t learning and people are complaining about it,” she said. “It was at a standstill. We just had to give it a push and that’s what happened.”

Together with Zalmi Zahir, the Puyallup Language Program is spearheading a renewed movement among the Puyallups to show tribal members how to look beyond learning individual words and begin using the language in the home, at work and in the community. The emphasis is to get individuals to start using the language for communication by changing out English for Twulshootseed in day-to-day speech. This is why Monte Singer-Legarde got involved in the Language Program, because he wants to hear the language spoken more on the reservation.

“This is our land and I never hear it much,” he said. “So rather than sit and wonder how come, I wanted to do something about it to bridge that gap, to do what I can.”

The Language Program staff learned about this method to bring the language into modern daily life during two weeks of intensive college-level courses at the NILI this past June. Amber Sterud Hayward, Monte Singer-Legarde and Deonnah McCloud attended classes in Lushootseed, linguistics, teaching methods and language material development to bring them up to speed for using language back home on the reservation.

Under the instruction of Zalmi Zahir and other instructors at NILI, the three Puyallup students were shown how to “reclaim domains” in Twulshootseed for activities that we do every day. This included activities such as washing hands and brushing teeth. They learned how to “self-narrate” through the activity by using Twulshootseed to say things like, “I’m turning on the water,” and “I’m reaching for the soap,” etc. This way, rather than learn single and random words, the language becomes something everyone can use at home and in daily life to reinforce the words and phrases by putting them into a familiar context.

“You need to speak it in your home,” Amber Sterud Hayward said. Using the language at home allows the adults in the family to speak it to, and with, the children. As a tool to remember, posting flash cards around the house literally puts Twulshootseed everywhere in the learner’s world.

Amber Sterud Hayward said this reclaiming of domains and self-narrating through everyday activities is a different method than the Tribe has used in the past to learn the language.



PHOTO BY CHRIS DUENAS
Amber Sterud Hayward
Language Instructor



PHOTO BY AMBER STERUD HAYWARD
Chris Duenas
Media Developer



PHOTO BY CHRIS DUENAS
Monte Singer-Legarde
Language/Culture Instructor



PHOTOS BY MONTE SINGER-LEGARDE
Deonnah McCloud, assistant director at Grandview Early Learning Center, listens to instructor Zalmi Zahir in the Lushootseed course at the Northwest Indian Language Institute at University of Oregon.



Language Instructor Amber Sterud Hayward takes notes during the Lushootseed course at the Northwest Indian Language Institute at University of Oregon.

“(Zahir) asked us, ‘How often do you see bears and cougars, and how often do you go picking berries?’ While these things are important to our people, we don’t use this language in our everyday routines. We’re learning how to wash our hands and brush our teeth in Lushootseed because we do that numerous times a day.”

Zalmi Zahir explained the importance of creating a “language nest” in the home – a physical location where the language “lives” and only it is spoken in this special location.

“This concept was started by the Maori people of New Zealand. Their language was dying and the elders didn’t want it to die so they created a ‘daycare’ in their kitchen where the kitchen was



Many tribal languages were represented in the linguistics course at the Northwest Indian Language Institute including Choctaw, Klamath, Chinuk Wawa, Lushootseed, Bannock, Northern Paiute and Hanis Coos.

a language nest – no one could speak English in the kitchen because English would contaminate the nest. So you’re using the language, the kids are there, and they’re hearing the language

being used and they’re able to understand it.”

This brings the language to the next level. “It goes from having a desire to speak the language to ‘now I have to

speak the language,’” Zalmi Zahir said.

Monte Singer-Legarde has recently introduced the language at Grandview during kickball games with the little ones, focusing on verbs such as “I throw,” “you throw,” “run,” “kick,” “catch” and “drop.” Combining the actions with the language, he gives them directions, like “throw the ball,” and when the child throws the ball, he or she must say, “I threw it.”

“So far the kids and staff are receiving it very well,” he said. “The ultimate goal is to have full kickball games in our own language.” He and Zalmi Zahir are developing language and materials to reclaim several domains at Grandview and will be putting up posters, signs and words throughout the center so that all the children and staff can see the language around them every day.

The Tribal Council is making a concerted effort to bring the language more into meetings. Council members, council secretaries and administrators are all practicing the language daily. “They’re reclaiming domains,” Zalmi Zahir said. “The idea is to eventually be able to hold council meetings in Lushootseed.”

The Puyallup Language Program is currently putting a strong emphasis on Chief Leschi Schools, working with teachers and staff to foster the language among the current generation of youth. Most recently, Language Program staff conducted a workshop with Chief Leschi teachers and staff on reclaiming domains and language nesting to bring the language into classrooms consistently. There is also a program being developed with help from the University of Oregon’s NILI, which includes having books translated into Lushootseed.

These efforts at school, combined with using the language at home, makes for the perfect combination according to Zalmi Zahir. “To help get it out of the classroom, they must have it in the home. It’s not an option for language revitalization. The parents are driving this, not the teachers, the school board or principals so it’s not top-down; it’s growing organically from the children and parents into the classroom.”

NEW WEBSITE: www.PuyallupTribalLanguage.org

Chris Duenas has created a new website with a clean design for the Language Program. It features videos of tribal members speaking in Twulshootseed including: common conversations, self-narration, weather and sports. It also includes a phrase of the week, and a blog. This new site is drawing positive attention and feedback from people across North America. Watching the videos, seeing the words spelled out and hearing them spoken are all meant to work in tandem to provide visual and auditory aids in learning.



Representing a rainbow of tribes and cultures, Northwest Indian Language Institute participants gathered for a group photo.

PHOTO COURTESY OF NILI