

POLICY
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INTRODUCTION
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The viability of Canada's Native languages is a serious issue. We have witnessed the loss of other parts of Native culture during the last century as White contact increased and Native peoples were drawn further into the ways of dominant society. This process is closely tied to urbanization and developments in educational systems and the media.

The loss of one's original language represents a break with the past, with one's heritage. It is a break with the older generations and the oral history upon which they place much value. Oral history can continue in the second, or new, language but somehow, something is always lost.

In many Native communities only the very oldest people speak their Native language. In others (generally those where local schools are a more recent phenomenon) everyone may be fluent. The latter type are becoming rare. They are the last to remind us of a past which most of us have not had the opportunity to observe.

In recent years there has been an increase in the number of Native language courses offered in Canada. Departments of Native Studies are responsible for some of these, as are Native-controlled schools and colleges. These efforts represent one response to the growing awareness that the use of Native languages is diminishing and yet, is something worthy of revival. While it would not be practical for Cree, Dakota or Inuktitut to become one of the official languages of Canada, it would not be too farfetched to suggest that these might be preserved, taught and expounded upon in order that they do not pass into the category of the archaic with barely a whimper of protest. These Native languages are part of Canada's heritage and though their communities of speakers are relatively small, this does not provide us with a rationale for allowing their silent demise. Canada's history is not a long one compared to those

of other countries, but it has been a history characterized by diversity, both regional and ethnic. A great part of this diversity is evidenced by the multiplicity of the languages spoken by our population.

Following is an article by John Price which addresses some of these issues from the perspective of one who has been an observer of Native life both in Canada and the United States for many years. It represents the viewpoint of one individual, although the ideas presented are undoubtedly shared with others. The editor welcomes comments on this article which may in future appear in this or the Discussion column.