

## **Skeletons in our closet: Reconciling Linguistics' relationship with Indigenous peoples**

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The western scientific tradition has a long and exploitative, damaging history with Indigenous peoples worldwide. While linguists never kidnapped or robbed graves, our discipline has been employed as a tool in justifying acts of genocide and today maintains a position of authoritative power to exploit Indigenous peoples for its own gain and all must reckon with the history of the discipline and our position in it. Linguistics has largely sidestepped the issue of race, allowing us to avoid addressing our positionality and role in exploiting Indigenous peoples and upholding white supremacist power structures, although recent critical commentary has begun to change that (e.g. Charity Hudley et al 2018, Gaby and Woods 2020, Leonard 2020). This talk will present a case study of the relationship between linguistics as a discipline and the Ojibwe people and language.

The earliest linguistic writings about Ojibwe were made by missionaries, motivated by the evangelical goal of assimilating Indigenous peoples from a white supremacist belief in the inferiority of Indigenous peoples and cultures. Baraga (1850) explicitly states his evangelical motivation and further notes that “pluperfect, and the imperfect tense, are not so sharply distinguished in Otchipwe, as they are in English, or in other civilized languages.” (Baraga 1878: 98)

The legacy of Baraga's grammar as a tool of assimilation is generally ignored in linguistic literature or even framed positively as in Bowers et al (2017). It is not customary of theoretical or computational linguistics to address one's positionality and the history of their sources and the discipline itself. There is a need for Linguistics to begin a paradigm shift in acknowledging its history and position and I will suggest a blueprint for how theoretical linguists can address both their own positionality and that of their colonial sources such as in the Ojibwe context discussed above.