

# Using a class wiki to facilitate community & linguistic inclusivity

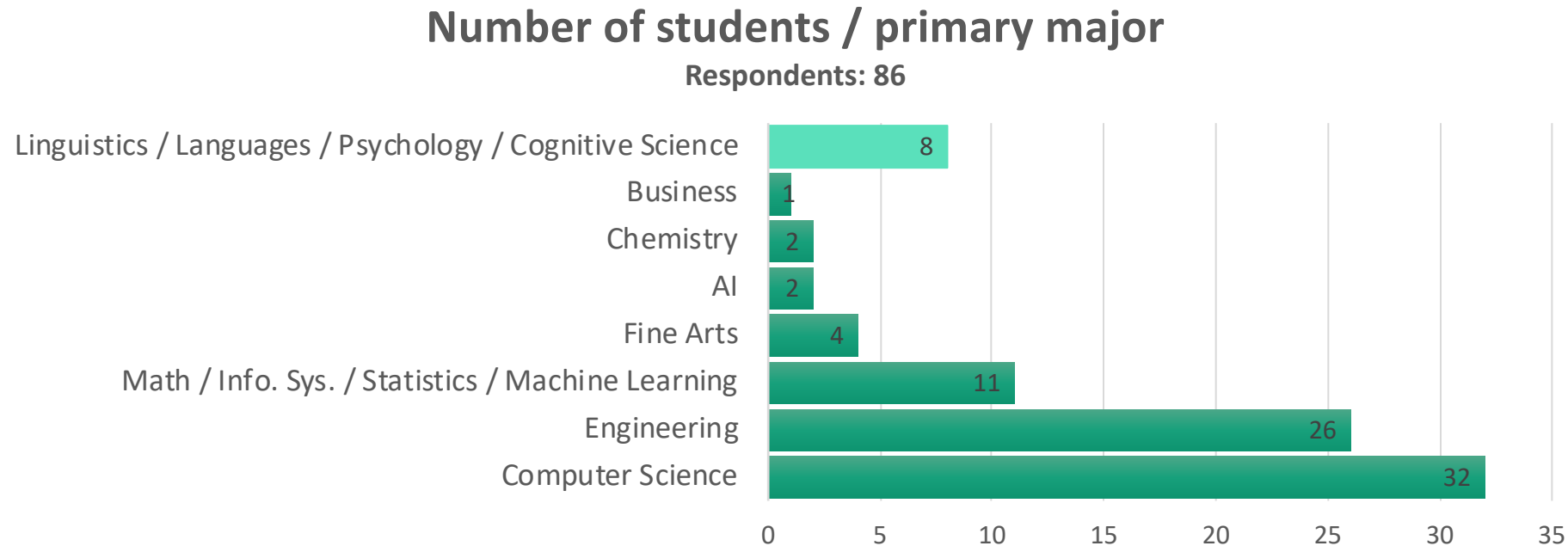
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# Pedagogical context: *Nature of Language*

- Introductory linguistics class; cap of 120 students
- 2 lectures, 1 recitation / week; 50 min each
- Flagship course of the linguistics major
- Functions as general education requirement: majority are STEM majors



# Pedagogical challenge

1. Facilitate asynchronous student engagement and collaborative learning
2. Provide opportunities for students to engage with various linguistic issues having to do with JEDI  
*(JEDI = Justice, Equity, Diversity, Inclusion)*

# Why a wiki?

## Potential for **collaborative learning**:

- “students working cooperatively to accomplish shared goals”
  - development of community
  - diversity of perspectives
  - actively contribute to learning
  - may be particularly relevant for online learning
- But note: the degree to which wikis actually contribute to collaborative learning is unclear
  - some students may do all the work, others may only contribute right before deadlines, etc.

Laal & Ghodsi, (2012)

Kumi-Yeboah, A. (2018).

Judd *et al.* (2010)

# Why a wiki?

Target **JEDI issues** in breadth & depth

- linguistics classes often integrate JEDI topics
  - prescriptivism, vocal fry, accent bias, grammaticality, audism, etc.
  - BUT: lecture hours are limited!
- greater range of topics
- **student-directed** learning

1. Typology of phonetic contrasts
2. **Indigenous languages of the Americas**
3. Phonological phenomena in spoken languages
4. **Language of the Nacirema**
5. **Morphosyntactic diversity**
6. **Linguistic discrimination in the wild**
7. Endangered languages
8. Sign languages
9. Varia
10. + two ELI5 categories
  - phonetics & phonology
  - morphology & syntax

**Bolded categories** address JEDI issues and were deemed “essential”

# Implementation: pmwiki



## Nature of Language Wiki

[MyDashboard](#)[Instructions](#)[CommunityGuidelines](#)[Help](#)

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**Articles by Category**

**Practice Category**[Typology of Phonetic Contrasts](#)**Indigenous Languages of the Americas**[Phonological phenomena in spoken languages](#)**Language of the Nacirema****Morphosyntactic diversity****Linguistic Discrimination in the Wild**[Endangered Languages](#)[Sign Language](#)[Varia](#)

[\(all articles\)](#)

**ELIS**[Phonetics and Phonology](#)[Morphology and Syntax](#)

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**Berlin And Kays Study Of Color Terminology And Its Flaws**

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[Varia](#)

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**ARTICLE\_TITLE**

**Authored by:** 

[loraZ](#)

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I've always been interested in how languages develop from humans, and a popular theory proposed by Berlin and Kay in 1969 studies color terminology and the development of basic color terms (BCT) in languages. The study looks at BCTs, color words that describe a wide range of objects and is monolexemic, and concludes after studying the BCTs of languages across the world that there are basic stages a language goes through that maps out the sequence of when that BCT was developed in the language. The sequence proposed starts with Stage I being terms for white/black, Stage II being a term for red, Stage III/IV being terms for green and yellow, Stage V being a term for blue, Stage VI

## 3.2 Typology of phonetic contrasts

<https://cbjorndahl.github.io/CMUNoLWiki/>

3.2.1 OVERVIEW

3.2.2 CATEGORY DESCRIPTION

### Learning objectives:

- Become acquainted with and navigate linguistic databases such as [WALS](#) and [PHOIBLE](#)
- Practice phonetic terminology taught in class

In this category, students are introduced to linguistic typology while they are learning about articulatory phonetics. Since the content taught in lecture focusses on the sounds of English, this category provides students the opportunity to compare English with other languages with respect to certain typological parameters.

## 3.3 Indigenous languages of the Americas (essential)

3.3.1 OVERVIEW


3.3.2 CATEGORY DESCRIPTION

### Learning objectives:

- Learn about the linguistic diversity of the Americas
- Identify Indigenous languages of the Americas using <https://native-land.ca/>
- Compare Indigenous and non-Indigenous depictions of Indigenous languages
- Learn about language revitalisation and reclamation initiatives

Indigenous languages are often featured in linguistics classes and texts as data, thereby decontextualising them from the people who speak/spoke the language. This wiki category is an attempt to invert the standard narrative, asking students to *first* learn about the people and the culture associated with a particular place, and only after this learn a linguistic fact about the language in question.

In the description for the category, I also aim to model the process of learning about decolonising linguistics as a discipline, by describing my own growth on the subject, and contextualising the document itself by its author and influences. In that spirit, feedback received on the document will not only be incorporated, but also shared freely with future students.



Type of contribution	WikiPoints	Description
Article	15 WP	An article should <b>summarise or explain a topic, in your own words</b> and using correct terminology. Articles must be submitted before the deadline to be counted.
Expansion	10 WP	An expansion is <b>a substantial elaboration on another student's article</b> , either by providing a different kind of explanation, a new example (with an explanation), or a different perspective. For categories with article deadlines, elaborations can be submitted up to one week past the article deadline, but no later than the last day of class.
Tidbit	2 WP	A tidbit is a <b>brief comment</b> on an article or expansion (e.g., posting a relevant link with little to no explanation), or a contribution to a discussion. There are no deadlines during the semester for this type of contribution. These are not graded for content, but they should still be substantive (i.e., writing "Cool!" on a post won't get any points).
ELI5 Question: Article request	5 WP	There are two ELI5 categories, where students can ask questions about content in either Phonetics & Phonology, or Morphology & Syntax.
ELI5 Answer: Article	10 WP	"ELI5" comes from Reddit, and it means, "Explain it like I'm 5". You may respond to a peer's ELI5 question, or respond to your own, but your response should be in terms simple enough that a 5 year old could understand the response. This is a great way to make sure you understand the material!



# Assessment

Contributions were graded as either **pass/fail** based on 5 criteria:

1. Is it correct?
2. Is it complete?
3. Is it relevant?
4. Is it yours?
5. Is it appropriate?

If the contribution failed any criteria, flagged by a TA with feedback; students had one week to fix their contribution.

# Levels of engagement

- Wiki worth up to 15% of grade

	Full	Partial	Minimal
Articles*	3 essential + 1 = 60 WP	2 essential + 1 = 45 WP	1 essential + 1 = 30 WP
Expansions*	3 = 30 WP	2 = 20 WP	1 = 10 WP
Additional content	30 WP	20 WP	10 WP
Total WikiPoints	120 WP	85 WP	50 WP
	15%	12%	10%

## Sign language

<https://www.bu.edu/sph/news/articles/2018/healthcare-language-barriers-affect-deaf-people-too/>

<https://www.sacbee.com/news/local/health-and-medicine/article88784482.html>

There are many deaf and hard of hearing individuals that utilize ASL as their primary language of communication, with around 1 million primary users in the United States, as reported by the Communication Service for the Deaf. Despite the large population of ASL users, there is an alarming lack of ASL interpreters when it comes to medical care. Without an interpreter, it is difficult to understand and talk with medical staff, which often leads to misdiagnoses, mistreatment, or the prescription of improper medications.

In a specific instance, Ellen Thielman, who has been deaf since infancy, was met with difficulties when trying to get a medical ASL interpreter. At two appointments, "it took three to four hours for a trained interpreter to arrive in the emergency room". Subsequently, she could not even schedule an interpreter when in the hospital. Thielman discusses her feelings of isolation and unknowingness in regards to the procedures being done to her, as well as her exact medical status.

The inequity and audism present in healthcare puts deaf individuals at higher risk for harmful health outcomes, particularly in regards to "cardiovascular health, testicular cancer and pregnancy and birth". Furthermore, although the Americans with Disabilities Act (ADA) requires both equal access and effective communication wherever there is social interaction, as well as for healthcare providers to provide interpreters and other accommodations in order to communicate with deaf patients (by law), the regulation is written in an optional language, including the words "should" and "may". This choice of words for such an important statement allows for healthcare systems to take advantage of the regulation, and find a loophole. The denial or inaccessibility of ASL interpreters for deaf patients can have dire, deadly consequences; this will only continue to happen if medical professionals are not trained on working with patients with disabilities in an accommodating fashion.

## Indigenous languages of the Americas

I chose the place Mississauga/Toronto because I was born there and spent most of my childhood in Toronto there. The natural stewards of the region were small tribes that collectively became known as the Mississaugas (formally now known as the Mississaugas of the Credit First Nation). I was unable to find on their website a transcription, so the transcription based on my understanding is reproduced as [mɪsɪsəgə. I do not claim for this to be absolutely correct --- merely my transcription of it.

As for the land, the land has undergone many changes through the various treaties over the recent 200 years or so as the English Crown has gradually acquired land. Some of the bigger treaties that have affected the area include: (1) Between the Lakes Purchase; (2) Ajetance Purchase; (3) Toronto Purchase and many others.

The language utilized by them is Anishinaabemowin. From their site, it seems that there are still attempts to use the language. From the education section of their site, the language seems to still be utilized in elementary school --- along with posts about learning the language. This leads me to believe that the language is still at least being used in some shape or form and is still being passed down. Membership is officially listed at 2570 so it can be reasonably inferred that some proportion of them are active speakers.

Writing a summary based on non-indigenous sources (i.e Wikipedia) would likely result in a more Euro-centric view. The discussion of Mississaugas on Wikipedia, while staying generally in alignment on a factual basis, is much more focused on actions by European actors rather than local. There is no discussion of revitalization or the state of people today --- rather it is more historical based. Another key difference is that indigenous sources tend to highlight more clearly how their land has been transformed over the past centuries along with providing more descriptive information about their language and community.

# Elaborations

## Discourse particles in Singaporean English

Authored by:



Colloquial Singaporean English (Singlish), a variant of English spoken in Singapore, borrows discourse particles from other languages spoken in the region such as Cantonese, Hokkien and Malay. These are words that are attached to the end of sentences that alter their meaning. Interestingly, these particles largely retain the tonal system they were borrowed from. These discourse particles can make Singlish speech especially expressive and terse.

For instance, take the simple sentence "Can" in Singlish (examples and translations adapted from Wikipedia). The addition of various discourse particles drastically change the meaning and each discourse particle carries with it subtleties that are hard to translate into standard English.

- "Can." – means "I can do it."
- "Can lah." – means "Don't worry, I can do it."
- "Can hor (rising tone)" – means "You can do it, right?"
- "Can hor (falling tone)" – means "Yes, it can be done."
- "Can lah!" – means "Obviously it can be done."
- "Can one" – means "Trust me, it can be done."
- "Can what (falling tone)" – means "It can be done, you should know this."
- "Can anot?" – "Can it be done?"
- "Can izzit?" – "It can be done, right?"
- "Can meh?" – "Are you sure it can be done?" (spoken with doubt)

These discourse particles don't carry meaning by themselves; for example, it wouldn't make sense to simply say "lah" or "hor".

## Singlish good or bad?

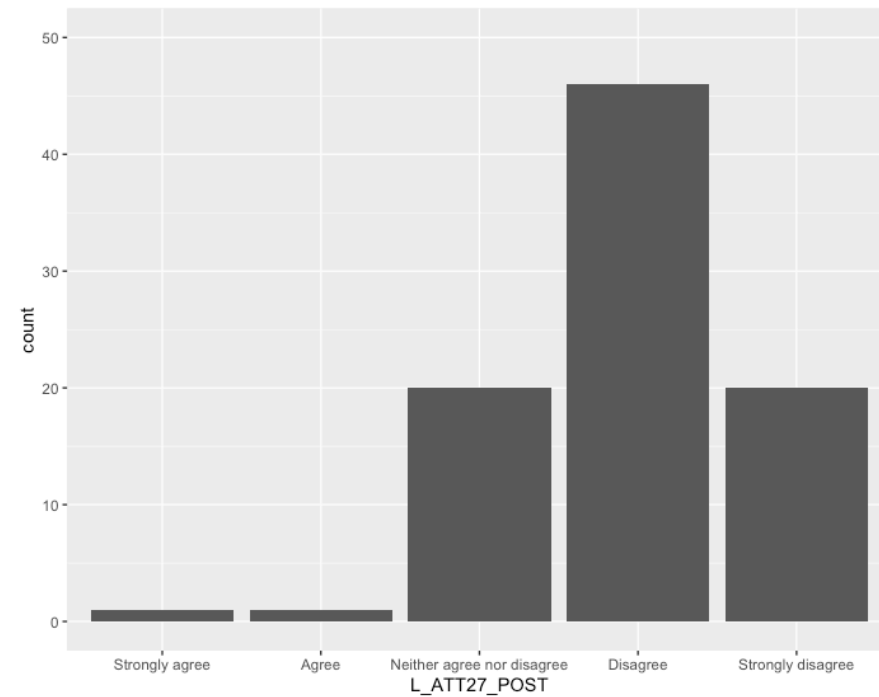
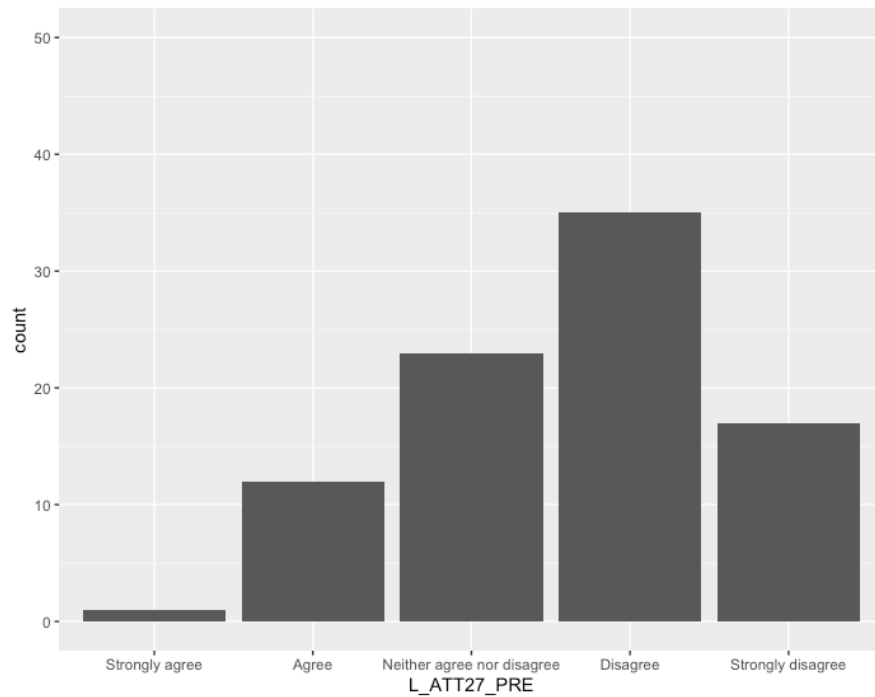


As one who grew up in Singapore and loves the convenience that Singlish brings as well as the identity it carries, I found it to be a conscious effort to drop the usage when speaking to my peers in university. While I have not experienced prejudice regarding my usage of Singlish, it is true that the issue of being grammatically correct by the benchmark of standardized English is being debated in Singapore at times. In educational settings and formal workplaces, we do follow the standardized British English and Singlish is sometimes seen as "bad" English. In April 2000, our then Prime Minister launched a "Speak Good English" movement to encourage Singaporeans to speak English that is \*universally understood\*. I found a short youtube video introducing Singlish and the different opinions people hold about it, link below!  
<https://youtu.be/1AnPurpl81c>

# Survey on language attitudes

- Survey done at beginning and end of course to gauge language attitudes
- Tackled JEDI in multiple ways, so not specific to Wiki
  - Homework assignment & discussion of Leonard (2011):  
“Challenging ‘Extinction’ through Modern Miami Language Practices”
  - Two special discussion lectures:
    - vocal fry, accent bias, white voice
    - appropriation of BEV, dog whistles
  - Final problem set included a reflection on JEDI issues, including an option to summarise wiki contributions

Q: “Reviving dead languages is not a good use of time.”

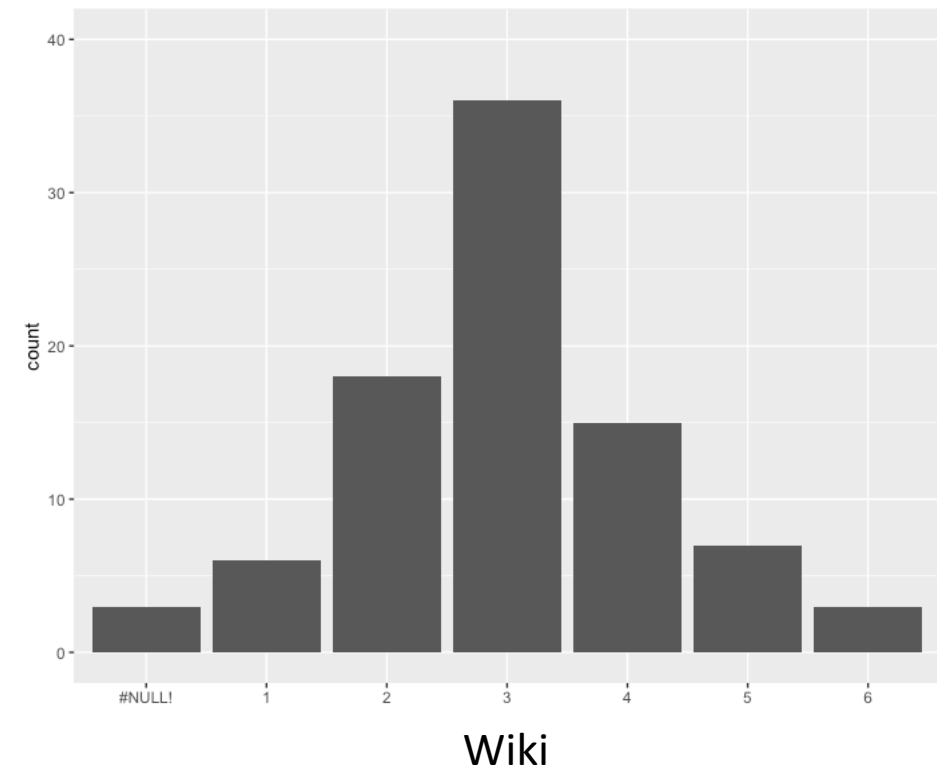
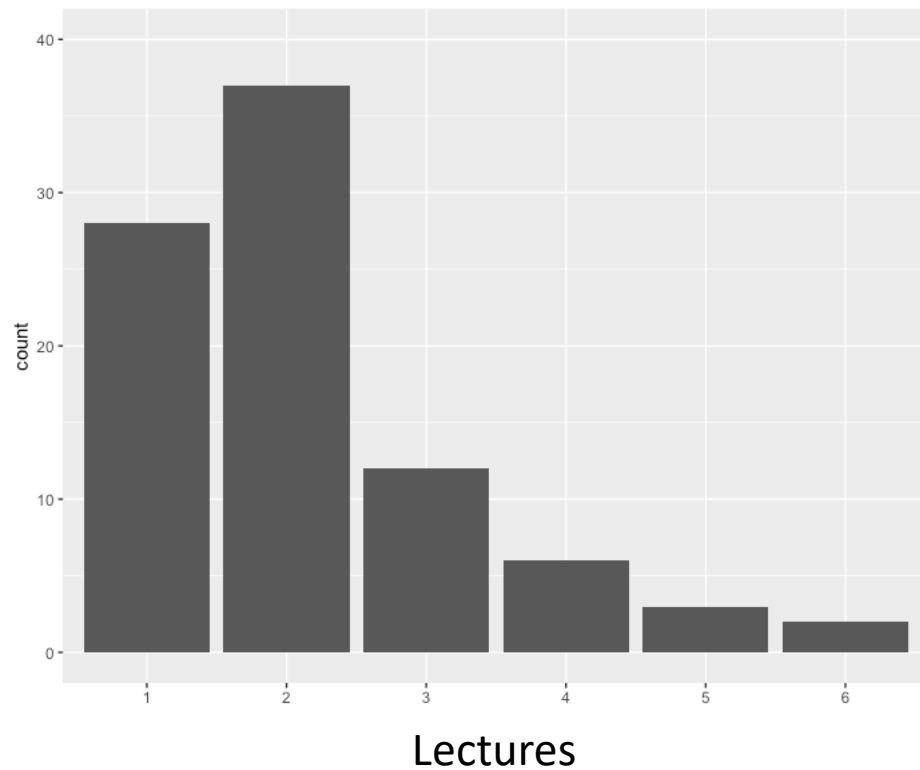


“I think my perspective on endangered/dead languages has changed; often these kinds of languages die because of assimilation or factors outside of people's control. These languages may have cultural significance as well and may be important to some to preserve.”

# Linking the wiki to the class

“The most interesting subject in this course for me was **the idea of the asymmetrical views on language death held by indigenous peoples and non-indigenous people**. The article we read partway through the course was particularly thought-provoking, and **one of the wiki articles I wrote** dealt with an American Indian language that was in the process of revitalization. **I fell pretty deep down a rabbit hole when researching for that article and ended up on a lot of websites and watching a lot of YouTube videos from people who were trying to revitalize the language**. While reading articles was informative, I thought it was **really cool to see the specific strategies** they were using to bring the language back into prominence in their community, which made the process a lot more real and understandable to me.”

# Reflection: How useful was X for JEDI?





# Reflections on the wiki

- Overall awareness and maturity w.r.t. language and linguistics seemed higher than in previous semesters
  - Then again, the students just seem to get better and better every year...
  - Difficult to get a sense of *all* students in remote environment
- Many students commented that they loved the wiki
- Others found it complicated
  - Needed more reminders
- Wanted the articles to be referred to in class more
- Collaborative component could be strengthened, perhaps by reducing number of WikiPoints required and increasing the expectations for collaborations

# Want more?

- For more details, see: <https://cbjorndahl.github.io/CMUNoLWiki/>

# Thank you!

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