Language in Kwän Dék’án’ Do

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Acknowledgments

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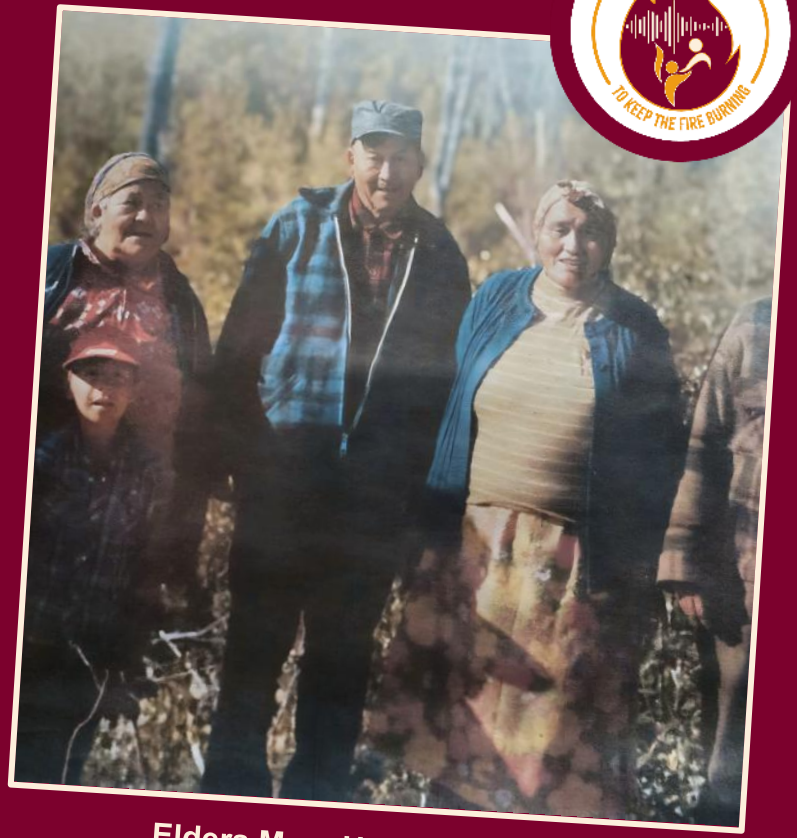
Introduction

Realizing the promise of new technologies to support sustained and renewed language use relies on bringing together **people**, **approaches**, and **resources.**

People

Recognizing and **honouring** the contributions of past and present **language keepers**, centring this project on the language that they share and have shared.



Elders Mary Hager, Edwin Hager, Lucy Peter, and Sam Peter *(FNNND)*

Approaches

Building relationships that connect and support Elders, learners, and other partner individuals and organizations.

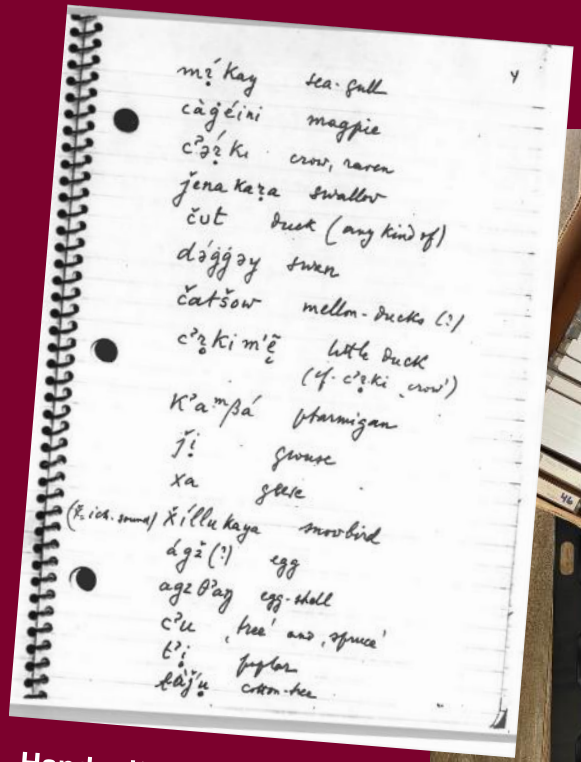
Resources

Selectively adopting digital tools that are **appropriate** to Dän Dhá', **adaptable** to other Indigenous languages, and **respectful** of community ownership and control of language and culture.

Helen Buyck and **Lucy Peter**
(NNBY: Haa Shagoon, S03E07)

Dän Dhá’
(*Northern Tutchone*)

- **Dän** *(Dene)* **language** spoken throughout the central Yukon
- Active and growing community of **adult language learners** from multiple Yukon First Nations
- Records of language *(spoken, written)* primarily from **1970s onward**



Handwritten / Archival materials

(ANLA CN-Tutchone, Box 2, f.5-1, p.4)

Pre-digital audio and video recordings *(FNNND)*

Storybooks and class

(Germaine & YNE

Language apps, signage, and 'born digital' resources

(FNNND Heritage Department , 2024)

Cross-institutional collaborations

With support from several institutions, we are working to **identify** and **integrate language materials** currently housed outside of the community:

- **Alaska Native Language Archive** *(Fairbanks, AK)*
- **Canadian Museum of History** *(Gatineau, QC)*
- **Yukon Native Language Centre** *(Whitehorse, YT)*

Digital tools

Evaluating and selecting mature, well-supported digital tools that ensure **community control and ownership** of language materials:

- Textual and still-image language resources *(e.g., posters, handwritten notes, books, photos, etc.)* ⟶ **Transkribus**
- Audiovisual resources (e.g., digitized A/V recordings, new recordings with Elders) ⟶ **ELAN**

1. https://transkribus.eu/
2. https://archive.mpi.nl/tla/elan

Home > Collection > ttm-Northern_Tutchone > **Upload**

IIIF Upload

Drop files here or browse files

Note: Accepted file formats are JPEG/JPG, TIFF, PNG (20MB), or PDF (512MB) Maximum file number is 3000 for images and 200 for PDFs. Maximum file name length is 180 characters. This includes folder names if you upload folders. More info.

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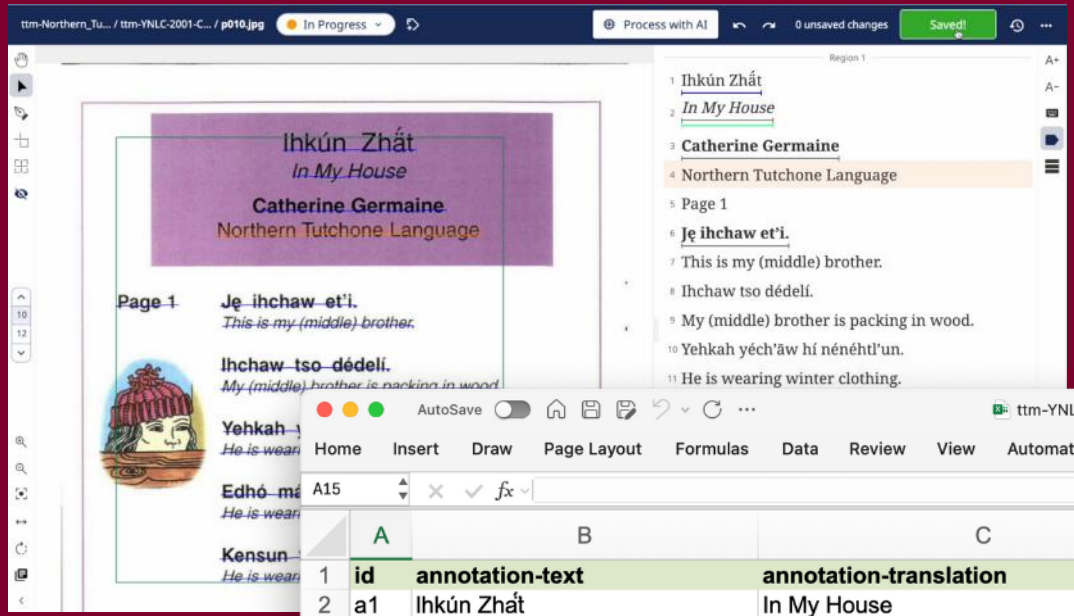

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Comments Share

A15

	A	B	C	D	E	F
1	id	annotation-text	annotation-translation	source	language	variety
2	a1	Ihkún Zhat	In My House	Catherine Germaine	Northern Tutchone (ttm)	Mayo
3	a2	Ję ihchaw et'i.	This is my (middle) brother.	Catherine Germaine	Northern Tutchone (ttm)	Mayo
4	a3	Ihchaw tso dédelí.	My (middle) brother is packing in wood.	Catherine Germaine	Northern Tutchone (ttm)	Mayo
5	a4	Yehkah yéch'ăw hí néhtl'un.	He is wearing winter clothing.	Catherine Germaine	Northern Tutchone (ttm)	Mayo
6	a5	Edhó má t'édéhnyak.	He is wearing moose skin mitts.	Catherine Germaine	Northern Tutchone (ttm)	Mayo
7	a6	Kensun t'éhe'yó.	He is wearing moccassins.	Catherine Germaine	Northern Tutchone (ttm)	Mayo
8	a7	Ję ihdyó et'i.	This is my (middle) sister.	Catherine Germaine	Northern Tutchone (ttm)	Mayo
9	a8	Ihdyó tu eka.	My (middle) sister is packing water.	Catherine Germaine	Northern Tutchone (ttm)	Mayo
10	a9	Ts'a néhtl'un thądéh'ę.	She is wearing a knitted hat.	Catherine Germaine	Northern Tutchone (ttm)	Mayo
11	a10	'Yak néhthaw t'éhede.	She is wearing a warm jacket.	Catherine Germaine	Northern Tutchone (ttm)	Mayo
12						

ttm-YNLC-2001

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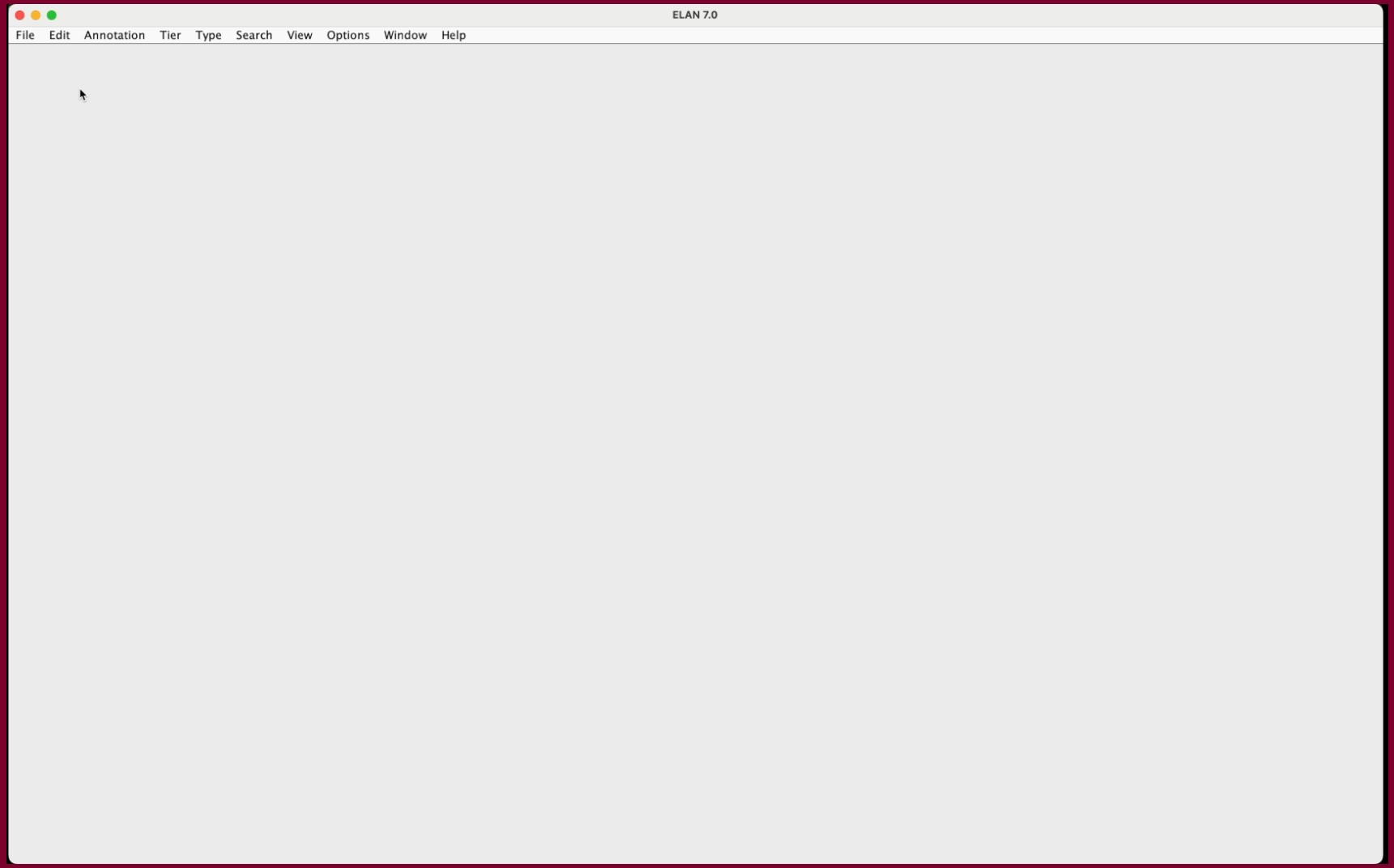
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Progress – Textual resources

- **2,257 pages** of digitized Dän Dhá’ language materials from **65 scanned resources** *(language booklets, posters, historical fieldnotes, etc.)* fully reviewed and corrected
- **13,000+ words and expressions** in Indigenous languages (primarily Dän Dhá’) identified and tagged across these resources

Progress – Audio and video resources

- **30+ hours** of digitized audio and video recordings provided by two partner organizations *(segmentation, transcription, and translation now underway)*
- Current archival research and digitization in major collections at two other organizations

Next Steps

- Working with partner organizations to identify, digitize, and **‘bring home’ more language resources** for Dän Dhá’
- **Delving deeper** into the available resources *(into vocabulary, expressions, language patterns)*
- Finding creative ways of **addressing possible ‘gaps’** in existing resources—what words, expressions, and language patterns would people *like* to use, but aren’t in those sources?

Northern Tutchone Grammar Sketch

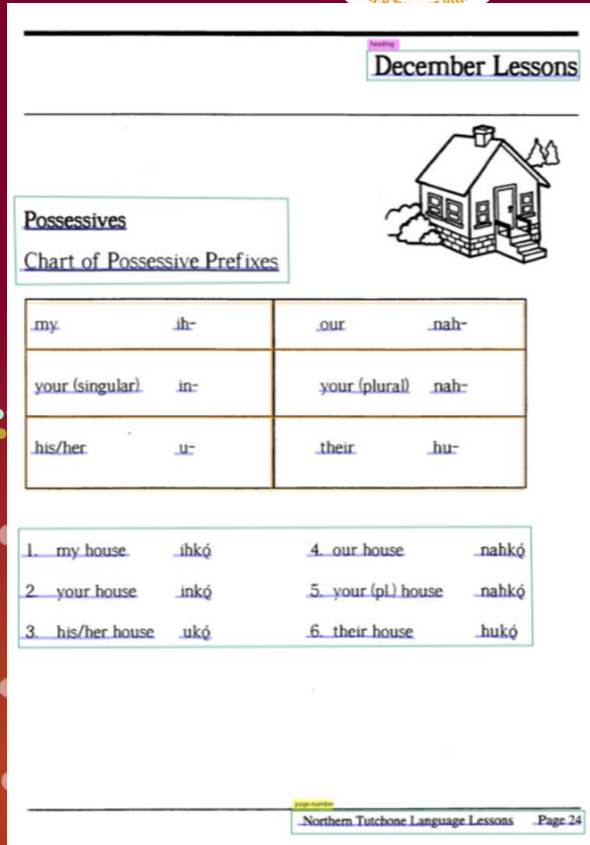
Acknowledgment

First, we acknowledge gratefully the speakers and community who provided all of the language data in this presentation.

The language team on this project includes 24+ undergraduate and MA research assistants, Louise Koren, and Prof. Chris Cox. All data was provided by the Yukon Native Language Center.

Purpose of Project

- Why are we doing this? How does a grammar sketch help the project? There are lots of answers to this question
- It is pedagogically valuable. It is much more difficult, and impossible for non-speakers, to develop pedagogical materials without descriptive grammar.
- A descriptive grammar can help teach AI about the language.
- Descriptive grammar is a valuable resource for linguists.



December Lessons

Possessives

Chart of Possessive Prefixes

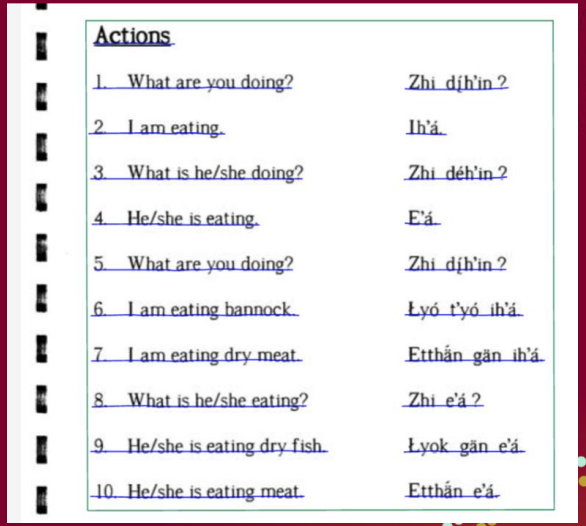
my	ih-	our	nah-
your (singular)	in-	your (plural)	nah-
his/her	u-	their	hu-

1. my house	ihkǫ́	4. our house	nahkǫ́
2. your house	inkǫ́	5. your (pl.) house	nahkǫ́
3. his/her house	ukǫ́	6. their house	hukǫ́

Northern Tutchone Language Lessons Page 24

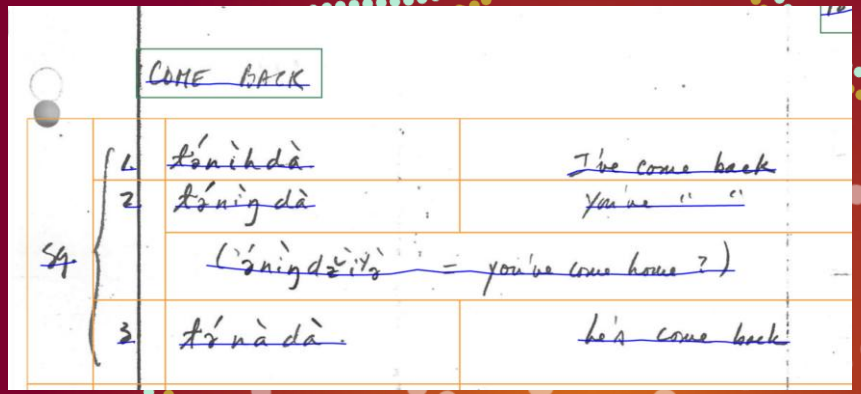
Our Process

- Use documents from YNLC (language lessons, notes from linguists)
- Grammar Sketches:
  - Background information (sociolinguistic)
  - Phonemic inventory (which sounds exist in the language?)
  - Phonological description (how do sounds pattern together?)
  - Morphology (how are words formed?)
  - Syntax (how are sentences formed?)



Actions

1. What are you doing?	Zhi dịh'in ?
2. I am eating.	Ih'á.
3. What is he/she doing?	Zhi déh'in ?
4. He/she is eating.	E'á.
5. What are you doing?	Zhi dịh'in ?
6. I am eating bannock.	Łyó t'yó ih'á.
7. I am eating dry meat.	Etthắn gän ih'á.
8. What is he/she eating?	Zhi e'á ?
9. He/she is eating dry fish.	Łyok gän e'á.
10. He/she is eating meat.	Etthắn e'á.

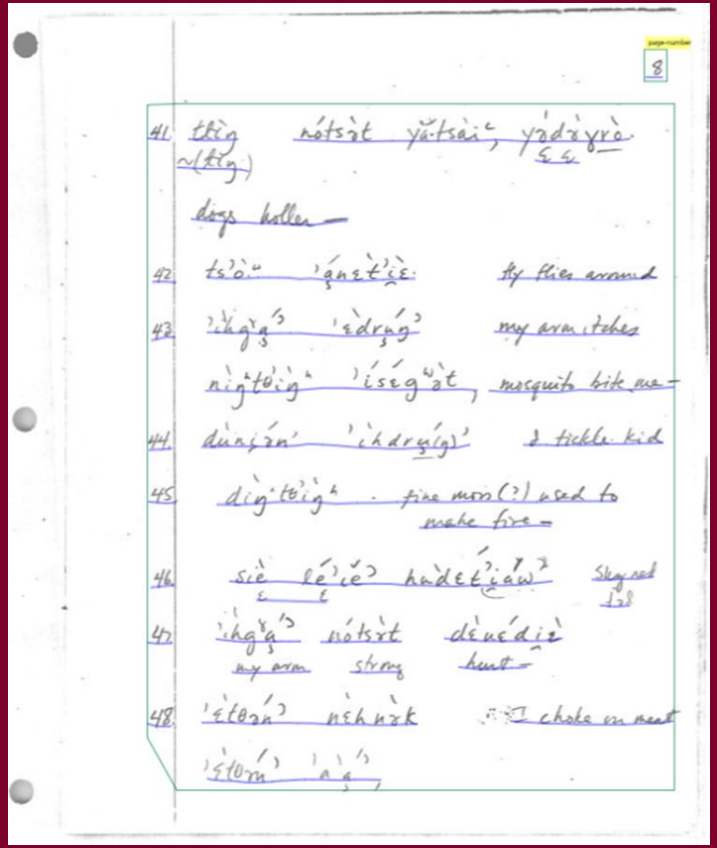


COME BACK

S4	1	tə́nìhdà	I've come back
	2	tə́nìŋdà	you've " "
		(ə́nìŋdə̀ìyə̀ = you've come home ?)	
	3	tə́nàdà	he's come back

Challenges in Writing a Grammar

- Northern Tutchone has no previous grammatical description. Everything must be observed in documented language or inferred from pan-Dene principles.
- Sources can be difficult to interpret. There is no common orthography, so the same word may be written differently in various sources. Ritter's orthography is especially difficult.
- Dialectal variation. Is a given word or construction common across Northern Tutchone, or is it unique to a dialect?



Northern Tutchone Verb Morphology

•Northern Tutchone and other Dene languages have a very distinctive polysynthetic, prefixing *verb complex.*

•Verbs are headed by a word-final stem syllable. They are preceded by a string of prefixes that grow in relevance as they approach the stem.

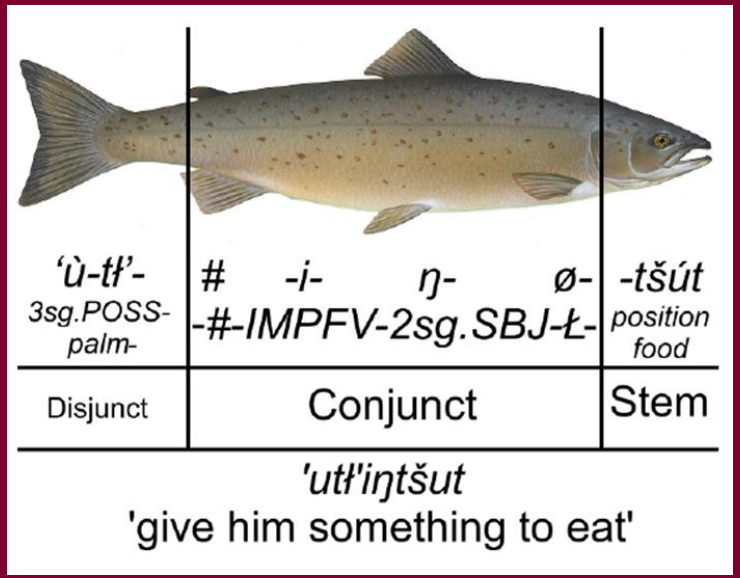
•Verbs of positioning and movement are *classificatory*: the verb stem changes depending on the noun's characteristic (clothlike, animate, etc.)

•*ts'ət nedihtšų'*

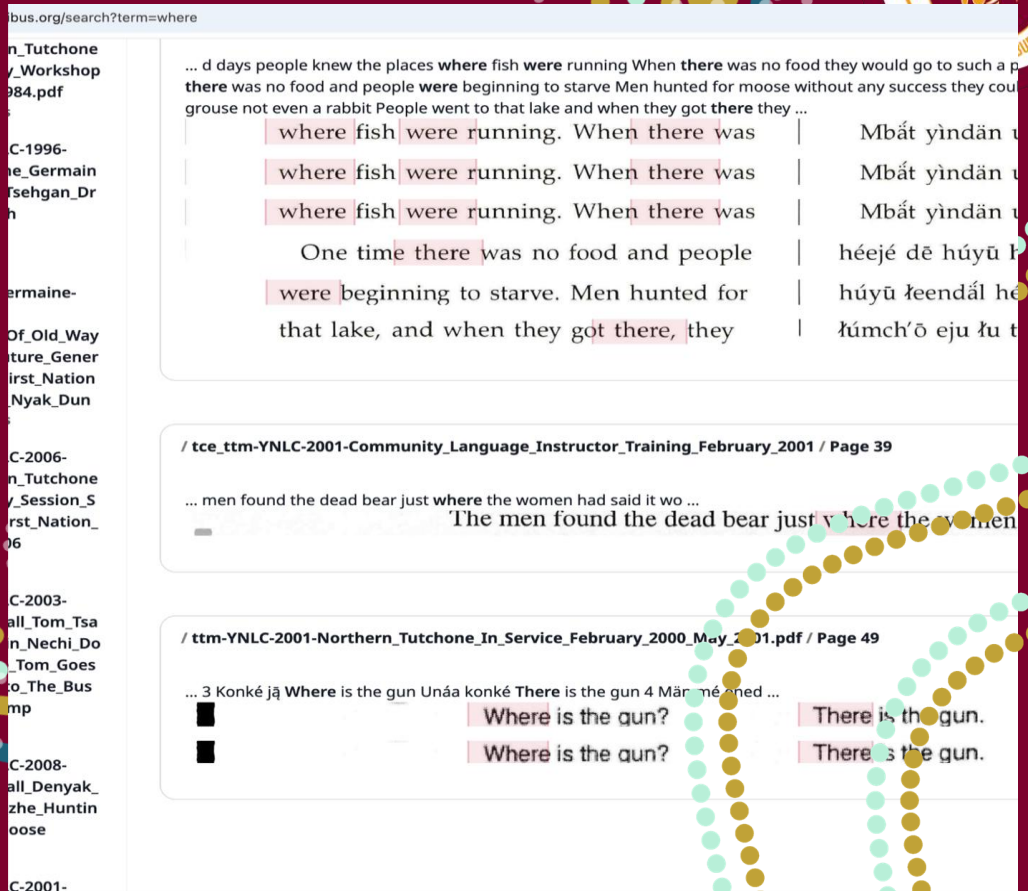
ts'ət ne- #-d- i- Ł-tšų'

blanket ITER-#-QUAL-1SG.PRES-Ł-handle.clothlike

'I pick up a blanket'



Searching in Transkribus (Example)



Question Formation in Northern Tutchone

Example: Questions with *where?*

- (A) Asking about the location of an action/state (*where is the dog sitting?)*
- (B) Asking about the location of an object (*where is the trap?)*
- Different dialects are spoken in different communities

Action/State: 'Where is the dog sitting?'

Dialect			
Caramacks	tlin dog	jun where	hede sit
Mayo	Indyǭ where	tlin dog	téné̀h'e sit

Object: Where is the trap?

Dialect		
Caramacks	Khyál trap	jā where
Mayo	khyá trap	yedyą́ where

MUSSI CHO