Polysynthetic languages

- complex morphological structure
- words consist of many morphemes – meaningful units
can express rich lexical meanings
- noun-incorporation / lexical suffixes
- morphemes that represent objects are part of the word
- wide-spread in BC FN languages
- 34 languages spoken in BC (FPCC 2014)
- not taught as polysynthetic languages in BC
- usually taught as IndoEuropean languages (Kell 2014)

Living Kwak’wala

- Kwak’wala has been documented for more than 100 years
- Kwak’wala teaching & curriculum in schools for more than 3 decades
- Ministry of Education approved curriculum in School District 72 & 85
- growing number of community members learning the language
- several Kwak’wala learning groups over Vancouver island
- some are formal & some are informal
- There are increasing efforts to revitalize the language
- Today’s teachers are often adult learners of their language
- B. Ed in Indigenous Language Revitalization cohort at the University of Victoria

Kwak’wala morphology

- over 400 suffixes
  - lexical suffixes
  - body parts, locations, physical objects

Beautiful words and worldview

kwə’lə’yu̱ – a term of endearment used to address a loved child, the literal meaning of this word is ‘my reason for living’
kwə́ = life la = continuous yu = instrument for
ŋəgwaxtəs – often taught as ‘what is your name?’ can be understood literally as ‘who is on your head?’ referring to the responsibility and honour that one carries when given an ancestral name
hayəsəkələ – often taught to mean ‘married couple’ the literal translation can be understood as ‘breathing together as one’

Some questions:

- How can linguistic understandings better inform Indigenous language learning and teaching?

Kwak’wala is rich with metaphor that conveys meaningful concepts of body/house/land (Nicolson 2013). What learning experiences can we create that reflect these cultural understandings?

- How can we more effectively teach lexical suffixes supporting learners to apply these units of meaning to understanding and producing words?