

Indigenous languages in danger of dying off, says Laurentian University professor

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It's been more than seven months since Justin Trudeau pledged to develop an Indigenous Languages Act, and a Sudbury professor is hoping that the government eventually develops a preservation plan with "teeth."

Mary Anne Corbiere of the University of Sudbury said that some languages are on the brink of being lost.

"If they are not preserved, they will die when the last speaker dies," Corbiere told CBC's *Morning North*. "Some languages in Canada now just have fewer than 10 speakers who grew up with the language. Most of those speakers are elderly."

- ['A core part of our identity': Indigenous language law targeted for 2018](#)

Students in immersion program 'doing their darndest'

Corbiere said that the three Indigenous languages that are generally cited as having the greatest chance of survival are Inuktitut, Cree and Ojibwe.

The others, like Cayuga, Delaware and Oneida, she said, are in turmoil.

To combat the loss, Corbiere has been running her own courses at the University of Sudbury, where students can earn credits for learning and speaking Indigenous languages. She said the program has inspired students to take the knowledge back to their communities.

"The dedicated students in my immersion program are doing their darndest, using the language in their everyday activities," Corbiere said. "The more they learn, the more they try to use it so [preserving languages] is certainly possible with dedication."

- [Click here to see an interactive map of Indigenous Languages](#)
- [Indigenous languages lost, found and shared](#)

Language protection a 'sign of respect'

Corbiere is also hoping that any legislation to protect Indigenous languages also has adequate funding.

"At this point, those people that are running immersion programs have to scrounge for funding," she said. "Some have been very determined and very successful. But for many other languages, they are struggling to make those programs happen."

In the end, Corbiere sees a chance that some of the languages can make a return to Canada's cultural landscape. And if non-Indigenous speakers make an attempt at learning the tongues, it will be a step in the right direction.

"I welcome anybody who wants to learn our languages," she said. "My view is that when someone makes a sincere effort to communicate on their terms, their language, that's the greatest sign of respect you can give anyone."