



Final Report

2018 Harris Centre Thriving Regions Applied Research Fund
Project: Documenting a community's response to food insecurity
in Southwestern Newfoundland and Labrador

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Summary

"Lights... Camera... Grow!" is a cross-sector, collaborative project that was developed for the third Thriving Regions Partnership Process (2018) and engaged residents of the southwest coast of NL on the theme, "Building Food Security (Fisheries and Agriculture)". The principal output from this project is a short film that documents how community members have responded to local food security threats. It also spawned a Youtube, live streamed panel discussion hosted by the Harris Centre. Disrupted and delayed by the COVID-19 global pandemic, "Lights... Camera... Grow!" was shot by west coast videographer Tom Cochrane, with further filming and editing by Peter Elliot and Christopher Richardson of Cranky Goat Entertainment. It features vignettes of residents sharing local knowledge and practices for preparing gardens, selecting vegetables that will survive a SWNL summer, and how to care for their crops. Participants discuss the importance of food security in a relatively remote part of the island and demonstrate how sharing produce can bring farmers and gardeners together. Our findings suggest that in the context of a university-community engagement project, sociolinguistic practices - here, centred on community identification and self-preservation - are important semiotic markers of community participation that deserve further study.

Headlines News in NL

N.L. leads country on food security for poor, research says
CBC News · Posted: Sep 12, 2015

Single parents hit hard by food insecurity
Why so many in N.L. are struggling to put food on the table
CBC News · Posted: Feb 19, 2020

Why is food insecurity such a big issue in N.L.?
Alex Kennedy · CBC News · Posted: Feb 17, 2020

N.L.'s fall from grace on food insecurity record 'disturbing'
Adam Walsh · CBC News · Posted: Feb 22, 2020

Marine Atlantic 'not a viable alternative' to Oceanex, says freight association
Advocacy group warns of food and chemical shortages if Oceanex slashes services again
Terry Roberts · CBC News · Posted: May 05, 2020

Pandemic could affect food supplies, power grids, telecommunications, says government document
Agriculture minister warns labour shortages could affect the food supply
Catharine Tunney · CBC News · Posted: Apr 15, 2020

Newfoundland faces possible food shortage as pandemic hammers key shipping company
Oceanex looking for federal subsidy to keep supply ships running
David Cochrane · CBC News · Posted: Apr 13, 2020

As the headlines attest, Newfoundland and Labrador faces a food security problem. The United Nations' [Committee on World Food Security](#) defines food security as when “all people, at all times, have physical, social, and economic access to sufficient, safe, and nutritious food that meets their food preferences and dietary needs for an active and healthy life”. Many Newfoundlanders and Labradorians would agree that their basic food needs are not being met. In response to the headline news and after witnessing food rotting on the shelves in rural grocery stores, I proposed a Thriving Regions Partnership Process project to document one community's local response to this problem. This report is meant to accompany a viewing of the short film, “Lights. Camera. Grow!” as it identifies a number of key issues that took place behind-the-scenes and will give further understanding of the scenes that were included in the film.

Positioning & Participating

As a faculty member at the St. John's campus, I sit well beyond the social and geographic boundaries of South West Newfoundland and Labrador (SWNL). Moreover, I am a linguist - specifically, one who studies how regional and temporal social systems create and are influenced by variation in spoken English. So, it might not be immediately clear why I would want to make

a film about food security and the efforts of farmers and gardeners in SWNL to promote traditional growing practices. Without a doubt, this took me out of my comfort zone but as I had come to learn through this project, some principles of linguistic analysis and film production are mutually beneficial methods for community engagement.



When I had read the TRPP call for funding proposals, I had just completed a year-long sabbatical during which I held a board position with the DOCTalks Festival & Symposium Inc. DOCTalks is a not-for-profit organization based in New Brunswick that promotes cross-sector collaboration between documentary filmmakers, academic researchers, community groups, governments, foundations and broadcasters to produce knowledge mobilization-based documentary media projects. While in this position, I completed a digital film production course at the University of New Brunswick and worked on a short, documentary film about the Hayes Farm in Fredericton, New Brunswick called, “Growing Farmers”.



By working directly with a documentary producer and professional photographer/videographer, I gained first hand experience with processes of documentary filmmaking and developed working relationships with many other Atlantic Canadian funders, producers, filmmakers and broadcasters. This experience led to editing the DOCTalks Guidebook: Cross-sector Collaborative Practices for Knowledge-based Documentary Media, a resource for starting a documentary CoP (De Decker, P., 2020). Around the same time, I co-authored a multimedia tool, “Show, Don’t Tell: Breaking the bottleneck between evidence & impact through documentary” (De Decker, P. et al. 2021). Both the guide and the multimedia resource provide practical insight into the process of producing and funding knowledge-mobilization documentary media, from a *community of practice* point of view. The community of practice framework focuses our view of what a knowledge-based project is: where cross-sector collaborators are mutually engaged in the creation of knowledge around a pressing issue facing their community. Based on my experiences with these projects, and with a network of support, I felt motivated and capable of initiating a documentary media community of practice in SWNL.

Talking in a Thriving Region

The community of practice framework (Lave & Wenger 1991) (henceforth CoP) has its origins in the scholarship of Jean Lave (a cognitive anthropologist) and Etienne Wenger (an education theorist). They defined a CoP as: “a group of people who share a concern or a passion for something they do, and learn how to do it better as they interact regularly”. A CoP approach to the type of documentary media proposed here provides a number of advantages. First, it turns the focus towards collaboration, defined by cross-sector collaborators engaged around a common interest to investigate and address the social concerns they face at local, national and international levels. All participants, peripheral as well as central members, are responsible for contributing to the final product. Second, this process of engagement prioritizes the CoP’s members’ experiences and specialized knowledge (e.g. media production, academic research, understanding of a social problem under investigation, personal experiences), sees them as important to the identity and goals of the entire group and seeks to capitalize on them. Third, it views its members’ interpretation of research knowledge or personal experience as important to the development of the emerging media project. The collective learning that takes place in a CoP becomes the focus of knowledge-based media, as it works to develop a common narrative for the issues they seek to address

As a sociolinguist employing a CoP approach to knowledge-mobilization via documentary film, I understand local knowledge around food security as an emergent and negotiated property between multiple actors. It is transmitted via local linguistic practices. It was therefore necessary to document how language is used by CoP members in relation to knowledge, belief and practices surrounding food security, farming and gardening in SWNL.

For example, one overarching theme identified in the interviews with participants, and further signalled on Port Aux Basque’s website is that the SWNL area is “one of the best farming areas in the province” (PAB 2023). It became clear that this oft-cited claim required our documentary focus in order to show how local community members discursively constructed (i.e. talked about) and involved it in their ideological framing of food security activities in the area.

Another source of ideological framing was introduced by the Hayes Farm workshop that was funded by the TRPP grant. In the *Growing Farmers* film mentioned above, we focussed on the knowledge that the Hayes Farm had generated as a 200-year-old, recently repurposed farm in Fredericton, New Brunswick. The Farm is a community-led organization, “designed to inspire and mobilize farmers towards a resilient and thriving food system, provide skills, expertise and support and practice for regenerative agriculture” (Hayes 2023). Through this TRPP funded workshop residents of SWNL communities were able to come together to learn more about the Hayes Farm and their advocacy for human-scale farming and consider ways their own regional knowledge (like what types of vegetables to plant and when) might be similar or different from the Hayes’ practices. Importantly, it provided an opportunity for community members to talk to each other and share knowledge about growing their own food.

Therefore, such talk about farming and family gardening practices, in both more formal contexts, like the Hayes Farm workshop and the Port-Aux-Basque website, and in, for example, the personal conversations between two local business owners, became the immediate object of study and documentation that we set out to elicit and record.

Procedures

Part of the Thriving Regions Partnership Process preceded my involvement with the first meeting taking place at Port Aux Basque on October 18, 2018. There, participants identified priority research themes with a particular interest in how any of them might relate to entrepreneurship or community/regional collaboration:

- embracing the aging population,
- understanding tourism patterns,
- building food security (fisheries and agriculture)

My first meeting with community members was through Grenfell's Office of Engagement which set up a workshop on December 5, 2018. Along with two other faculty members, I presented my proposal, which centred on the following activities:

- to document local practices; establish connection with agripreneur model via member of the Hayes Farm from NB to NL
- to provide collaborative learning opportunities to share small-scale organic gardening practices designed to produce market-ready vegetables where local stakeholders will carry out training provided by Hayes on a voluntary basis

My approach in this project was to provide opportunities for social engagement (e.g. meeting with a Hayes Farmer, a planting and gardening workshop, a season-end harvest potluck, etc) and thus opportunities for community members to talk to each other. This seemed to work well and aligned with activities and initiatives the community had independently planned for themselves. For example, the Hayes workshop fit in well with an annual planting workshop that some participants were already intending to hold again this year. Building on community scaffolding already in place harmonized with my goal to document the communication practices that emerge at local events. Such opportunities were crucial in understanding how local knowledge is created and transmitted, how this knowledge could be highlighted for local entrepreneurial purposes and, likewise, how sociolinguistic activities underlying local knowledge production might be made more accessible in future TRPP public engagement activities.

Working with Stakeholders/Collaborators

It is perhaps appropriate for a project on communication to experience a significant episode of miscommunication. While an encouraging number of community members were present at the PAB meetings, and a larger number of volunteers signed up to our email list, in the end, very few participants were actively involved with this project. I understood this to be due - in part - to a fundamental misunderstanding about what the project would support. One community official, eager to start a community garden in their town, believed the entire project's budget would be used to hire a local farmer to build and maintain the garden. After confirming what the funding was for, this community dropped out. Other members indicated that the project wasn't feasible in bringing together members of communities across SWNL (i.e. the distance was too far; communication networks were not yet established). While TRPP had identified SWNL as a coherent "thriving region", this project suggests that it might not be a coherent "sociolinguistic

community”. Rather, it might be better defined as independent networks with weak ties to each other. In this respect, the project was not able to - nor initially designed to - bring these networks together and this turned into an obstacle that threatened to derail the project. I offer a further analysis of the problems relating

Despite this initial misunderstanding and setback, the project continued on thanks to two indispensable community members: Melissa Samms (from Port-Aux Basque) and Roshni Caputo-Nimbark (Codroy). Without their collaboration, the resulting short film would not have been completed. Such is the instability and vulnerability of public engagement where very little is in the hands of the scholar or so-called “principal investigator”.

Thanks to Christopher Paterson and Bojan Fürst of the Harris Centre for recognizing the inherent challenges that came with documenting community partnership in the SWNL region. And for their patience and guidance when those challenges appeared insurmountable.

I am also grateful to Josh Smee from Food First NL. Not only did his experience and insight appear in the film, it also helped me understand how significant food insecurity is.

Although the project was greatly disrupted and delayed by the COVID-19 global pandemic, we had a diligent team that included Tom Cochrane, a west coast videographer who shot much of the footage onsite. Additional filming and the seemingly unending job of editing was taken up by Peter Elliot and Christopher Richardson of Cranky Goat Entertainment in St. John’s. Melissa Samms and Roshni Caputo-Nimbark also shot and contributed cellphone video straight from their own communities.



The Crew of Cranky Goat Entertainment
Photo: <https://crankygoatentertainment.ca/>

Final Products

“Lights. Camera. Grow!” aired on Youtube on June 22, 2021. The video, just over 16 minutes in length is accessible via https://youtu.be/jTIQy1uj_ZY. It was listed as an official selection of the Silver Wave Film Festival in Fredericton, New Brunswick in 2021.



Following this, Bojan Fürst of the Harris Centre invited me and key stakeholders in the project to be part of a panel discussion called, Southwest Coast TRPP Panel Discussion which was live streamed to Youtube on June 28, 2021. The livestream video was recorded and is currently available at the Harris Centre's channel via <https://youtu.be/rgYdY8GV7DI>



Conclusions

This project faced several challenges that problematized the initial proposal. The most significant is the ontological underpinnings that lead to the labelling of the communities of Codroy, Port Aux Basque, Isle aux Morts and Burnt Islands as belonging to a larger regionally integrated entity called “South West Newfoundland and Labrador”. As the Southwest Coast Thriving Regions Workshop Phase 2 Report states: SWNL is composed of “over twenty communities between North Branch and La Poile with a population of nearly 7,800 people”. The sociolinguistic methodology used here detected the lack of

coherent, shared linguistic practices across this vast region. In practice, trying to work with SWNL as a proper “community” made the goal of regional collaboration difficult, if not impossible. The two communities that did remain active in the project worked separately from each other, citing distance as the main barrier.

As noted above, the project was designed to document communicative practices.. These are important for understanding how local knowledge is produced and transmitted. We discovered where those lines of communication exist and where they do not. It is suggested, going forward, to work with a sociologically, internally-defined community rather than imposing one from outside.

On a positive note, building on community scaffolding already in place harmonized with my goal to document the communication practices that emerge at local events. This allowed us to better understand the creation and re-creation of local knowledge.

The success of this project rests in ultimately finding and turning the subject matter of the short film towards relatively small, previously established communities of practice already engaged at the time of shooting. As a linguist, I can see that we managed to capture sociolinguistic engagement of an active few among the twenty communities, documenting not just activities in the fight for food security but also how language - synchronically and diachronically - serves as a tool for drawing a social order in which local history and growing practices may be able to reverse the tide of negative headlines identified at the outset of this report. This talk, as captured on film and made freely available online for anyone to view and use to continue conversations about food security and create new generations of local stewards engaged in maintaining food security for their communities.

References

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