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Pronunciation

The Sounds

The goal of this book is to let English speakers acquire an intelligible pronunciation of Chinook Jargon in as short of time period as possible and to have fun doing it. In the spelling system used in this book, each letter or letter combination has a single pronunciation and there are no silent letters. There are some sounds in Chinook Jargon that are not found in English. Some consonant pairs, such as *kl*, represent sounds that are different from their normal English representation, so you should study this chapter carefully.

In 1909, Frederick Long wrote, “[N]othing but a short talking acquaintance with the Indians themselves can convey the correct pronunciation” [of Chinook Jargon]. Native American languages found in the Pacific Northwest contain sounds that are not found in English. These sounds entered Chinook Jargon in words borrowed from these languages and persist in Chinook Jargon today. As spoken at Grand Ronde, Chinook Jargon contains sounds that English speakers don’t normally use. Where an English speaker has a *k*, a Grand Ronde Chinook Jargon speaker has to choose from a *k*, *k^h*, *k’*, *q*, *q^h*, and *q’*. The *k* can either be pronounced as a normal English *k* or the same sound can be produced deeper in the throat indicated by a *q*. Each variation of the *k* or *q* is slightly different and can affect the meaning of a word. Grand Ronde Chinook Jargon speakers have other sounds not found in English.

Historically, because Chinook Jargon was learned by most of its speakers as a second language, not every speaker accurately produced every sound in any given word. Some varieties of Chinook Jargon differed slightly from the norm. Even with variation, Chinook Jargon speakers were able to communicate with each other.

Some English speakers made do with approximations of sounds that they found difficult. Other English speakers really did “sound Native” when speaking Chinook Jargon. Linguistic transcripts of one English speaker’s Chinook Jargon from Alaska show that this speaker used the barred-L sound in many words. The barred-L in Chinook Jargon is derived from Native American languages and is not found in English.

The spelling system used in this book is designed so that Chinook Jargon can be learned quickly, so some sounds are approximated for the English speaker.¹

Chinook Jargon



This is a picture of Maquinna, a Nuu-Chah-Nulth *tayi* or leader. Maquinna traded with Europeans who came to Vancouver Island looking for sea otter skins. He also had two Europeans as slaves in the early 1800s. One of them, John R. Jewitt, published a book about his experience when he returned home. This picture was drawn around 1788 by Tomas Suria, a Spaniard.

“*Le-yee ma hi-chill* signifies, ‘Ye do not know.’ It appears to be a poetical mode of expression, the common one for ‘you do not know’ being *Wik-kum-atush*; from this it would seem that they have two languages, one for their songs and another for common use.” — John R. Jewitt (1816, *Narratives of the Adventures and Sufferings of John R. Jewitt*)

“Another of the developments of these contacts between the Indians and the whites was the creation of Chinook jargon. This was a trade language chiefly, with words from Indian languages, French and English. It had a limited vocabulary and was not difficult to learn. It was extremely convenient and became the *lingua franca* up and down the Island as well as the mainland.” — S. W. Jackman (1972, *Vancouver Island*)

Consonants

Here's a list of the consonant sounds used in this book's Chinook Jargon: *b, ch, d, g, h, hw, k, kl, kw, l, m, n, ng, p, r, s, sh, t, tl, ts, w, and y.*

Some of the consonant sounds are pronounced or used differently than they are in English. With a little practice, you can master them:

- ch* is pronounced as in the English “change” or “each.”
- h* is pronounced like an English “h” at the beginning of a word. When it precedes another consonant, thicken it to make it more audible.
- hw* The *h* is the stressed consonant and dominates the *w*.
- k* is optionally unaspirated in some words. *Skukum* often sounds like *sgugum*. Some Native teachers wrote “kg” where an unaspirated-K occurred. For example, *kalakala* was written as *kgalakgala*.

Common Sounds

Sounds used in speaking Chinook Jargon are common across the indigenous languages of the Pacific Northwest. Some of the sounds were unfamiliar to non-Natives, who tended to simplify them.

“The sounds used by most [Native] speakers of Jargon are the sounds used in their native languages and dialects. This results in little or no phonetic confusion when strangers from far-distant tribes meet and converse in Jargon.” — Melville Jacobs (1932, *Notes on The Structure of Chinook Jargon*)

“As the Jargon is to be spoken by Englishmen and Frenchmen, and by Indians of at least a dozen tribes, so as to be alike easy and intelligible to all, it must admit no sound which cannot be readily pronounced by all.” — Horatio Hale (1890, *An International Idiom*)

“One important point to remember in speaking Chinook is that there are in Chinook many guttural [sic] sounds which the English language has no letter equivalent for but which are common enough in German. These must be indicated by comparative word sounds as used in English.” — W. S. “El Comancho” Phillips (1913, *The Chinook Book*)

Chinook Jargon

kl The *kl* sound represents a barred-L. A barred-L is the same sound as the Welsh *ll*. Put the tip of the tongue against the roof of your mouth and hiss. This is the preferred sound for the *kl*. However, three alternate pronunciations are heard for the barred-L.

Some speakers use a “t” and an “l” pronounced together. The “t” and the “l” are pronounced as close to one another as the speaker can.

Other speakers use an unaspirated-K with an “l.” An unaspirated-K sounds to many English speakers as if it were almost a “g.” Some people write it as a “kg.” Think of “kgl” and use the sound found in “ankle” and “oracle.” In Chinook Jargon, this sound can begin a word.

Still other speakers produce the exact sound as they would in English for a “kl” or “cl.” These speakers will sound the “kl,” like they do with every “kl” sound that begins a word, and produce the sound as in “clean” or “climb.”

Remember, once you settle on one of the possible ways of saying a *kl*, be consistent.

kw is the same as the English “qu” in “queen” or “quote.”

ng sounds like the “ng” in “dong.”

tl Use a true barred-L or, as an alternative, a “t” and an “l” pronounced close together. See the *kl* sound.

ts is pronounced as in “ts” but occurs in Chinook Jargon at the beginning of words.

The rest of the consonant sounds are as in English. The consonant pairs *bl*, *dl*, *kr*, *kt*, and *st* also occur in Chinook Jargon words. There are a few words where the *kl* is pronounced as in English and not as a barred-L. An example is *lakli*, which is from the French *la clé*. These are noted in the vocabulary.

Vowels and Diphthongs

This book's spelling system uses a one to one correspondence between each sound and letter or pair. Each vowel or diphthong, which is a vowel pair, indicates a unique sound. Pronounce vowels and diphthongs as follows:

<i>a</i>	ah, papa
<i>e</i>	bet, men
<i>ê</i>	ton, but
<i>i</i>	ill, tin
<i>o</i>	toe, row, stove
<i>u</i>	loop, tune
<i>aw</i>	house, trout
<i>ay</i>	buy, I, tide
<i>ey</i>	pay, bait, grade
<i>iy</i>	beat, leap, me
<i>oy</i>	boy, toy
<i>uy</i>	hoo-eeey, <i>oui</i> (French)

They Drift a Bit

Hilu, halo, helo, helu, and elo are recorded as ways to say “none.” While the vowels drift from dictionary to dictionary and region to region, consonants remain pretty stable.

“The modern usage of the vowels of the jargon is better defined than that of the time of the Astoria settlement, for Alex. Ross, one of the Astor men, in his Chinook vocabulary, represents our *klaxta* by ‘tluxta,’ *ahnkutty* by ‘ankate,’ *weght* by ‘wought,’ *kuitan* by ‘keutan,’ *kultus* by ‘kaltash,’ *iskum* by ‘eshkam.’ Other early writers indicate the same doubtful vowel sounds of the Indian speech, which time and usage have brought to the simpler present forms.” — John Gill (1909, *Gill's Dictionary of the Chinook Jargon*)

“The Indians are very quick to detect any difference in the intonation or method of pronunciation of the whites, and sometimes think we speak different languages. An Indian asked me one day (while pointing to a cow) what was the name we called the animal. I told him ‘cow.’ He said that he had just asked another white man, and he called it a ‘caow.’” — James G. Swan (1857, *The Northwest Coast*)

Accent

The trick to pronouncing a Chinook Jargon word is to use the syllable breakdown found in the vocabulary at the back. The correct syllable breakdown will help you identify consonant combinations and apply the correct accent. Most Chinook Jargon words are accented on the first syllable (e.g., *nay-ka*). The major exceptions to this are words derived from French nouns. These are easily identified as they begin with an “l” and are accented on a later syllable (e.g., *li-mo-to*)

The Barred-L

The barred-L sound (see page 22), represented as an “l̄” in the international phonetic alphabet, is not found in English, but is found in many other languages, including Welsh. In the mouths of some Chinook Jargon speakers, the barred-L became a “kl” at the beginning of words and just an “l̄” in the middle of words. The pronunciation of Chinook Jargon in slang and place names reflects this. The modern pronunciation of “Alki Beach,” “klahowya,” and “klahanie” are examples of this.

“The peculiar clucking sound is produced by the tongue pressing against the roof of the mouth, and pronouncing a word ending with *tl* as if there was the letter *k* at the end of the *tl*.” — James Swan (1857, *The Northwest Coast*)

“LL – a consonant whose difficulty is much overrated, and which can easily be mastered with a little practice. Put the tip of the tongue against the roof of the mouth and hiss. *Llan* (‘church’ or ‘village’), *Llan-gollen*, *Llanelli*.” — John Bowen & T.J. Rhys Jones (1960, *Welsh*)

“t̄ – is a voiceless ‘l’ made with a somewhat hissing sound: try setting your mouth to make an ‘l’, then blow gently.” — Henry B. Zenk & Tony A. Johnson (2003, *Chinuk Wawa, As Our Elders Teach Us to Speak It*)

“t̄ – is like [f], but made with the tongue initially in position for *t*; you will come close simply by trying to say the combination ‘tl’ as if it were English.” — Henry B. Zenk & Tony A. Johnson (2003, *Chinuk Wawa, As Our Elders Teach Us to Speak It*)

Henrietta Failing picked up the phrase “*klatawa saya*” from her father, James Failing, a Portland pioneer. Henry Zenk noticed that she pronounced *kl* in *klatawa* as a *kgl*, a noticeably non-English sound. This is evidence that non-Natives, in the Portland area, targeted the Native *t̄* sound as “correct.”

Development

The sounds and words of Chinook Jargon were “worked out” by the people who spoke it, but not everyone contributed equally. The Nuu-Chah-Nulth contribution, through English, gave a base, but the Chinooks contributed the bulk. There were borrowings from French, English and other Native American languages.

“The Nootka [Nuu-Chah-Nulth] no doubt entered the pidgin through white intermediaries: the marked sounds characteristic of the Chinook– and Salish–derived portion of the lexicon do not occur in any of the Nootka–derived words, except for the voiceless lateral fricative /ʃ/, and it was apparently late eighteenth–century European traders who first introduced a Nootka–based jargon (or incipient pidgin) to the Columbia River.” — Thomason and Kaufman (1989, *Language Contact, Creolization and Genetic Linguistics*)

“The persistence of such features [non-European sounds] is conclusive proof that most Indians learned CJ from other Indians, not from whites; they also show, I think, that whites were not involved in the original pidginization process.” — Sarah Thomason (1983, “Chinook Jargon in Areal and Historical Context”)

“The Indians are at present in the habit of living part of the year in Victoria, Vancouver, or New Westminster, working in various trades: in saw-mills and canneries, on wharves, as sailors, etc. In the fall they go to Puget Sound hop-picking. At these places members of numerous tribes gather, who use Chinook as a means of communication. They have their own quarter in every city.” — Franz Boas (1888, “Chinook Songs”)

“The words of English origin numbered in 1841, 41; in 1863, 67, and in 1904, 570. Many words of French and Indian origins have been dropped. The English words are used both by Indians and whites when they talk Chinook, and have become part of the language.” — (1909, attributed to Myron Eells by George Shaw, *The Chinook Jargon and How To Use It*)

“It might have been expected from the number of Sandwich Islanders introduced by the Hudson’s Bay company, and long resident in the country, that the Kanaka element would have found its way into the language, but their utterance is so foreign to the Indian ear, that not a word has been adopted.” — George Gibbs (1863, *Dictionary of the Chinook Jargon*)

Growth

Regardless of Chinook Jargon's origins, by the end of the nineteenth century it had grown into an international language.

"It is a language confined wholly, I believe, to our Northwestern possessions west of the Rocky Mountains. It originated in the roving, trading spirit of the tribes, and has been added to and increased since the introduction of the whites among them." – James G. Swan (1857, *The Northwest Coast*)

"The 'Trade Language' which came afterwards to be known as the 'Chinook Jargon,' grew into existence. As finally developed, it has become really an 'international speech,' widely diffused..." – Horatio Hale (1890, *An International Idiom; a Manual of the Oregon Trade language, or Chinook Jargon*)

Regional Differences

Although most Chinook Jargon words are pronounced the same across the Northwest, there are a small number of regional differences. These differences are not much of a hindrance in communication but are fun to explore.

Take the word for straight, correct, or truly. It is *délet* in the vocabulary. It is pronounced *délet* or *déleyt* at Puget Sound but *dret* at Grand Ronde, Oregon. *Délet* originated from the French *droit*. Grand Ronde, populated by people from Fort Vancouver and the Willamette Valley, preserves the form closest to the old Canadian and Missouri patois used by the voyageurs, *dret*. As Chinook Jargon spread and developed, an *l* was substituted for the *r* which many Native Americans had difficulty pronouncing. In the 1850s, as Chinook Jargon was adopted in the Puget Sound area, the *d* and *l* sounds were separated. *Dret* became *délet*. At some point the second vowel was elongated. A diverse pool of Native American and European speakers had begun using Chinook Jargon as a second language during this period. They required a more emphatic pronunciation of words to avoid confusion caused by their accents. The word *délet* was often pronounced *déleyt* and was learned that way by new Chinook Jargon speakers. On the other hand, Native American hop-pickers who spoke Chinook Jargon fluently, carried the original forms back to Kamloops, where both *délet* and *dret* have been recorded. *Déleyt* spread northward along the coast from Puget Sound through British Columbia and into Alaska, while *dret* is used today at Grand Ronde and *délet* elsewhere in southern Washington and Oregon.

Dictionaries

The late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries saw dozens of Chinook Jargon dictionaries on the market. While some were just money-making enterprises, other authors struggled to represent the language as best they could using the French and English orthographies of the times.

“The jargon is essentially a spoken and not a written tongue ... it is very much alive! There are no hard and fast rules for the spelling of words, and everyone, in writing Chinook, follows the dictates of his own judgement in the fabrication of phonetic equivalents, which are at best only approximations.” — Dr. C. M. Buchanan (manuscript quoted in the 1913 edition of Theodore Winthrop’s *The Canoe and the Saddle*)

“With regard to the spelling, it is believed that a sufficient number of forms is recorded to enable the student to identify practically every word, as well as to trace the origin of many words of undetermined derivation.” — George Shaw (1909, *The Chinook Jargon and How To Use It*)

“The phonology of the Jargon seems simple, but depends to a great extent on the speaker. Since most of the dictionaries have been written by native speakers of English, the more difficult of the sounds ... are represented as they would be pronounced by an English-speaking person.” — Barbara Harris (“Chinook Jargon: The Nineteenth Century Trade Language”)

“In consulting old word lists or dictionaries one is likely to find the variation in spelling very confusing. The difficulty lies in the fact that those who recorded the words made an attempt to spell them phonetically; but the guttural clucking pronunciation characteristic of the Indians of the Northwest was extremely difficult to represent with accuracy.” — Rena V. Grant (1942, “The Chinook Jargon, Past and Present”)

Middle Ground

Chinook Jargon provided a middle ground for the whites who couldn't learn a "real Indian" language and for Natives who preferred not speaking English. Even today, knowledge of Chinook Jargon is a cultural identifier.

"The Indians had strange-sounding names for things. The door, which they entered without knocking, was *le pote*. The pitch they recommended for starting fires was *le gome*. Head was *le tate*; the tongue, *le lang*; and the teeth, *le dents*. At first the settlers thought those were Indian words, but it turned out to be the language worked out by traders and trappers and their Indian customers, and the settlers began to learn the useful Chinook Jargon [from the Indians]." — Archie Binns (1941, *Northwest Gateway*)

"Besides the foregoing language, there is another lingo, or rather mixed dialect, spoken by the Chinook and other neighbouring tribes; which is generally used in their intercourse with the whites. It is much more easily learned, and the pronunciation more agreeable to the ear than the other...." — Alexander Ross (1849, *Adventures of the First Settlers on the Oregon or Columbia River, 1810–1813*)

"Unfortunately, all these languages, — the Nootka, Nasquale, Tshinuk, Tsihailish, &c, — were alike harsh in pronunciation, complex in structure, and spoken over a limited space. The foreigners, therefore, took no pains to become acquainted with any of them." — Horatio Hale (1846, "Ethnology Report")

"They appear to have a great aversion to learning the English language, contenting themselves with the Jargon, which they look upon as a sort of Whiteman's talk." — James G. Swan (1857, *The Northwest Coast*)

"It must not be supposed, however, that the pronunciation I have given is the only correct one; as already stated, there are often different ways of pronouncing the same word in different localities."
— George Shaw (1909, *The Chinook Jargon and How to Use It*)

"The speech thus recorded is very Native-sounding, and includes half a dozen gutturals completely absent from my grandfather's Jargon." — Robert Henderson (September 1997, "Klahowya, Sikhs!")

3

Grammar

Like the grammar of any other language, Chinook Jargon grammar provides a target for speakers. Chinook Jargon was spoken over a large geographical area and by people from diverse backgrounds. Chinook Jargon varied from place to place and over time. The main rule in speaking Chinook Jargon is to speak so you are understood and try your best to understand the other speaker. You will need to be flexible, so hang loose.

A complete grammar of Chinook Jargon is beyond the scope of this book. In this section you'll learn the most important rules used by Chinook Jargon speakers. You will speak good Chinook Jargon if you adhere to these rules. The best way to learn Chinook Jargon is to find a friend and start practicing.

Personal Pronouns

The personal pronouns in Chinook Jargon are:

I, me, my, mine	<i>nayka</i>
you, your, yours (singular)	<i>mayka</i>
he, she, it, him, his, her, hers...	<i>yaka</i>
we, us, our, ours	<i>nêsayka</i>
you, your, yours (plural)	<i>mêsayka</i>
they, them, their, theirs	<i>klaska</i>

These pronouns are used as subjects, objects and to show possession.

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The second column in this issue of *Kamloops Wawa*, a periodical, is written in a Chinook Jargon version of Duployian shorthand. Father Jean-Marie LeJeune, a Catholic priest at Kamloops, B.C., published *Kamloops Wawa* from 1891 until 1904. *Kamloops Wawa* not only contained parish news, but also religious instruction, stories, several plays, and colorful advertisements in the Chinook Jargon shorthand.

Father LeJeune published other material in the shorthand, such as catechisms, bible interpretations and a dictionary.

Articles

There is no word for “the,” so use *ukuk* if you are referring to a particular item. *Ukuk* means “this” or “that.” There is no word for “a” but sometimes the word *ikt*, meaning “one,” or even *ukuk*, for a specific item, can be used.

a man	<i>man</i>
one man	<i>ikt man</i>
the man	<i>ukuk man</i>
that man	<i>ukuk man</i>

Ukuk is sometimes used on its own as a pronoun.

This is my bag.	<i>Ukuk nayka lisak.</i>
That [thing] is powerful.	<i>Skukum ukuk.</i>

Word Order

The verb normally goes after a pronoun in Chinook Jargon. This is always the case when the verb indicates an action. When an adjective or noun is used in place of an action verb (e.g., “I [am] tired”) the word order can be switched.

I throw a ball.	<i>Nayka mash libal.</i>
I go to the store.	<i>Nayka klatawa kupa makuk haws.</i>
	but
I am tired	<i>Til nayka.</i>
	or
	<i>Nayka til.</i>
He’s a coyote	<i>Talapus yaka.</i>
	or
	<i>Yaka talapus.</i>

Kupa indicates location and translates “to,” “with,” “at,” “on,” “in,” “from,” or “by.” *Klak*, *kikwêli*, and *klahani* are three modifiers that sometimes appear before *kupa*. *Klak kupa* means “off of” or “away from,” while *kikwêli kupa* means “down from” or “underneath.” *Klahani kupa* means “outside of,” as in *Nayka mitlayt klahani kupa town*, “I live outside of town.”

Word Types

Even though linguists say that Chinook Jargon words are flexible as to usage, the vocabulary at the back of this book classifies each word as being a noun, verb, adjective, adverb, etc. You should normally use a word according to the type described in the vocabulary. You will avoid mistakes caused by subtle shades of meaning if you adhere to this policy. If you really need to use a word as a different type, here are two rules to follow:

- Combine a noun or adjective with *mamuk* to use it as an action verb. *Isik* refers to a “paddle.” *Mamuk isik* means “to paddle.”
- Combine a noun or verb with *kakwa* to use it as an adjective or adverb to express likeness or similarity. *Chikêmin* is the noun for “metal.” *Kakwa chikêmin* means “metallic” or “like metal.”

A quick warning: Combined words often turn into compound words, which may have special meanings. Check the vocabulary in the back of the book for the meaning of some compounds.

More Words

Horatio Hale documented Chinook Jargon as part of an ethnological study of Oregon conducted by the United States Exploring Expedition in 1841. Hale revisited Chinook Jargon fifty-nine years later. Hale found the language’s grammar was stable during that period, but the number of simple words had increased from the original 250 he had collected.

“But, as might be expected, the language continued to develop. Its grammar, such as it was, remained the same, but its lexicon drew contributions from all the various sources which have been named [Nootka, English, French, Chinook], and from some others. In 1863, seventeen years after my list was published, the Smithsonian Institution put forth a ‘Dictionary of the Chinook Jargon,’ prepared by the late George Gibbs, a thoroughly competent investigator. His collection comprised of nearly five hundred words.” — Horatio Hale (1890, *An International Idiom*)

“A. P. Grant (1994 MS) is a collection of all morphemes which I have been able to find as purporting to belong to the CJ lexicon; these are divided into well-attested and dubious forms. The latter number over 550; the former ... number 1078.” — Anthony P. Grant (1996, “Chinook Jargon and its distribution on the Pacific Northwest and beyond”)

A “Correct” Jargon?

“Judge Coquille Thompson, now at Warm Springs, but originally from the northwest Oregon area in which Mr. Walker lived, and where Jargon was strongest in Oregon, considers that those at Warm Springs who have some knowledge of Jargon ‘don’t put the words together right.’ There seems, then, to have been a norm, and a role, for Jargon, beyond sheer makeshift expediency. Perhaps more of the outlines and character of the Jargon speech community can yet be determined, from documents and memory.” — Dell and Virginia Hymes (1972, “Chinook Jargon as ‘Mother’s Tongue’”)

Context

Context provides the framework in which an action occurs. Words or phrases marking context are usually placed at the beginning of a sentence. Context can be tense, time, probability, or place.

She goes.	<i>Yaka klatawa.</i>
She will go.	<i>Atlki yaka klatawa.</i>
She will go soon.	<i>Wik lili yaka klatawa.</i>
She will go a while from now.	<i>Bambay yaka klatawa.</i>
Maybe she goes.	<i>Klonês yaka klatawa.</i>
She is going now.	<i>Alta yaka klatawa.</i>
She went.	<i>Ankati yaka klatawa.</i>
She just went.	<i>Chiy yaka klatawa.</i>
She went a little while ago.	<i>Tênês ankati yaka klatawa.</i>
She’s going alone.	<i>Kêpit ikt yaka yaka klatawa.</i>
She went yesterday.	<i>Tatlki san yaka klatawa.</i>
She’s unable to go.	<i>Hawkwêtl yaka klatawa.</i>

Chinook Jargon relies heavily on context for meaning. Once the context is established, it does not have to be repeated in each sentence. Context words can also appear within a sentence if you wish to emphasize other words.

Chinook Jargon

Modifiers

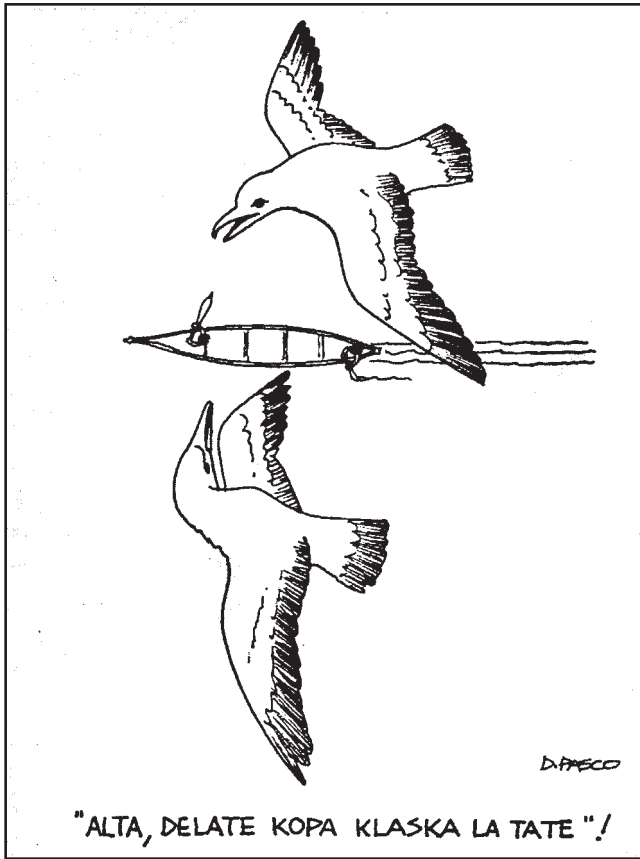
Adjectives and adverbs are important since Chinook Jargon words never change for gender or quantity. The word *musmus* meaning “cow” could be “a male cow,” “a female cow,” or “cows.” Modifiers are placed in front of the noun or verb. A female cow is a *kluchmên musmus*.

many	<i>hayu</i>
some	<i>tênês hayu, wik hayu</i>
all	<i>kanawi</i>
big, very	<i>hayash</i>
small, little	<i>tênês</i>
strong, powerful	<i>skukum</i>
quick	<i>hayak</i>
slow	<i>klawa</i>
male	<i>man</i>
female	<i>kluchmên</i>

Wik negates the phrase. *Wik* goes before the subject pronoun and verb in a phrase. *Hilu* is a replacement for *wik* in some varieties of Chinook Jargon, but implies “nothing.” *Hawkwêtl* also replaces *wik* and indicates you are unable to do something.

I watch.	<i>Nayka nanich.</i>
I don't watch.	<i>Wik nayka nanich.</i>
Bob doesn't see anything.	<i>Bob wik ikta yaka nanich.</i>
They don't have children.	<i>Hilu tênas mitlayt kupa klaska.</i>
I can't see.	<i>Hawkwêtl nayka nanich.</i>

In some northern varieties of Chinook Jargon, *hilu* completely replaces *wik*.



— Duane Pasco (*Tenas Wawa*)

This cartoon is from *Tenas Wawa*. Translated it says, “Now, straight for their heads.”

“The future, in the sense of ‘about to,’ ‘ready to,’ is sometimes expressed by *tikeh* or *tikegh* [*tiki*], which means properly to wish or desire; as, *nika papa tikegh mimaloose*, my father is near dying, or about to die.” — Horatio Hale (1890, *An International Idiom*)

Some speakers of Chinook Jargon at Grand Ronde use proclitic pronouns. A proclitic pronoun is reduced in form and placed in front of the verb. *Na* is often used for *nayka*, *ma* for *mayka* and *ya* for *yaka*. *Na klatawa* replaces *nayka klatawa* for “I go.” The complete longer forms are used when a speaker wishes to emphasize the pronoun. *Nayka na klatawa* means “I am the one who wants to go.” This usage never caught on outside of Grand Ronde.

Chinook Jargon

Pronouns with Other Words

Chinook Jargon speakers include pronouns where they are not used in English. When a noun is the subject, *yaka* or *klaska* is generally put in front of the verb in spoken Chinook Jargon.

That man talks. *Ukuk man yaka wawa.*

(Linear translation: That man he talks.)

People see you. *Tilikêm klaska nanich mayka.*

(Linear translation: People they see you.)

I am going to look for.... *Nayka klatawa nanich....*

(Linear translation: I go watch.)

Mary teaches me. *Mary yaka mamuk kêmêtêks nayka.*

(Linear translation: Mary she teaches me.)

Pronouns also show possession. Without a pronoun, any noun preceding another noun will become an adjective.

a dog's house *kamuks yaka haws*

(Linear translation: dog his house)

a dog house *kamuks haws*

(Linear translation: dog house)

Bob's wife's hat *Bob yaka kluchmên yaka siyaputl*

(Linear Translation: Bob his wife her hat)

Some people omit the pronoun when a subject noun is present. Even though people like Charles Tate, Myron Eells, and Father LeJeune were known to speak Chinook Jargon fluently, they adopted a writing style that did not always use a pronoun with a subject noun.

Comparisons

Ilêp, which means “first,” conveys “more,” and *kimta*, which means “behind,” conveys “less.” Use *dêlet* in front of *ilêp* or *kimta* to get the superlative.

better	<i>Ilêp klush</i> or <i>manêki klush</i>
worse	<i>kimta klush</i> or <i>manêki wik klush</i>
You’re better than I am.	<i>Mayka ilêp klush kupa nayka.</i>
best	<i>dêlet ilêp klush</i>
worst	<i>dêlet kimta wik klush</i>

Paraphrasing can also make comparisons.

You’re better than I am. *Wik nayka klush kakwa mayka.*
 (Linear translation: Negative I good as you.)

Manêki and *pus* are sometimes used instead of *ilêp* and *kupa*.

El Comancho

Using the pen name “El Comancho,” Walter Shelley Phillips wrote books with titles such as *Totem Tales* and *Indian Tales for Little Folks*. In *The Chinook Book*, published in 1913, he documents the language as it was spoken on Puget Sound after the turn of the century. Phillips links Chinook Jargon to Native Americans culturally. Like any other language, a student must understand the culture, within which the language originated, to speak it fluently:

“One may learn to talk Chinook from a study of this book but he cannot learn to speak it fluently without considerable study into other things than the mere jargon itself.

“The most important knowledge to possess in this connection is a thorough understanding of the Indian point of view; that is to say, how the Indian thinks, the mental process by which he arrives at an idea and, in addition to this, a knowledge of his method of expressing this idea. Without this knowledge you can never speak Chinook, or any Indian language, fluently.”

Chinook Jargon

Question Words

Question words go at the beginning of a sentence. Raise the pitch of your voice when asking a question, as you would in English.

where	<i>ka</i>
when	<i>kênchi</i>
how much	<i>kênchi hayu</i> or <i>kênchi</i>
why, how	<i>kata</i>
what	<i>ikta</i>
who	<i>klaksta</i>
why	<i>pus ikta</i>

Where are you?	<i>Ka mayka?</i>
When are you coming?	<i>Kênchi mayka chaku?</i>
Who's there?	<i>Klaksta yawa?</i>
What's the matter?	<i>Ikta kata?</i>

The simplest way of turning a declarative statement into a question in Chinook Jargon is to raise the pitch of your voice as you would in English. All speakers will understand this method of asking a question.

You are running.	<i>Mayka kuli.</i>
Are you running?	<i>Mayka kuli?</i> (raising pitch)

Chinook Creole?

“Hale reports that in Fort Vancouver many children who were the offspring of French trappers with Cree wives spoke CJ equally as well as French, Cree or occasionally English. He wondered whether a situation would ever develop where some people used only CJ as a linguistic medium. No such development is known to have occurred.” — Terrance Kaufman (1968, “A Report on Chinook Jargon”)

More Questions, Conditionals and Imperatives

Chinook Jargon has several words that can be added to the beginning or the end of a sentence to make it conditional, solicit a confirmation or give an order. Here are some:

- Wikna* *Wikna* is used for *wik na* and translates as “isn’t it so?” or “right?” The speaker uses *wikna* to solicit the listener’s confirmation. The sentence “It’s good, right?” could be translated into Chinook Jargon as *Klush, wikna?*
- Nihwa* *Nihwa* is an attention marker, but also signifies “why don’t?” “Why don’t you give me some food?” would be *Nihwa mayka patlêch mêkmêk kupa nayka?* Use *Nihwa* in place of “please” when making requests.
- Klush* *Klush* at the beginning of a sentence indicates a strong desire on the part of the speaker. “You better go away!” would be *Klush mayka klatawa!* Adding *pus* softens the command. *Klush pus mayka klatawa* means “It would be good if you went away.”
- Na* Somewhat obsolete, *na* can also be added before a verb to turn any phrase into a question. *Nayka na klatawa kupa makuk haws?* means “Am I going to the store?” Most often though, questions are indicated by raising the pitch of the voice.

Chinook Jargon speakers use these words to be courteous to each other and to ensure the listener is understanding and agreeing to what is being said.

Sermons and Hymns

“Mesplie had been pastor of St. Peter’s church at The Dalles from 1851. In the spring of 1855, his parish held only 117 Whites but 300 Indians; of the 500 people baptized up to that date most were Indians. When Captain Archer paid a tourist’s visit to this church in March 1856, ‘to see the converted Indians at their devotions,’ the sermon and hymns were in the trade dialect Chinook.” – Robert Ignatius Burns (1966, *The Jesuits and the Indian Wars of the Northwest*)

Compound Words and Idioms

There are only 500 to 800 simple words in Chinook Jargon. A vocabulary of 200 simple words is sufficient to be conversant. Chinook Jargon uses compound words to stretch its vocabulary. Often an idea in Chinook Jargon is expressed by combining several words together to form a compound word. A compound word can be a noun or verb. It is treated as a single word.

learn	<i>chaku kêmhtëks</i>
teach	<i>mamuk kêmhtëks</i>
sell	<i>mash makuk, makuk saya</i>
dream	<i>musêm nanich</i>
respond	<i>kilapay wawa</i>
die, expire	<i>chaku hilu</i>
forget	<i>kêpit kêmhtëks</i>

Chinook Jargon uses a lot of idiomatic expressions. An idiom is an expression that has a meaning beyond the meanings of the individual words. Take the expression *Nayka sik têtêm* that literally translates as “I have a sick heart.” It is often used casually for “I’m sorry.” It doesn’t connote the emphasis the literal English translation does. Chinook Jargon speakers often use idioms as if they were single words. The idiomatic expressions are pronounced quicker than the words would be singly. Correct use of idiomatic expressions is a sign of a good Chinook Jargon speaker.

Dialects?

James G. Swan wrote about his experiences in early Washington Territory in *The Northwest Coast* (1853). He used Chinook Jargon daily. Several times he mentions the challenges caused by the different varieties of Chinook Jargon:

“By this means, different Indians who have been with the whites acquire a habit of pronouncing such English words as they pick up in the same style and manner as the person from whom they learn them. This causes a certain discrepancy in the Jargon, which at first is difficult to get over. And, again, each tribe will add some local words of their own language, so that while a person can make himself understood among any of the tribes for the purposes of trade, it is difficult to hold a lengthened conversation on any subject without the aid of someone who has become more familiar with the peculiar style.”

“Colonel B.F. Shaw was the interpreter, and spoke the [Chinook Jargon] language fluently; but, although he was perfectly understood by the Cowlitz and Satchap Indians, he was but imperfectly understood by the Chenooks, Chehalis, and Queniults, and it was necessary for those present who were conversant with the Coast tribes to repeat to them what he said before they could fully understand.”

“I experienced the same difficulty; for, as I had been accustomed to speak a great deal of the Chehalis language with the Jargon, I found that the Indians from the interior could not readily understand me when making use of words in the Chehalis dialect.”

Stress and emphasis

A word can be stressed in Chinook Jargon by lengthening its vowel.

before now	<i>ankati</i>
a very long time ago	<i>aaankati</i>

A word can also be stressed by moving it from its normal position to the front of the sentence and accentuating the word.

I went there.	<i>Nayka klatawa yawa.</i>
I went there, not elsewhere.	<i>Yawa nayka klatawa.</i>

Pitfalls

There is no word for “to be” in Chinook Jargon. Instead, an adjective or noun will simply take the place of the verb.

She is strong.	<i>Skukum yaka.</i>
This is a good book.	<i>Klush buk ukuk.</i>
My name is Henry.	<i>Nayka niym Henry.</i>
That woman is a doctor.	<i>Ukuk kluchman dakta yaka.</i>

Mitlayt or *kupa* can be used for “to be” when the object physically sits or resides at a location.

We are in the house.	<i>Nayka mitlayt kupa haws.</i>
Tom is there	<i>Tom yaka mitlayt yawa.</i>
I am in this canoe.	<i>Nayka kupa ukuk canim.</i>

Many nineteenth-century writers felt that Chinook Jargon had no fixed grammar. Based on this, many people take liberty with the word order. Use the word order found in this book, but be open to usage of other speakers.

Try to think in Chinook Jargon. Chinook Jargon is an idiomatic and expressive language. It is better to use the correct idiom or describe a concept in simple terms rather than go for the fancy word that may not be understood. Learn the idioms and phrases in the following sections. There are more idioms in the appendix. When you’re comfortable with an expression, substitute words to use the idiom in a new way.

4

Conversation

You'll never ever need to use Chinook Jargon on the streets of Seattle or Vancouver. But a little Chinook Jargon can be a lot of fun among family and friends. Chinook Jargon will also give you an insight into Native American culture in the Northwest. You'll be speaking an indigenous American language when you *wawa Chinuk*.

Meeting People

Here are some phrases that you and your *tilikêms* can use in the Northwest. Practice them with your family and friends while you walk through Gas Town in Vancouver or visit Pike Place Market in Seattle.

Hello	<i>Klahawya</i>
How are you?	<i>Kata mayka?</i>
I am...	<i>...nayka.</i>
good	<i>Klush</i>
tired	<i>Til</i>
sad	<i>Sik têtêm</i>
sick	<i>Sik</i>
What's your name?	<i>Kata mayka niym?</i>
I'm Jim.	<i>Nayka niym Jim.</i>
What do you do for a living?	<i>Kata mayka tulo dala?</i>
I am a ...	<i>...nayka.</i>
doctor	<i>Dakta</i>
student	<i>Skul tilikêm</i>

I...	<i>Nayka...</i>
farm.	<i>mamuk ilêhi.</i>
teach.	<i>mamuk kêmhtëks.</i>
program computers.	<i>mamuk computer.</i>
I am unemployed.	<i>Wik nayka tulo dala.</i>
That's useless (or broken).	<i>Kêltês ukuk.</i>
Strong, powerful, "cool"	<i>Skukum</i>
Please	<i>Klush or Nihwa</i>
Thank you.	<i>Mersi</i>
You're welcome.	Just smile!
What's the matter?	<i>Ikta kata?</i>
Nothing's the matter.	<i>Wik ikta kata.</i>
Good-bye.	<i>Klahawya.</i>
We'll talk soon.	<i>Atlki nêsayka wawa.</i>
Move it!	<i>Hayak!</i>
You're on my foot.	<i>Mayka kupa nayka lipiy.</i>
My cell phone doesn't work.	<i>Nayka sel tintin kêltês.</i>
I'm really sorry.	<i>Nayka dêlet sik têmhtëm.</i>

It's Not English!

English marks nouns as either singular or plural. Although common among European languages, this is by no means universal. Chinese uses adjectives which describe quantity; it does not change the noun or add an article. This is similar to the Chinook Jargon usage of *hayu*.

The meaning of *alta* in Chinook Jargon is given as "now, in the present." However, in storytelling, both formal and informal, *alta* often means "then," "and then" or "next." "*Ankati ikt kluchmên yaka musêm kupa yaka biyt. Alta yaka kêmhtëks ikta kupa yaka kwêlan. Alta yaka gidêp.*" means, "A certain woman was sleeping in her bed. She heard something. And then she got up." *Alta* is often used in Chinook Jargon storytelling to give a sequence of events, indicating that the events took place in the order they are related.

Relations

Relationships and family are important to many Northwest Native Americans. A second or third cousin is considered close kin. Friendships are shared across generations. On the other hand, your typical Seattle transplant may not know how to spell his own mother's maiden name.

mother	<i>mama</i>
father	<i>papa</i>
older brother, sister or cousin	<i>kapho</i>
brother or male cousin	<i>aw</i>
sister or female cousin	<i>ats</i>
child	<i>tênas</i>
brat	<i>têna</i>
son or boy	<i>tênês man</i>
daughter or girl	<i>tênês kluchmên</i>
husband or man	<i>man</i>
wife or woman	<i>kluchmên</i>
old woman	<i>lamiyay</i>
old man	<i>olman</i>
grandfather	<i>chup</i>
grandmother	<i>chich</i>
friend	<i>tilikêm or shiks</i>
boss, leader	<i>tayi</i>
family, person, people	<i>tilikêm</i>

In Chinook Jargon, there are words for other relations, but they can also be described. The man who married your sister (brother-in-law) could be described as *nayka ats yaka man*, meaning “my sister’s husband.” It is easier to describe the relation than it is to memorize another word.

Chinook Jargon

Food and Drink

Salmon and camas were two important foods to Native Americans. Salmon is still popular in the Northwest. Camas is a bulbous plant in the lily family. When roasted it provides a delicious source of starch. Don't try to harvest it yourself, though. A similar-looking plant, called "death camas," is poisonous.

I am hungry.	<i>Nayka ulu.</i>
I am thirsty.	<i>Nayka ulu chék.</i>
Do you want something to eat?	<i>Mayka tiki mékémék?</i>
Please give ...to me.	<i>Klush pus mayka patlêch ... [kupa] nayka.</i>
an apple	<i>ikt lipom</i>
some beef	<i>musmus itluli</i>
a bottle of beer	<i>ikt labutay or lamchêk</i>
some berries	<i>ulali</i>
a biscuit	<i>ikt lebiskwi</i>
some bread	<i>lipan</i>
some coffee	<i>kabi</i>
some fish	<i>pish</i>
two eggs	<i>makst lisap</i>
a hotdog, sausage	<i>ikt sikaluks itluli</i>
some meat	<i>itluli</i>
some milk	<i>musmus tutush</i>
a pizza	<i>ikt pissa</i>
some pork	<i>kushu itluli</i>
a potato	<i>ikt wapêto</i>
some salmon	<i>samên</i>
some water	<i>chék</i>
some wine	<i>ulali puyu</i>
Where's Starbucks®?	<i>Ka mitlayt Starbucks®?</i>