

Chinook Jargon Article

Peter Grauer

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"Klahowya tillicum. Did you hear about that Boston from New York? That high muckamuck shot a mowich out of season, and now he has to pay some skookum moolah for a fine. Those Cheechakos never learn."

Until very recently, residents of Kamloops, the surrounding areas and most First Nations peoples in the Pacific Northwest would have had no trouble in understanding these words. This mixture of English and Chinook jargon was often heard around Kamloops in the first half of this century, and some words are still being used today. Those who have been resident in this area for any length of time will use, or have at least heard, individual words of the jargon. Many of our place names, such as Canim Lake, Skookumchuk, the TumTum River and Hyas Lake have their origins in Chinook jargon. Klahanie and Sahali in Kamloops are also Chinook in origin. The Rocky Mountain Rangers' regimental motto on their crest is "Klotche Nanitch", which could be translated as "good look" or "good view".

It is clear that the use of Chinook in the Interior was most prevalent in the 19th Century. It was used by First Nations, the Hudson's Bay Company, the first settlers and missionaries, the voyageurs and the colonial government of the day. While its development over the years has been augmented by many words of English and French, its roots are with the languages of Coastal peoples, and to a lesser extent, those tribes of the Interior. Some linguists and students of the jargon maintain that the language existed in its purest form before contact with Europeans. They assert that the First Nations peoples of the Pacific Northwest (Northern California to Alaska) evolved the jargon for their own trading purposes, and this debate continues.

The impetus for the spread of Chinook throughout the west of Canada and the US was started with the establishment of trading posts at the mouth of the Columbia River in Oregon. For the Hudson's Bay Company and the North West Company, the Columbia River was a vital trade route into the interior of the continent, and led explorers and traders into the Okanagan Valley and eventually to Kamloops in 1812. The jargon was used by up to 50 tribes in Northern California, through Oregon and Washington, British Columbia and up to Alaska. It not only assisted First Nations and traders with communications, it may have included such disparate groups such as the Inuit and even Hawaiians to communicate for trading purposes.

In Kamloops, Father LeJuene and the "Kamloops Wawa" were instrumental in preserving much of what we know about Chinook jargon in this area. From 1891 to 1907, Fr. LeJeune published a newsletter called "Kamloops Wawa". Originally done by hand and reproduced by mimeograph from the back rooms of St. Joseph's Church on the Kamloops Indian Reserve, Father LeJeune realized an eventual peak distribution 500 copies monthly.



St. Joseph's Church, Kamloops

His enterprising and creative mind quickly saw that the Duployen system of shorthand would adapt well to the simple Chinook jargon, and each issue included this method of communication. It was apparently quite successful, and individual copies of each issue were judiciously passed around to both First Nations and some of the settlers and ranchers in the area. The Kamloops Museum and Archives possesses an almost complete collection of the Wawa as well as other assorted Chinook esoterica such as prayer books and hymnals. Another similar journal

was produced in Williams Lake called the "Sugar Cane Tin Tin", however the writer has not seen any extant copies of this publication, but some were reproduced in the Wawa.

A number of articles dealing with the Chinook jargon in Kamloops and the influence of Father LeJeune have appeared in local newspapers in the past. Mary Balf wrote at least one in the 1970s which concentrated on Father LeJeune and the Wawa. In June of 1986, Ken Favrholt undertook a lengthy and comprehensive 2 part article in the Kamloops News on the Kamloops Wawa, Chinook jargon, the Duployen shorthand method and Father Lejeune. Any serious student of the jargon should refer to these knowledgeable and detailed short treatises on local history.

They are available at the Kamloops Museum and Archives, and may be photocopied by those



interested in more detail than can be supplied by this brief summary. Fortunately, if you should decide to follow up on this fascinating aspect of our heritage, resources are available from many sources. Some, which may reside in practically any of our interior Archives, may not have even been catalogued. Besides our Archive sources, the University College of the Cariboo has some original dictionaries published in the early years of this century in its collection.

Kamloops WaWa, Kamloops Museum and Archives

There is some controversy and study being undertaken on the Chinook word "Moola" which most dictionaries translate as a mill which either cuts lumber or grinds grain. However, many of us use the word to denote money or to give emphasis to how much something costs. ("Those new Land Rovers cost a lot of moola!") Perhaps it descended from the salary or payment one would receive in turn for supplying labour to these early employment opportunities, or it could descend from entirely different origins.

Another word which recently raised heated discussion on the Internet is "seahpo" or hat. Some amateur and professional linguists maintain that it is descended from the French "Chapeau", however others maintain that it is descended from tribes such as the Utes further east from the Pacific Northwest.

Some interesting Chinook words which also give food for thought on the origins of language are contained in the following brief list. In the early 19th Century, the basic Chinook jargon vocabulary consisted of about 250 words.

Deer - "Mowich"

Water - "Chuk"

Strong - "Skookum "

High muckamuck - (originally from "hiyu muckamuck" meaning big feast or good meal, it came to be used by some Kamloops and area residents to describe one who thinks he is better than others really perceive him to be. I have always thought that this would be a great name for a Kamloops restaurant.)

Englishman - "Kintchossh" (King George)

American - "Boston" (from the French-Canadian "Bostonna ise")

Frenchman - "Pasai" (from the French-Canadian "Francais")

German - "Dutchman"

Hello or greetings - "Klahowya"

Low or below - "Keekwulee" (or ki'koole)

Ground - "Illa hee" ("Boston illahee" - United States)

Above - "Sahali" (Sahali illahee - mountains)

Great or big - "Hyas"

Much - "Hyiu"

Food, or to eat - "Muckamuck"

Canoe - "Canim"

Berries - "Olali" (Sopolallie - soapberries)

To come - "Chako"

Lately - "Chi" (or chee)

Newcomer or Johnny-come-lately - "Chichako"

Explosion - "Poo" (Does this word still survive in our everyday language?)

Close friend, family or group - "Tillicum"

Great or very - "Hyas"

House cat - "Puss puss" ("Hyas pusspuss" - cougar)

To stink - "Piupiu" ("Hyas piupiu" - skunk)

Many of the Chinook words are onomatopoeic, or words that sound the sense.

Heart - "Tum Tum"
To boil - "Lelep"
Bell - "Tin tin"
Wagon or team - "Tsiktsik" (The sound made by a teamster to start up his team.)
Watch - "Tiktik"
To vomit or pour out - "Wagh"
Laughter - "Heehee"
Cattle - "Moosmoos"
To talk - "Wawa"

Some perfectly proper English-derived Chinook words are ship, pray, tea, sick, sing, mama and papa. Some have adapted to the common pronunciation held amongst some First Nations.

Cold - "cole"
Dry - "dly"
Grease - "glease"
Coffee - "kaupy"
Quarter - "Kwahtah"
Rice - "Lice"
Rum, whiskey, or alcoholic spirits - "Lum"
Soap - "Sop"
Paper - "Pehpah"
Warm - "Waum"
If - "Poos" (from "suppose"?)

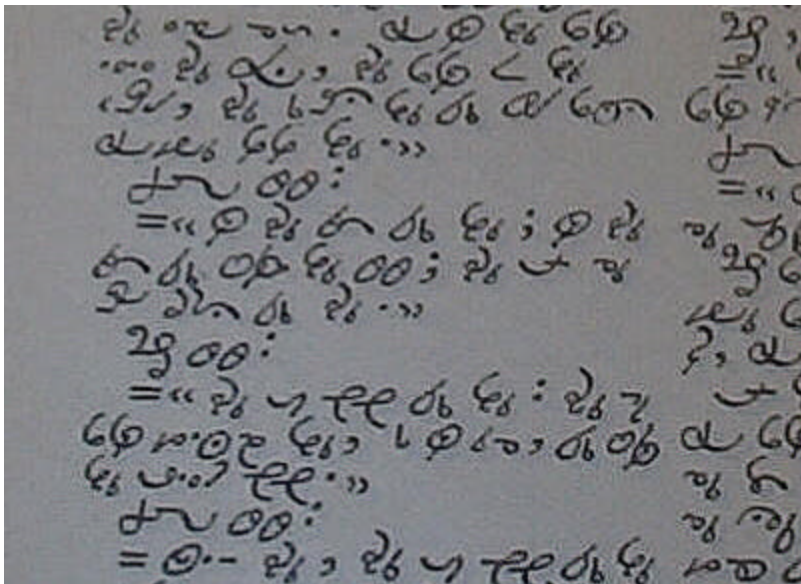
Many words descended from the French Canadian voyageurs and traders.

Axe - "Lahache"
Drugs or medicine - "Lametsin"
Wolf - "Leloup"
Sheep - "Lemouton"
Tobacco pipe - "Lapeep"
The door - "Lapote"
Foot - "Lapee"
Thanks - "Mahsie" (Merci)

It may come as some surprise to many of us that Chinook jargon is far from a "dead language", such as is Latin and ancient Greek. In fact, it is alive and well and living on the Internet. A number of web sites and a mailing list are enabling the jargon to move into the 21st Century. These sites engender discussion, research and revitalization of the language (or as some maintain, a pidgin or creole). Dictionaries, poems, stories and history are all presented and discussed. As can be imagined, strict spelling rules do not and cannot apply as

Chinook had no literature upon which to base a proper grammar. Instead, spelling adheres to the requirements of pronunciation.

Duployan Shorthand Example:



Small but enthusiastic Chinook jargon groups are springing up all around the Pacific Northwest. The Confederated Tribes of Grand Ronde, Oregon are teaching the jargon to a new generation. A first ever jargon workshop was held in Mission BC in September of last year at the First Nations Learning Centre. A second annual Chinook Jargon Workshop (Chinuk wawa Lu?lu) is to be held August 13th to 15th, 1999 at the

Grand Ronde Reservation in central western Oregon. Check their web page for more information. (<http://www.adisoft-inc.com/chinook.html>.)

Dave Robertson, a Spokane linguist, is the listserv owner of a mailing list that encourages and entertains all aspects and inquiries on Chinook jargon and it's history. (Chinook Listserv: <http://listserv.linguistlist.org/archives/chinook.html>)

The newsletter "Tenas Wawa" has been published semimonthly for the past four years by Duane Pasco and his family from Poulsbo, Washington. This unique publication includes original art and stories related to relevant history and First Nations life, all written in the jargon with accompanying English translations. Duane has also created a contemporary Jargon dictionary "Klahowya", and it is accompanied by a tutorial cassette. Back issues have been posted on Jeffrey Kopp's site in Portland. (This site is no longer current as of 30 March 2006.)

Mike Cleven of BC has put together an impressive site that includes a Chinook glossary, historical material, personal comments and an on-line tutorial. Also on Mike's site is an extensive photographic history of the Bridge River-Lilloet area and his own personal Family History. His site gives you some good links to follow for more sites related to the jargon. (This site is no longer current as of 30 March 2006.)

Check out these quality web sites, and pay a visit to our local Archives to have a look at the "Kamloops Wawa". I know you will be impressed with the data that's available to everyone out there on this fascinating part of our heritage.

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