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Songs and Stories

Chinook Jargon is a wonderful communications medium. From about 1840 until 1920, Chinook Jargon was used to create songs and stories in the Northwest. Since 1990, several people have begun to use Chinook Jargon again for poetry, storytelling, and journalism.

Songs

Native Americans normally used their first language in traditional and ceremonial singing. Chinook Jargon was used for the little songs that people often made up to express their feelings as they went about their daily business. The last half of the 1800s was a period of change for Native Americans. People moved away from the traditional village life and into cities and onto reservations. Many of the songs they composed and sang reflected the loneliness they felt and the problems they experienced with their new life. Franz Boas collected some of these songs. In this one, the singer cries for his former home:

<i>Ka'nowē sun naika kelai'!</i>	I cry always
<i>Saia ē'li naika mitlait alta.</i> ¹	Far away is my country now

In the next song, the singer suggests that the city is ruder than he would like. This is a common theme in country western music today. This song could be titled "In Victoli":

<i>Haias tlaquaya</i>	Very unhappy I was
<i>Kunamokst naika oleman,</i>	[Together] With my wife,
<i>Kopa Bictoli.</i>	In Victoli.
<i>Hēlo tlaksta</i>	Nobody
<i>Wawa tlaquaya nesaika</i>	Said good-day to us
<i>Kopa Bictoli.</i> ²	In Victoli.



— Edward Keithahn (1963, *Monuments in Cedar*)

Mungo Martin was a world-renowned artist and fluent speaker of Chinook Jargon. Linguists studying Chinook Jargon recorded him. Here he is seen working on a totem pole.

“Vocabularies and collections of phrases were published from time to time, but it is not generally known that the jargon is even used by native poets.”

— Franz Boas (1888, “Chinook Songs”)

“This legend was told to Hy-na-um by his uncle Cheepsaw; [his] father was Tsa-tsa-wist-a-a. Hy-na-um told it to me. Believing that there are many who would like to know what Chinook sounds like, I have written the legend in the jargon, each paragraph followed by a somewhat free translation.”

— Alfred Carmicheal (“The Legend of the Flood”)

“Yeah, yeah. *Konaway kah nika coolie konaway delate cultus okoke lalang*.³ Yeah, yeah. That’s what they’d say. Didn’t matter where you went in those days, people talked Chinook. Yeah, *lalang*. That’s language.” — Gilbert McLeod (1992, Interview with Andrea Giles, University of Victoria)

Gilbert McLeod was born in 1903 at Cape Muzon on Dall Island in southern Alaska. His parents came there as Presbyterian missionaries.

A large number of early songs dealt with love. They carry many of the same themes that love songs do today. In this song, which mixes English and Chinook Jargon together, a woman asks her lover, Charlie, not to forget her when he marries another.

<i>Good-bye, oh my dear Charlie!</i>	Good-bye, oh my dear Charlie!
<i>Spōs maika iskum tlōtchman,</i>	When you take a wife,
<i>Wēk maika ts'ēpe naika.⁴</i>	Don't forget me.

And finally, in this song, a husband's anger has gotten the better of his wife. She asks him sadly what is wrong:

<i>Ikta maika tiki?</i>	What do you want?
<i>Kwansum maika soleks.</i>	You are always cross.
<i>Maika ōleman,</i>	Your old wife
<i>Hēlo skukum alta.⁵</i>	Is very weak now.

Some of these songs remained popular for many years after they were first sung in Chinook Jargon.

Hymns

Non-Natives dominated this genre. The Reverend Myron Eells wrote *Hymns in the Chinook Jargon Language* in 1889. Eells was born in Oregon but learned Chinook Jargon after he became a minister in Washington. Eells' Hymn Book Song #4 is perhaps the most popular of the so called temperance songs. Here is the first verse of a song-called "Whiskey":

<i>Ahnkuttie nika tikegh whiskey,</i>	Formerly, I loved whiskey,
<i>Ahnkuttie nika tikegh whiskey,</i>	Formerly, I loved whiskey
<i>Pe alta nika mash –</i>	But now I throw it away –
<i>Alta nika mash.</i>	Now I throw it away.
<i>Alta nika mash.</i>	Now I throw it away.
<i>Ahnkuttie nika tikegh whiskey,</i>	Formerly, I loved whiskey,
<i>Ahnkuttie nika tikegh whiskey,</i>	Formerly, I loved whiskey,
<i>Pe alta nika mash.⁶</i>	But now I throw it away.

Chinook Jargon

Whiskey was a very popular theme with Eells and many of the missionaries. Eells' Song #5 is also called "Whiskey." It gives good advice on what drinking does to your savings.

Spose nesika muckamuck whiskey, If we drink whiskey,
*Whiskey muckamuck nesika dolla.*⁷ Whiskey will eat up our money.

Further verses of this song have whiskey eating up *iktas*, *wind* and *tumtum* or "things," "lives," and "souls."

Popular Tunes

Laura B. Downey-Bartlett translated some songs into Chinook Jargon in an effort to improve Chinook Jargon's status among non-Natives. Here is the first verse to "America":

Nika illahee, kah-kwa mika,
T'see illahee, wake e-li-te,
Kah-kwa mika, nika shunta.
Illahee, kah nika papa mamaloos,
Illahee, klosh tellicum chaco;
Kee-kwilla konaway lemoti,
*Mamook wake e-li-te tin-tin.*⁸

My country 'tis of thee
Sweet land of liberty,
Of thee I sing;
Land where my fathers died,
Land of the pilgrims' pride;
From every mountainside,
Let freedom ring.

One thing you'll notice is that the Chinook Jargon version of the song has too many syllables to be sung easily to the traditional tune. Ms. Downey-Bartlett performed in Chinook Jargon at the Pioneer Reunion in Portland on Thursday, June 19, 1913 and probably on other occasions as well.

Stories

It is a mistake to think that Chinook Jargon was used only for bartering and other functional activities. During his fieldwork in the thirties Melville Jacobs documented that Chinook Jargon was used in traditional storytelling. One of his consultants makes specific mention of having learned many myths and narratives in Chinook Jargon that she had not learned in her two tribal languages. Jacobs wrote in the preface to *Texts in Chinook Jargon*, “[S]ince about 1850, no small portion of native culture and knowledge was handed on of late years in the medium of Jargon.”

The following example is from “The Origin of Death.” Coquille Thompson of the Siletz Reservation told this story to Melville Jacobs in 1935.

*lasga-milet tēnas-aya lasga-haus. wel, ik-dilxēm yaga-milet ik-dēnas-man, yaga-uguk-saya milet ik-tēnas-man. wel, ik-man yaga-tēnas uguk-tcagusik, wel, tēnas thunas mak-san yaga-sik, alda yaga-mimlus tēnas-man. wel, uguk-man sgugum-sik-dēmdēm. yaga-klai. wel, yaga-mac kaba ili'i, ya-mak-ixbu uk-ili'i. wel, k'ilaba' kaba-haus, yaga-sik-dēmdēm.*⁹

They dwelt some distance apart in their (respective) houses. Well, that person had a son, (and) that one yonder (also) had a son. Well, the son of that man became ill, well, the youngster was sick perhaps two days, and then the young man died. Well, that man was extremely sick at heart. He cried. Well, he put him in the ground; he had the ground covered over. Well then, he went back home, he was sick at heart.

This passage shows the sound shifts in Chinook Jargon. In the above paragraph, *k* and *t* sounds associated with this book's orthography, and many other dictionaries, were recorded by Jacobs as *g* and *d*. The *l* sound is the barred-L and is similar to the Welsh *LL*. This book uses the *kl* and *tl* for this sound and its approximation by *Bastēn* speakers. Jacobs also uses hyphens to show word clustering by the speaker. Accent marks in Jacob's original have been omitted above.

The Canoe and the Saddle

The Canoe and the Saddle; or, Klalam and Klickitat, was first printed in 1863 with the final printing in 1913. The author, Theodore Winthrop, chronicles his trip throughout the Pacific Northwest in the early 1850s. Throughout the book, Winthrop uses Chinook Jargon in all conversations involving Native Americans. The style and timing of Winthrop's Jargon indicate that he had learned it during his Northwest trip. Winthrop was killed in the Civil War.

ST. MARK'S KLOOSH YIEM

KOPA NESIKA SAVIOUR

JESUS CHRIST

**LONDON
BRITISH AND FOREIGN BIBLE SOCIETY
1912**

St. Mark's Kloosh Yiem or "St. Mark's Gospel" was published by the British and Foreign Bible Society in 1912, after the height of Chinook Jargon usage in the Northwest.

Revival

Several authors have attempted to revive Chinook Jargon by making Chinook Jargon translations of popular literature. Robert Stuart, a contemporary of Elizabeth B. Downey-Bartlett, made some of these early attempts. Stuart translated the poem “The House That Jack Built” and circulated it among people interested in preserving Chinook Jargon. Here is the third verse of the poem:

<i>Okoak Pish-pish,</i>	Here is the cat.
<i>Yaka memaloose tenas mowitch,</i>	That killed the rat,
<i>Yaka muck-a-muck la-reh,</i>	That ate the malt,
<i>Midlight copa house</i>	That lay in the house
<i>Jack yaka mamook.</i> ¹⁰	That Jack built.

Stuart’s translation is interesting for several reasons. He uses the term *pish-pish* for “cat.” Most Chinook Jargon varieties use *puss-puss*. He also uses the term *tenas mowitch* (*tênês mawich*) or a “little deer” for a rat. *Tênês mawich* was sometimes used for any small animal the speaker didn’t know the name of. According to W. S. Phillips in his *Chinook Book*, the term for rat, *hyas hoolhool* (*hayash hulhul*) or a “big mouse”, was used, but not common. Stuart uses the correct Chinook Jargon construction “Jack yaka mamook” where many non-Native authors might have been tempted to say simply “Jack mamook.” Stuart also uses *yaka* instead of directly translating the implied “who.” This is similar to the later speakers of Chinook Jargon from Vancouver Island and Alaska who often use *yaka* in place of *klaska* and *klaksta*. Stuart clearly had a good working knowledge of Chinook Jargon.

Personal Correspondence

Was Chinook Jargon used in personal letters? Revivalists and people having fun certainly used it, but there are cases where it was used as the primary means of written communication. For example, in “Klahowiam Mr. Smis,” Barbara Harris analyzes a letter written in Quileute, Washington to an A.W. Smith in Seattle on February 1, 1881. James Winston wrote two letters to his grandchildren on November 27, 1891. James Winston, originally from Richmond, Virginia, arrived in Oregon City in 1846. Another letter, written in 1900 by Sue Bert to the *Oregon Native Son*, complains about the paper’s delivery service. Not a lot of Chinook Jargon letters have been preserved, but for a “spoken” language, these types of manuscripts indicate that Chinook Jargon was used in normal personal correspondence.

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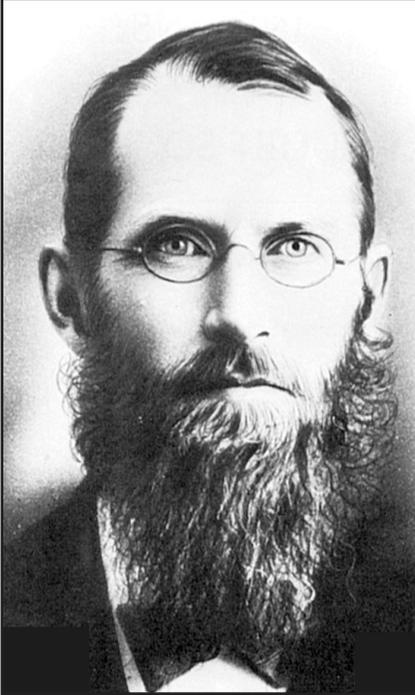
Duane Pasco published *Tenas Wawa, The Chinook Jargon Voice* from 1990 to 1995. Pasco, a leading Northwest Coast-style artist, was born in Seattle in 1932, but soon moved to Anchorage with his parents. There, between the ages of four and six, he learned some Chinook Jargon. His interest in it developed as he heard Chinook Jargon off and on throughout the Northwest. In 1990, he started the “Chinook Write a Letter Club.” Pasco would write a letter to a person in Chinook Jargon and then he would wait for a reply. After some time, he would tire of waiting and he would write a new letter to someone else in the club. He would wait again. In 1990, he decided to formalize the process by publishing *Tenas Wawa*. This bimonthly publication achieved a circulation of 150 subscribers in 1994. Due to the low circulation and large effort required to produce the newsletter, publication ceased in early 1995. Here are the first five paragraphs from an article called “Pelton Tilikum Ship,” which appeared in Volume 3, Number 1, January 1992:

*Kwinnum ton bronze canim pahlt animal pe tilikum.
Bill Reid pe yaka elan tilikums, klaska mamook hiyu yeah kopa okoke hyas pe delate. Toketie sculpture pe alta yaka kopet.
October, okoke year, tilikum klaska mitwhit yaka kopa Canadian Embassy, Washington, D.C.
Yaka delate yahul “Spirit of Haida Gwai” keschi Reid, yaka potlatch nem “Pelton Tilikum Ship.”
Okoke sculpture, yaka delate le-gley klale kahkwa argillite. Yaka sit kopa tenas wake klip chuck. Sculpture, yaka delate kloshe kunjie towagh chako klak chuck pe koko okoke klale klimin canim.¹¹*

It’s a five ton bronze canoe filled with animals and people. Bill Reid and his assistants worked hard and diligently on this for many years. This beautiful sculpture is now complete. October, this year, it was placed at the Canadian Embassy in Washington, D.C. It’s officially called the “Spirit of Haida Gwai,” but Reid has given it the name, “Ship of Fools.” This sculpture is very dark grey resembling argillite. It sits in a shallow pool of water. The sculpture looks best when the light reflected off the water hits the dark soft canoe.

Duane Pasco also authored the book *Klahowya* in 1990. *Klahowya* is a handbook for learning Chinook Jargon accompanied by a cassette.

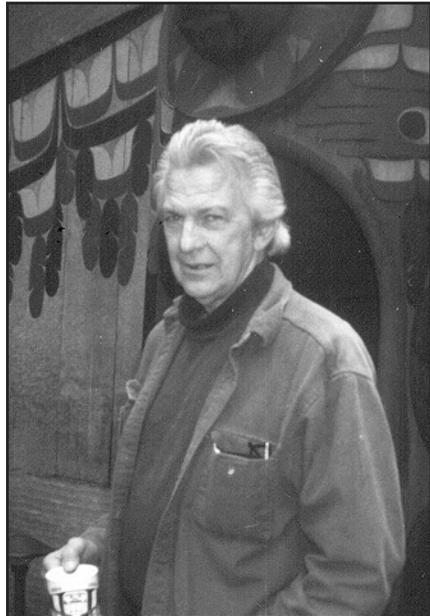
A Voice Great Within Us by Terry Glavin and Charles Lillard explores the significance of Chinook Jargon in the culture of British Columbia. In the poem “Rain Language,” Glavin tells the story of Chinook Jargon through



Myron Eells composed many hymns in Chinook Jargon. Although born in Oregon in 1843, he didn't learn Chinook Jargon until he moved to Washington in 1874. His *Hymns in the Chinook Jargon Language* was published in 1878 and 1889.

— George Castile (1985, *The Indians of Puget Sound*)

Duane Pasco is a famous Northwest Coast artist. From 1990 until 1995 he published *Tenas Wawa*, a bi-monthly publication in and about Chinook Jargon. He first became acquainted with Chinook Jargon as a child in Alaska during the early 1940s.



Chinook Jargon

imagery. He compares linguistic survival to a race between two cars and the abundance of Chinook Jargon place names to “*tsiatko cooley chako halo kah*,” or “ghosts walking out of nowhere.” While giving poetic examples of how Chinook Jargon words affected the world-view of people in British Columbia, Glavin weaves in Chinook Jargon songs from the 1800s to bring the Chinook Jargon experience back to life. Here are the first 18 lines of the poem which starts with the race between a Ford and a Chevrolet, or Chinook Jargon and English:

Yako yiem halo kliminawhit.
This is a true story.
Waum illahie klip sun, kopa Byrne Oakut,
On a late summer evening on Byrne Road,
kimta tenas wahm snass chako,
after a gentle summer rain,
spose hyack cooley konamokst chikchik, Ford pe Chevrolet,
in a race between a Ford and a Chevrolet,
spose Ford tolo kopa tenas-sitkim mile
if the Ford won on the quarter mile
pe Ford man mamook klahwa,
and the Ford guy slowed down
kopet cooley, yaka halo mamook fly
soon enough to avoid going airborne
oakut opoots,
at the end of the road,
*Ford, yaka skookum chikchik.*¹²
then the Ford was the skookum car.

Since the Chinook Jargon Revival is still picking up steam, it is expected that a number of new works and teaching aids will become available in the next few years.

Accross The Wide Missouri

“Across the Wide Missouri” was filmed in 1951. It starred Clark Gable as mountain man Flint Mitchell and Ricardo Montalban as Ironshirt, a Nez Perce. Taking place in the 1830s, the Native Americans and mountain men speak Chinook Jargon to each other. Nipo T. Strongheart was the technical advisor.

The book, *Accross the Wide Missouri* by Bernard DeVoto, which the movie is “based” upon, makes no reference to Chinook Jargon.

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Resources

Now you're interested in learning more about Chinook Jargon and possibly even speaking a little. Where do you go from here? I'd be deceiving you if I said there were a lot of possibilities out there. However, a few exist, and given the way information moves nowadays, many of these are probably available to you.

Dictionaries

If you are serious about Chinook Jargon, you will want a Chinook Jargon/English - English/Chinook Jargon dictionary. A good *Bastên*-style Chinook Jargon dictionary, *A Dictionary of The Chinook Jargon or Trade Language of Oregon* was written in 1863 by George Gibbs. The last edition was in 1911. Gibbs lived in Oregon and Washington from 1848 until 1860. According to James Pilling, while Gibbs was in the Pacific Northwest, he devoted himself to the study of Native American languages and the collection of vocabularies and traditions of the region. Gibbs helped the Smithsonian Institution organize their collection of Native American manuscripts. His Chinook Jargon spelling was the basis for later dictionaries and place names. Although out of print, it is still available at large libraries and on at least one Web site.

Another good dictionary is *Chinook Dictionary, Catechism, prayers and hymns composed in 1838 and 1839...* Demers, Blanchet and St. Onge wrote this. Although the "dictionary" part is a bit jumbled, the wordlist itself is comprehensive and there are plenty of language examples in the catechism, prayer and hymn sections. This is readily available on the Internet.

The easiest way to get a physical dictionary is to acquire a copy of *The Chinook Jargon and How to Use It*, by George Shaw. This book is valuable because it includes some words that Gibbs' dictionary does not. Originally published in 1909, it has been reissued and is available from Coyote Press, P.O. Box 3377, Salinas, CA 93912. Coyote Press provides anthropology, archeology, history and prehistory publications on California and the western U.S. The price of the Shaw reprint is approximately US\$ 10.00 plus

Chinook Jargon



Henry Zenk, an anthropologist, recorded and documented the Chinook Jargon used by some Grand Ronde elders in the early 1980s. People studying Chinook Jargon find his Ph.D. thesis to be very useful. It is titled: *Chinook Jargon and Native Cultural Persistence in the Grand Ronde Indian Community, 1856-1907: A Special Case of Creolization*.

US\$ 3.00 for shipping and handling. Coyote Press can be reached at (831) 422-4912 or at their Web site at www.coyotepress.com. They answer their phone “Archeological Consulting,” so don’t hang up! You should check with them before ordering.

Edward H. Thomas’ *Chinook – A History and Dictionary* is another useful book. Although out of print it can still be obtained in bookstores in the Northwest and from Web bookstores such as Amazon.com or Barnes and Noble (ISBN: O-8323-0217-1). The price is approximately US\$ 15.00– US\$ 20.00. In creating his work, Thomas basically acquired the rights to Shaw’s work, publishing an updated volume. He also includes 56 pages of history before the dictionary.

From time to time, other nineteenth–century dictionaries are reprinted and can be found in museum shops. Also, if you’re lucky enough to live in the Northwest, consult your public or university library. Many of the Chinook Jargon dictionaries may still be on the shelves.

Books

Klahowya – A Handbook for Learning Chinook Jargon by Duane Pasco is available with an accompanying cassette for US\$ 22.50. The book gives grammar tips and provides exercises in the form of stories that the student can read and translate. The tape is especially useful. It is one of the few ways the student can actually hear Chinook Jargon being spoken.

Back issues of *Tenas Wawa*, a bimonthly newsletter, are available for US\$ 2.00 each. You may obtain all 27 issues for US\$ 54.00. *Tenas Wawa* was published in Chinook Jargon along with English translations from 1990 until 1995, reporting on Northwest Coast news items and printing short stories. In August 1992, the saga of “Moola John” was introduced. “Moola John” is the fictional story of an East Coast immigrant to the Northwest told within the historical backdrop of the 1850s.

As of April 2004, both *Klahowya* and *Tenas Wawa* can be purchased by sending a check for the total amount along with US\$ 3.50 for shipping and handling, to Duane Pasco, 19330 Widme Rd. N.E., Poulsbo, WA 98370.

A Voice Great Within Us, by Charles Lillard and Terry Glavin, is published by New Star Books in Vancouver, B.C. It contains two essays on the history of Chinook Jargon in British Columbia, the poem “Rain Language,” a glossary, and a list of eighty Chinook Jargon place names found in British Columbia. This book costs CAN\$ 16.00. You may order it from New Star Books, 2504 York Avenue, Vancouver, BC V6K 1E3. Include CAN\$ 4.00 for shipping and handling. It’s best to call New Star first at (604) 378-9429 as there are also GST and HST taxes. The book is also available through General Distribution Service at (800) 387-0141 if you live in Quebec or Ontario, or (800) 387-0172 for the rest of Canada. (ISBN: 0-921586-56-6.)

A Chinook Jargon Speech

The Columbia River Bicentennial Commission published an audio cassette, *In Their Own Words*, in 1993. Side B talks about Chinook and Chinook Jargon. As part of this discussion, Henry Zenk reads a reconstruction of a speech that was originally given by Dr. William McKay as part of the Centennial Celebration of Captain Gray’s discovery of the Columbia River. Dr. McKay gave the 1892 speech in Chinook Jargon. Since the audience was a gathering of Oregon pioneers, it can be surmised that many people in the audience understood the speech.

Internet

The Internet is an inexpensive way for individuals to publish their thoughts and to make documents available. It's hardly surprising that it should become a forum for the perpetuation of Chinook Jargon. A Web search on "Chinook Jargon" will turn up a number of sites dedicated to the language.

"The Chinook Jargon: Selected references for students and scholars." by Jeffrey Kopp is aptly titled. This site provides links to many dictionaries and historical texts. Another interesting site is "Tenas Wawa - The Chinook Jargon Voice." It has the story of "Moola John," and provides access to the *Tenas Wawa* Bookstore.

Mike Cleven of Vancouver, BC, attempts to carry Chinook Jargon from the nineteenth directly into the twenty-first century with his Web site. Besides offering a look into the role that Chinook Jargon played in the early lives of British Columbia, Cleven provides a glossary that includes up-to-date words, such as *piahtzum skookumklahwayhut*—literally the "fire-writing super-free-road" or the information superhighway, for the Internet. Cleven states, "I am interested in the adaptation of the jargon for modern use, and am ready to try and coin terms and usages, rather than regarding it as fixed in the past." In addition to an original glossary, this site provides Shaw's dictionary and examples of Chinook Jargon usage.

Organizations

The primary organization playing an active role in preserving and perpetuating Chinook Jargon is the Confederated Tribes of Grand Ronde, Oregon. Grand Ronde is currently developing a Chinook Jargon language program for learners affiliated with the tribe, and an introductory *Chinuk Wawa* class is held weekly. For more information on the language program and its availability contact the cultural education coordinator at The Confederated Tribes of Grand Ronde, 9615 Grand Ronde Road, Grand Ronde, Oregon, 97347.

Beyond Grand Ronde, there is an informal network of people who meet at the annual *Chinuk Wawa Lu'lu*; "Chinook Jargon Workshop" and subscribe to The Linguist List's Chinook e-mail discussion list. There are occasionally other groups that meet to practice Chinook Jargon.

"Chinook jargon, the Native American trading language that once linked Northwest tribes and early U.S. fur traders and settlers, is finding a new life – on the Internet." — Courtenay Thompson (1998, *The Oregonian*)