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16 Skukum Words

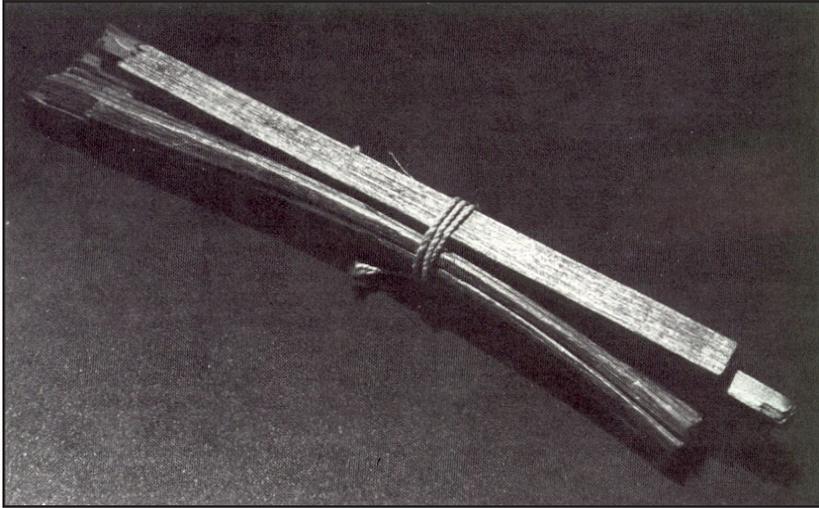
It's not the number of words that's important. It's how they get used that counts. Chinook Jargon has a small vocabulary but each word is special and does double duty. Here are 16 *skukum* words. You can use them when you *wawa Chinuk wawa*, or you can use them mixed with English, as you tramp around the Northwest.

délet

This word means straight, direct, without equivocation. *Délet wawa* is “direct talk” or the “straight truth.” You could say something’s *ukuk klush*, meaning “that’s good,” or you could go with *Nawitka, délet klush*, “Yes, perfect.” *Délet* makes a statement positive and removes any element of doubt. Anything *délet* is the genuine article.

kêltês

George Shaw gave the meaning of *kêltês* as: “worthless; good for nothing; abject; barren; bad; common; careless; defective; dissolute; filthy; foul; futile; rude; immaterial; impertinent; impolite; no matter; shabby; slippery; unmeaning; untoward; useless; paltry; worn out.” The real meaning of *kêltês* is that the item or activity has no purpose or is somehow diminished. It’s not a moral issue. It is just in a diminished state. If something is really wicked, use *masachi* instead. If something just lacks a purpose, use *kêltês*. When you *kêltês kuli*, you’re just running around with no destination. When you *kêltês nanich*, you’re just looking around. *Kêltês wawa* is gossip or idle talk. If something is *délet kêltês*, it’s truly worthless, beyond a shadow of a doubt. If in doubt, use *wik klush* or “not good.” That would be your opinion. *Kêltês* can also mean weak, the opposite of *skukum*. (My son thinks my tennis serve is *kêltês*.) In another meaning, *kêltês* can be “just,” “only,” or “merely.” If I *kêltês nayka mitlayt*, I am just sitting.



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

A *patlêch* invitation consists of specially shaped sticks wrapped with a string. In the old days, the invitation was simply left at the front door of the guest's house, as the host didn't want to receive any special attention.

kêmtêks *Kêmtêks* is understanding. If you *kêmtêks* something you understand it or know it. To teach is to “make understood,” or *mamuk kêmtêks*, and to learn is to “become knowing,” *chaku kêmtêks*. If you “stop knowledge,” or forget, you've *kêpit kêmtêks*. Don't forget; *wik kêpit kêmtêks!*

klahani “Out,” “outside,” and “exterior” describe this word. *Klahani* is often used in place names for “the great outdoors” with various spellings. There's a Klahanie Road on the way to Whistler and a Klahhanie Lodge in Port Angeles. Be careful. If you're *klahani*, you're outside, but to *klatawa klahani* or “go *klahani*” can mean you're on your way to a restroom.

klahawya This is the ordinary salutation or greeting when folks meet or separate. A *klahawya tilikêm* or *klahowya shiks* says it all. There are a lot of stories about the origin of this word. They range from its being a corruption of “Clarke, how are you?” to Nuu-Chah-Nulth for “Did you just arrive on the beach?” The most believable story is that it is an alternate form of *klahawyêm*, which is from the Old Chinook root *klahauia*. *Klahowiyêm* means “poor” or “miserable,” but was used as part of a long salutation when meeting or departing. The salutation was shortened simply to *klahawyêm*, and later *klahawya*. While *klahawyêm* can be used as a salutation, *klahawya* can never be used to mean “poor.”

makuk *Makuk* means “to buy.” A useful secret word when browsing in the many marketplaces of the Northwest. A *tiki makuk* to your partner signifies a buying strategy in the face of an aggressive clerk. A *makuk haws* is a store, and to *mash makuk* means you’re selling instead of buying. *Hayash makuk* means “it’s expensive” while *wik ikta makuk* says “it’s not worth it.”

mamuk This is the busiest word in Chinook Jargon. It is the great Chinook Jargon action word. *Mamuk* means to do, to make, or to work; it’s a deed, exercise, motion, operation, service, performance, or anything having motion or action. In short, unless you’re going or coming, you can use *mamuk*. *Mamuk* can turn any noun or adjective into a verb. You can *mamuk* your bed when you get up. *Mamuk têtêm* is to make up your mind. If you *mamuk mimêlust*, you’ve “made dead” or killed something. If you *mamuk* something you’re either making it, building it or using it for its intended purpose. Myron Eells, a preacher, collected 233 different uses for the word *mamuk*. George Shaw’s dictionary lists 34. If you want to turn any idea into an action, and you don’t have a verb, you can usually *mamuk* the thing.

Chinook Jargon

mêkêmêk This is Chinook Jargon word that has found its way into English as “muckamuck.” Most of us know the phrase, “the big muckamuck.” A big or high muckamuck is a person who’s important because, well, he or she is just important. In Chinook Jargon, *mêkêmêk* is anything associated with food and drink. As a noun, it’s the food and drink itself. When *mêkêmêk* is used as a verb, it means to eat or drink. In English, “big muckamuck,” a variation of “high muckamuck,” comes from *hayu mêkêmêk*, a person who ate at the main table with the *tayi*, or chief, where there was lots of food. These spots were reserved for people of some importance, although they were often visitors not known to everybody in the long house. Maybe his or her importance wasn’t always apparent. One Chinook Jargon place name in California is Muckamuck Creek, which feeds into the Klamath River near Hamburg in Siskiyou County. (*Siskayu* is another Chinook Jargon word, which describes a bob-tailed horse.) Muckamuck Creek may have been a good place to collect food.

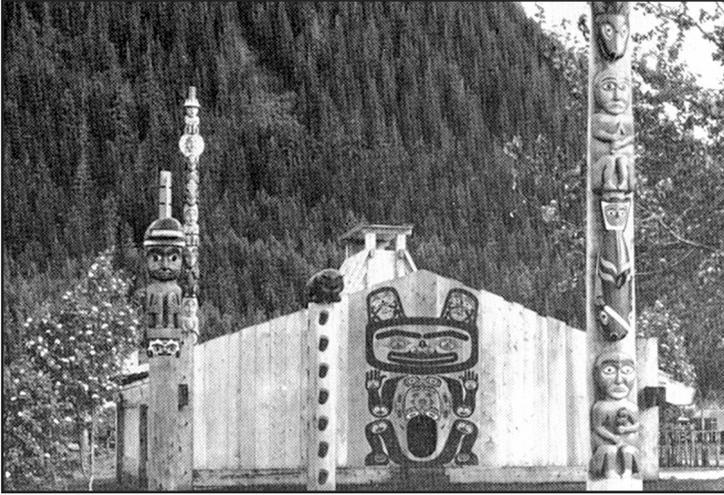
mitlayt This word comes from the Old Chinook imperative for “sit down.” In Chinook Jargon, it does duty for a lot of other ideas. The place where you sit or *mitlayt* is where you live. In Chinook Jargon *Nika mitlayt kupa Seattle*, means “I live in Seattle.” If you sit, lie, stay, stop, remain or reside at a location, you also *mitlayt* there. In one odd meaning, *mitlayt*

Legend?

Somebody went “crazy” and he’s been remembered in Chinook Jargon by having his last name, *piltên*, used for that condition ever since. However, the story varies and usually comes second-hand.

“The Indians adopted this word [*piltên*] from the name of a deranged person, Archibald Pelton, or perhaps Felton, whom Mr. Wilson P. Hunt found on his journey to Astoria, and carried there with him. The circumstance is mentioned by Franchère, in his ‘Narrative,’ etc.” — George Gibbs (1863, *A Dictionary of the Chinook Jargon*)

“The word *pehlten* [*piltên*] – insane, crazy – comes from ‘Filion,’ the name of an employee of the Hudson’s Bay who became insane. Between French and English pronunciation of that name, the Indians made it *pilio*, *pilian*, and at last *pehlten*, and adopted the name to mean insane in general.” — (1909, attributed to *Kamloops Wawa* by George Shaw)



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

This is *Tayi Shakes*' traditional house in Alaska. The Shakes were powerful Tlingit warriors who fought against Russian imperialism in Alaska. A comparison of other "less powerful" people to the Shakes may have given English the expression "no great shakes."

provides a concept of possession. Some Chinook Jargon varieties have the word *towên* which means "to physically have," but *mitlayt* allows for a more poetic form of ownership. The things that sit with you are the things associated with you. If the relationship's right, they are the things you own. If you own the dog or the dog hangs around you, you could say *kamuks mitlayt kupa nayka* or "the dog sits with me." In the book, *The Canoe and The Saddle*, which is about the young author's trip to the Northwest in the 1850s, Theodore Winthrop wrote, "*Hyas tyee mika,—hiu mitlite ikta, halo ikta mitlite copa nika tenas.*"¹ This literally translates as, "Big leader you, many reside things, no things reside with my son," or "You're a great leader who has many things, my son has nothing." Winthrop, in the flamboyant language of his time, actually translated it as, "Great chief thou, with thee plenty traps abide, no traps hath my son." Times change. Originally when people used *mitlayt* for possession, the things "sat with" or *mitlayt kupa* them, but eventually, *mitlayt* became a replacement for "have" and an English-like construction was adopted.

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nawitka *Nawitka* means “yes,” “for sure,” “certainly,” or “I’ll get right on it.” It denotes agreement, confirmation and affirms what another speaker is saying. *Délet nawitka* means that you are 100% committed, but *hilu nawitka* signifies that you’re undecided and sitting on the fence.

patlêch *Patlêch* comes from the Nuu-Chah-Nulth language. *Patlêch* means “to give.” If you *patlêch* something to someone, you’re physically giving it to them. It’s not necessarily without any strings attached though. A gift given with nothing expected in return is a *kêltês patlêch* or a “giving with no purpose.” *Patlêch*, commonly spelt “potlatch” in English, also refers to several types of Native American ceremonies or celebrations. Guests are invited by the host to bear witness to the event. Their function is similar to the guests at a European-style wedding or baptism. The *patlêch* can be for the naming of a child, a marriage, or an acceptance of an important position, such as group elder. The host always pays his guests for witnessing the act, so he *patlêches* a gift to them. By accepting, the guests signify they agree with what is going on. The host also makes sure he has enough *mêkêmêk* for everybody. A little entertainment’s not a bad idea either.

skukum *Skukum* has a broad range of meanings. Accented on the first syllable, it can be anything from a replacement for *klush*, meaning “good,” to “strong,” “powerful,” “ultimate” and “first-rate.” Something can be *skukum*, meaning “cool,” or *skukum* can be “tough.” A *skukum* burger is a big hamburger, but when your Mom’s food is *skukum*, it’s delicious. If you have a *skukum têtêm*, you’re brave. *Skukum chêk* is a river rapid or strong current. If you *skukum wawa* you’ve constructed your arguments well, or you’re giving someone a piece of your mind. The Democratic Club of Seattle was once called the Skookum Club. When you’re *skukum*, you’ve got a purpose and you’re on solid ground. *Skukum* is the opposite of *kêltês*. *Skukum* is power and strength. In an odd turnaround, if you accent *skukum* on the last syllable, it refers to a bad spirit.

tamanêwês George Gibbs writes: “A sort of guardian or familiar spirit; magic; luck; fortune; anything supernatural. One’s particular forte is said to be his *tamanêwês*. *Mamuk tamanêwês*, to ‘conjure’; ‘make medicine’; *masachi tamanêwês*, ‘witchcraft’ or ‘necromancy.’” Your *tamanêwês* can be your guardian spirit who gives you your strength or a *tamanêwês* can be an evil spirit out to steal your soul. A *masachi tamanêwês* is an evil spirit, but traditional healers use *tamanêwês* to cure many ills.

têmtêm This is the sound of a heart beating. Tum, tum, tum, tum.... *Têmtêm* signifies your insides, your heart, and your inner feelings. If you *têmtêm* something, it’s what you think. Your *têmtêm* is your opinion or your internals. If you *têmtêm klush*, it’s a good idea, but if you’re *klush têmtêm*, you’ve got a kind heart or you’re feeling good. Having a *sik têmtêm* doesn’t usually mean that you have heart disease but rather that you’re sad or sorry.

tilikêm Your *tilikêms* are your people. These can be friends, family, or your social group. *Tilikêm* means a person or people, but has come to signify a friend or ally. *Klahawya tilikêm* is a standard greeting in Chinook Jargon.

tiki *Tiki* means you want or like something. Wanting or liking something is akin to making it happen in Chinook Jargon, so *tiki* can also mean that something is about to occur. If you say *nayka tiki klatawa*, you want to go, and you are about to go. If you *tiki* someone of the opposite sex, it means you’re sweet on them.

These words not only have linguistic value, they give you a little insight into how the inhabitants of the Northwest view the world they live in.

How Expressive?

Just how expressive is Chinook Jargon? Those who say it is limited often refer to Horatio Hale's description, claiming a need for accompanying sign language. On the other hand, sometimes there was less gesturing in Chinook Jargon than in other Native languages.

"We frequently had occasion to observe the sudden change produced when a party of natives, who had been conversing in their own tongue, were joined by a foreigner, with whom it was necessary to speak the Jargon. The countenances which before had been grave, stolid, and inexpressive, were instantly lighted up with animation; the low, monotonous tone became lively and modulated; every feature was active; the head, the arms, and the whole body were in motion, and every look and gesture became instinct with meaning. One who knew merely the subject of the discourse might often have comprehended, from this source alone, the general purport of the conversation." — Horatio Hale (1846, "The 'Jargon' or Trade-Language of Oregon")

"Sometimes Hy-na-um ... found his knowledge of Chinook insufficient for his purpose. He would then lapse into his native Ohyaht, supplemented by dramatic gestures. I believe I sensed what he meant and for the sake of continuity, I have written these passages of his narration in Chinook, and then translated them." — Alfred Carmichael ("The Legend of the Flood")

"Doctor Maynard was master of ceremonies, and an interpreter hacked and jammed the Governor's English into procrustean Chinook jargon." — Archie Binns (1941, *Northwest Gateway*)

"Mother is approaching her 90th birthday and the present eludes her. But speak some words of the Chinook jargon and she can come right back." — Edith Randall (1970, told to Jess Scott, *The Oregonian*)

"How can this Jargon pretend to be a universal language? At least as reasonable as the Volapuk [an early Esperanto-type language]; for where is the Volapuk spoken? — whereas, without pretending to make the Chinook the language of the twentieth century, it is true to say that it is understood by 20,000 or 30,000 people in British Columbia, Washington and Oregon." — Fr. Jean-Marie LeJeune (1895, *Kamloops Wawa*)

6

Places

Over a thousand places in the Pacific Northwest have Chinook Jargon names. Most visitors and residents see them simply as more Native American names. Recognizing these names as Chinook Jargon and translating them can add lots of enjoyment to any trip.

Important Words

You can easily translate Chinook Jargon place names because they tend to come from a small subset of the vocabulary. The same words are used over and over again. Be on the lookout for variations in spelling as place names use various historic spellings, which aren't standardized. For instance, the word *klahani* is usually spelled "klahanie" in place names. Kopachuck really means *kupa chék*, or "at the water." Here are the most important words you'll run into:

alkie, alki	<i>atki</i> - future
alta	<i>alta</i> - now, presently
chuck	<i>chék</i> - water
coolie, cooley	<i>kuli</i> - run (There is another word <i>coulee</i> which refers to a stream or river that is dry part of the year. This is not actually Chinook Jargon but from a French dialect.)
cooliechuck	<i>kuli chék</i> - stream, small river, tidal eddy
cultus	<i>kêltês</i> - useless, worthless, no value
delate, delett	<i>dêlet</i> - straight, true, very
illahie, illahee, illahe	<i>ilêhi</i> - land
kanaka	<i>kanaka</i> - Hawaiian native
klahhanie, klahanie	<i>klahani</i> - outdoors, outside
kopa, copa	<i>kupa</i> - on, near
memloost, memaloose	<i>mimêlust</i> - dead
mesachie	<i>masachi</i> - bad, evil
muckamuck	<i>mêkêmêk</i> - food, to eat

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ollalie, ollala	<i>ulali</i> - berries
owyhee	<i>owayhi</i> - Hawaiian
pil	<i>pil</i> - red
skookum	<i>skukum</i> - strong, powerful, steep
skookumchuck	<i>skukum chêk</i> - rapids, river
tumwater, tumchuck	<i>têmwata, têtchêk</i> - waterfall
tyee	<i>tayi</i> - leader, important, excellent

There are many other words used in place names. You'll find many of these in the vocabulary at the back of this book.

Interesting Places

One of the most commonly used Chinook Jargon words is *tayi*. *Tayi* means "leader," "chief," "best," or "important," and is spelt in place names as "tyee." There's a Tyee Hotel on Interstate 5 in Washington south of Olympia. There's a Tyee Court in Vancouver and a Tyee Road in Victoria. Tyee Drive is located in Point Roberts. Point Roberts is a little bit of the U.S. that is totally cut off by British Columbia from the continental U.S. People unfamiliar with the area drew up the boundary between Canada and the United States, isolating Point Roberts from the rest of the United States. Oregon has Tyee Camp, along with Tyee Wine Cellars and Tyee Lodge. There are many businesses with "tyee" in their name in the Pacific Northwest.

Tilikêm, commonly spelt "tillicum," means "person" or "people," and often has the connotation of a friend or relative. There's a Tillicum Mall along Tillicum Road in Victoria and a Tillicum Street in both Seattle and Vancouver. Tillicum Village on Blake Island, accessible from Seattle by ferry, offers a northwest luau, complete with a stage show, for the hungry tourist. Blake Island is believed to be the birthplace of Chief Seattle.

The Pacific Northwest and the great outdoors are synonymous. Therefore it isn't surprising to find a lot of places named *klahani*, which means "outside." Seattle and Victoria both have Klahanie Drives, while Klahanie Road is located along the way to Whistler, British Columbia. Klahanie Bed and Breakfast is in Port Angeles, Washington, which is at the top of the Olympic Peninsula.

The Chinook Jargon word *têm*, spelt "tum" in place names, refers to the sound of a tumbling brook or beating heart. Your heart is your *têmtêm*. Tumwater, Washington, just south of Olympia, was named after the falls on

the Deschutes River. Native American names for the place were *Têmhêk*, *Têmwata*, and *Spakwatl*. There are several other places named Tumwater in Washington. *Têmwata* was the Chinook Jargon name for Oregon City.

Washington also has a place called Tumtum. *Têmtêm*, besides meaning your “heart” and “thoughts,” can connote something unusual, such as a large tree with special significance. There was a large yellow pine in Tumtum that was used as a gallows. A local character known as Chief Tumtum greeted visitors with *Hayu têtêm!* or “Good day.”

The Hawaiians, who arrived early on during the fur trade, also left their mark on the map with two frequently used words. These are *owayhi* and *kanaka*. *Owayhi*, spelt “Owyhee” in place names, is a corruption of ‘*O Hawai‘i* or “Hawaii.” *Kanaka* is the term for “person” in the Hawaiian language. Both of these words came into Chinook Jargon because of the Hawaiians who worked at Fort Vancouver.

Owyhee River, which flows into the Snake River in Oregon, was named in honor of two Hawaiians. They were part of an early fur exploration party and were killed in a skirmish with Native Americans along this river. There are Owyhee counties in Idaho and Nevada. Kanaka Point in British Columbia was also named in honor of an early Hawaiian. There’s a Kanaka Place in Victoria, while Kanaka Creek and Kanaka Gulch are in the Siskiyou Mountains of Northern California.

Kêltês is also a popular name. Meaning “worthless” and usually spelt “cultus,” *kêltês* either signifies a place that has no economic value or was often substituted for more vulgar terms when official recording was done. Take Cultus Hole, a lake in the Wenatchee National Forest in Washington. The place was originally named something else by local sheepherders, who were known for their especially vulgar speech habits. When it came time to

Company Men Turned Family Men

James Swan, in *The Northwest Coast*, 1857, repeats often that many Hudson Bay Company employees left the company to settle down with their Native wives.

“A number of the retired servants of the Hudson Bay Company who had intermarried with this tribe [Nez Perce] had settled in the Willamette Valley, and to these persons the Indians communicated the intelligence of the gold discovery.”

“The fact that the [Hudson’s Bay] Company were about to remove from the Territory, and intended closing up their affairs there, was well known and talked about by the Indians and by those of the former servants who had permanently settled themselves on farms.”

Their Own Names

While we focus on the names that entered English, many places with English names also have Chinook Jargon names.

“This talk Leschi had brought back to the sound, along with a terrifying notion of *polakly illeha*, the land of perpetual darkness (an echo, perhaps, of Alaska’s long winter nights). *Polakly illeha*, so he said, was the reservation to which the whites intended to send the Indians when they signed the treaty.” – David Laverder (1958, *Land of Giants*)

Its Chinook Jargon-speaking inhabitants knew Fort Vancouver as *Ski-chut-hwa*.

The Chinook Jargon of British Columbia uses the word *stalo* for “river.” It comes from the local name for the Fraser River and the Salish-speaking people who live along it.

Bastên ilêhi is the Chinook Jargon word for the United States. In effect, the whole country is named after the city of Boston where many of the first Yankee traders came from.

According to Edward H. Thomas, “Sketsotwa” [*Skichuthwa*] is also the name for the lower Columbia river in Chinook Jargon.

According to Edward S. Farrow, in *Mountain Scouting – A Handbook for Officers and Soldiers on the Frontiers*, the Chinook Jargon name for Vancouver [Washington] was *Kits-oat-qua*. This is probably a variation of *Skichuthwa*.

Victoria became *Biktoli* in Chinook Jargon. While modern tourists are enamoured with the quaintness of the city, early Native Americans often found it large, cold and impersonal.

Gilbert McCleod gave *Matala* as the Chinook Jargon name for Victoria in a 1992 interview.

The Chinook Jargon word for New Westminster, BC, *Kunspaeli*, is derived from the original European name of the area, Queensborough.

“Seattle was growing into a town, and still the big lake to the east was *hyas chuck* and the little lake between the big one and the Sound was *tenas chuck*. Those were not even proper Indian names. They were Chinook jargon for ‘big water’ and ‘little water’; identifications, but not names.” — Archie Binns (1941, *Northwest Gateway*)

In Seattle, *hayash chêk* became Lake Washington and *tênês chêk* became Lake Union.

Olympia, Washington is referred to as *Stechas* and France is written as *Flance* in a 1918 letter written in Chinook Jargon from the “Thomas Prosch Collection” at the University of Washington.



This Delate Road is located just outside of Poulsbo, Washington, across from Seattle on the Olympic Peninsula. There are many roads and streets with Chinook Jargon names in the Pacific Northwest.

draw a map of the area for U.S. Forest Service personnel, the first word of the original name was swapped for *kêltês* to allude to the original meaning. Both Oregon and British Columbia boast a Cultus Lake. Vancouver has a Cultus Avenue and a Cultus Court.

The Siskiyou

The largest geographical feature that bears a Chinook Jargon place name is the Siskiyou Mountains separating Oregon from California. In Chinook Jargon, *siskayu* is a bob-tailed horse. George Gibbs explains how this word came to be applied to the mountain range:

Mr. Archibald R. McLeod, a chief factor of the Hudson's Bay Company, in the year 1828, while crossing the mountains with a pack train, was overtaken by a snow storm, in which he lost most of his animals, including a noted bob-tailed race-horse. His Canadian followers, in compliment to their chief, or "bourgeois," named the place the Pass of the Siskiyou, — an appellation subsequently adopted as the veritable Indian name of the locality, and which thence extended to the whole range, and the adjoining districts.

The northern most county in California takes its name from the Siskiyou Mountains.

Chinook Jargon

Name Givers

Many Chinook Jargon place names were given in the old-fashioned way. Early explorers, trappers, settlers, and Native Americans who knew and spoke Chinook Jargon referred to geographical features in the language they knew. The names stuck and were recorded.

On the other hand, real estate agents, property owners and entrepreneurs use Chinook Jargon names to give a natural or slightly exotic flavor to their wares. Some turn to Chinook Jargon dictionaries in their quest for originality. The U.S. Forest Service also used Chinook Jargon in an attempt to give each geographical feature a unique name as an aid to firefighting. One employee, A. H. Sylvester, often turned to his knowledge of Chinook Jargon as he put an estimated 3,000 names on the map.

In *Names of the Land*, James Stewart gives this account of Sylvester's naming style. Stewart wrote: "Klone [*klon*] in Chinook means 'three,' and after paying three dollars for a dog, Sylvester named him Klone. 'His full name was Klone pee sitkim, three and a half, for I hadn't had him long until he killed a chicken for which I had to pay half a dollar.' Klone Peak, therefore, does not mean a triple-pointed mountain, but like many another American stream or hill commemorates a good dog, even though he may have begun as a chicken killing pup." Sylvester often turned to Chinook Jargon to eliminate redundant names. A mountain named Cougar Peak that was too close to another mountain, also named Cougar Peak, was renamed Puss-puss Peak.

7

Outside

The Pacific Northwest is synonymous with the great outdoors. When you're *klahani* or outside, you'll see a lot of animal and plant life. Try using their Chinook Jargon names when you talk about them.

Animals

Some of these animals are domestic and some of them are your *limulo shiks* or wild friends. Some of the words consists of repetitive syllables. For example, *kwiskwis* is pronounced *kwis-kwis*, and *kêlakêlama* is pronounced *kêla-kêla-ma*.

beaver	<i>ina</i>
bird	<i>kêlakêla</i>
black bear	<i>itswêt</i>
bug	<i>inapu</i>
cat	<i>puspus</i>
chicken	<i>lapul</i>
cougar, mountain lion	<i>hayash puspus</i>
cow	<i>musmus</i>
coyote	<i>talêpês</i>
crow	<i>kaka</i>
deer	<i>mawich</i>
dog	<i>kamuks</i>
duck	<i>kwehkweh</i>
eagle	<i>chakchak</i>
elk	<i>mulak</i>
fish	<i>pish</i>

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flea	<i>supêna inapu</i>
frog	<i>shwakek</i>
goose	<i>kêlakêlama</i>
grasshopper	<i>klakklak</i>
grizzly bear	<i>shayêm</i>
mosquito	<i>malakwa</i>
orca	<i>kakowan yaka pishak</i>
otter (land, river)	<i>nênamuks</i>
otter (sea)	<i>ilaki</i>
owl	<i>wahwah</i>
pig	<i>kushu</i>
porpoise	<i>kwisêo</i>
rabbit	<i>yutlkêt kwêlan</i>
raccoon	<i>kalis</i>
raven	<i>hayash kaka</i>
salmon	<i>samên</i>
seal	<i>ulhayu</i>
sheep	<i>limoto</i>
squirrel	<i>kwiskwis</i>
vulture	<i>hêm latet</i>
whale	<i>ikuli</i>
wolf	<i>lilu</i>

Chinook Jargon speakers often use the term *tênês mawich*, “little deer” to refer to any small animal for which they do not have a name. Other animals can be described. A turkey is a *yutlkêt liku kêlakêla* or “long-necked bird.”



Kopachuck State Park is located on Highway 16 just north of Gig Harbor in Washington. *Kupa chék* means “at the water” in Chinook Jargon.

“The [San Francisco] Times of June 24 [1858] prints a letter from a Fort Langley miner who says, ‘Mining license is \$5 a month, which the American peeps won’t pay. King George’s men may if they like, but Boston men, no But very few Indians here speak the Chinook lingo.’ — Rena V. Grant (1942, “The Chinook Jargon, Past and Present”)

“In going up the [Fraser] river they should never interfere with their Indians, but permit them to go by any route they see fit to select, and to load the canoes as they please. When at Fort Hope, they should be very careful to select good and smart Indians, and to have one who can speak the Chenook jargon.”
— W. H. Woods (1858, *San Francisco Evening Bulletin*)

“The Chinook jargon should be learned by everyone contemplating a trip to the Fraser River gold mines, as it is the language used by all the different Indian tribes in British North America west of the Cascade Mountains, as the means of conversation with the whites, and a knowledge of it has in many instances saved the wandering traveller from being scalped, and not a few from being treacherously murdered.” — Duncan MacDonald (1862, *British Columbia and Vancouver’s Island*)

During the period of 1858 to 1862, Chinook Jargon seems to have become well established in the Fraser River gold mining area.

Plants

The Pacific Northwest is famous for its *hayash stik ilêhi*, “big tree country,” or rainforest. In Chinook Jargon, many trees get their names from their use. The cedar was the choice for making canoes so it became the “canoe tree” or *kanim stik*. The maple and ash were used for paddles so they both became the “paddle tree” or *isik stik*. Use the vocabulary in the back of this book to decipher the names of the other trees.

ash tree	<i>isik stik</i>
acorns	<i>kênawi</i>
bark	<i>stik skin</i>
blackberries	<i>klikêmuks</i>
camas	<i>lakamas</i>
cedar tree	<i>kanim stik</i> or <i>klush stik</i>
corn	<i>isath</i>
fir	<i>mula stik</i>
flower	<i>tokti tipsu</i> or <i>tatis</i>
grass	<i>ilêhi tipsu</i>
hazelnut tree	<i>takwêla stik</i>
maple tree	<i>isik stik</i>
oak tree	<i>kêl stik</i> or <i>kênawi stick</i>
pine tree	<i>lagom stik</i>
potato	[<i>bastên</i>] <i>wapêtu</i>
salal bush	<i>salal</i>
tree	<i>stik</i>
wapato	[<i>sawash</i>] <i>wapêtu</i>
willow tree	<i>ina stik</i>

Geography

The Pacific Northwest has some of the most stunning scenery in two countries. See how many of these Chinook Jargon words you can use as you drive through it.

beach	<i>pulali ilêhi</i>
creek	<i>tênês chêk</i>
field	<i>klush ilêhi</i>
forest	<i>stik ilêhi</i>
hill	<i>tênês sahali ilêhi</i> or <i>tênês lamotay</i>
lake	<i>chêk</i>
mountain	<i>lamotay</i>
ocean	<i>salt chêk</i>
opposite shore	<i>inatay</i>
place, land	<i>ilêhi</i>
pond	<i>mimêlust chêk</i>
prairie	<i>tipsu ilêhi</i>
rapids, current	<i>skukum chêk</i>
river	<i>chêk</i> or <i>stalo</i>
salt water, sea	<i>salt chêk</i>
seashore	<i>nawits</i>
stream	<i>tênês chêk</i>
water	<i>chêk</i>
waterfall	<i>têmchêk</i> or <i>têmwata</i>

Chinook Jargon

Directions

These direction words will help you navigate.

across	<i>inatay</i>
away from	<i>klak</i> or <i>saya kupa</i>
below	<i>kikwêli</i>
east	<i>ka san yaka chaku</i>
from	<i>kupa</i>
shoreward	<i>matlhwêli</i>
left	<i>kêltês lima</i>
nearby	<i>wik saya</i>
north	<i>ka kol chaku</i> or <i>stopilo</i>
on top	<i>sahali</i>
over there	<i>kupa</i>
right	<i>klush lima</i> or <i>kenkiyêm</i>
seaward	<i>matlini</i>
south	<i>ka san mitlayt kupa sitkum san</i> or <i>stewah</i>
towards	<i>kupa</i>
west	<i>ka san klatawa</i> or <i>ka san klip</i>

The Fires Below

While most sources provide *sahali ilêhi* as the word for “heaven,” “hell” has many different names. Father Demers gives *lempel*, while some sources cite *kikwêli paya*, *hayash paya*, *diyab yaka ilêhi*, and *kikwêli ilêhi*. Gibbs and many others are quiet on the subject.

The Sky and the Weather

Here are the names of some of the things you might see in the sky.

cloud	<i>kosah smok</i>
fog	<i>ilêhi kosah smok</i>
rain	<i>snas</i>
sky	<i>kosah</i>
snow	<i>snu or kol snas</i>
sun	<i>san</i>
wind	<i>win</i>

International Idiom

There are interesting anecdotes of Chinook Jargon being spoken far from its home in the Pacific Northwest. Pauline Johnson, a Mohawk poet, used it with Joe Capilano, a Vancouver Native, in London, 1906. In “The Chinook Jargon, Past and Present,” Rena Grant tells the story of Captain Dan O’Neill. O’Neill was the captain of the first river steamer in the Pacific Northwest, the *Columbia*, in 1849 and 1850. In Australia during the 1850s, he relates:

“On one particular evening I was suffering from a lame knee and amused myself by sitting in one corner with my disabled limb resting on an extra stool. Upon the starting of music, the dancers soon appeared, and the seats were all occupied. One rough-looking red-shirted chap, pretty well filled with ‘tangle-foot’ came over to where I was sitting and took hold of the stool that I was using as a rest for my knee. I said, ‘You can’t have that, my friend, I am using it.’ He straightened up a moment, looked sharply at me and replied: ‘Well, I’m a better man than you are.’ He was told there was no doubt of that. He continued: ‘I’m a smarter man, better educated, can speak more languages than you can’ —opening with ‘Parlez-vous Francais?’ ‘No,’ said I, ‘I don’t parlez vous.’ He then came back with ‘Sprechen sie Deutsche?’ I shook my head, when he followed with, ‘Hablar usted Espanol?’ Of this I was also ignorant, and he seemed quite disgusted over my lack of lingual abilities, the audience around being amused as well. He stood there hesitating as if in doubt what he would try me with next. I concluded to try him with a language not common in that part of the world, and said to him. ‘Nika cumtux Chinook?’ He gave a startled look for the moment and then burst out with, ‘now-witka six, nika cumtux Chinook. Nika hyas close wawa—’ and more, all rattled off lively.... He had lived in Oregon in the early ‘forties. I acknowledged that he was a smarter man and knew more languages than I did.”

Groups in the Northwest

Sawash is the word used to describe a Native American in Chinook Jargon. In English this became “Siwash” and is now considered to be derogatory. Demers doesn’t use this word, instead preferring *telikom* [*tilikêm*], which was the Chinook Jargon word for “people.”

While the derivation of *Bastên man* for an American and *Kinchuch*, a corruption of “King George” for a Canadian or Englishman seem obvious, the usage of *pasayuks* for French or French–Canadian is not.

“As most of those who came to these coasts under the Stars and Stripes were from Boston and as Americans made many inquiries for the lost ship Boston, which the Nootkans had burned after killing the crew, the Indians learned to associate the name of Boston with the Stars and Stripes. To this day ‘Boston-Man’ means American in the Indian Esperanto, or Chinook jargon, just as ‘King George-Man’ means Englishman.” — Edmond S. Meany (1946, *History of The State of Washington*)

“The opposite of ‘sourdough’ in Alaskan (the equivalent of the ‘tenderfoot’ of the West) is ‘cheechako,’ pronounced cheechawker, derived from a word in the Chinook jargon meaning ‘newly arrived.’” — Ernest Gruening (1964, *The State of Alaska*)

“...*Pasaiuks* [*pasayuks*], which we presume to be the word *Français*, corrupted to *Pasai* (as neither *f*, *r*, nor the nasal *n* can be pronounced by the Indians), with the Tshinuk plural termination *uks* added. The word for blanket is probably from the same source (*françaises*, French goods, or clothing).” — Horatio Hale (1846, *The “Jargon,” or Trade-Language of Oregon*)

“Mr. Hale supposed this [*pasayuks*] to be a corruption of the French word *Français*. It is, really derived from the foregoing [Chinook] word, *pasisi*, with the terminal *uks*, which is a plural form applied to living beings. Lewis and Clarke (vol. ii, p. 413) give *pashisheooks*, clothmen, as the Chinook name for the whites, and this explanation was also furnished me by people of that tribe. It has since been generally restricted to the French Canadians, though among some of the tribes east of the Cascade Range, it is applied indiscriminately to all the Hudson’s Bay people.” — George Gibbs (1863, *A Dictionary of the Chinook Jargon*)

Theodore Winthrop, in *The Canoe and the Saddle*, first published in 1853, uses the term “blanketeer” when he talks about voyageurs, the French–Canadian employees of the Hudson’s Bay Company. He refers to these same voyageurs as *pasaiooks* [*pasayuks*] in his Chinook text.

8

Numbers

Counting

Chinook Jargon numbers have an interesting story behind them. Father Jean-Marie LeJeune wrote this in 1924:

To understand the origin of the numbers, as expressed in the different languages of these districts, open out both hands, palms facing outside, the thumbs near each other. The little finger of the left hand is one, next to it, his helper, his second, two; the third finger, middle hand, three; the next coming, the index, is a special number, four: they used to keep the dead bodies until the fourth day. Then comes the thumb, full hand five; the next is across to the other hand, the thumb of the right hand, the first of the second hand, six. Seven seems to mean second of the right hand and in fact we have *sinamox*t, again two. Eight is also a special number, an octave, *stotekin*. The fourth finger of the right hands shows but one, both hands full but one, *kwist*, pretty nearly full hands. Then comes full hands, ten. Notice *kwinnum*, five, *taghum*, across to the other hand, *tahtlum*, both hands full, has the same termination....

The numbers in Chinook Jargon are straightforward.

one	<i>ikt</i>
two	<i>makst</i>
three	<i>klon</i>
four	<i>lakit</i>
five	<i>kwinêm</i>
six	<i>taham</i>
seven	<i>sinêmakst</i>
eight	<i>stutkin</i>
nine	<i>kwayts</i>
ten	<i>tatlilêm</i>
one hundred	<i>takomunêk</i>

Chinook Jargon

Compound numbers are made by using *pi* to add the simple numbers together.

eleven	<i>tatlilêm pi ikt</i>
twelve	<i>tatlilêm pi makst</i>
thirteen	<i>tatlilêm pi klon</i>

Placing the multiplier in front of ten (*tatlilêm*) creates units of ten.

twenty	<i>makst tatlilêm</i>
thirty	<i>klon tatlilêm</i>
forty	<i>lakit tatlilêm</i>
fifty	<i>kwinêm tatlilêm</i>
sixty–two	<i>taham tatlilêm pi makst</i>
ninety–nine	<i>kwayst tatlilêm pi kwayst</i>

Numbers can be used as modifiers and context dictates whether they indicate order or are being used to describe quantity. To indicate repetition, *i* is added to the end of the number. Use *ikti*, “once” and *maksti*, “twice.”

three people	<i>klon tilikêm</i>
the second person	<i>ukuk makst tilikêm</i>
I went twice.	<i>Nayka klatawa maksti.</i>
He is the third.	<i>Yaka ukuk klon.</i>

The expression “a lot of” is translated *hayu*.

Days of The Week

Sunday is *Santi*, while the other days of the week are numbered from that day. Monday is *ikt san*. Tuesday is *makst san* and so on. To avoid confusion between “the number of days ago” and the days of the week, some Chinook Jargon speakers will use *mamuk* [*san*] for the days of the week. Monday is *ikt mamuk* [*san*]; “first work day” and Saturday is *taham mamuk* [*san*]; “sixth work day.”

“The other days of the week are usually counted from this [Sunday]; as, *icht, mokst, klone sun kopet Sunday*, ‘one, two, or three days after Sunday.’” — George Gibbs (1863, *Dictionary of the Chinook Jargon*)

“Saturday used to be called at the Hudson’s Bay Company’s posts *muckamuck sun*, ‘food day,’ as the one on which the rations were issued.” — George Gibbs (1863, *Dictionary of the Chinook Jargon*)

“*Sunday, Sunday. Ikt sunday*; one week. *Hyas sunday*; a holiday.”
— John Gill (1889, *Gill’s Dictionary of the Chinook Jargon*)

Time

The months and days of the week are usually expressed in English or numerically (e.g., January could be *ikt mun*).

afternoon	<i>lah san</i>
day	<i>san</i>
evening	<i>tênês pulakli</i>
month	<i>mun</i>
morning	<i>tênês san</i>
night	<i>pulakli</i>
noon	<i>katsêk san</i>
sunset	<i>klip san</i>
tomorrow	<i>tumala</i>
week	<i>santi</i> or <i>wiyk</i>
yesterday	<i>tatlki san</i>

Chinook Jargon

Hours are expressed by prefixing the number to the word *tintin*.

six o'clock	<i>taham tintin</i>
seven-thirty (linear translation: seven and a half o'clock)	<i>sinêmakst pi sitkum tintin</i>
three-fifteen (linear translation: three and a quarter o'clock)	<i>klon pi kwata tintin</i>
two-twenty (linear translation: two and twenty o'clock)	<i>makst pi makst tatlilêm tintin</i>
four-fifty (linear translation: ten before five o'clock)	<i>tatlilêm ilêp kwinêm tintin</i>

Here are some things to say about time:

What time is it?	<i>Kênchi tintin?</i>
It's three fifteen.	<i>Klon pi kwata tintin.</i>
When can I go outside?	<i>Kênchi nayka klatawa klahani?</i>

Numbers Remembered

"Henrietta Failing recalls going with her parents as a small girl to trade with the Indians. Members of local area tribes, as many as 60 or 70, would set up shop in the open at what is now the site of Couch School in northwest Portland. There they would barter and sell their handicrafts – garments, baskets, beaded pouches, leatherwork and blankets – to Portlanders.

"On such occasions Chinook jargon flew fast and furious. Knowing your numerals – Ikt, Mox, Klone, Lock-it, Kwin-num, Tagh-kum, Sin-na-mox, Sto-te-kin, Twaist, Tan-tlum (1, 2, 3, 4, etc.) was almost essential if you didn't want to resort to counting on your fingers." – Karl Klooster (1989, "Local Lore: The Chinook Jargon," *The Oregonian*)

Money

As a visitor or resident in the Northwest, you're sure to spend some money. Chinook Jargon uses the American slang terms for the names of the coins. A dime or ten cents started out as a *kêltês bit*. With the American term, there are eight bits in a dollar. Each bit is worth 12 ½ cents. Since the American dime or Canadian 10-cent piece is short of that, both were referred to as a *kêltês bit* or worthless bit. *Kêltês* was eventually dropped and *bit* now refers to 10 cents only. But *makst bit* or two bits still refer to an American quarter or Canadian 25-cent piece. This makes for interesting math. In Chinook Jargon, two 2-bit pieces may be half a dollar, but a half-dollar is worth five bits.

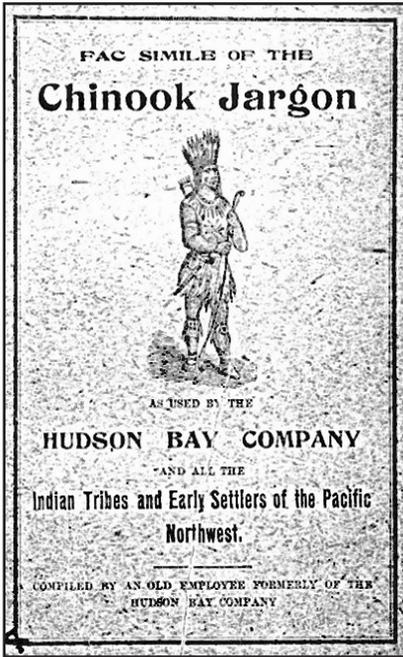
one cent	<i>peni</i>
five cents	<i>kwinêm peni</i> or <i>sitkum bit</i>
ten cents or dime	<i>bit</i>
twenty-five cents or quarter dollar	<i>makst bit</i> or <i>kwata</i>
fifty cents or half-dollar	<i>sitkum dala</i>
one dollar	<i>ikt dala</i>
coins	<i>chikêmin</i>
paper money	<i>piypa dala</i>

Here are some phrases to help you manage your money:

How much is this?	<i>Kênchi hayu dala ukuk?</i>
That's two dollars.	<i>Ukuk makst dala.</i>
That's very expensive!	<i>Hayash makuk!</i>
I'll give you a dollar and a half.	<i>Nayka patlêch [mayka] ikt pi sitkum dala.</i>
Dad, I want five dollars.	<i>Dad, nayka tiki kwinêm dala.</i>
Keep the change.	<i>Wik kilapay patlêch chikêmin.</i>

A Trading Language Forever

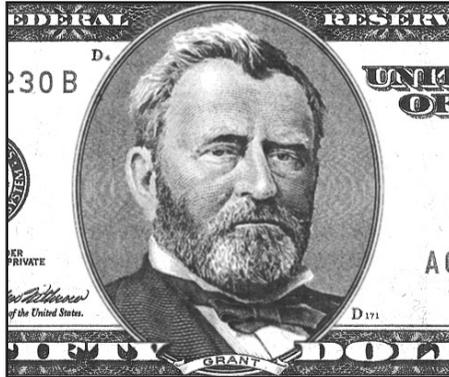
Chinook Jargon was used as a trading language well into the twentieth century.



The pocket wordlist *Facsimile of the Chinook Jargon as Used by the Hudson Bay Company and all the Indian Tribes and Early Settlers of the Pacific Northwest* was “compiled by an old employee formerly of the Hudson Bay Company.” It is small in size, 3 inches by 5 inches, and only 6 pages long. It was meant to be carried around as a word book, possibly for use during trading sessions.

According to Dan Macy, a retired store keeper from Warm Springs, Oregon, dentalium and Chinook Jargon were used in the store there until the 1940s.

At least one Chinook Jargon speaker appears on the money of the United States of America. President Ulysses S. Grant is on the fifty dollar bill. Grant learned Chinook Jargon when he was stationed in the Pacific Northwest prior to the Civil War.



“The handy little 1902 pocket edition loaned to me belonged to Henrietta’s father, James Failing, youngest brother of Henry Failing, one of Portland’s most influential civic leaders in the 19th century. The fact that banker James Failing kept such a booklet in his possession attests to the persistence of the jargon as a means of communication between local whites (Boston men) and Indians (Siwash) into the early 20th century.” – Karl Klooster (1989, “Local Lore: The Chinook Jargon,” *The Oregonian*)