Chinook Jargon
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What is Chinook Jargon?

- Chinook Jargon is a trade pidgin used in the Pacific Northwest, extending from Northern California to Alaska.

- While commonly referred to as a jargon, it has also been called a pidgin, an expanded pidgin, and a creole.
CJ Development

There are two theories that posit possible CJ development scenarios:

1) CJ existed before whites arrived in the PNW. It was used as a trade jargon between Native American tribes in the area. It developed mostly from Chinook and Nootka.

2) CJ developed when white fur traders from the Astor and Hudson Bay Trading Companies showed up in the PNW. It developed mostly from Chinook, but up to one-third of its vocabulary is English or French.

Early CJ: In early 19th century, CJ vocab was only about 250 words. Now, 600-1,000 words are attested.
Development Timeline

- (Year unknown) jargon existed between tribes (no documentation to prove time period)

- 1792: 1st contact between whites and PNW – Captain John Gray (trader ship)

- 1806: Meriwether Lewis’ records show that the language they spoke to him had English-sounding words and that the natives responded to words like “musket, powder, knife, son of a bitch”
  1) He said that their language sounded the closest to English that he had heard
  2) First reliable attestation of the existence of CJ
Development Timeline

- 1810: John Astor’s Pacific Fur Company – trading outpost at Astoria and the Hudson Bay Company’s post in Fort Vancouver
  
  1) Astor’s post significantly increased the amount of French influence in the area

- 1840: “Chinook Jargon” became a common term

- 1863: printing of the first dictionary

- 1890: writing system developed from French DuPloyer shorthand system

- 1891-1907: newsletter that reached up to 500 copies/month
Chinook Jargon Today

- Still used in isolated areas
- Classes taught on the Grande Ronde Reservation, OR
- Websites, mailing list, dictionaries, poems, etc.
- ISO 639-3: chn. Ethnologue lists CJ as being a nearly extinct language having under 100 speakers left.

http://www.grandronde.org/culture/ikanum/
Chinook Phonemes

Vowels
/i u e o a ø/

Consonants
p  t  ts  tš  k  kw  q  qw ʔ
p’  t’  t’ť  ts’  k’  kw’  q’  qw’
b  d  g
l  s  š  x  xw  X  Xw
m  n
r  l
w  y

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Note: There wasn’t really a “correct” way to pronounce CJ since its speakers came from so many different backgrounds (English, French, NatAm). Speakers had to realize this and attune their ears to hearing different pronunciations of the same thing.
Native American Pronunciations of European Words

/f/ → /p/
‘fire’ → ‘piah’ ‘fish’ → ‘pish’ ‘coffee’ → ‘kaupy’

/d/ → /t/
‘dance’ → ‘tance’ ‘dollar’ → ‘tollah’

/ɹ/ → /l/ or is dropped completely
‘dry’ → ‘dly’ or ‘tly’ ‘grease’ → ‘glease’ ‘rice’ → ‘lice’
‘dollar’ → ‘dollah’ or ‘tollah’ ‘sugar’ → ‘shugah’ ‘paper’ → ‘papeh’

/dʒ/ → /tʃ/
‘King George man’ → ‘King Chautsh man’ ‘sturgeon’ → ‘stutchin’

French nasals drop or become /n/ for Native American and English speakers.
‘le mouton’ becomes ‘lemooto’
‘la main’ becomes ‘lemah’
Origins of Chinook Jargon Lexicon

Chinook 200
French/Canadian 94
English 67
Chihalis 32
Nootka 24

Other sources:
Nisqually, Klikatat, Yakama, Cree, Chippeway, Wasco, Kalapuya, onomatopoeia, unknown.
Chinook Syntax

- CJ is an SOV language, though OSV is possible as a marked word order.

- Negators and other adverbs usually precede subjects, adjectives precede nouns and genitive constructions precede the noun which governs them.

- An interrogative particle na is sometimes found sentence-finally
Syntax Examples

Delate nika sick tumtum.
Really (truly) I’m sorry

Nika delate sick tumtum
I’m very sorry

Mika kumtux Chinook wawa?
Do you understand Chinook?

Mika kumtux wawa Chinook?
Do you know how to talk Chinook?
Chinook Syntax

Simple grammar in that there is no conjugation of verbs and no noun declension

Naika wawa chinook wawa

“I speak Chinook Jargon”

Iaka wawa chinook wawa

“He speaks Chinook Jargon”

The verb “to speak,” “wawa,” does not change
Chinook Morphology

- CJ exhibits little to no inflection, which contrasts greatly with its parent languages.

- Some words, “tilxams “people” (tixlam person) and iktas “gear, property” (ikta, something) are marked for pluralization with the English plural marker: “s” All other words remain invariant in all cases.
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