

Bella Coola /-uks/ reconsidered

Hank Nater

Some time after publication of my thesis on a Chinook origin of the Bella Coola pluralizer /-uks/, I became convinced that this suffix has actually been derived from Chinook /-ukš/. Strangely, however, the parent suffix itself has more limited application than the Bella Coola suffix, and members of the allomorphic set /-ukš, -ikš, -kš/ are distributed erratically. Suspecting that /-kš/ is not innately Chinook, I argue that it has in turn sprung from a source further to the east.

1 In my brief paper on the origin of the Bella Coola pluralizing suffix /-uks/ (IJAL 66:137-139), some issues remained unresolved:

- (a1) If /-uks/ has not been copied from Chinook, how/where did it originate?
- (a2) If Bella Coola /-uks/ is originally Chinook, why is it more productive than Chinook /-ukš/?
- (b) Why does Chinook have /-kš/ and /-ikš/ in addition to /-ukš/?
- (c) Is pluralizing /-ks, --kš/ found beyond Bella Coola and Chinook?

As regards (a1), I dismiss notions that /-uks/ is a proto-Salish relic or recent innovation, or that it derives from Chinook Jargon: **it cannot be due to mere chance that Bella Coola /-uks/ and Chinook /-ukš/ are nearly identical (in form and function), while a productive pluralizer */-uks/ is non-existent in Chinook Jargon.** In light of well-known trade patterns, we should consider other hypotheses, such as:

More than two centuries ago (before the Chinook Jargon evolved), Bella Coola traders who had been exchanging goods with Chinook merchants returned home speaking a "Chinookanized" form of Bella Coola, augmented with /-uks/.¹ Many of their peers then copied their use of /-uks/ (a handy suffix, see below: a2). Integration of /-uks/ into Bella Coola was further enhanced by occurrence of the very same phoneme sequence in frequently used enclitic strings like /_su_ks/ 'then!', /_lu_ks/ 'inevitably', /_k^w_u_ks/ 'unexpectedly'. As concerns the remaining issues, note that:

- (a2) Chinook /-ukš/ pluralizes animate nouns only, but Bella Coola /-uks/ acts on nouns, intransitive agents and transitive patients; it also distinguishes singular from plural mass nouns – *expanded usage of a borrowed morpheme.*

¹ The Bella Coola were avid travelers and merchants, as reflected in Bella Coola names for places far to the south (e.g. *sisaat* 'Sechelt', *mixtuuli* 'Victoria'), and in stories about trade, potlatches and warfare. Being members of a linguistic minority in the Pacific Northwest region, many Bella Coola individuals were (some still are) multilingual, and at least a few must have been (semi-)fluent in Chinook Proper, particularly in pre-Chinook Jargon times. The Chinook traveled even further, and "*traded widely with other tribes as far away as the northern Great Plains and Alaska*", see

<http://www.mnsu.edu/emuseum/prehistory/northamerica/culture/w.coastcultures/chinook.html>

- (b) Members of the Chinook suffix set /-kš, -ikš, -ukš/ appear to be in random distribution, but they are originally *reshaped borrowings* (see section 4).
- (c) Chinook /-kš, -ikš, -ukš/ itself has a *remote ancestry*: see 2-4 below.

2 The erratic distribution of Chinook /-kš, -ikš, -ukš/, and absence of similar pluralizers in the entire Pacific Northwest except Bella Coola, motivated me to include more distant areas in my search for comparable morphemes. I then found Blackfoot /-iksɨ/ which, like Chinook /-(i/u)kš/, pluralizes animate nouns:

	'cat'	'fish'	'man'	'pigeon'
singular	/póós-ə/	/mamíí-wə/	/nínaa-wə/	/kakkóó-wə/
plural	/póós-iksɨ/	/mamí-íksɨ/	/nína-iksɨ/	/kakkó-íksɨ/

(Frantz 1991:8-9). Noting that Blackfoot /s/ is retroflex (Frantz 1991:4) (non-speakers perceive the Blackfoot suffix as [---iks, ---iksʃ]), I sensed that **the phonetic and functional resemblance between the Chinook and Blackfoot suffixes is not accidental**. Observing as well that the Blackfoot pluralizer derives regularly from proto-Algonquian */-aki/ (Aubin 1975:8; for *a → i and *ki → ksi see Proulx 1989:52-54), and therefore has not been adopted from Chinook, I concluded that Blackfoot must be the source language for Chinook pluralizing /---kš/. Below, I contemplate how Chinook groups may have entered situations in which they could copy elements from Blackfoot.

3 A borrowing relation between the Chinook and Blackfoot would have been possible if these groups once engaged in frequent or prolonged mutual contact. Was there such contact? Though the Chinook and Blackfoot territories may in the very distant past have been in closer proximity than has been the case more recently (see Appendix I),² it is not likely – in view of the phonetic similarity noted earlier – that diffusion of /---ks/ took place so far back in time, and we must explore other scenarios in an attempt to determine how the pluralizers may be linked. However, the Chinook – Blackfoot interaction pondered here is in essence indemonstrable: it may be impossible to reconstruct all the factors that may have contributed to remote linguistic borrowing between groups in the Pacific-Plateau-Plains macro-region. Actually, as indicated on Walker's first map (1997: Introduction, see Appendix II), trade relations between the Chinook and Blackfoot appear to have been indirect (via Flathead, Umatilla and/or Nez Perce, and Yakama). Nevertheless, Chinook and Blackfoot merchants must have had face-to-face contact within this region (see fn. 1).

There were hostile encounters as well, cf. Walker (1997: Protohistory):

"The horse was adopted quickly and became an integral part of Plateau and Yakama life. It did much to intensify existing patterns of subsistence, trade, and exchange, broadening the range of Yakama travel by several orders of magnitude. Raiding became a problem as well. Lewis and Clark noted that the Columbia River villages from the Umatilla to The Dalles were mostly located on the north shore or on islands in the stream, for fear of the depredations of ..."

² Ross (1995, referring to J. Peter Denny's The Algonquian Migration from Plateau to Midwest: Linguistics and Archaeology, 1991): "Denny places the PA speakers around the upper Columbia River in Oregon and Washington." If (precursors of) the Blackfoot were once de facto living further southwest, and if the Bella Coola do have a southern origin (Nater 2000, section 3), the Bella Coola/Chinook/Blackfoot triangle may originally have been much smaller.

... Shoshone, Paiute, and Bannock raiders. They had adopted horses earlier and a wide-ranging predatory life style, hunting bison in the headwaters of the Snake, Missouri, and Yellowstone rivers. The early Shoshone-Bannock traveled east of the continental divide and warred with Blackfeet and Siouan groups."

Although Walker does not mention Blackfoot invasions into Chinook territory (or vice versa) as such, it is possible that Chinook men joined other groups – e.g. the Nez Perce – in conflicts with the Blackfoot,³ and that they were later responsible for adding /-kš, -ikš, -ukš/ to their language.

4 Even if, in the absence of historical testimony, we must reject the hypotheses proffered above (as a means of delineating plausible solutions to an intriguing enigma), the structural/semantic resemblance between the pluralizers alone is compelling enough for one to decide that there has been contact (*of whatever nature*) between speakers of the unrelated, and geographically equidistant, languages regarded here. Odd as it may seem that this apparently resulted in adoption of only one foreign element (but a very convenient one, see section 1), transference of /---ks/ possibly took place via idioms spoken by professional traders who influenced the language of their fellow villagers only marginally.⁴ Again, the borrowing direction is clearly Blackfoot → Chinook → Bella Coola:

Blackfoot /-i---/ and /---i#/ (as in *póósiksĭ*) → Chinook /Ø/ → Bella Coola /Ø/;

Blackfoot /ii/ and /ai/ (= [e]) (as in *mamíłksĭ, nínaiksĭ*) → Chinook /i/;

Blackfoot /oi/ (as in *kakkółksĭ*) → Chinook /u/ (via */oØ/) → Bella Coola /u/;

Blackfoot /s/ (= [š]) → Chinook /š/ → Bella Coola /s/;

Blackfoot /(-i/a/o)-iksĭ/ was perceived by the Chinook as a set of allomorphs, and copied as /-kš, -ikš, -ukš/.

In summary, the Bella Coola/Chinook/Blackfoot pluralizers evolved as follows:

<u>Proto-Algonquian</u>		<u>Blackfoot</u>		<u>Chinook</u>		<u>Bella Coola</u>
*-/aki/	→	/-iksĭ/	→	/-kš/		
		/---i-iksĭ/	↘	/-i(-)kš/		
		/---a-iksĭ/	↗			
		/---o-iksĭ/	→	/-u(-)kš/	→	/-uks/

³ Ewing (2000): "The Nez Perce ... allied themselves closely with the other Penutian speakers, trading and hunting with them on generally good terms. They were much less friendly with ... and Blackfeet."

⁴ There may be at least one other Blackfoot element in Chinook, viz. /...kiútan/ 'horse', which resembles Blackfoot *kiiyí?taan* 'saddle horn' (Frantz & Russell 1989). Was this word *misconstrued* as referring to horses, or did the Chinook convert it into a *pars pro toto* term (e.g. for counting horses)?

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Hank Nater
P.O. Box 7
Conklin, Alberta
Canada T0P 1H0
nater@telusplanet.net

