FOUR FORMS OF THE VERB IN SLIAMMON

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This paper was written during May, 1971, in consultation with speakers of the Sliammon language. It was distributed in June, 1971, to interested members of the Sliammon, Homalco, and Klahoose bands and their non-Indian friends.

This paper is being presented in the hope that comments will be offered on its design to fulfill two pedagogical purposes: to introduce the concept of "aspect" to speakers of Sliammon and to give non-Indians some idea of the structure of the language. This is the first of several projected papers on points of Sliammon to be written for the nonlinguist. It is intended that these papers will form the nucleus for a pedagogical grammar.

The orthography used herein was developed over the past three years by Professor G.N. O'Grady and other members of the Department of Linguistics at the University of Victoria. It has been used mostly with Cowichan but was designed to be used for Salish languages generally, with minor modifications. Its advantages are that it uses no diacritics over or under the letters and the only additional symbol is the apostrophe. This orthography was adopted for Sliammon after a year's dialogue with speakers of the language. At the request of a member of the Homalco band, the digraph wh is being used instead of hw; otherwise the orthography is unchanged.
NOTE

The alphabet used here in this paper is the same as the alphabet that is being used to write the Cowichan language in Duncan. It is not the technical alphabet used by linguists.

INTRODUCTION

The verbs of Sliammon are extremely interesting, occurring in a wide variety of forms with such precision and economy that often one word will include several elements of what would be an entire verb phrase or sentence in English. For example:

- Kw'unomisolh. He saw you.
- Ch'unuch'iamum. He's feeling cold.
- z'iz'iytawuhl (the one) which you are hunting for
- z'o'okw'okw' just breaking daylight

For the person learning Sliammon, the simplest forms of the verb are those that are often translated into English by phrases equivalent to "it's about to do it (or has just done it)", "it is doing it", "it does it several times", and "it is it".

The first of these four is the shortest form of the word:

- joxwut he is about to vomit
  (here the o is pronounced as in "nose" and the u as in "but")

The second consists of the word with a doubling of the first syllable:

- jojoxwut he is vomiting
  (here the first o is pronounced as in "lose" and the second o as in "nose")

The third consists of the word with a doubling of the first syllable along with the consonant after it, sometimes with a change of the vowel:

- jiaxwjoxwut he vomits several times
  (here the o is pronounced as in "nose" and the a almost as in "cat")

The fourth form involves the insertion of the letter i:

- joxwit it is vomiting
  (here the i is pronounced as ea in "head")

ASPECTS

These four forms of the verb are not tenses, but are called "aspects", a term used by linguists to mean the type of action referred to, rather than the time of the action. In these four examples, the first form is said to be in the "perfective aspect" (not continuing action), the second in the "imperfective aspect" (continuing action), the third in the "iterative aspect" (repeated action), and the fourth in the "stative aspect" (in a state of being). Hopefully, as the study of Sliammon grammar progresses, more descriptive Sliammon words can be used to replace the four linguistic terms used above.
TENSES

Sliammon also has various ways to show the tense or time of the word. The most common way to show the past tense is to add -olh onto the end of the word:

- joxwutolh - he vomited (here both o's are pronounced as in "nose")
- jojoxwutolh - he was vomiting
- jiaxwjojoxwutolh - he vomited a lot
- joxwitolh - it was vomit

This ending can also be added to nouns:

- shuth chiaptholh - your late uncle (deceased)
- lhuth chiaptholh - your late aunt (deceased)
- natolh - last night (a as in "father"; o as in "nose")
- jiasolh - yesterday

The most common way to show the future tense is to add -sum onto the end of the word:

- joxwutsum - he will vomit (both u's as in "but")
- jojoxwutsum - he will be vomiting
- qwul' sum - he will come
- qwul' chunsum - I will come

This ending can also be added to nouns:

- snanatsum - this evening
- kwisum - tomorrow

SPELLING

Sliammon can be spelled with four vowels: a i o u. The exact pronunciation of each vowel is precisely determined by the surrounding consonants. Depending on the neighbouring consonants, these four vowels may be pronounced as follows:

- a as in: 1. father
- 2. fat or cat
- 3. caught
- i as ea in: 1. head or read (past tense) or sweat
- 2. great or wear
- 3. heat or read (present tense) or seat
- o as in: 1. lose or move or toque or tomb
- 2. nose or hope
- u as in: 1. busy or business or lettuce
- 2. but or putt
- 3. put or bush or pull or push
In addition to the four vowels the following consonants and combinations of consonants are being used to write Sliammon:

- ch ch' g h j k k' kw kw' 1
- l' lh m m' n n' p p' q q'
- qw qw' s sh t t' th tl tl' w
- w' wh x xw y y' z z'

The raised comma is used to show when the breath is cut off or slowed down in the throat. For example, the first member of each of the following pairs of words does not have the raised comma while the second one does:

- imush
- i'imush
- tam?
- t'in
- tlusum
- tl'alhsum
- puq
- p'uq'
- qay'
- q'ay'um

In the following sentence, notice the raised comma at the end of the last word and compare its pronunciation with the second word:

Q'atwholh ch'ia tu ch'ia'. There was a fire on the island.
(literally: There was a fire out in the middle of the water.)

The letter ~ is being used to show the sound made at the front teeth; it is pronounced like the end of the word "eighth".

- uzna' ch'iano
- hozum
- z'iz'ikw'
- xiz'
- z'okw'

The letters x and q are being used to show sounds made far back in the mouth:

- xa'a
- mulxw
- suq'
- qawum
The following pairs of words show a comparison between k and q:

- kwanuch: sitting down
- qwasum: flower
- kwom'a'jus: red spot on the cheek (pronounce o as in "lose")
- qwom'a'jus: kiss on the cheek (pronounce o as in "nose")
- lhokw': to fly (pronounce o as in "lose")
- lhoqw': clear weather (pronounce o as in "nose")

The following letters and combinations of letters are not used at all in writing Sliammon:

b d e ee f oo r v

SOUNDS THAT CHANGE

In Sliammon, the letters j and y sometimes change into each other. When this happens, j occurs before a vowel and y occurs not before a vowel:

- tl'axay: old man or woman
- tl'axajolh: those that were old long ago
- hoy gi!: quit it!
- hojit: ready (pronounce i as ea in "heat")

And the letters g and w sometimes change into each other. When this happens, g occurs before a vowel and w occurs not before a vowel:

- Qiw: Deer (his myth name)
- qiguth: deer (pronounce i as ea in "great")
- hihiw: very; foremost (pronounce i as ea in "head")
- higos: a rich man, a high class person
- tuw': ice (pronounce u as in "put")
- ta'git: it is frozen (pronounce i as ea in "heat")

"DOUBLING"

The linguist's term for "doubling" is "reduplication", a term which comes from Latin. "Doubling" as a grammatical process is extremely common in Sliammon. For example, in plurals:

- junus: tooth (pronounce u as in "busy")
- junjunus: teeth
- hiyom': seagull (pronounce i as ea in "head", o as in "move")
- hiyhiyom': lots of seagulls
- qam: husband or wife; companion
- qamqams: his companions
Plurals (continued):

kwasho pig (pronounce o as in "who")
kwishkwasho pigs (pronounce i as ea in "heat")
choy' child (pronounce o as in "move")
chuychoy' children (pronounce u as in "busy")

"Doubling" is also used in referring to something small, or to a little bit:

qaymuhw Indian
qaqaymuwh small Indian
nuwhulh boat (pronounce both u's as in "pull")
nunwhulh small boat (pronounce the first u as in "lettuce")
z'ayz'ojos crazy
z'iz'uyz'ojos a little bit crazy

Some words always appear "doubled":

wuxwux cigarettes
homhom blue grouse
z'iz'ikw' earthworm
z'iz'iq' mud (pronounce both i's as ea in "head")
kwishkwish blue jay
ch'umch'um cold (pronounce both u's as in "busy")
(ccompare: ch'umshin ch "my feet are cold")
tlatlapwh pocket knife
(compare: tlupwh "to break")

For some meanings, the vowel changes when the word is "doubled":

tlacht asleep (pronounce a as in "father")
tluchtlacht sleepy-head (pronounce u as in "busy")
tam? what? (pronounce a as in "father")
Tatum chwh? What are you doing? (pronounce u as in "but")
ch'umch'um cold
Ch'umch'iamum a chwh? Are you feeling cold?
qasqasqum smile (pronounce u as in "but")
qasqasqum lots of smiles
imush walk
am'imush walking around
i'amush daytime hunting
**THE IMPERFECTIVE ASPECT**

The imperfective aspect refers to a continuing or incomplete action and is translated into English by phrases equivalent to "it is doing it". This aspect is formed by "doubling" the first syllable of the word. In the following pairs of words, the first is in the perfective aspect and the second is in the imperfective aspect:

- thiq'um to dig (pronounce i as ea in "head")
- thithiq'um he is digging
- z'iyum look for something
- z'iz'iyum he is looking for something
- jothut push it
- jojothut he is pushing it
- shiasum sneak
- shiasiasum he is sneaking
- ilhtun eat; food (pronounce i as ea in "head")
- i'ilhtun he is eating
- thuyumtus it has sunk
- thuthuyum it is sinking
- suyt'ut toss it
- susuyt'ut he is tossing it
- suyayawus he got drunk
- susuyawus he is drunk
- jiaqw'um sweat
- jiajiaqw'um he is sweating

Sometimes the vowel drops out after the word is "doubled":

- nushum swim (pronounce u as in "busy")
- nunshum he is swimming
- yumum kick
- yuyma'am he is kicking

If the vowel drops out and the first consonant is j, then it must become y because it is no longer before a vowel (compare with tl'axay and tl'axajolh).

- jutl' run (pronounce u as in "busy")
- juyl'tl' he is running
- juqush crawl
- juyqush he is crawling
- jukw't rub it (pronounce u as in "flute")
- juykw't he is rubbing it
THE IMPERFECTIVE ASPECT (CONTINUED)

If the vowel drops out and if the first consonant is $g$, then it must become $w$ because it is no longer before a vowel (compare with $hiihiw$ and $higos$).

- guxmin'ot: dream (pronounce $u$ as in "but", $o$ as in "nose")
- guwxnom'ot: dreaming (pronounce $u$ as in "put")
- guqw'um: drag something
- guwqw'a'am: he is dragging something

THE ITERATIVE ASPECT

The iterative aspect refers to a repeated action and is usually translated into English by phrases equivalent to "it does it several times". This aspect is indicated by "doubling" the first syllable along with the consonant after it, sometimes with a change of the vowel.

- guxmin'ot: dream
- guxguxnom'ot: keeps having dreams, like night after night
- qusum: smile
- qasqusum: lots of smiles
- joxwut: vomit
- jiaxwjoxwut: vomiting several times
- jothut: push it
- jiathjothut: pushing several times
- nuqum: swim (said of a fish)
- nuqnuqum: lots of fish swimming

THE STATIVE ASPECT

The stative aspect refers to a state of being and is often translated into English by expressions equivalent to "it is it" or "it is thus-and-so". It is formed by the insertion of the letter $i$ into the word. In the following pairs of words, the first word in each pair is in the perfective aspect and the second is in the stative aspect:

- tlupwh: it has broken
- tlupiwh: it is broken (pronounce $i$ as $ea$ in "great")
- axuth: go to bed
- axith: be in bed (pronounce $i$ as $ea$ in "head")
- lhayt: land ashore
- lhayit: he has landed (pronounce $i$ as $ea$ in "heat")
- xwoqw't: snore
- xwoqw'it: snoring (pronounce $i$ as $ea$ in "head")
- hoy gi!: quit it!
- hojit: ready (pronounce $i$ as $ea$ in "heat")
The stative aspect is not limited to verbs:

- tl'up  
  (it is) deep  (pronounce u as in "but")

- tl'ipums  
  under it  (pronounce i as ea in "head")

- qay'uws  
  tired  (pronounce u as in "put")

- qay'ugis  
  tired and can't do anything  
  (pronounce u as in "but", i as ea in "heat")

OTHER ASPECTS OF VERBS

The four aspects listed above are not the only aspects used in Sliammon; they are merely the simplest. The following pairs of words give examples of some other aspects:

- jiaxut  
  to wreck, take apart

- juijiaxim  
  something that's falling apart (e.g., an old shack)

- shia't'aych'um  
  stretch way over backwards

- shia'sht'aych'um  
  doing backbends

- z'okw'  
  day

- z'oz'okw'okw'  
  just breaking daylight

- tl'iqw'  
  high tide

- tl'il'tiqw'iqw'  
  (when) the tide is turning to come in

- mutl'  
  calm on the water

- matl'utl'  
  the wind is dying down

- yuw  
  dry

- yuguw  
  dry

- thuyumtus  
  it has sunk

- tha'ayum  
  it sinks

- qwul'  
  come

- qwa'aqwul'  
  they are coming

- qwa'aqwulul'  
  they are coming

POSTSCRIPT

These eight pages have given some points of Sliammon grammar. However, much more remains to be found in future study. The grammar of Sliammon is a highly sophisticated system of aspects, tenses, plurals, diminutives, independent clauses, subordinate clauses, and more. In some ways it is reminiscent of European languages such as English, Latin, or German, but in other ways it is quite unlike them. Sliammon has its own unique and special characteristics and its own power of expressing thoughts and ideas.

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