

# Old Records of Three Contiguous Pacific Northwest Languages: Bella Coola (Nuxalk), Carrier (Dakelh), Shuswap (Secwepmc)

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**Abstract:** In this brief report, I contemplate northern Salish and Carrier language samples as recorded by the Scottish explorer Alexander Mackenzie, who first made contact with local people in the Shuswap–Carrier–Bella Coola macro-region in 1793. The first short word list presented in his log affords proof of two developments (drag chain sound shifts in Carrier and extinction of a Shuswap dialect), and the second one confirms the *\*...an#* → *...a#* shift in Bella Coola. In combination with Mackenzie’s Carrier data, Daniel Harmon’s word list (1820:403–413) provides a time line for completion of the /k/ series → /č/ series and /q/ series → /k/ series shifts in older stages of Carrier. It is also noted that, whereas the Shuswap dialect observed by Mackenzie appears to have differed from current Shuswap dialects on the lexical level, Bella Coola lexicon may have remained virtually unchanged over the past 226 years.

**Keywords:** Bella Coola, Shuswap, Carrier, sound shifts, dialect extinction, language contact

## 1 Introduction

The first European to establish contact with speakers of the northernmost Salish languages Bella Coola and Shuswap, as well as with Carrier Athabascans, is the Scottish explorer Alexander Mackenzie. In 1793, he documented some Carrier, Shuswap, and Bella Coola words which he listed in his journal. Although his rendition of the native terms is, as expected, inadequate and inconsistent, we can decipher these word lists easily if we are familiar with, and/or have access to printed sources for, the languages they represent. We then detect three points of interest: (1) drag chain sound shifts in Carrier; (2) disparities between current Shuswap and the now extinct “Chin-Indian” dialect recorded by Mackenzie; (3) confirmation of the *\*...an#* → *...a#* shift in Bella Coola. Note that Mackenzie’s journals have been published at least twice: a comprehensive edition in 1801, and a shorter one in 1911. In this paper, I quote from the latter version, except in one footnote where reference is made to old Chipewyan words for ‘hair’ and ‘wood’.

The data are presented and examined in Section 2, while in Section 3, a few remaining topics are addressed: rapid phonological changes in Carrier; lexical copying in Shuswap; lexical history and prehistory of Bella Coola.

## 2 The data

Mackenzie lists Carrier (“Nagailer or Carrier-Indians”) and Shuswap (“Atnah or Chin-Indians”) words side by side (preceded by the English gloss) on pages 164–165, while on page 315, he presents a similar list for Bella Coola, but with a different choice of vocabulary (and with an English gloss following each entry).<sup>1</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> “Nagailer” may be related with Carrier *naɔigél* ‘he is packing’. “Atnah” is probably Carrier *ɔətna* which, however, now means ‘Indians of west coast’.

## 2.1 The Carrier word list

Below, current Carrier forms in parentheses are as recreated by myself. Carrier data are from Antoine F. et al. (1974), and PA reconstructions (\*...) from Kari (1990), Krauss and Leer (1981), and Leer (2008).<sup>2</sup>

**Table 1:** Mackenzie’s Carrier word list

Gloss	Carrier	Gloss	Carrier
‘eye’	nah ( <i>ʔəna</i> )	‘elk’	yezey ( <i>yəzi</i> )
‘hair’	thigah ( <i>ʔəçi-yaʔ</i> ‘head-hair’)	‘dog’	sleing ( <i>ti</i> ) (* <i>ləŋ</i> )
‘teeth’	gough ( <i>ʔəyu</i> )	‘groundhog’	thidnu (cf. <i>dətni</i> ‘id.’)
‘nose’	nenzeh ( <i>ʔənincis</i> ) (*- <i>nə-čʰi</i> <sup>n</sup> ʔ)	‘iron’	thilisitch <sup>3</sup> ( <i>ləztih</i> ‘knife’)
‘head’	thie ( <i>ʔəçi</i> ) (* <i>ciʔ</i> )	‘fire’	coun ( <i>kʷən</i> )
‘wood’	dekin ( <i>dəčən</i> ) (* <i>də-kən</i> )	‘water’	tou ( <i>tu</i> )
‘hand’	lah ( <i>ʔəla</i> )	‘stone’	zeh ( <i>çe</i> ) (* <i>ce</i> ’)
‘leg’	kin ( <i>ʔəkečən</i> ) (*- <i>qeʔ-kən</i> )	‘bow’	nettuny ( <i>n-əltiʔ</i> ‘your rifle’) <sup>4</sup>
‘tongue’	thoula ( <i>ʔəçula</i> ) (* <i>culaʔ</i> )	‘arrow’	igah ( <i>k’a</i> ‘bullet’, <i>k’aza</i> ‘arrow’) <sup>5</sup>
‘ear’	zach ( <i>ʔəzeh</i> ) (*- <i>ʒaχ</i> )	‘yes’	nesi (?) <sup>6</sup>
‘man’	dinay ( <i>dəne</i> )	‘plains’	thoughoud ( <i>λ’ok’ət</i> ‘meadow’)
‘woman’	chiquoi ( <i>c’eku</i> ‘id. pl.’) (* <i>č</i> ’)	‘come here’	andezei (cf. <i>ʔandit</i> ‘now?’)
‘beaver’	zah ( <i>ca</i> ) (* <i>čaʔ</i> )		

From a few entries it appears that the Carrier variant represented in this list was at the time more archaic than it would be some twenty years later (after Harmon’s arrival in BC). These entries, to wit “nenzeh” = \*(*ʔə*)*nənciχ* ‘nose’, “dekin” = \**dəkən* ‘wood’, “kin” = \*...*kən* ‘leg’, “zach” = \*(*ʔə*)*zaχ* ‘ear’, and “sleing” = \**liŋ* < PA \**ləŋ* ‘dog’, had changed little since the PA phase (see Section 3 for further details). Sound shifts are of the drag chain type: (1) fronting of the /*c*<sub>1</sub>/ and /*č*<sub>1</sub>/ series and unrounding of the /*č*<sup>w</sup>/ series, (2) fronting of the /*č*<sub>2</sub>/, /*k*/, and /*q*/ series.<sup>7</sup>

<sup>2</sup> As a rule, Mackenzie’s “ch” = /x, χ/ (except in “chiquoi” ‘woman’), “z” = /ʒ, c, c’, s, z/, “eh” = /iχ, e, ε/, “ei, ey” = /i/. PA = proto-Athabaskan.

<sup>3</sup> “...tch” (rather than “...teh”) must be a typesetting error (Carrier does not have word-final affricates).

<sup>4</sup> Harmon (1820) cites both “al-tung” ‘bow’ and “al-tee” ‘gun’ (a doublet, see Kraus and Leer 1981:50).

<sup>5</sup> ‘Arrow’ is the original meaning of *k’a* (see Morice 1932:25), (-)*za* ‘only’.

<sup>6</sup> Could this be ‘I (have) see(n it)’, cf. Tahltan *nesʔi’n* ‘id.’ (my field notes)?

<sup>7</sup> Similar shifts took place in other Athabaskan, e.g. Chipewyan, which appears to once have had “thiegah” ‘hair’ and “dethkin” ‘wood’ (the latter with odd “...th...”) (Mackenzie 1801:cxxx–cxxxix).

**Table 2:** Sound shift progression from proto-Athabascan to Carrier

PA	/q/	/k̥/	/čʷ/	/č₁/	/c₁/	
↓	/q/	/k̥/	/čʷ/	/č₁/	<span style="border: 1px dashed black; display: inline-block; width: 20px; height: 15px;"></span>	/ç/
↓	/q/	/k̥/	/čʷ/	<span style="border: 1px dashed black; display: inline-block; width: 20px; height: 15px;"></span>	/c₂/	/ç/
1793	/q/	/k̥/	<span style="border: 1px dashed black; display: inline-block; width: 20px; height: 15px;"></span>	/č₂/	/c₂/	/ç/
↓	/q/	<span style="border: 1px dashed black; display: inline-block; width: 20px; height: 15px;"></span>	/č₃/		/c₃/	/ç/
Carrier		/k/	/č₃/		/c₃/	/ç/

## 2.2 The Shuswap word list

Below, parenthetic forms (current Shuswap) are as reconstructed by myself (and quoted from Kuipers 1974), and proto-Salish *\*smulac* is from Kuipers (2002).

**Table 3:** Mackenzie’s “Chin-Indian” word list

Gloss	“Chin-Indian”	Gloss	“Chin-Indian”
‘eye’	thloustin ( <i>xkʷt’ustn</i> )	‘elk’	ookoy-beh <sup>8</sup>
‘hair’	cahowdin ( <i>qewtn</i> )	‘dog’	scacah ( <i>sqéxe</i> )
‘teeth’	chliough ( <i>χlexʷ</i> )	‘groundhog’	squaisquais ( <i>sqʷiʔqʷe</i> )
‘nose’	pisax ( <i>sp’seqs</i> )	‘iron’	soucoumang ( <i>səkʷmin</i> ‘knife’)
‘head’	scapacay ( <i>sk’pqn</i> )	‘fire’	teuck ( <i>tʔikʷ</i> )
‘wood’	shedzay ( <i>sχc’ey</i> )	‘water’	shaweliquoih ( <i>séwlkʷe</i> )
‘hand’	calietha ( <i>kelx</i> )	‘stone’	ishehoinah ( <i>sxenx</i> )
‘leg’	squacht ( <i>sqʷeχt</i> ‘foot’)	‘bow’	isquoinah ( <i>ckʷinək</i> )
‘tongue’	dewhasjisk ( <i>tixʷeʔck</i> )	‘arrow’	squailai ( <i>sckʷil</i> )
‘ear’	ithlinah ( <i>t’éne</i> )	‘yes’	amaig ( <i>méʔe</i> )
‘man’	scuyloch ( <i>√sqeləxʷ</i> )	‘plains’	spilela ( <i>spelm</i> ‘prairie’)
‘woman’	smosledgensk ( <i>*smulac</i> )	‘come here’	thla-elyeh (cf. <i>ʔst’ile</i> ‘stop!’)
‘beaver’	schugh ( <i>sqlew</i> )		

<sup>8</sup> This may have been a taboo term, possibly *\*χʷə~χʷey-upeʔ* ‘bereft of one’s tail’.

Although Mackenzie’s “Chin-Indian” words are unquestionably Shuswap, there are a few discrepancies: (1) a phoneme, or phoneme sequence, is absent in the 1793 words for ‘eye’, ‘nose’, ‘beaver’, ‘bow’; (2) a phoneme, or phoneme sequence, is absent in the current words for ‘hand’, ‘ear’, ‘groundhog’, ‘stone’, ‘bow’, ‘arrow’, ‘yes’; (3) “scapacay” ‘head’ was probably \**sk’əpqin* = [sk’əpqéːn ~ sk’əpqéː(ː)], while “spilela” ‘plains’ must be \**spəl~eləm* (where [...ləm] may have alternated with [...laː]); (4) “smosledgensk” ‘woman’ certainly derives from proto-Salish \**smulac* ‘id.’ (Lillooet *smúlac*, Tillamook *swiléc* (Kuipers 2002:68)),<sup>9</sup> whereas the current Shuswap word for ‘woman’ is *nuχ<sup>w</sup>~nχ<sup>w</sup>* (from proto-Interior Salish \**nəχ<sup>w</sup>* ‘female’ (Kuipers 2002:176)); (5) “scuyloch” ‘man’ (\**sqaylax*?) resembles words for ‘man’ in other Interior Salish (Kuipers 2002:83), but current Shuswap *√sqelax<sup>w</sup>* is found only in *s-t’l’-sqélax<sup>w</sup>* ‘soul’ (Kuipers 1974:162). In view of these differences, I gather that the “Chin-Indians” spoke a Shuswap dialect, now extinct, that was lexically close to Lillooet.

### 2.3 The Bella Coola word list

Of the entries listed below, Mackenzie glossed “dilly” as ‘a fish of the size of a salmon, with canine teeth’ and “nochasky” as ‘a dish composed of berries and salmon roes’. Forms in italics are from my field notes.

**Table 4:** Mackenzie’s Bella Coola word list

zimilk = <i>smlk</i> ‘fish, salmon’	dichts = <i>t’χt(-s)</i> ‘(it is a) stone’
dilly = <i>t’li</i> ‘dog salmon’	neach = <i>niix<sup>w</sup></i> ‘fire’
sepnas ‘hair of the head’ <sup>10</sup>	ulkan ‘water’ = <i>ʔulqn</i> ‘bucket’
kietis = <i>χic</i> ‘axe’	gits com = <i>st’x<sup>w</sup>m, kalst’x<sup>w</sup>mta</i> ‘mat, mattress’
clougus = <i>qluq’s</i> ‘eye’	shiggimia = <i>sak’ima</i> ‘thread, string’
itzas = <i>ʔica(-s)</i> ‘(it is a) tooth’	till-kewan ‘chest or box’ = <i>plkiʔwa</i> ‘cedar storage box’
ma-acza = <i>maaxsa</i> ‘nose’	thlogatt = <i>luq’alt</i> ‘inner bark of red cedar’
ich-yeh = <i>ʔixa</i> ‘lower leg, foot’	achimoul = <i>ʔalmul</i> ‘beads’
shous-shey = <i>suxa</i> ‘lower arm, hand’	il-caiette ‘a bonnet’ = <i>(ʔil.)qayt</i> ‘(a woman’s) hat’
watts = <i>wac</i> ‘dog’	couny ‘a clam shell’ = <i>k’<sup>w</sup>uxani</i> ‘butter clam’
zla-achle ‘house’ = <i>sc’laaxll</i> ‘boards’	nochasky = <i>nuχ<sup>w</sup>ski</i> ‘soapberries’
zimnez ‘bark mat robe’ <sup>11</sup>	caiffre ‘what?’ (cf. <i>ka(,ks)</i> ‘which?’)
couloun = <i>q<sup>w</sup>ulun</i> ‘beaver’	

<sup>9</sup> “...ensk” unidentified sequence (cf. *-enk* ‘belly, curved surface?’).

<sup>10</sup> This may be *cpt,nas* ‘wipe it!’ or *sp’t,nas* ‘hit it!’ (‘hair of the head’ is *mnlk<sup>w</sup>a*).

<sup>11</sup> This looks like *ci,mnac* ‘my daughter’ (whose robe was being discussed?).

I equate Mackenzie’s “till-kewan” with *plkiʔwa* ‘cedar storage box’ on the assumption that “t...” must be due to a misrecording or labret use. Apart from this \*t... vs. p... disparity, “till-kewan” looks older than *plkiʔwa* insofar as Bella Coola ...*(i)wa* often continues \*-(i)wan ‘spirit, essence, principle’ (see Nater 2013:123).<sup>12</sup> The isolability of ...*wa(n)* in this case is also implied by the formal and semantic resemblance between Bella Coola *plkiʔwa* ‘cedar storage box’, Kwakwaka *pkuʔ* ‘coiled Salish basket’ (Lincoln & Rath 1980:62), and Quileute *pi·kʷoʔ* ‘basket (watertight)’ (Powell & Woodruff 1976:393). We may hence infer that *plkiʔwa* likely continues \**pəkyuʔ-wan* (via \**pəkyuʔwan* → \**plkiʔwan* → *plkiʔwa*).

Mackenzie’s “caiffre” ‘what?’ remains enigmatic. Even though “cai...” can be plausibly identified as *ka(ks)* ‘which?’, “...ffre” is not recognizable.

### 3 Remaining issues and preliminary conclusions

Fronting of the PA /c/ series is widespread in Alaska and northern Canada, and Krauss (1976:324) considers the possibility that a /c/ series → /ç/ series shifting tendency already existed in PA.

Note that, whereas the /k̥/ and /q/ series were still intact in Carrier in 1793, the /k̥/ series → /ç/ series and /q/ series → /k/ series shifts had been completed before 1820 (Harmon 1820:403, 404, 406):

**Table 5:** /k̥/ series → /ç/ series and /q/ series → /k/ series shifts

Gloss	Mackenzie (/q/ and /k̥/ series)	Harmon (/k/ and /ç/ series)
‘tree, wood’	“dekin” * <i>dək̥ən</i>	“tuch-in” <i>dəčən</i>
‘leg’	“kin” *( <i>ʔəqe</i> ) <i>k̥ən</i>	“O-ca-chin” <i>ʔəkečən</i>
‘nose’	“nenzeh” *( <i>ʔə</i> ) <i>nənciχ</i>	“pa-nin-chis” <i>ʔənincis</i> <sup>13</sup>

Note as well that Harmon’s “ch” is /ç, č, c, c’/, while his “ts” is /ç, ç’/. This suggests that Harmon must have had difficulty perceiving such “un-English” syllable-initial sequences as [t<sup>s</sup>...] and [t<sup>s</sup>...]: “paninchis” ‘nose’ = *bənincis* ‘his nose’, “chaka” ‘woman’ = *c’eke*. Occasionally, he even writes “ch” for /ç, ç’/: “chakate” ‘muskrat’ = *çek’et*, “tchâ” ‘hat’ = *ç’oh*.<sup>14</sup>

While Mackenzie may have recorded words from a homogeneous variant of Athabascan, Harmon’s list may contain either a collection of words from two different dialects (Central vs. Southern Carrier) or words from a dialect that was intermediate between (or a blend of) what are now Central Carrier (Antoine et al. 1974) and Southern Carrier (my field notes):

<sup>12</sup> The related suffix *-liwa* (\*-*l-iwan*) ‘-like, -ish’ compares with Lillooet *-aliwán* ‘size, hulk’ (also ‘-ish’, as in e.g. *qʷəqʷs-aliwán* ‘smallish’) (Van Eijk 2013:435) and Upper Chehalis *-aliwan* ‘appearance, looks’ (Kinkade 1991:344).

<sup>13</sup> “pa-” = Southern Carrier /bə-/ ‘his’, Central Carrier /bə-/ ‘their’. Here, \*/x̥/ → /š/ (fronting) was followed by /c...š/ → /c...s/ (progressive assimilation).

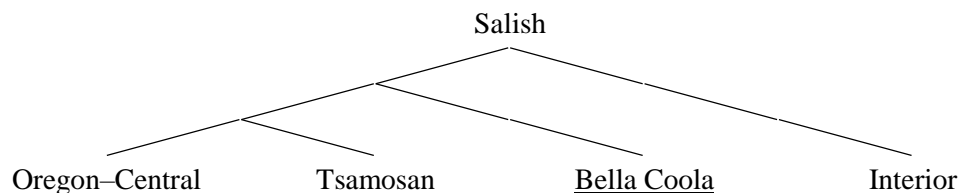
<sup>14</sup> In Southern Carrier, the /ç/ and /c/ series have merged into one /c/ series (and here, ‘hat’ is *c’ah*). This merger, which may have begun in the early nineteenth century, may have been another factor in Harmon’s apparent confusion in re /ç/ vs. /c/ vs. /ç/.

**Table 6:** Uniformity vs. dialectal diversity in Carrier

Gloss	Harmon (1820)	Southern Carrier	Central Carrier
‘four’	<i>ting-kay</i>	<i>dijŋk’i</i>	<i>(dənyɪ)</i>
‘five’	<i>skoon-e-ly</i>	<i>skʷənlai</i>	<i>(kʷəlai?)</i>
‘ten’	<i>lân-ne-zy</i>	<i>lanezi</i>	<i>(xʷənizyɪ)</i>
‘mother’	<i>un-nung-cool</i>	<i>n-angʷəl</i> ‘your ...’	<i>(ʔəlu)</i>
‘two’	<i>nong-ki</i>	<i>(nanʔkoh)</i>	<i>nanki</i>
‘three’	<i>toy</i>	<i>(tak’i)</i>	<i>ta</i>
‘nine’	<i>clo-hoo-ly</i>	<i>(lək’ihulah)</i>	<i>ʔilohúloh</i>
‘salmon’	<i>tâl-loo</i>	<i>(taluk)</i>	<i>talo</i>

Northern Interior Salish groups have interacted with Athabascan neighbors and transients for centuries, possibly since as early as 800 AD (cf. Seymour 2012:156–157). This protracted intermingling fostered, among other things, vocabulary copying.<sup>15</sup> The following samples illustrate the Athabascan-to-Interior Salish copying direction: Shuswap *təniye* ‘moose’ (cf. Carrier *dəni*), Shuswap *q’wúne* ‘soup made of fish-eggs with *sceqʷm*’ and Lillooet *k’wúnaʔ* ‘salmon roe’ (cf. PA \**q’u’n* ‘roe’), Shuswap *ʕn-em* ‘to growl’ (cf. PA \**-ʕan* ‘id.’), Shuswap *qm~qem-t* ‘lukewarm’ and Lillooet *qá~qm’-əp* ‘id.’ (cf. PA \**-gəŋ*’<sub>2</sub> = *-gəm* ‘id.’), Lillooet *lic’* ‘type of dog’ (cf. Carrier *lic’e* ‘female dog’, i.e. /li-c’e/ ‘dog-female’), Lillooet *k’wúsqʔ* ‘to urinate (men or animals)’ (cf. Tahltan *kóʕsa* ‘urine odor’).<sup>16</sup>

Subsequent to Mackenzie’s visit to Bella Coola, the Bella Coola language would barely change over the following two centuries. Earlier, however, there had been a significant lexical and structural influx from non-Salish languages, mainly North Wakashan (Nater 2013) and Tsimshianic (Nater 2018). Note further that a number of morphemes (two prepositions and various verbal suffixes) link Bella Coola more closely with Tsamosan than with Central Salish, while others have been copied directly from Nootkan, Quileute, and Chinookan: as inferred earlier (Nater 2014 and 2018), this indicates that the post-*proto-Salish* dialect that underlies contemporary Bella Coola was spoken on and around the Olympic peninsula. The position of Bella Coola within Salish is as illustrated in Figure 1 below.

**Figure 1:** The position of Bella Coola within Salish

<sup>15</sup> Thompson-Lillooet /z z’/ (which resemble Athabascan /z/, and – along with /ç s/ – pattern as “pharyngealized postdentals”) and vowel retraction in /\_z\_ z’/ in a Lillooet dialect (Van Eijk 1997:8), too, may have evolved as a consequence of contact with Athabascan (Chilcotin: Cook 1987).

<sup>16</sup> Shuswap data are from Kuipers (1974), Lillooet data from Van Eijk (2013), Carrier data from Antoine et al. (1974), Tahltan data from my field notes, PA data from Krauss and Leer (1981).

In re Bella Coola-Athabaskan interaction, note that the Na-Dene portion of the Bella Coola lexicon includes words of PA-Eyak, pre-PA, PA, and more recent Athabaskan descent (Nater 1994). The archaic forms shown in Table 1, recentness of an Athabaskan presence east of Bella Coola,<sup>17</sup> and Nater (1994:181–182) suggest that Athabaskan bands migrating through or near Bella Coola territory (around 1700 AD or so) spoke a form of PA that had retained some PA-Eyak and pre-PA vocabulary.

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<sup>17</sup> “The presence of trade goods in most of the structures indicates the Chilcotin components at Anahim probably do not date much earlier than 1750; trade goods were absent in one unit which dated A.D. 1670 (GSC-1371), which might represent late prehistoric Chilcotin” (Wilmeth 1970:43). It appears that the Chilcotin arrived in Anahim Lake prior to being replaced in that area by Ulkatcho Carrier (Wilmeth 1970:42) about one century later.

<sup>18</sup> A more comprehensive version of this book (which includes a list of Chipewyan words two of which are mentioned in fn. 7) was published in 1801 by R. Noble (London), with the even lengthier title *Voyages from Montreal, on the River St. Laurence, through the Continent of North America, to the Frozen and Pacific Oceans; in the Years 1789 and 1793. With a Preliminary Account of the Rise, Progress, and Present State of the Fur Trade of that Country*.

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