Bringing back the Nooksack language from the dead

Brent Galloway, George Adams, Catalina Renteria
First Nations University, Nooksack Tribe, Nooksack Tribe

With the death of Sindick Jimmy in 1977, the last fluent first language speaker of Nooksack, there remained only a few partial speakers and seemed little or no chance to restore Nooksack. However, the Breath of Life Workshops run at University of California, Berkeley have begun the process with some California Indian languages, and an Australian Aboriginal language that suffered a similar fate now has some new speakers intent on restoring the language, one speaker at a time. This paper is a report of what has been accomplished so far for the Nooksack language. We start with a look at the new orthography developed for Nooksack (Lhéchelesem), then discuss how progress has been achieved so far (the first public speech in Nooksack in 25 years, the first tentative conversations, the first reading of a Nooksack story in the language in 25 years, etc.) and what is required for continued progress.

1.   **Orthography**

1.1   **Development of an orthography**

Since we have been working with the Nooksack tribe in maintaining Upriver Halkomelem for those speakers who speak it and those who want to learn (Galloway began this in 1974, Adams and Renteria began it in 2000), those Nooksacks who have become literate have learned the Stó:lō orthography. Elders of both the Stó:lō and Nooksack (and indeed a number of Nooksack are members of both groups, officially) have had regular gatherings together. The Stó:lō orthography has proven a useful tool from the beginning. We have been successful in developing new curricula for classes both on Mac computers and in actual regular classes and classroom visits at several different levels. The Nooksack Tribe and granting agencies have begun supporting these programs since about 2000.and they now run through their Education Department.
       The plan was to work with the language with remaining speakers first, developing a foundational program and a demand and some successful participants. Now that has begun, in 2002 Galloway made copies of all his Halkomelem tapes and of the Amass, Frat, Thompson, and Galloway & Richardson tapes of Nooksack onto CDs and presented them to the tribe. Once

the orthography was developed based on minimal revisions from the Stó:lō orthography, George Adams began transcribing the Nooksack language CDs, largely on his on time, then once the tribe hired him, also during regular work hours when he wasn't teaching or being the speaker at ceremonies. Galloway and his research assistant who copied the tapes onto CDs thanks to a SSHRC grant, decided for the presentation ceremony to put together some phrases useful for public speaking in Lhéchelesem, in case they were asked. When Galloway went over these with Adams, the master of ceremonies, Adams, who already had studied the tapes and had some recollection of Nooksack words himself, took the materials and on May 31, 2002, gave the first Lhéchelesem speech since 1976, and announced that this was the start of bringing back Lhéchelesem for the tribe.

George Adams Speech in Lhéchelesem, May 31, 2002
(l-r: Brent Galloway, Pamela Amass, Vi Hilbert, George Adams)
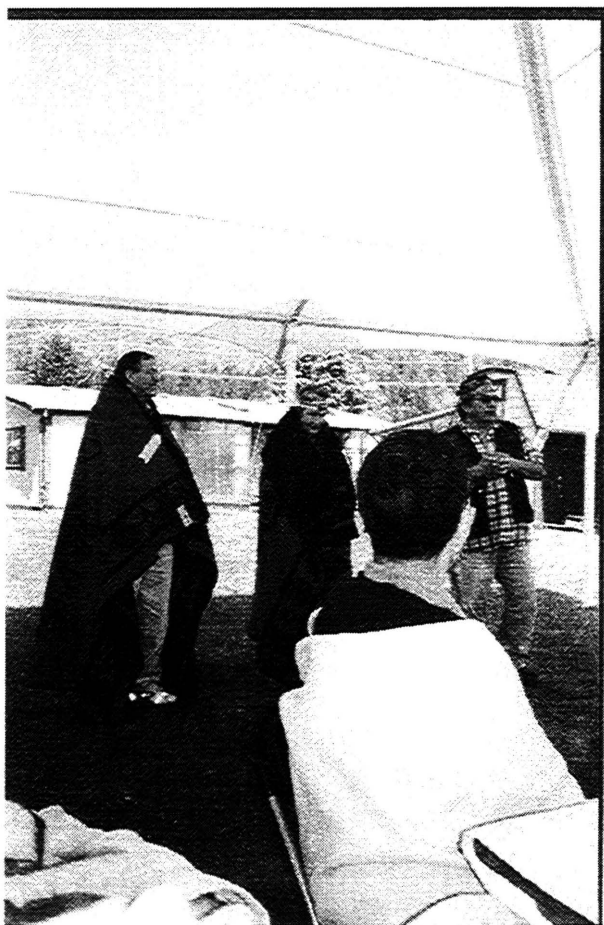
Ceremony at Nooksack Tribe, Deming, Wash., l-r: CDs with Nooksack and Upriver Halkomelem being given to the tribe (covered in blanket on chair; some of the researchers who recorded the tapes & CDs: Brent Galloway, Sonja van Eijk, Pamela Amass, Alan Richardson) May 31, 2002

Some of the workers at the ceremony, far left George Adams, far right, Catalina Renteria, and center Alan Richardson

1.2.   The first Lhéchelesem Alphabet Chart

Lhéchelesem (Nooksack Language) Alphabet Chart designed by Brent Galloway (Lawéchten) Jan.22, 2003

a   as in English "ask" or "ambition" and Lhéchelesem SJ spá7ats 'bear' and stám 'what?', GS 7as7ísta or 7asísta 'like that', SJ 7as7ísta 'just

like', SJ and GS skwáyil 'day'. á and a can always be pronounced as in English "ask", and unstressed a at normal and fast speeds can also be pronounced as in English "men". Examples from SJ: 7ímats 'grandchild', kwáyelas 'tomorrow', mal ~ mal7 (unstressed) 'just (merely)', tsamám 'twice', lhixwálh 'three times', tú:xwalh 'nine times', ts'áli7 'heart', xpáy7ay 'red cedar tree', tsámatl'o 'she', kwá7a sná 'your name', tíya 'that (male)', tsíya 'that (female)', má:n 'father' , ch'án7cha (hyper-slow) or ch'án7cha (normal tempo) 'I am really'.

ch   as in English "church" and Lhéchelesem ch ílepem 'have a tickling sensation', chilqwóme? 'blackcap berry'

ch'   not in English, as in Lhéchelesem ch'án7cha 'I am really',

e   as in English "cup" or "understand" and Lhéchelesem 7elíle7 ~ 7alíle7 'salmonberry, salmonberries', 7eypánat 'planting'

h   as in English "house" and Lhéchelesem honáli ~ hunáli 'fireplace', hóy ~ húy 'done, already finished', hóchem water

i   as in English "ski" or "easy-going" and Lhéchelesem 7i7yúmish 'pretty, good-looking', 7istí7ti7ixw ' people'. Also this letter can be pronounced as in English "ski" or English "say" in free variation after q, q', qw, qw', x, xw, h, 7 as in examples from SJ: sqwíqwemey7 little dog, q'íxil7 'kinda black, getting black', lhxílishlha 'stand up' sóqw'eys 'his brother', LG súqw'ey 'younger sibling', 7ey7íws 'right-hand', qwíts 'drown',xwíl7it 'beat someone up', stiqíw 'horse', 7ilh ~ 7ílh ~ 7èlh possibly '(new information)'. Also elsewhere when unstressed, i can be pronounced as in English "ski" or English "sit" in free variation. For example, snéxwilh 'canoe; car', (tl'e7álilhten 'them (obj. of preposition)', 7álilhten 'them', sqwehálich 'village near Lynden', teláwil7 'to run', chálish 'hand', yenís 'teeth, tooth', chmshó:ytsin 'lips (both)'. Elsewhere under stress i is always pronounced as in "ski".

kw   as in English "quite" or "Kwik Stop" and Lhéchelesem kwáyelas 'tomorrow', kwúxwets 'silver salmon (coho)', kwósan 'star'

kw'   not in English, as in Lhéchelesem kw'ikw'chúsam 'mirror', kw'át'en 'mouse'

l   as in English "lip" and Lhéchelesem lilót+ shálh 'railroad tracks', líqwil 'slack off, calm down', lálam7 'house' (cf. SJ lálem7)

lh   as in English "clock" or "clean" (many speakers) and Lhéchelesem lhixwálh 'three times', lhémuxw 'to rain', Lhéchelesem 'original Nooksack language'

m   as in English "many" or "gum" and Lhéchelesem SJ men:a7 'offspring', mó:s 'four'

n   as in English "nine" and Lhéchelesem Nuxwsá7aq 'Nooksack people; village name', nánatuxw 'morning'

o   as in English "go" or "also" and Lhéchelesem 7óxw or 7úxw 'go', xwo7wókw 'not yet', kw'óntl'el 'Kwantlen (village)', 7oxw kwóma 'go way back (away from water)'.

LG has s7áx̲wo7 'clam', skwóya7 - skwóyá7 'squirrel', shxwexwó7os 'thunder,
thunderbird', kwósan 'star', and yeq'ós' to sharpen'; many other examples are shown under
the letter u since o and u are often in free variation.

p	as in English "pee<u>p</u>" and Lhéchelesem pónoxwas 'he saw him', pespéskwtem 'he was insulted or sworn at repeatedly (about his body)', píshpish 'cat', pónthutchan 'I looked at myself'
p'	not in English, as in Lhéchelesem p'í:ch't charcoal
q	not in English, as in Lhéchelesem qelá7wiya7 'Beaver (name in story)', qén:uxw 'outh, esp. of animals', qelelhómish 'ugly, bad-looking'
q'	not in English, as in Lhéchelesem q'íx̲il7 'kinda black, getting black', q'él7min 'a camp'
qw	not in English, as in Lhéchelesem qwo7ó:p 'crabapple', qweníqwshɒ ankle
qw'	not in English, as in Lhéchelesem qw'ó:y ~ qw'ú:y 'die', qw'ulá:n7 'ear'
s	as in English "sau<u>ce</u>" and Lhéchelesem syúwens 'his spirit song',spú7 'wind', sníchim 'word, what was said', salhá:m7 'chief, headman; high-born person'.
sh	as in English "<u>sh</u>e" or "wi<u>sh</u>" and Lhéchelesem shóqwil 'village near Everson'. shxwum7níkw 'uncle, aunt', shalh 'trail, road'
t	as in English "<u>t</u>augh<u>t</u>" and Lhéchelesem tú:xwalh 'nine times', SJ stúl7ow7 or stul7aw7, LG stúl7aw7 'river', tuwát who?, tíxwtsalh 'tongue'
t'	not in English, as in Lhéchelesem t'ónuxwas 'they understood it', t'á7ach' 'stabilizing barbecue stick'
tl'	not in English, as in Lhéchelesem tl'ú or tl'ó 'that's', tl'álham7 'salt'
ts	as in English "ca<u>ts</u>" and Lhéchelesem tsámatl'o 'she', tsamám 'twice', tsótsin mouth
ts'	not in English, as in Lhéchelesem ts'áli7 'heart', ch'mshó:ytsin 'lips'
u	as in English "Lulu" and in Lhéchelesem as a common free variant of o (English "so") in Lhéchelesem SJ has 7úxw or 7óx̲w 'go', honáli or hunáli 'fireplace', hóy or húy 'done, already finished', tl'ú or tl'ó 'that's'; GS has qw'ó:y or qw'ú:y 'die', qwo7ó:p 'crabapple', syúwens 'his spirit song',spú7 'wind', tíyano or tíyenu 'those', kwóma or kwúma 'go back far', t'ó:num 'it was understood, recognized', sq'í:lo(w)7 'food put away', 7eyx̲ílix̲tum7 'fighting', yithemtó:m 'they were told', hó:nchup 'build a fire', t'onómut 'realized', t'ónuxwas 'they understood it', lhémuxw 'to rain', x̲átl'thut or x̲átl'thot 'get rough-flowing, turbulent'. When unstressed o varies freely with u and ɒ (the last vowel is pronounced as in English "w<u>oo</u>d" or "sh<u>ou</u>ld". kwɒm7 'future tense' (all speakers pronounce with ɒ, SJ sqáwɒts 'potato', nánatɒxw 'morning', shxwɒm7níkw 'uncle, aunt' qw'ɒlá:n7 'ear'; GS t'ó:nɒm or t'ó:num 'it was understood, recognized'.

w	as in English "wow" and Lhéchelesem wehíq 'to shove off (in a canoe)', wel:áp (hyper-slow) or wel áp (normal) 'you (pl.), you folks'
xw	not in English unless you say "where" with a blown breathy sound", as in Lhéchelesem xwehom7in7 'throat, windpipe', xwta7á7 'than; for', xwúyum (slow) - xwúyem (normal) 'to sell'
x̲	not in English, as in Lhéchelesem x̲páy7ay 'red cedar tree', x̲átl'thut or x̲átl'thot 'get rough-flowing, turbulent'
x̲w	not in English, as in Lhéchelesem x̲wíl7it 'beat someone up',
y	as in English "yes" and "say" and Lhéchelesem yenís 'teeth, tooth', yútl'un 'to rub something'
7	as in English "uh-uh" and Lhéchelesem 7álilhten 'them'
´	stress (not written in English) written over the vowel in Lhéchelesem for new learners, as in Lhéchelesem
:	length, as in English "wo_w" and Lhéchelesem t'ó:num 'it was understood, recognized', wel:áp (hyper-slow) or wel áp (normal) 'you (pl.), you folks'

Only in words borrowed or pronounced with a Halq'emeylem accent:

k	as in English "kick", Chinook Jargon "lesák" 'bag', Halq'eméylem "lesák" 'bag', and Lhéchelesem ke7áket 'later'
th	as in English "thick", Halq'eméylem "thát" 'dark' and Lhéchelesem with Halq'eméylem accent (Lhéchelesem normally has ts where Upriver Halq'eméylem has th) thút te qelá7wiya7 'Beaver said', GS has qel:ó7th 'dull (of knife)', thematl'ó 'that (female), she, her', thút or thót 'say', kwenán7th 'get me', thíya 'this (female)'
th'	as in some English speakers "eighth", Halq'eméylem "th'á:le, 'heart' and Lhéchelesem with Halq'eméylem accent (Lhéchelesem normally has ts' where Upriver Halq'eméylem has th'); GS has sth'ópeth' 'tail', th'íx̲wnitem 'he is pitied'
x	not in English, as in Halq'eméylem "xóxekw'em" 'bathing' and Lhéchelesem with Halq'eméylem accent (Lhéchelesem normally has sh where Upriver Halq'eméylem has x) SJ schálish '(someone's) hand', GS schálix '(someone's) hand', xalhemín 'look after, take care of', qw'eyílixchálep 'dance (you folks)'
o̲	as in English "hot", Halkomelem "pot" 'blow something', and Lhéchelesem swów7eles 'men,' for example, and Lhéchelesem with Halq'eméylem accent (Lhéchelesem normally has o (pronounced as in English "old" where Upriver Halq'eméylem has o pronounced as in English "spot") SJ yó̲swe 'must be', (and in the same sentence) mo̲yúts 'always' (elsewhere SJ mayúts, s7ó̲x̲wo̲7 'small clam' (versus LG s7áx̲wo7), tqó̲chi7iqw 'eight dollars', ló̲y 'only' stó̲kan7 or stó̲kin7 'stockings, socks'. Compare UHk /yáswə/ maybe, perhaps, /wə-yáθ/ or /yáθ// always, /s7áx̲wə/ small clam tqácá:s eight dollars, /wə-láy/ or /láy/ only, /stákyəl/ stocking, socks.

1.3 Articulatory chart of the Nooksack orthography

Consonants	bilab	intrdent	alveol	alv-pal	lamino-pal	velar	uvular		glottal	
Stops vl.	p		t			(k)	kw	q	qw	7
glottalized	p.		t.				kw'	q.	qw'	
Affricates vl.			ts	ch						
glottalized		(th).	ts.	ch.	tl.					
Spirants vl.		(th)	s	sh	(x)	lh	xw	x	xw	h
Resonants vd.	m		n		y	l	w			

Vowels	Front unrounded	Mid unrounded	Back unrounded	Back rounded
High	i			u
Mid		e		o
Low	a		(o)	

Stress   ´

2.   Further developments

As the restoration effort has developed, George has continued studying and learning Nooksack from the CDs and transcriptions, and the three of us have begun working on a project on Nooksack Morphology and Syntax, funded in 2004, by the Social Sciences and Research Council of Canada. As reported in our other paper in this volume, we have been transcribing, editing transcriptions, and analyzing stories told on the CDs by Sindick Jimmy and George Swanaset. Some recordings are almost fifty years old now. As we worked on this and completed the first story and most of the second, George read our transcriptions out loud on Saturday May 1, 2002, and Galloway mentioned to him that that was the first telling of a Nooksack story in Lhéchelesem in about 30 years. As we worked, we ate lunch on several days at different locations on the river that had Nooksack placenames. We made it a point to visit a different one each time and talk about its history and name. On May 4, 2002, as we travelled in to Bellingham to make photocopies of Fetzer's field notes, Adams initiated several short conversations in Lhéchelesem with Galloway, and Renteria joined in with a few words. Galloway mentioned that these were the first conversations in Nooksack in 50 or more years. As we write this all parties continue to study the language, and it seems likely that Galloway and Renteria will have their hands full trying to keep pace with Adams in learning the language. The next step, one the syntax is figured out, will be to draw up some lessons to teach the language to others. We will all likely work together on that. Some will be designed for use on the computer, with new and old recordings of Lhéchelesem.

References

Galloway, Brent. 2003. Language Revival Programs of the Nooksack Tribe and the Stó:lō Nation. Accepted by editor of a volume on problems & challenges in continuity of Salish language and culture for U.B.C. press.
Galloway, Brent, George Adams, and Catalina Renteria. 2004a. What a Nooksack story can tell us about morphology & syntax