Chinuk Wawa Translations by Joe Peter, 1941:
Glimpses of a "Chinuk Man" in Action

Henry B. Zenk and Tony A. Johnson
Confederated Tribes of Grand Ronde, Oregon

In this paper, we begin an exploratory investigation of approximately ten hours of English prompts and Chinuk Wawa (Chinook Jargon) translations recorded in 1941 by J. P. Harrington's associate Jack Marr. Marr was the prompter; and the translator was a Cowlitz Indian named Joe Peter. This presentation highlights the most immediately striking feature of these recordings: the fluidity and evident fluency of Joe Peter's Chinuk Wawa. We point out that the Marr-Peter recordings constitute direct documentation of Chinuk Wawa's expressive potential, albeit their transcription and interpretation is complicated considerably by their uneven sound quality.

In June of 1941, J. P. Harrington's associate Jack Marr went to Yakama Reservation to visit Joe Peter, a Cowlitz Indian originally from Olequa on the lower Cowlitz River. Marr cut at least 15 18-inch aluminum disc recordings (approximately 40 minutes each) with Peter (Marr 1941). Harrington (1942) also visited Peter at Yakama Reservation, transcribing wordlists including Salish (Lower Cowlitz), Sahaptin (Upper Cowlitz and Yakama), and Chinuk Wawa (Chinook Jargon) lexical items. Thanks to Marr's effort, Chinuk Wawa is by far the most thoroughly collected of Joe Peter's languages. Marr used the following procedure to secure a mass of Chinuk Wawa data from Peter: with the recording machine running, Marr read from translated portions of Boas (1894), breaking the latter into single-sentence, multi-sentence, and phrasal prompts; Joe Peter is then heard translating each English prompt into Chinuk Wawa.

The sheer volume of material recorded makes this one of the single most extensive records of Chinuk Wawa ever collected. Unfortunately, it is a record that may be only partially recoverable, owing to the recordings' inconsistent sound quality. Many of Marr's prompts and Peter's translations sound unintelligible at first hearing. While a fair number of both begin to reveal themselves with frequent enough re-auditing, the process is a tricky one at best. Understanding of the English prompts is facilitated by referring to the Boas text from which Marr is reading, and our own previous familiarity with Chinuk Wawa enables us to render significant chunks of Peter's translations intelligible. Along with the "significant chunks," however, gaps remain. In some places the sound quality is very poor. In others, repeated auditing of the Chinuk Wawa fails to restore intelligibility, leading us to suspect that in addition to Chinuk Wawa as we know it, Peter's translations contain Chinuk Wawa and/or other

lexical items that we don't know.[1] Nor can our transcriptions be considered accurate with respect to the details of Peter's articulatory phonetics: it is simply too difficult to accurately audit such features, and too easy to hear what one expects to hear.

We maintain that despite these shortcomings these singular recordings are of considerable linguistic value, albeit not as a reliable record of phonetic forms and variants.

To support our assessment, we have prepared a sample transcript consisting of the first 25 prompt-translation pairs opening one of the clearer tape dubbings (see appendix). We have adapted our transcription to bring out the most immediately striking and impressive aspect of Peter's translations: their fluidity and evident fluency. Peter almost always responds to Marr's prompts without perceptible hesitation, and the Chinuk Wawa that follows is likewise both rapid and fluid. As a general rule, each translation is restricted to one breath group: marked # . . . # in our transcript. This is almost always true, regardless of the length of Marr's prompt. There is furthermore a distinct tendency for constituent items within a breath group to cohere tightly, without perceptible break: we join such constituents using dashes (-). Brief pauses are also heard within breath groups: here, we drop the dashes and write periods (.) followed by spaces. All of these conventions are illustrated by pair 25 in the transcript:

These are not the same canoes he said.
#yaka-wáwa-kánawi-ukuk-kaním-wík-ˈyáx̱ka-ukuk-kaním. x̱lóym-łáska#

Here are the foregoing Chinuk Wawa items, modified to conform to our current usages in the dictionary we have been working on for the Confederated Tribes of Grand Ronde (Zenk and Johnson 2001):

yaka wáwa kʰánawi ukuk kaním wík ˈyáx̱ka ukuk kəním.
3 sg say all these canoes not 3sg (EMPH) these canoes
x̱lúyma łáska.
different 3 pl
'He said "none of these canoes are the *particular* canoes. They are different."'

---

[1] This may be because Peter uses some lexical items known to him from a local variety of Chinuk Wawa, and/or is prone to code switch into his other languages. The fact that we find some English intrusions lends plausibility to the latter possibility. Later on in the tape sampled here, we also encountered one item elsewhere identified as Lower Cowlitz, the word for 'cougar' (which we heard as swáwo). This suggests that had either of us any significant knowledge of the other languages represented in Harrington's Joe Peter transcriptions (Lower Cowlitz Salish and Upper Cowlitz and Yakama Sahaptin), we might be in a better position to comment on this aspect of the recordings.

The clusters of closely cohering items within breath groups can get rather drawn out, as in pair 24:

Now all the things you said, you see are not true.
#álta-ukuk-kánawi-ikta-mayka-wáwa-mayka-nánitš-álta-wík-yaka-kákua-dléyt#

Again, analyzed and translated *a la* Zenk and Johnson (2001):

álta ukuk kʰánawi-ikta mayka wáwa mayka nánich álta
now those EVERYthing 2 sg   say   2 sg   see   now
wík yaka kákwa dlét.
not 3 sg like/as true
'Now each one of those things you told (about), you see now (that) it does not seem to be true.'

Brackets in our transcript mark off inaudible or less than clearly identifiable stretches within breath groups. It is possible that some or all of the brackets marked [p..] (pair 3), [.. .. ..] (pair 11), [t'ókwi..] (pair 13), and [wíltšə] (pair 16) are indicative of code switches involving (an)other language(s)--which, however, we are at a loss to evaluate.

We use this sample as an opportunity to make the following points:

1. It is obvious enough from our sample that Joe Peter's translations are in fluidly delivered Chinuk Wawa, albeit apparently broken here and there by code switches involving his other languages. Since this is Chinuk Wawa and syntax is a function primarily of isolable items and word order, we need only to correctly identify lexical items within significant chunks of Peter's translations to provide a very significant new source of data for analyzing Chinuk Wawa syntax. Indeed, our small sample presents a number of syntactic features of interest for placing Joe Peter's Chinuk Wawa in the context of regional Chinuk Wawa:

- Two distinct forms of the 3 sg pronoun: yaka, the usual subject and noun-possessor form (examples 1, 3, 4, 5, ...); and yaχka, used both as an object form and for focusing special attention on the subject (19, 23, 25).
- Two distinct forms of the demonstrative pronoun: uk (6, 22) and ukuk (2, 4, 8, 9 ...).
- Use of the 3 sg to refer to inanimate and/or indefinite subjects (3, 8, 13, 17, 21?, 24).
- Contrasting forms for the demonstrative adverb kupá 'over there' (7) and the universal preposition kúpa (also kápa) (1, 6, 8, 12, 21, 23).
- Possible occurrence of a short form of the causative auxiliary (16), alongside the usual regional form mamuk (4, 5, 9).

- Post-verbal noun subject paired with pre-verbal pronoun subject (20), and the pronoun yax̣ka used post-verbally to focus attention on a subject simultaneously marked by pre-verbal yaka (19).
- The (possibly) ambiguous transitivity of the verb wax̣, which in 14, 15 may be functioning as a stand-alone transitive verb ('spill it'), contrasting with 5, 9, where mamuk-wáx̣ suggests the frequent Chinuk Wawa causative-transitive construction mamuk + intransitive (active or stative) verb. Note also mámuk [ukuk?] wáx̣ 'make [that?] spilled' in 4, where usual Chinuk Wawa would be mamuk-wáx̣ úkuk 'spills that'.

The sample also includes a number of multi-word combinations that appear to function as compounds. Those marked with dashes below show expected Chinuk Wawa stress patterns for idiomatic compounds:

- mamuk-wáx̣ (see above).
- łush-ı́li?i 'prairie' (1, 6, 8, 12).
- łímulo-stik 'woods' (6).
- kupít mákst 'only two' (7).
- wik-sayá 'near' (8, 15).
- íxt wáx̣t 'one more' (10).
- kupit-íxt 'only one' (11).
- ítsxwət pásisi 'bearskin blanket' (17).
- tšaku-páya 'get burned' (17).
- tšaku-púlakli 'get dark' (21).
- kánawi-ikta 'EVERYthing' (24).

2. Although the uneven quality of the original recordings renders many features of the speaker's *articulatory* phonetics unrecoverable (at least, with any degree of confidence), suprasegmental features like stress and syllable prominence are more easily identified. Indeed, such features contribute importantly to the impression of fluidity, rapidity, and internal cohesion characterizing this speaker's Chinuk Wawa delivery. We find the same basic *cadences* or prosodic rhythms familiar to us from the Chinuk Wawa of Grand Ronde and lower Columbia River elders in the Chinuk Wawa of Joe Peter. In normal fluid speech, pronouns preceding the verb or noun they modify are usually unstressed; when used as subject or object forms following a verb, they are usually stressed. Bipartite compounds show main stress on one constituent, often the second; reversals of usual pattern may be emphatically weighted (as in 24). Heavier stress is an attention-focusing device (25).

3. Closely related to the description of the speaker's Chinuk Wawa fluidity is the problem of evaluating his Chinuk Wawa *fluency*. Insofar as we can successfully decode significant chunks of Joe Peter's Chinuk Wawa, we are in a position to begin assessing the adequacy of his translations in relation to Marr's English prompts. This exercise could actually turn out to have wider

implications, in view of the historical importance of Chinuk Wawa as a translator's medium serving both intertribal and interethnic communications in the old Pacific Northwest. It is this potential larger significance of our little exercise that motivates our subtitle: *glimpses of a "Chinuk Man" in action.* The term Chinuk Man appears in the following passage from *Kamloops Wawa* (no. 149, vi,2:26, February 1897), as transliterated from the original Duployan shorthand and translated by David Robertson (personal communication):

Sen Mark iaka Sen Pitir iaka "intirpritir," kakwa iaka chinuk man.
'Saint Mark was Saint Peter's "interpreter," so he was a Chinuk Man'

The quote's equation of "interpreter" (translator) and "Chinuk Man" reminds us that Chinuk Wawa was at one time the translator's language *par excellence* in the Northwest. Marr has provided us with an unexpected glimpse of one Chinuk Man in action, and a revealing glimpse it is. The rapidity and fluidity with which Joe Peter is able to process English into Chinuk Wawa seems striking, even remarkable. But we must pause a moment and consider why this should be so. Were Peter translating English into one of his tribal languages, not "Jargon," rapid and fluid processing would call for no special comment. Of course, individuals vary considerably in their capacity or "knack" for such processing. But no one would attribute a hampered or poor translation from English into Lower Cowlitz to expressive limitations inherent in Lower Cowlitz as a translation medium. However, inherent limitations of this sort have often been attributed to Chinuk Wawa. An anecdote from a recent conversation between Zenk and a respected Northwest historian may suffice as an illustration of that point. Responding to Zenk's description of the Marr recordings, this scholar expressed surprise that anything much at all could be gathered from Joe Peter's Chinuk Wawa--because the audio medium precluded observation of the speaker's gestures and body language! The unspoken assumption here was: Chinuk Wawa being so *linguistically* impoverished, successful Chinuk Wawa communication must be difficult or impossible lacking some sort of *extra-linguistic* enhancement.[2]

---

[2] In the background of this historian's reaction was a well-known observation by Hale (1890:18-19). Explaining "how a language composed of so few words, thus inartificially combined, can be extensively used as the sole medium of communication among many thousand individuals," Hale cites the following anecdote:

> ...in the [Chinook] Jargon, as in the spoken Chinese, a good deal is expressed by the tone of voice, the look, and the gesture of the speaker....We frequently had occasion to observe the sudden change produced when a party of natives, who had been conversing in their own tongue, were joined by a foreigner, with whom it was necessary to speak in the Jargon. The countenances which had before been grave, stolid, and inexpressive, were instantly lighted up with animation; every feature was active; the head, the arms, and the whole body were in motion, and every look and gesture became instinct with meaning.

The issue of Chinuk Wawa's suitability for complex translation tasks will not be resolved on the basis of just 25 sentence and phrasal examples, needless to say. However, this beginning effort should at least make linguists aware of the existence of a body of heretofore untapped primary data relevant for addressing the issue. The translator from whom these data were recorded was moreover a Chinuk Man in the mold of the old Northwest--an Indian of an older generation whose language repertoire included at least two tribal languages, in addition to English and Chinuk Wawa. Granting that there were Chinuk Men before Joe Peter who spoke varieties of Chinuk Wawa with comparable fluidity and fluency, the Marr recordings represent a unique opportunity to explore how Northwest translators of yesteryear could have processed complex meanings from other languages into Chinuk Wawa.

We conclude with another anecdotal observation, this one from Johnson. As a second language speaker of Chinuk Wawa, who learned the language from first language speakers, Johnson can personally attest to the stereotypes we frequently encounter regarding Chinuk Wawa's perceived limitations. An example he has often used to counter such stereotypes is that of Franz Boas, who explicitly stated that he conducted his Lower Chinook and Kathlamet fieldwork with Charles Cultee entirely through the medium of Chinuk Wawa. This seems to many a remarkable fact, and to others an impossibility. How could he have used a medium as limited as Chinuk Wawa to work out something as complex as the intricacies of Chinookan grammar? Johnson observes that the Marr recordings, as back-translations into Chinuk Wawa from English translations originally worked out in Chinuk Wawa, provide important confirmation of Chinuk Wawa's adequacy for conveying complex and rich meanings--such as implicit in Boas's monumental *Chinook Texts* and *Kathlamet Texts*.

Appendix: Data Sample

Marr (1941), recording no. 694 (English by Jack Marr; Chinuk Wawa by Joe Peter):

1. He reached still another prairie.
#yaka-qə́-wəχt-kúpa-íxt-ɬuš-íli?i#

2. The third one.
#ukuk-ɬún#

3. One half of it burned.
#íxt-sítkum-ukuk-[p..]-yaka-[an-fáya]#

4. He took one of his buckets and emptied it.

One who knew merely the subject of the discourse might often have comprehended, from this source alone, the general purport of the conversation.

#íxt-yaka-kítɬən-yaka-ískam-pi-yaka-mámuk-[ukuk][3]. wáx̣. kanáw#

5. He took one more bucket and emptied half of it.
#yaka-ískam-íxt-yaka. kítɬən-yaka-mamuk-wáx̣-sítkum#

6. Then he reached the woods on the other side of the prairie.
#álta-yaka-q̓ó-[a]-límulo-stik-yáwa-ínatay-kápa-uk-ɬúš-iləhi#

7. Now he had only two buckets and a half left.
#álta-kupít-mákst-pus-sítkum-yaka. tšə́q. kupá#

8. He reached another prairie which was almost totally on fire.
#yaka-q̓ó?-kupa-íxt-ɬúš-ili?i-álta-wik-saya-kánawi-yaka-páya-úkuk#

9. He took one half the bucket and emptied it.
#yaka-ískam-sítkum-yaka-[..]-kítɬən-yaka-mamuk-wáx̣-ukuk#

10. He took one more bucket.
#íxt-wə́x̣t-yaka-kítɬən-yaka-ískam#

11. Now only one bucket was left.
#kupit-íxt-yaka-kítɬən-[.. .. ..]#

12. He reached another prairie.
#yaka-q̓ó-wəx̣t-kupa-íxt-ɬuš-íli?i#

13. It was all on fire.
#kánawi-áaal-[t̓ókwi..]-yaka-páya#

14. He poured out his bucket.
#yaka-wáx̣-álta-íxt-yaka-kítɬən#

15. When he nearly came across he emptied his bucket.
#yaka-wik-sayá-tšəq-[wən]-ənatayá-álta-yaka-kanáwi-álta-yaka-tšə́q-yaka-wáx̣#

16. He took off his bearskin blanket and beat the fire.
#yaka-[mɔnk][4]-ɬáq-uk-[wíltšə]-pásisi-álta-pi[..]. [qwə́ɬ]-ukuk-fáyər#

17. The whole bearskin blanket was burned.
#ukuk. ukuk-ítsxwət-pásisi-álta-kánawi-yaka-tšaku-páya#

---

[3] Johnson hears mámuk wáx̣, Zenk hears mámuk ukuk wáx̣.
[4] The form as heard appears to closely match *munk*, the usual Grand Ronde form of the causative auxiliary. In regional Chinuk Wawa, the usual form is *mamuk*. Johnson is confident in the match. Zenk, noting that *mamuk* also appears in the sample (4, 5, 9), prefers to reserve judgment pending a larger data sample.

18. His hair caught fire.
#yaka-[áa]-yáqsu-kánawi-tšaku-páya#

19. And he was burned.
#álta-yaka-tšaku-páya-[y]áx̣ka#

20. Now that bird was dead.
#álta-yaka-míməlus-ukuk-kláklə#

21. When it was growing dark he came to his sister.
#álta-[yaka]-tšaku-púlakli-[alta]-yaka-q̓ó?-kúpa-yaka-áts#

22. Ah my brother is dead.
#álta-uk-nayka-áu-yaka-míməlus#

23. He said to him.
#yaka-wáwa-kúba-yáx̣ka#

24. Now all the things you said, you see are not true.
#álta-ukuk-kánawi-ikta-mayka-wáwa-mayka-nánitš-álta-wík-yaka-kákua-dléyt#

25. These are not the same canoes he said.
#yaka-wáwa-kánawi-ukuk-kaním-wík-'yáx̣ka-ukuk-kaním. x̣lóym-łáska#

References

Boas, Franz
    1894   Chinook Texts. Bureau of American Ethnology Bulletin 20.
    Washington.
Hale, Horatio
    1890   An International Idiom: A Manual of the Oregon Trade
    Language, or "Chinook Jargon." London: Whitaker.
Harrington, John P.
    1942 [J. P. Harrington papers microfilm, vol. 1, reel 18.] National
    Anthropological Archives, Smithsonian Institution, Washington.
Marr, Jack
    1941   [NAA sound recordings nos. 682-696.] National
    Anthropological Archives, Smithsonian Institution, Washington.
Zenk, Henry B., and Tony A. Johnson
    2001 chinuk-wáwa kákwa ntsayka úlman tílixam łaska
    munk-kə́mtəks ntsáyka = Chinuk Wawa As Our Elders Teach Us
    to Speak It [draft]. The Confederated Tribes of the Community of
    Grand Ronde, Oregon.

Henry Zenk
Hzenk@pdx.edu

Tony Johnson
Tony.Johnson@grandronde.org