Walker_#WA20215FLW

1/12 Building a Bridge: Crafting a Southern Pomo Pidgin for Heritage Speakers

Southern Pomo (Ps) is one of seven mutually unintelligible Pomoan languages Indigenous to Northern California. It has no living speakers.

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Southern Pomo has a rich inventory of consonants and (for English speakers). The table below gives the inventory of sounds.

	BILABIAL	DENTAL	ALVEOLAR	PALATO–ALVEOLAR	VELAR	GLOTTAL
PLOSIVES	p p' pʰ b	t t̪' t̪ʰ	t ʈ' tʰ d		k k' kʰ	ʔ
AFFRICATES			c c'	č č' čʰ		
FRICATIVES			s	š		h
NASALS	m		n			
APPROXIMANTS	w		l			

It also has exceedingly complex phonological and morphological alternations (e.g. [l], [m], and [n] alternate in certain positions and interact with other morpheme-specific phonological rules to allow the same speaker to pronounce ‖hu:w-mul-Vn‖ as [hu:muman] or [hu:mulin] with no difference in meaning—the same morphemes are present in both forms (Walker 2020: 105-108). Verbs and kinship terms are polymorphemic, as in the two examples below:

daʔṭamhukʰ:eʔyowanṭonhkʰay
da-ʔṭa-mhu-kʰ:e=ʔyowan=ṭonhkʰay
by.sight-encounter-RECIPROCAL-FUTURE=DETERMINER.OBJET=ward
'toward (the place) where we shall meet each other'

mač:ac'yačo:šan
ma-č:a-c'-yačo:-šan
3COREFERENTIAL-mother's.father-GENERATIONAL.SUFFIX-PLURAL.OBLIQUE-ALLATIVE
'toward (the place) of my grandfathers'

I served as the Language Project Coordinator for the Dry Creek Rancheria Band of Pomo Indians from 2011-2014, in which position I taught Southern Pomo to heritage speakers via weekly classes.

This Southern Pomo revitalization project included the creation of posters, signage, smartphone apps, and summer day camps for language learning. This effort revealed the severity of the challenges faced by Southern Pomo heritage learners.

Despite successes among a subset of learners, the language project did not meet the expectations of many tribal members, who hoped to learn Southern Pomo quickly and with little effort. I chose to end the program in 2014, though I continued to work with students off and on.

In 2019, discussion began on whether a new revitalization plan might allow learners to acquire enough knowledge in a short time to satisfy their communicative needs. The proposed solution is a carefully designed pidgin, dubbed Še:wey Čahnu 'New Language'.

This proposed solution is inspired by Chinook Jargon, a trade pidgin used by both Indigenous & European speakers in the 18th to 19th centuries in the Pacific Northwest (Silverstein 1971: 191-192). This plan was also influenced by my learning Tok Pisin for work in 2018.
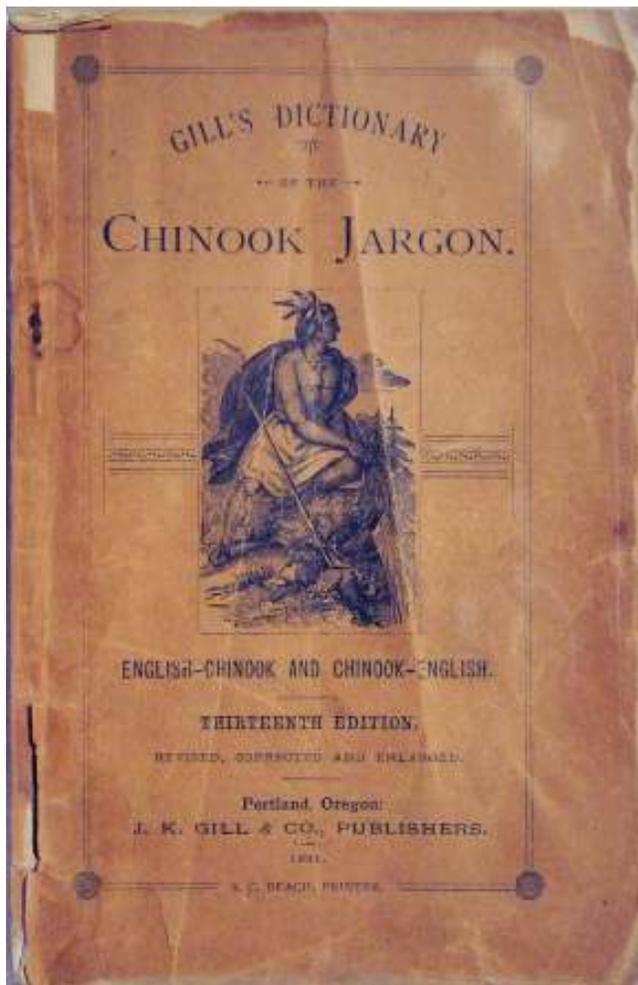
7/12 Chinook Jargon takes its phonology & most of its limited lexicon directly from Indigenous languages of the area. It lacks any of the complex inflectional morphology of the Indigenous languages from which it draws its lexicon, but its phonology preserves non-European sounds.

10 — CIK'IA THEIR MYTH. [BUREAU OF ETHNOLOGY]

CIK'IA MYTH. — 11
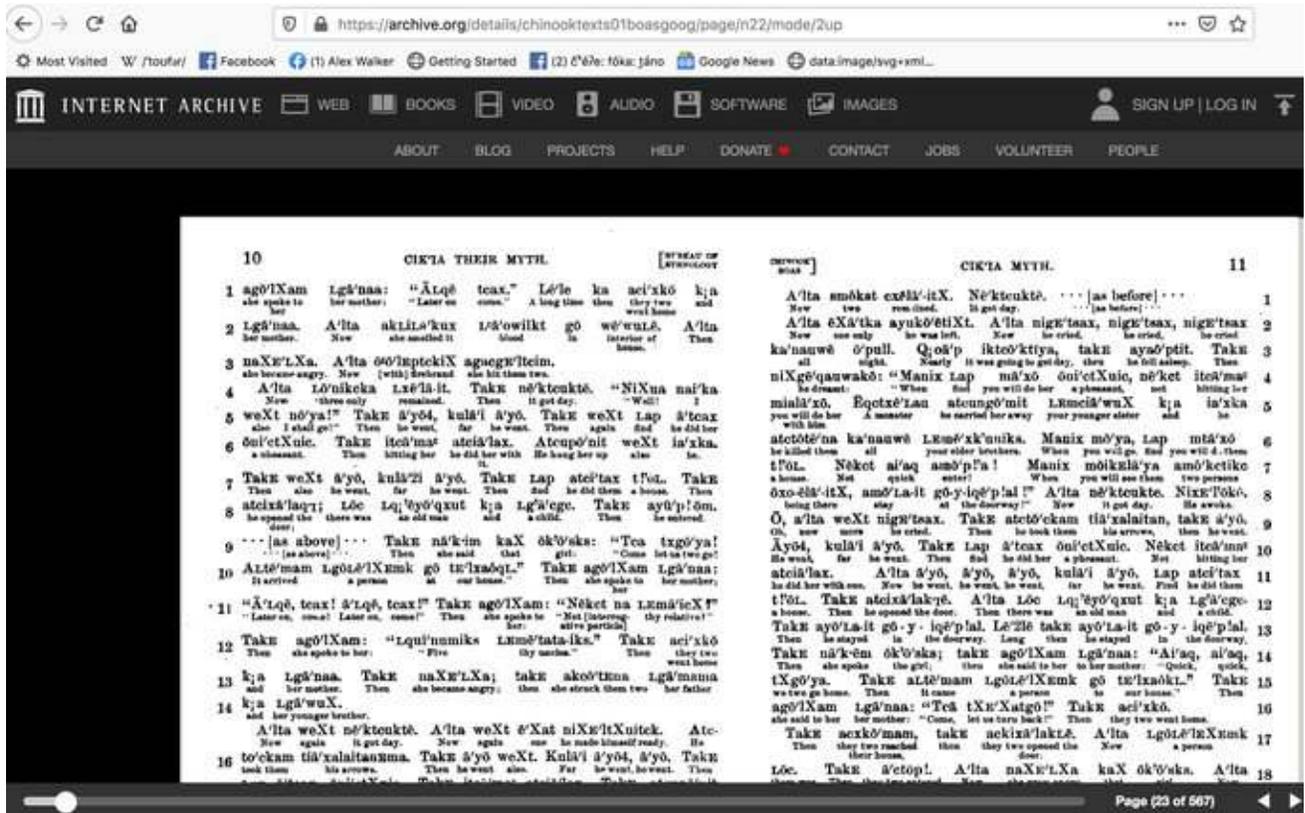
8/12

On the basis of this model, Še:wey Čahnu is designed to preserve all the sounds of Southern Pomo and keep special words for key cultural concepts, but the complexities of verb paradigms and nominal declensions are almost entirely removed.

9/12

A critical part of the design of this pidgin involves how complexity is removed from the grammar. The goal is to allow learners the ability to speak relatively quickly & to let a subset of learners who wish to access traditional texts to move on to the full language.

Thus Še:wey Čahnu makes use of simplified constructions that would be grammatical (or near-grammatical) in Southern Pomo. The end product uses a limited number of words and just a fraction of Southern Pomo affixes to allow basic communication on any topic.

The Ps Pidgin allows two suffixes: the citation form suffix (the perfective), and the future (which is regular). The agent/patient case marking suffixes & clitcs are omitted and only the Ps SOV word order is preserved to indicate who does what to whom.

Traditional Southern Pomo	Proposed Southern Pomo Pidgin
doːnonhkʰay hoːlikʰːeʔwaʔya	ʔaːʔa doːno(nhkʰay) hoːlikʰːe
doːno=nhkʰay hoːli-kʰːe=ʔwa=ʔya	ʔaːʔa doːno(=nhkʰay) hoːli-kʰːe
hill=ward go-FUTURE=COPULA.EVIDENTIAL=1SG.PLURAL	1SG.AGENT hill(=ward) go-FUTURE
čuhːuːli hoːliw	čuhːuw hoːliw
čuhːu-ːli hoːli-w	čuhːu-w hoːli-w
eat-DIFFERENT.SUBJECT.SEQUENTIAL go-PERFECTIVE	eat-PERFECTIVE go-PERFECTIVE
'After (someone) ate, (someone else) left.'	

Currently, members of the Dry [Creek] Rancheria Band of Pomo Indians are trying to decide on a core vocabulary that preserves as many unique cultural concepts as can be included. The other remaining question is how to handle the directional suffixes of Ps.

References

Silverstein, Michael. 1971. "Language contact and the problem of convergent generative systems: Chinook Jargon." In *Pidginization and creolization of languages: Proceedings of a conference held at the University of the West Indies Mona, Jamaica, April 1968*, 191-192. Edited by Dell Hymes. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.

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