

SAHAPTIN PEOPLE

LESSON I.                      Sahap. 108    Continuation of Introduction.

Sahaptin-speaking peoples have no single name for their language, such as Nez Perce (Shiwanishma) term "Numiipuutimt" or the Wasco-Wishram (Wishxam) term "Kiksht." Thus, when speaking English, Sahaptin people usually refer to their language as the Yakima, Umatilla, or the like, or else simply as the "Indian language." Actually, Yakima, Warm Springs, and Umatilla are what linguists refer to as "dialects" of a single Sahaptin language. In their own language, Sahaptin people commonly refer to it as ichishkin or chishkin, "speaking in this manner, in this way", as for example in these sentences:

Northeast Sahaptin: Kuma tiinma pa-nattunxa ichishkin.

Northeast Sahaptin: Kuma natitaytma pa-sinwixa chishkin.

Columbia River S.: Kuma tananma pasinwixa chishkin.

Those Indian people speak Sahaptin.

In developing a practical alphabet for Sahaptin, strict attention must be paid to the alphabetic principle for each distinct sound of the language. Each letter or combination of letters contained in the language must stand for only one sound.

There are twenty-six letters in the standard English alphabet that are available for use in the Sahaptin practical alphabet, but some of them stand for sounds which are not found in Sahaptin. For example, there are no native Sahaptin words that contain the sounds which the letters b, d, g, f, r, and z commonly stand for in English. There are no English words that contain sounds like those at the beginning of k'amkaas shoulder, k'ashinu, elbow, or lamtix head (all in Yakima dialect). English letters are used, and combinations of letters to represent sounds which are identical or similar in Sahaptin. This practical alphabet is a Sahaptin alphabet and it requires special explanation for some of the features before it can be read with ease and speed. It is to some of these distinctive features of the practical alphabet and writing system that we now turn.

There are important differences in the Sahaptin language between "hard" and "soft" consonants. For example, compare the hard ch' sound at the beginning of the word ch'im sharp with the soft sound at the beginning of the word chimti new. Or compare the hard-front k' at the beginning of k'amamul bald eagle with the soft- k th at begins with kapin digging stick.

ch'im	sharp	ch'im xapilmi	sharp knife
chimti	new	chimti taatpas	new shirt
k'amamul	bald eagle	k'amamul iwa kakya.	
		Bald eagle is a bird.	
kapin	digging stick	kapin-ki ayatma pa-xnixa.	