

Introduction

The Sahaptin language is spoken today by several hundred Indian people, who live on the Yakima, Warm Springs, and Umatilla Reservations, as well as in several smaller communities as Nespelem, Priest Rapids, Rock Creek, and Celilo. The term "Sahaptin" is not their own name for their native language. It comes from the Columbia Salish name s-haptenoxw, by which the Wenatchee and Moses Salish people call the Nez Perce. However, the early White explorers applied the term to the various Sahaptin-speaking peoples, as well as to the Nez Perce. "Sahaptin" has since come into common usage among many Indian people, linguists, and anthropologists to designate the native language of the Yakima, Warm Springs, and Umatilla people, among others, but it does not include the native language of the Nez Perce people. However, the Nez Perce language is a closely related sister-language to Sahaptin.

In fact, the Sahaptin-speaking peoples have no single name for their language, such as the Nez Perce term "Numiipúutimt" or the Wasco-Wishram term "Kiksht." Thus, when speaking English, Sahaptin people usually refer to their language as 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 íchishkin or chishkín in this matter, in this way, as for example in the sentences:

Northwest Sahaptin: Kúma tíinma panáttunxa
íchishkin.

Northeast Sahaptin: Kúma natítaitma pasénwxa
chishkín.

Columbia River Sahaptin: Kúma tanánma pasénwxa
chishkín.

Those Indians speak Sahaptin

Over a century ago, the French priest, Father Marie Charles Pandosy, wrote a short grammar and dictionary of the Sahaptin language which was translated into English and published in New York City in 1862. It is based mainly upon the Kittitas or Pshwanwapam dialect. The book is hard to obtain and contains many misprints and mistakes. Another French priest, Father St. Onge, wrote a short Yakima primer and catechism about the same time for the use of Indian school children. It, too, is very difficult to obtain.

The late Dr. Melville Jacobs of the University of Washington worked extensively in the Klickitat and Taitnapam dialects or Sahaptin in the late 1920's. He published several volumes of myths and legends, as well as a grammar. They are very fine works, although they are little known to Sahaptin people and they are

generally expensive to buy in old book stores. More recently, I have been a student of the Sahaptin language since 1963. I have worked mainly in the Umatilla and Yakima dialects and have collected many words, sentences, and stories.

In the past few years, there has been an awakening of interest among many Sahaptin people to help preserve and maintain their native language by teaching it in the public schools and in special classes. However, there has been little agreement on how the Sahaptin language should be properly written. In the following pages, I present and use a practical alphabet for Sahaptin which I have taught in several workshops on the Yakima Reservation. The Sahaptin practical alphabet uses only common English letters and combinations of common English letters, plus the apostrophe (') and the underline (___). It can be typed on any standard typewriter, although it is necessary to mark in the stress accents on words by hand.

In developing a practical alphabet for Sahaptin, I have paid strict attention to the alphabetic principle-each distinct sound of the language must have its own letter or combination of letters, and each letter or combination of letters must stand for only one sound. The standard English alphabet and writing system actually does not follow the alphabetic principle consistently. For example, the combination of letters ough in the five

words bough, cough, enough, though, and through actually stands for five different vowel and vowel-plus-consonant sounds. Perhaps this sort of inconsistency is one of the reasons that children have so much trouble learning to read and write English in grade school. I have tried to avoid this sort of difficulty in following and designing a practical alphabet for writing Sahaptin.

There are twenty-six letters in the standard English alphabet that are available for use in a Sahaptin practical alphabet, but some of them stand for sounds which are not found in Sahaptin. For example, ~~there are~~ not 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 native English words that contain sounds like those at the beginning of k'ámkaas shoulder, k'áshinu elbow, or ^{el} hlemtáx head (all in the Yakima dialect). To the extent that it is possible, I have used English letters and combinations of letters to represent sounds which are identical or similar in Sahaptin. Nevertheless, this practical alphabet is a Sahaptin alphabet and it requires special explanation ~~for~~ some of its 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 is an important difference in the Sahaptin language between "hard" and "soft" consonants. For example, compare the hard ch' sound at the beginning of

the word ch'ém sharp with the soft ch sound at the beginning of chémti new. Or compare the hard k' at the beginning of k'amamul bald eagle with the soft k that begins kápen digging-stick. The hard consonants sound as though they were "popped" or "exploded". Linguists call them "glottalized" consonants. It is easy to test whether a consonant in a particular word is a hard one or not. Just place your index finger (imínk tuskáwas) on your Adam's apple - if your Adam's apple moves up quickly when you pronounce the consonant, it is hard. If it does not move up quickly, it is a soft consonant. In the Sahaptin practical alphabet and writing system, the hard consonants are indicated by placing an apostrophe, following, as in ch', k', kw', k', kw', p', t', tl', and ts'.

The Sahaptin language also distinguishes between "front" and "back" k-like sounds. Compare the soft back k sounds in kashkáash roan horse with the soft front k sounds in kákya bird, or compare the soft back k in akú heavy with the soft front k sounds in the English word for cocoa. The Sahaptin k is pronounced further back in the throat than the English k. The Sahaptin front and back k sounds may also be hard or soft. The word for horse, k'úsi, begins with a hard front k', while the word for colt, calf, k'ayík begins with a hard back k'.

There are other k-like sounds in Sahaptin which are pronounced with the lips rounded. They are spelled with

the letter w following, and they, too, may be front or back, hard or soft. Examples are given in the key.

Sahaptin also has several h-like sounds. The first of these is a **plain h**, pronounced just as the sound that begins the English word hop. It is the sound that begins the word hulí'wind. The two remaining h-like sounds are not found in English. We use the letter x to represent them because they are similar to the sound represented by the x in the Classical Greek language and other European languages. The most common x-type sound in Sahaptin is the **back x**, as in xátxat duck, or xáxa maternal aunt or mother's sister. The back x sounds fairly rough or harsh. The front x is not very frequent in Sahaptin, but it is the sound found at the end of awiix thin.

Back x

Sahaptin vowels may be either short or long in their pronunciation. Compare the second vowel in iwáshasha he is riding with that in iwáashasha he is dancing, and note how the second vowel in iwáashasha takes longer to pronounce. The vowels in niipt two and tnuun mountain sheep are also long. Long vowels are indicated in the practical alphabet and writing system by doubling or repeating the appropriate vowel letter.

Some Sahaptin words are spelled the same except that they differ in their stress marking and thus, they are slightly different in their pronunciation. The stress mark (') is placed directly above the most

prominent or strongest vowel in a word. Compare these two verb sentences:

Pak'ínushana. They saw him.

Pák'inushana. He saw him.

Compare also ákak goose with akák your maternal uncle or mother's brother. I have found that most of my Sahaptin friends have a rather difficult time learning to mark the stress on the proper syllable. I suspect that in most cases, people would find it easier simply to ignore the problem and not bother to mark the stress.

A last comment concerns the dialect differences which are found among the Sahaptin-speaking peoples. In brief, there are **three main groupings of Sahaptin dialects**: the Northwest Sahaptin, the Northeast Sahaptin, and the Columbia River Sahaptin dialects. Each of these groupings has a number of words peculiar to itself: as for example, Northwest Sahaptin íkw'ak tiin, Northeast Sahaptin kw'a natítait, and Columbia River Sahaptin kw'ai tanán, which all mean that person, that Indian.

In the old days, these differences in vocabulary were no trouble to the old people (ench'ínch'ima) who knew the words of other dialects, although they generally used only their own words when speaking. It used to be possible to travel all the way from the Palouse country in the east to the Upper Nisqually country in the west and be understood when speaking one's own local dialect. Today, many younger people lack a knowledge of other

Sahaptin dialects because they don't use their native language much when visiting other reservations and communities where Sahaptin is spoken. The practical alphabet that is presented in these pages can be used to write any word in any Sahaptin dialect easily and accurately.

This material has been written for use primarily on the Yakima Reservation, where the Northwest and Columbia River Sahaptin dialects are the more common ones spoken. People on the Yakima Reservation usually refer to the Northwest dialect as the "Yakima" language, while the Columbia River dialect is called the "River" language. In general, people who speak the "River" language are the descendants of native people who lived along the north bank of the Columbia River from Paterson down to the west of Rock Creek. In giving words, I have tried to list both Yakima proper and River forms. The Yakima forms are given first; the River forms follow the semicolon.

Verbs are listed in the dictionary in their bare stem form with no inflectional prefixes or suffixes. This is done for the sake of economy; it would take too much space to list all the inflected forms for each verb. For example, consider the following inflected verb forms:

wáshat	<u>riding</u>
wáshasha	<u>is riding</u>
wáshana	<u>rode</u>
iwáshaxana	<u>he used to ride</u>