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Midterm Project: A Pacific Northwest Indigenous Language Dictionary

Physical Characteristics

The full name of the book is “Dictionary of Indian tongues, containing most of the words and terms used in the Tshimpsean, Hydah, and Chinook, with their meaning or equivalent in the English language.”¹ With only 16 pages of text, 14 of which contain vocabulary, the dictionary is rather short. Combined with its small size, just a few inches long, it would be quite portable for a user. The book has a green and brown protective cover, and it is not particularly frail, especially for such an old work. In addition, the dictionary is fully digitized by Princeton University, allowing for minimal handling by researchers.

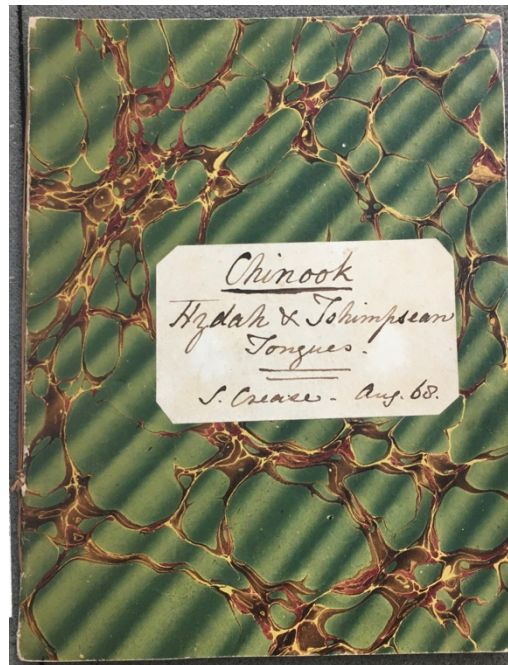


Figure 1: Front cover of Long's dictionary. Photograph by Jeremy Nelson. Taken in Rare Books and Special Collections, Firestone Library, Princeton University, October 25, 2019.

¹ Frederick J. Long, *Dictionary of Indian Tongues, Containing Most of the Words and Terms Used in the Tshimpsean, Hydah, and Chinook, with Their Meaning or Equivalent in the English Language*. (Victoria, Vancouver Island Colony: Hibben & Carswell, 1865), <http://hdl.handle.net/2027/njp.32101074870617>.

Origins

Frederick J. Long, about whom little information exists, compiled the dictionary in the early 1860s. A printing company called Hibben & Carswell published the book in Victoria, then part of the Colony of Vancouver Island; the British colony eventually became part of British Columbia, Canada. This particular copy was published in 1865, although the first version was published in 1862.² The historical context here is of note, as the United Kingdom formally chartered the colony in 1849.³ This, of course, means that the dictionary came into circulation as interactions between European-Americans and the indigenous inhabitants of the region became more and more frequent with the development of the colony.

Contents

Three indigenous languages, in addition to English, appear in the dictionary. English words and their translations in Chinook Jargon, the economic *lingua franca* of the region, are prominently featured at the beginning. A couple of pages of Haida vocabulary follow, and the third and final language, Tsimshian, occupies a little over half of the entire contents. Researchers have proposed that Chinook and Tsimshian comprise part of the Penutian language family, though this is uncertain.⁴ Likewise, Haida has similarities to the Athabaskan language family, but researchers disagree on formal placement of the language.⁵ Little rhyme or reason informs the organization of the words themselves; no alphabetical arrangement exists in the book, neither for the English words nor for the representations of indigenous words in the Latin alphabet. Occasionally, though, words of similar subjects appear as groups — for example, Long might list

² See the full record at <http://hdl.handle.net/2027/njp.32101074870617>.

³ Barry M. Gough, “Crown, Company, and Charter: Founding Vancouver Island Colony - A Chapter in Victorian Empire Making,” *BC Studies*, no. 176 (Winter 2012): 9.

⁴ Philip Drucker, *Indians of the Northwest Coast*, Anthropological Handbook (American Museum of Natural History); No. 10. (New York: McGraw-Hill, 1955), 9, 12.

⁵ Drucker, 8.

pronouns, numbers, or animals together for convenience. Overall, the lack of alphabetical organization is less important because of the size of the dictionary; it would be more than feasible to memorize the vocabulary and not rely on looking up words during conversation.

Purposes

Given the expanding development of British colonialism, along with the concurrent development of U.S. territory in the Oregon and Washington territories, the audience for this dictionary was the portion of the burgeoning white population on the northwestern coast of North America who needed a method to communicate with the indigenous inhabitants of the region.

Examining the types of phrases in the dictionary assists an understanding of the usefulness of the book. Trade is clearly a key aspect of the relationship between the indigenous people and the European-Americans. In the Chinook section, Long gives example dialogue, which concerns negotiations and price haggling for the trading of a canoe.⁶ Similarly, he provides a litany of phrases in Tsimshian, many of which are either related to trade negotiations or work-related commands like “Wash my shirts” and “Sweep the floor.”⁷

Relationship to Linguistic Theories and Colonialism

Language ideology is not immediately present within the dictionary because Long does not provide commentary beyond his vocabulary and example lists. However, an intense colonial history lies behind the rather simple dictionary. As previously mentioned, European influences on Chinook created a pidgin language, Chinook Jargon, which came to serve as a *lingua franca* in the Pacific Northwest in the 1800s.⁸ The dictionary came into use during that moment in time,

⁶ Long, 5.

⁷ Long, 14.

⁸ Henry Zenk and Tony A. Johnson, “A Northwest Language of Contact, Diplomacy, and Identity: Chinuk Wawa / Chinook Jargon,” *Oregon Historical Quarterly* 111, no. 4 (2010): 445, <https://doi.org/10.5403/oregonhistq.111.4.0444>.

but soon, the colonial governments enforced the use of English as the official language of the region. Toward the end of the nineteenth century, these policies created divides between the older indigenous generation and the younger population, which faced that enforced assimilation. In European eyes, Chinook was an inferior language that needed to give way to English.⁹ The dictionary, then, demonstrates a fleeting moment when multilingualism was valued by the colonizers, because it served an economic purpose. In fact, it does so by going beyond Chinook and providing information about Haida and Tsimshian, as well. This encouragement of multilingualism did not last.

Provenance

The library catalog records no information relating to the provenance of the dictionary. However, several clues in the book itself provide relevant evidence. An insert at the back of the book identifies that the object was “Presented by Friends the Princeton University Library,” indicating that the organization probably bought it with the purpose of donating it to the library. On the inside cover, there are several disorganized annotations, some of which are illegible. A few of them are useful, however — two of them appear to be prices. One, dated 1949, indicates that the book cost 39.50, though whether this is in U.S. or Canadian dollars is unclear. A second price lists 37.50. Beside these prices is a monogrammed “Ex Libris” stamp, indicating that the book was at one time part of a personal library. Since the last initial in the stamp is “S”, the “Crease” signature on the front cover indicates that there were at least two different owners. Crease dates his signature to “Aug. 68,” which likely refers to 1868 given the archaic spelling of “Hydah” and “Tshimpsean” and the clear use of a dip pen or equivalent instrument. It seems probable that the dictionary was not an indigenous-owned work before it came to Princeton.

⁹ Zenk and Johnson, 458.

Bibliography

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