

MARSI! MIRSI! *MASI!¹
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Kamloops Wawa #4a:

alta
nsaika
wawa
maika
tlus
mirsi²
o
tlus³
sin
Shosip

(From a hymn:) ‘Now we say to you, great thanks, oh blessed Saint Joseph.’

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- 1 My title is a pun on the classic jazz song “[Mercy Mercy Mercy](#)” by Cannonball Adderley. It’s a list of spellings of the common Chinook Jargon word **masi** ‘thanks’. The first two spellings are actually found in *Kamloops Wawa*, but my final “*MASI” is written with the linguist’s asterisk before it, showing that it’s nonexistent – at least in that CJ newspaper.
 - 2 **Mirsi** is a spelling that shows Father Le Jeune of the *Kamloops Wawa* newspaper trying to reflect standard (European) French *merci*. There aren’t separate letters for the /e/ versus /i/ vowel sounds in Chinook Jargon, so the *Chinuk Pipa* writing represents both with the letter that I transcribe as <i>.
 - 3 **Tlus** ‘good’ is understood as ‘blessed’ when in its typical use before the names of major biblical personages. Another super-common example is **Tlus Mari** ‘blessed Mary’.

KW #4b:

(Also a hymn:)

**O tlus sin Shosip(,) maika drit tlus⁴ nanich
Shisyu pi Mali(,) nsaika drit tlus taii(;))
alta nsaika wawa maika tlus marsi(,)⁵
o tlus sin Shosip**

‘Oh blessed Saint Joseph, you truly took care
of Jesus and Mary, our very good leaders;⁶
now we tell you great thanks,
oh blessed Saint Joseph.’

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- 4 **Drit tlus nanich** is literally ‘really/very well watched’. Adverbs, such as the **tlus** ‘well’ here, are typically intensified by a preceding adverb **drit** ‘really; very’. Contrast this with adjectives, which in BC Jargon are normally intensified by the preserved early-creolized Oregon CJ prefix written as **aias-** in BC’s *Chinuk Pipa*. (It would be **hayas-** in Grand Ronde style, but that prefix has dropped out of use down south!)
- 5 **Marsi** as a variant pronunciation of **mirsi** indicates the continued Canadian Métis French linguistic influence in British Columbia well past the “frontier” era. We believe Father Le Jeune would have written **masi** if that were the pronunciation he was hearing locally. **Marsi** is identical with the pronunciation that’s found in other Métis languages including (Southern/Heritage) Michif (the French-Cree mixed language of Red River).
- 6 An alternate, totally acceptable reading of the **nsaika drit tlus taii** here would be a singular ‘our very good leader/chief’, addressed to St. Joseph. In texts as brief as hymn lyrics, it’s often hard to find enough context to prove that one reading is more right than another. For something like an answer, I would want to turn to the presumable European French original that this Chinook version was translated from.

KW #5:

<Chinook Hymns.>

<Naika Chako Wawa etc.>

Naika chako wawa⁷ tlus mirsi
kopa maika(.) tlus ShK:⁸
naika tiki wawa aias tlus⁹
kopa maika(.) naika papa.¹⁰

'I come to say great thanks
to you, blessed Jesus Christ:
I want to say beautiful things
to you, my father.'

7 With a verb of motion-for-a-purpose, you don't use any word in Chinook Jargon to express 'to' do something. So here we have just **chako wawa** meaning 'come (here) to say'.

8 **ShK** is the *Chinuk Pipa* abbreviation for **Shisyu Kri** 'Jesus Christ'.

9 **Aias tlus** is an interesting example of something mentioned in a footnote above. It's fundamentally an intensified adjective, 'very good' which is the usual way to say 'beautiful', but as is frequent for a certain small set of adjectives in this language, it's used as a noun here: 'very good things; beautiful things'.

10 It's very strange to see Jesus addressed as 'my father', considering the intense emphasis that the Catholic missionaries in BC put on the Trinity of the 'father, son, and holy spirit' in all the languages they preached in.

KW #23b:

Isaak

**chako aias yutl tomtom¹¹ nanitsh Shakob pi iaka wawa marsi
[ko]pa ST.¹²**

‘Isaac

became very glad-hearted seeing Jacob and he said thanks
to God.’

11 **Aias yutl tomtom** is still another instance of how adjectives (here **yutl** ‘glad’) are intensified in BC Chinook Jargon by the prefix **aias-**.

12 **ST** is the usual abbreviation in *Chinuk Pipa* for **Sahali Taii** (literally ‘the above chief’), ‘God’.

KW #29b:

Pi iaka iskom iaka

**lima, pi iaka mamuk pul¹³ iaka kopa sahali, pi iaka¹⁴ chako
skukum(,) ¹⁵ iaka lipii(,) pi iaka chomp¹⁶ pi iaka mit.hwit, pi iaka
kuli¹⁷ pi iaka klatwa kopa Sondi haws kimta kopa klaska,
pi iaka drit kuli¹⁸ pi iaka ayu wawa¹⁹ marsi kopa ST.**

‘And he took his
hand, and he pulled him up, and they became
healthy, his feet, and he jumped (up) and he stood, and he
moved around and he went to the church after them,
and he could truly walk and he was saying thanks to God.’

13 **Pul** ‘pull’ is much more common in BC Chinuk Wawa than the older/southern **hal** (which is from oldtime nautical ‘haul’). We even see an Indigenous-written letter referring to a horse who **pul bak** ‘pulled back; reared back’.

14 Here we can understand this **iaka** as the fluent speaker’s classic “plural” **iaka**, i.e. as ‘they’ rather than the commonly understood singular meaning ‘(s)he’.

15 **Skukum** (‘strong’) is the usual word for ‘healthy’. For example, it’s the way people answered ‘how are you folks?’: **kanawi skukum, ilo sik** ‘all healthy, none sick’.

16 **Chomp** ‘jump (up/down)’ is found more often in BC CW than the older/southern **sup’na**.

17 **Kuli** is just a generic word for ‘move; travel’ in BC CW, unlike the older/southern dialect, where it retains more of its original Métis French sense of ‘run’.

18 You might notice that there’s no word used to express ‘could’ (ability) here, which is very typical of this northern dialect.

19 When you put **ayu** as a prefix to an action verb in Chinook Jargon, the result is typically a sense of ongoing or continuous action, so here we have ‘was saying’.

KW #47:

ShK

iaka nanich iaka pi iaka wawa: “Kluchmin, naika mamuk klahawiam²⁰ maika, naika mamuk kopit²¹ maika sik(,) pi iaka mamuk²² iaka limī* kopa iaka latit pi aiak iaka chako strit(,) ²³ iaka bak, ²⁴ pi iaka wawa marsi kopa ST, pi ukuk taii kopa likatshism* haws(,) ²⁵ iaka saliks kopa ukuk²⁶ ShK mamuk kopit sik²⁷ ukuk kluchmin kopa Satirdi:

‘Jesus Christ

saw him and he said: “Woman, I’ll take pity on you, I’ll end your illness”, and he put his hands on her head and immediately it straightened out, her back did, and she said thanks to God, but that boss of the catechism house (temple), he was mad because Jesus Christ cured that woman on a Saturday (Sabbath).’

20 It’s worth pointing out that **mamuk klahawiam** (literally ‘make pitiful’) actually means ‘take pity on, have mercy on’; the idea is of treating someone as if they were poor, according to traditional Indigenous values – being kind to them according to your ability.

21 **Mamuk kopit** (‘make finished’) = ‘to put an end to; to finish, to end’ something.

22 **Mamuk** (‘do; make’) is also the typical way to express ‘put’ in BC Chinook Jargon.

23 The more recent English borrowed version, **strit** (‘straight’), was added to the existing Métis French-derived **drit** in BC CJ. As usual for these newer loans in BC, this one was more specific than the previous word, which had a range of meanings: ‘straight; true; real’ etc.

24 We don’t know any other word for a person’s ‘back’ in BC CJ than this **bak**, which is in fact pretty common here. The *Kamloops Wawa* newspaper once called buffaloes **homp bak musmus** ‘hump-back cattle’ :)

25 The **likatshism haws** / **katikism haws** ‘catechism house’ was the center of *Chinuk Pipa* teaching in a number of southern interior BC Native communities. Here the term is put into an extended sense as a respected ‘temple’.

26 The most reliable way to express ‘because’ in BC Jargon is this **kopa ukuk** ‘for this’. This way of putting it is very common in the world’s languages, including in older English before we borrowed the Latin/French word *cause*.

27 **Mamuk kopit sik** ‘make done being.sick’ is a synonym of another common phrase, **mamuk tlus** ‘make good/better’, both understood as ‘make healthy; cure’ someone.

KW #74:

**ShK iaka mamuk nanish²⁸ kopa nsaika kata
alki nsaika pus²⁹ nsaika mituit³⁰ kopa mimlus
ilihi.³¹ = O tlus³² nsaika wawa marsi [SIC] kopa [i]a[k]a.**

‘Jesus Christ shows to us how
some day we’ll be when we rise from the grave.
Oh, let’s say thanks to him.’

28 **Mamuk nanich** (‘make see’) is how Chinuk Wawa expresses ‘to show’ something to people.

29 **Pus** is the most frequent way to say ‘(at the time) when’ something eventually happens, in the northern dialect.

30 People also say **gitop** (‘get up; wake up’) for the idea of rising from the dead.

31 **Mimlus ilihi** (‘dead.people place’) means either ‘cemetery’ or ‘grave’; you decide.

32 It’s more common in BC Jargon to just say **tlus** (‘good’), rather than **tlus pus** (‘good if/that’), to form a command or request.

KW #54:

**Spos³³ Sakari iaka klatwa kopa haws pi iaka
kaw lalan.g, alta klaska tomtom iaka chi nanich
ST, pi pus ikta iaka tiki Sakari alta iaka
mamuk tsim, iaka mamuk sains.³⁴**

**Tanas lili pi Iisabit chi iaka komtaks
iaka mitlait tanas.³⁵ Iaka tlus tomtom, pi iaka
wawa mirsi kopa ST kiwa³⁶ iaka mamuk ilo³⁷
iaka shim kopa iaka ilo tanas.**

‘When Zachary went into the house and he was tongue-tied, that’s when they figured he had just seen God, and whenever he wanted anything, Zachary, then he wrote, he made signs (with his hands).

In a while Elizabeth found out she was pregnant. She was happy, and she said thanks to God because he had removed her shame about her (having) no child.’

33 **Spos** is a rare variant of **pus** for ‘when’ in *Kamloops Wawa*, but it’s a genuine northern Chinook Jargon word. This writer (Father Louis-Napoléon St. Onge) contrasts it with **pus** for ‘if’ later in the same sentence.

34 **Sains** or **sain** is a known word in northern Jargon for ‘sign language; hand gestures’, including the established Plains Indian Sign Language used farther east.

35 **Mitlait tanas** is literally ‘to have a child’, and it’s used for ‘being pregnant’ because in Jargon ‘have’ carries the implication of ‘already possessing’ a thing. The English expression ‘have a baby’ (to give birth) is **tlap tanas** ‘to get/find a child’.

36 **Kiwa** ‘because’ is an extremely rare word in northern Jargon, being more characteristic of the older/southern dialect. Here it amounts to a literary word, far less common than the **kopa ukuk** mentioned above.

37 **Mamuk ilo** (‘make nothing’) is a common expression in all Chinuk Wawa, meaning ‘destroy; obliterate’ and thus ‘remove, take away’ an undesirable thing.

KW #77:

<Father Le Jacq's Letter.>

Nyu Wisminstir <8> Ipril <1893>.

‘New Westminster, 8 April 1893.’

Pir Lshak iaka wawa kopa kanawi iaka tanas.

‘Père Le Jacq is speaking to all his children.’

Naika nanich kopa Kamlups Wawa msaika aias tiki³⁸ komtaks

‘I saw in *Kamloops Wawa* that you folks would love to know

kata naika alta. Msaika tiki pus naika mamuk tsim kopa Kamlups

‘how I am now. You folks want me to write to *Kamloops*’

Wawa pus³⁹ nawitka naika chako tanas tlus; drit kakwa. Naika chako

‘*Wawa* whether I’m really improving any; it’s really so. I’ve gotten’

tanas skukum chi alta. Aias lili⁴⁰ naika tiki wawa mirsi

‘a bit stronger just lately. For a very long time I’ve been wanting to say thanks’

kopa msaika: Naika komtaks msaika skukum styuil kopa ST pus

‘to you folks: I know you’ve been praying hard to God for’

iaka mamuk klahawiam kopa naika, pi kakwa wik naika mimlus.

‘him to have pity on me, and that’s why I haven’t died.’

Lili ilo naika skukum, kakwa wik aiak naika mamuk tsim kopa msaika.

‘For a long time I was weak, so I was slow to write to you folks.’

Msaika komtaks drit aias skukum ukuk naika sik: kanawi

‘You folks know it’s really quite powerful, this disease of mine: every-’

tilikom iakwa klaska tomtom wik kata⁴¹ dokta mamuk tlus naika.

‘body here thought there was no way a doctor could heal me.’

Kakwa lisivik wawa kopa naika: “Wik dokta mamuk tlus maika: Ayu

‘So the bishop said to me: “It’s not doctors that’s curing you: A lot of’

38 The intensifier **aias-** can also be applied to a few verbs, including **tiki** ‘want’. This is a very old usage, dating to Fort Vancouver times. One of its meanings is ‘to love’.

39 A frequent use of **pus** ‘if’ in the northern dialect is to express ‘whether’.

40 Although **lili** ‘for a long time’ is an adverb, it gets intensified by **aias-**. This usage seems to also be very old, going back before there even existed a northern dialect.

41 We would expect **wik kata pus** here, to express ‘no way’ to hypothetically (**pus**) do something, but this use of simple **wik kata** (‘can’t’) + verb is not uncommon.

tilikom mamuk styuil pus⁴² maika pi ST mamuk kolan⁴³ kopa klaska
'people prayed for you and God listened to their'

styuil, kakwa wik maika mimlus. Tlus maika wawa mirsi kopa
'prayers, and that's why you're not dead. You'd better say thanks to'

klaska."
'them.'

Lakit mun alta⁴⁴ naika mitlait kopa sik haws. Iht mun
'It's been four months now that I'm in the hospital. For one month'

dokta ilo komtaks ikta naika sik: Iawa⁴⁵ iaka chako komtaks (Ø)⁴⁶
'the doctor didn't know what my disease was: Then he figured it out'

pi iaka klatwa wawa kopa lisivik: "Pir Lshak wik kata pus
'and he went to say to the bishop: "Pere Le Jacq can't possibly'

chako tlus. Iaka drit mimlus: Kopit pus mamuk kyut⁴⁷ iaka sik
'recover. He'll definitely die: Only by slicing out his disease'

klunas iaka chako tanas tlus. Pi naika kwash mamuk kyut.
'might he get a little better. But I'm afraid to do the cutting.'

Naika kwash iaka aiak mimlus. Iaka lost⁴⁸ kanawi iaka pilpil.
'I'm afraid he'll die quick(er). He'll lose all of his blood.' '

Lisivik wawa: Tlus maika iskom hlwima dokta kanamokst pi
'The bishop said: "You should fetch other doctors together and'

42 **Styuil pus** is a southern-dialect way to say 'pray for' someone; Bishop Durieu learned his Chinook Jargon from the lower Columbia River tradition. In pure northern dialect we'd say **styuil kopa**.

43 It's good to note that simple **kolan** = 'hear', but when you add the Causative prefix **mamuk-** (which carries a tinge of doing things on purpose), **mamuk- kolan** = 'to listen'. Get it?

44 The other reasonable way to read **lakit mun alta** would be '4 months ago'. Can you see why I went with 'it's been 4 months' instead?

45 BC Chinook Jargon uses **iawa** 'there' to also mean '(and) then'.

46 Here we have the "silent IT" of fluent Chinook Jargon.

47 This is a newer borrowing, of English *cut*, replacing older/southern CW **lq'up**. Being so new, there's some fluctuation between people saying **mamuk- kyut** and just plain **kyut** to mean 'cutting' something. You'll find that **kyut** often means 'to cut off; to slice out; to cut up'.

48 You'll notice that **lost** here means 'will lose'; the word **lost** means generically 'to lose' as well as 'be lost', in any tense, past, present, or future. Of course this is yet another recent loan from English. For 'blood loss; bleeding', see the synonym **mash pilpil** ('throw blood') a little below this.

msaika trai:⁴⁹ **Alki ST iaka hilp**⁵⁰ **msaika.**” **Lakit dokta**
‘you folks can try: Come what may, God will help you folks.’ Four doctors’

chako: **[K]laska kyut ukuk naika sik. Ayu**⁵¹ **naika mash pilpil: Lili**
‘came: They cut that disease of mine out. I bled a lot: For a long time’

naika kakwa mimlus. Lili drit ilo naika skukum:⁵² **Mokst mun**
‘I was like a dead person. For a long time I was really weak: For two months’

pi sitkom naika kwanisim mitlait kopa bid, wik kata gitop.
‘and a half I was constantly in bed, not able to get up.’

Chi alta naika gitop.
‘Just now I’ve been able to get up.’

Tanas ayu kopa msaika mash pipa kopa naika, pi ilo naika
‘Several among you folks have sent letters to me, but I haven’t’

kilapai wawa kopa klaska: Tlus ilo msaika sik tomtom kopa ukuk(.)
‘made an answer to them: Please don’t be upset about this.’

Naika skukum sik,⁵³ **kakwa ilo naika kilapai wawa. Naika kakwa ilo**
‘I’ve been awfully sick, so I haven’t responded. I was basically un-’

komtaks⁵⁴ **ikta pus chako ukuk pipa: Ilo naika komtaks kah**
‘conscious of anything when those letters came: I don’t know where’

sistirs mash ukuk pipa: Kopit iht pipa naika komtaks,
‘the nuns put those letters: There’s only one letter that I know of,’

Fraswa Shilpahan kopa Kwawt iaka pipa: Pi alta iawa⁵⁵ **naika**
‘it’s François Shilpahan from Quaaout’s letter: And now then I’

wawa mirsi kopa kanawi ukuk mamuk pipa kopa naika.
‘say thanks to all of those who wrote to me.’

49 **Trai** is a very common newer loan in BC Jargon from English *try*. It’s very useful because there wasn’t really any established way to express ‘trying’ until this word came into the Jargon.

50 **Hilp** is a borrowing of English *help*, and again this a newer word, replacing older/southern **ye?lan**. Similar to the situation with **kyut**, we find people varying between **mamuk- hilp** and the simple form **hilp**, both expressing the same thing.

51 **Ayu** ‘a lot’ (of blood) goes first in the sentence, typical for CJ expressions of quantity.

52 The opposite of **skukum** ‘healthy’ is of course **ilo skukum** ‘weak’ (literally ‘not healthy’).

53 Another intensifier of adjectives and verbs is **skukum** ‘powerfully; hard’.

54 **Kakwa ilo komtaks** (‘like not knowing’) is a recognized Chinook Jargon expression for ‘unconscious; knocked out’.

55 **Alta iawa** (literally ‘now then’) is an example of a really distinctive, typical BC way of talking Chinook Jargon.

Another example is from one Native man’s letter, where he starts a sentence with **Wal naw alta** ‘well now then...’

Naika chako tanas tlus⁵⁶ pi wik drit kopit sik: Tlus

‘I’ve gotten a bit better but am not really done being sick: Please’

ilo msaika kopit styuil pus naika pus aiak naika chako

‘don’t stop praying for me so that I quickly get’

skukum: Naika aias tiki aiak kilapai kopa naika tilikom

‘healthy: I would love to get right back to my people’

kopa Williams Lik: Klaska aias klahawiam alta, ilo

‘at Williams Lake: They’re miserable now, not having’

klaska liplit.

‘their priest.’

Naika wawa klahawiam kopa kanawi msaika

‘I say goodbye to all of you folks.’

Naika Pir Lshak

‘I’m Pere Le Jacq.’

<Rev. Father Le Jacq, O.M.I.>

<St Mary's Hospital.>

<New Westminster, B.C.>

56 Adjectives in Chinook Jargon carry a sense of “scalarity”, which just means that an adjective X gives the idea of ‘more or less X’. So **tlus** ‘good’ has the sense of ‘more or less good; pretty good’, and therefore **chako-tlus** is not necessarily ‘become good’ but more often ‘become better, recover, recuperate, heal, improve’.