

APPENDIX III

Chinook Jargon and Northwest Treaty Negotiation

An important historical application of Chinook Jargon was its use in negotiating treaties between the United States and tribes living in the continental U.S. For many Washington tribes, first official contacts with the Whitemen came as late as the 1850's. By that time the Chinook Jargon had taken form and come into wide use between Indians and traders. It was only natural that Jargon should have been used in explaining treaty provisions to the Indians. Treaties were never written in Jargon. They were drafted and printed in English. These documents were then paraphrased verbally in Jargon so that the Indians would know what they were agreeing to. At that time for most tribes there were no available bilinguals capable of expressing these things in the Indians' own language. Jargon was therefore an important communicative tool during this period of first official interactions.

Several of the early Indian agents in western Washington were renowned Chinookers. James G. Swan, for instance, was a Bostonian who used the California gold rush as an excuse to exchange sedentary family life in New England for the individual freedom of the West. He was an Indian agent, medic, schoolmaster, and careful observer of Indians and settlers from 1850 until his death in 1900. Swan served as an interpreter for Isaac Stevens, governor of Washington Territory, who had designed and "imposed" the treaties upon the Indians along the Pacific Coast in what is now Washington state. Swan's reports of the use of Jargon in negotiating the treaties is therefore of interest to us for two reasons. It allows us to appreciate the crucial role of Jargon in these historical events; and, more importantly, it helps clarify current contentions by Indian groups that the native signers of these treaties poorly understood the contents of the treaties as a result of the use of an imprecise jargon in the negotiations. Swan's narrative provides an account of one use of Jargon in treaty discussions. It is not a positive picture of the value of Jargon.

"The next morning the council was commenced. The Indians were all drawn up in a large circle in front of the governor's tent and around a table on which were placed the articles of treaty and other papers. The governor, General (George) Gibbs, and Colonel (B.F.) Shaw sat at the table, and the rest of the whites were honored with camp stools, to sit around as a sort of guard, or a small cloud of witnesses After Colonel Mike Simmons, the agent, and, as he has been termed, the Daniel Boone of the Territory, had marshaled the savages into order, an Indian interpreter was selected from each tribe to interpret the Jargon of Shaw into such language as their tribes could understand. The governor then made a speech, which was translated by Colonel Shaw into Jargon and spoken to the Indians First the governor spoke a few words, then the colonel interpreted, then the Indians; so that this threefold repetition made it rather a lengthy operation. After this speech the Indians were dismissed until the following day, when the treaty was to be read.

The second morning after our arrival the terms of the treaty were made known. This was read line by line by General Gibbs, and then interpreted by Colonel Shaw to the Indians.

The features and provisions of the treaty were these: The Indians were to cede all the territory, commencing on the Pacific coast, at the divide of the Quaitso and Hooch Rivers, thence east between the same, along the line of the Quillahyute tribe, to the summit of the coast range; thence south, along the line of the Chemakum and Skokomish tribes, to the forks of the Satsop River; thence southeasterly, along the lands ceded by the Nisqually Indians, to the summit of the Black Hills, and across the same to the banks of the

Skookumchuck Creek; thence up said creek to the summit of the Cascade range; south, along the range, to the divide between the waters of the Cowlitz and Cathlapoodl Rivers; then southwestwardly to the land of the Upper Chenooks, to the Columbia River, and down that river to the sea. The Indians were to be placed on a reservation between Gray's Harbor and Cape Flattery, and were to be paid for this tract of land forty thousand dollars in different installments. Four thousand dollars in addition was also to be paid them, to enable them to clear and fence in land and cultivate. No spirituous liquors were to be allowed on the reservation; and any Indian who should be guilty of drinking liquor would have his or her annuity withheld.

Schools, carpenters' and blacksmiths' shops were to be furnished by the United States; also a saw-mill, agricultural implements, teachers, and a doctor. All their slaves were to be free, and none afterward to be bought or sold. The Indians, however, were not to be restricted to the reservation, but were to be allowed to procure their food as they had always done, and were at liberty at any time to leave the reservation to trade with or work for the whites.

After this had all been interpreted to them, they were dismissed till the next day, in order that they might talk the matter over together, and have any part explained to them which they did not understand. The following morning the treaty was again read to them after a speech from the governor, but, although they seemed satisfied, they did not perfectly comprehend. The difficulty was in having so many different tribes to talk to at the same time, and being obliged to use the Jargon, which at best is but a poor medium of conveying intelligence. The governor requested any

one of them that wished to reply to him. Several of the chiefs spoke, some in Jargon and some in their own tribal language, which would be interpreted into Jargon by one of their people who was conversant with it; so that, what with this diversity of tongues, it was difficult to have the subject properly understood by all. But their speeches finally resulted in one and the same thing, which was that they felt proud to have the governor talk with them; they liked his proposition to buy their land, but they did not want to go on to the reservation. The speech of Narkarty, one of the Chenook chiefs, will convey the idea they all had. "When you first began to speak," said he to the governor, "we did not understand you; it was all dark to us as the night; but now our hearts are enlightened, and what you say is clear to us as the sun".

(Excerpt from a description of the conference preceding the Cowlitz, Satsop, Chehalis, Quinault, and Chinook treaty of February, 1855, which took place on the Chehalis River. From The Northwest Coast, Or, Three Years' Residence in Washington Territory, Harper Brothers, 1857, pp. 341-345.)

Swan's account suggests a low opinion of Jargon for intercommunication. Part of this problem may have been caused by regionalisms and the use of words from local Indian languages which were not more widely known. In discussing Jargon, Swan enlarges on these problems.

"...different Indians who have been with the whites acquire a habit of pronouncing such English words as they pick up in the same style and manner as the person from whom they learn them. This causes a certain discrepancy in the Jargon, which at first is difficult to get over. And, again,

each tribe will add some local words of their own language, so that while a person can make himself understood among any of the tribes for the purposes of trade, it is difficult to hold a lengthened conversation on any subject without the aid of some one who has become more familiar with the peculiar style.

This fact I saw instanced on an occasion of a treaty made, or attempted to be made, by Governor Stevens with five tribes on the Chehalis River in the spring of 1855. There were present the Cowlitz, the Chehalis, Chenook, Queniült, and Satchap Indians. Colonel B.F. Shaw was the interpreter, and spoke the language fluently; but, although he was perfectly understood by the Cowlitz and Satchap Indians, he was but imperfectly understood by the Chenooks, Chehalis, and Queniülts, and it was necessary for those present who were conversant with the Coast tribes to repeat to them what he said before they could fully understand.

I experienced the same difficulty; for, as I had been accustomed to speak a great deal of the Chehalis language with the Jargon, I found that the Indians from the interior could not readily understand me when making use of words in the Chehalis dialect....."

".... It is a language, however, never used except when the Indians and whites are conversing, or by two distant tribes who do not understand each other, and only as an American and a Russian would be likely to talk French to communicate their ideas with each other. The Indians speaking the same language no more think of using the Jargon while talking together than the Americans do....."

"The Chehalis language is very rich in words, and every one is so expressive that it is not possible, like the Jargon, to make mistakes; for instance, in the Jargon, which is very limited, the same word represents a great many different things...."

"Many of the Jargon words, though entirely different, yet sound so much alike when quickly spoken, that a stranger is apt to get deceived; and I have known persons who did not well understand the Jargon get angry with an Indian, thinking he said something entirely different from what he actually did...."

"Ulthl means proud, and ulticut long, but they are readily confounded with each other. A friend of mine, who was about leaving the Bay, wished to tell some Indians who were working for him that if, on his return, he found they had behaved well, he should feel very proud of them and glad, used the following: Ulticut nika tumtum, or, my heart is proud. 'He must have a funny heart,' said the Indian who related it to me. 'He says his heart is long; perhaps it is like a mouse's tail'.

There are many other words that are as readily misunderstood....."

(Swan, Ibid., pp. 309-317.)

Swan knew Jargon well. As a regular user of the language and eyewitness to the negotiation, his report and opinion of the utility of Jargon (and its problems) deserve careful attention. Whether the problems of understanding were caused by regional usage or by the very nature of this pidgin's simple structure and vocabulary, a case can be made that there was not clear passage of ideas in the case reported above. The argument could be advanced that these discussions involved fourth-hand information (governor to Shaw to Indian translator to Indians) and even in a single language three retellings usually

engenders distortions of the message.

During the U.S. Court of Claims hearings on Indian land rights, there was an attempt to show that Chinook Jargon was a weak channel of communication which resulted in a historical unfairness during the treaty negotiations. In the courtroom, an English passage was translated in Chinook Jargon orally by an Indian and then this was retranslated into English by someone else (U.S. Court of Claims, Duwamish et al. - vs - U.S., Case File F-275). According to researcher Barbara Lane, the experiment was "not successful" in either sustaining or refuting claims about Jargon's value as a communicative device. I have done a similar experiment which I include here. While negotiating the Point Elliott Treaty, a Jargon speech was given on Governor Stevens' behalf by Indian Agent Mike Simmons. I have taken an English translation of that speech (A) and retranslated it into Jargon (B) which I then asked Squamish elder Louis Maranda to translate into English. All four forms of the speech are given below as an experiment intending to reveal how capable or problematic Jargon really was as a language for official use.

Mike Simmons' Jargon Speech at Point Elliott

"Nika Owh. Hyass leli nika kumtux mesika, pe mesika kumtux nika. Kwahnesum close tumtum mesika kopah nika, pe ahncotti kopa konaway Boston. Alta mesache Boston chahko pe mahcook lum kopa mesaika, kahkwa tilicum cupswalla mesika dolla pe chahko klahowyum Siwash. Alta ikt ikt Siwash mamook mesache kopa Boston. Nika tumtum lum mamook kahkwa Nika Siwash tumtum. Close nika potlatch tumtum kopa Siwash alta. Mesika copet mahcook lum kopa mesache Boston, wake leli chahko close konaway Siwash. Konaway mesika tenass chahko kahkwa Boston tenass. Leli hyass kly nika tumtum kwahnesum. Boston wawa nika Siwash kwahnesum capswalla yakka ictah, yakka lehash, pussisse, shirt, sakoleeks, wappatoo, pe kwahnesum mesache Boston kokshet Siwash. Kwahnesum Siwash wawa ikt ikt Boston mesache kokshet nika. Kwahnesum kly nika tumtum alta. Pose Siwash copet muckamuck lum, kopet klatawa

kopa mesahche Boston house, wake leli chahko close mesika Siwash. Mesika Papa, kopa Boston illahee wake yakka tumtum mamook mesahche kopa Siwash. Alki close nannitch Siwash kwahnesum. Spose chee Siwash pe Governor Stevens mamook paper, Nesika tyee yakka nannitch. Pose yakka kumtux paper close, yakka tchum yakka name hyas close kopa paper. Spose yakka tchum paper, chee paper kalipi, pe chahko mesika dolla kopa illahee. Okook ictah mesika iskum okook sun, cultus potlatch. Konaway Siwash kumtux nika tumtum elip Boston yukwa. Wake close nika na wawa kopa Siwash? Close kopa alta. Alta mesika wawa Governor Stevens pe Siwash tyee."

(A) "My Brothers.

I have known you a long time, and you have known me. Your hearts have always been good towards me and formerly they were towards all Americans. Since then bad white men have come who sell you rum, so that people cheat you of your money and Indians become poor. Nowadays some Indians ill treat the whites. In my opinion rum is the cause of this - such is my real mind. I now give my true heart to you. Do you stop buying rum of bad white men, and it will soon be well with all Indians. All your children will be like American children. My heart has cried for a long time. The Whites tell me the Indians are always stealing their goods, their axes, blankets, shirts, pantaloons, and potatoes, and bad white men are always beating Indians. The Indians are always telling me that some whiteman or other beats them. My heart is sick all the time. If you Indians will stop drinking liquor, stop going to the houses of bad white men, it will be good for you. "Your father in the American Country - his heart is not to do ill to you. He will hereafter always take care of you. As soon as the Indians and Governor Stevens have agreed on the paper, our chief will see it. If he thinks the paper good, he will put his name to it. When he has signed it, the paper will be returned and the money will be sent for your land.

"The goods that are given you today are given as a present. You all know what my opinion was before the Americans came here. Did I not tell you the truth? I have done. Now the Governor will speak again and then the Indian Chiefs." (Cheers)

(B) Translation back into Jargon by Jay Powell.

Nika Ow̓h. Nika hyas laly kumtuks mesika, pee mesika kumtuks nika. Mesika tumtum kwonesum kloshe kopa nika, kahkwa ankhuttie kopa konoway boston tillikum. Alta chako mesachie boston klaksta makook lum kopa mesika, pee tillikum kapswalla mesika dala. Siwash chako klahowyum. Alta tenas hiyu siwash mamook mesachie kopa boston tillikum. Nika tumtum lum mamook okoke --- nika delate kumtuks kopa tumtum. Alta nika wawa delate kopa mesika. Spose mika kopet makook lum kopa mesachie boston, halo laly konoway kloshe kunamokst siwash tillikum. Bymby konoway mesika tenas kahkwa boston tenas. Nesika tumtum hiyu laly kly. Boston tillikum wawa kopa nika, "Siwash kwonesum kapswalla nesika iktas. nesika lahash, nesika shut, nesika sakoleks, pee wapato", pee mesachie tillikums kwonesum mamook kokshut kopa siwash. Siwash kwonesum wawa kopa nika, "Ikt boston mamook kokshut kopa nika!" Kwonesum sick nika tumtum. Spose mesika siwash mamook kopet muckamuck whiskey, mamook kopet klatawa kopa mesachie boston yaka house, alki konoway hyas kloshe. Mesika papa, tyee kopa boston ilahee, halo yaka tumtum mesachie kopa mesika. Alki yaka mamook kloshe pee nanitch kloshe kopa mesika. Hyak, kunsih konoway siwash pee tyee Stevens mamook kloshe tumtum kunamokst kopa okoke pepah, alki nanitch okoke pepah hyas boston tyee. Spose yaka tumtum okoke pepah kloshe, yaka mamook tzum yaka nem kopa pepah. Pee spouse yaka mamook tzum nem kopa pepah, hyas hyak killapi pepah pee konoway dala kopa mesika illahee.

Nesika potlatch konoway okoke ikta kopa mesika. Mesika kloshe kumtuks nika tumtum elip chako boston tillikum yukwa. Halo nika wawa delate kopa mesika? Kloshe kakwa! Alta tyee Stevens wawa kopa mesika pee konoway siwash tyee wawa kimta yaka.

(C) Translation of B into English by Louis Maranda, Squamish elder of North Vancouver, B.C.

My brothers. I have known you all a long time and you all know me. Your hearts (or thoughts) were always good to me, like long ago with all White (or American) people. And now, the evil whitemen come who see rum/whiskey to you all. Then people steal your money. Indians become poor. Now a few more Indians do bad to the Whitemen. I think whiskey has done that. I really know in my heart. Now I speak true to you all. If you stop buying whiskey from bad Whitemen, not long

and all will be good with Indian people. After a while, all of your children will be like White children. My heart has had a plenty long cry. White (American) people tell me, Indians always steal our things, our axes, our shirt, our pants, and spuds. And bad people always are hitting the Indian. Indians often tell to me, a Whiteman beat me up. Always my heart is sad. If you Indians would stop drinking whiskey, stop going to bad Whitemen's houses. In the end it will be very good. The father of you all, the ruler or boss of the American land, he does not think (to do?) bad towards you all. In the future, he will do good and see good to you all. As soon as all the Indians and boss Stevens will make good feeling together, iwth this paper, the big American ruler, after seeing that paper, if he thinks that paper is good he will write his name on the paper. And if he does write his name on the paper, very fast he will return the paper an all the money for you land. We give all these things to you now, today. They are a gift. All of you Indians knew my heart before the Americans came here. Did I not speak right to you all? So be it! Now Ruler Stevens will talk to you all and all Indian chiefs will speak after him.

This has been a very revealing exercise. Despite three translations (an English speaker's Jargon speech translated into English, which was retranslated into Jargon, and that in turn was translated into English again) the message remains quite clear. A common party game is to have each member of the group "pass on" a short message to the next until it has been whispered all the way around the crowd. The message usually becomes quite garbled, even though it is carried on entirely in one language. It is a convincing validation of the communicative reliability of Jargon that three translations later the above speech remains relatively unchanged.

There are many who felt that Chinook Jargon served quite adequately for official purposes. Testimony in Jargon was accepted in courtrooms on Vancouver Island as late as the 1940's. C.H. Hanford gives an interesting insight into the use of Jargon for testimony in his book Seattle and Environs: 1852-1924 (p. 668, Vol. 1).

"It was not difficult for people to soon learn enough of the few words necessary for bartering or dealing with the Indians, and the general drift of short conversations could be understood where the jargon was interspersed with English words on the part of the white person and by a few "de-late Siwash" (straight Indian) words on the part of the Indian, accompanied by signs and gestures; but where clear understanding or more precision was necessary, like testimony in the trial of criminal and other cases in courts, a more thorough knowledge of the language and ingenuity in constructing sentences was required. For instance, it was somewhat difficult for the ordinary court interpreter to frame an oath to be administered to witnesses that would be impressive and follow as near as possible the usual English form. William DeShaw, a storekeeper at Point Agate, near the Port Madison Indian reservation, and whose wife was a granddaughter of Chief Seattle, when acting as interpreter, administered a very satisfactory and impressive form as follows:

Ul-tah kloshe mi-kah waw-waw de-late kon-a-way
mi-kah kum-tuks waw-waw de-late sponse Sok-a-ly Ty-ee
nan-itch mi-kah. Kloshe mahm-uk sok-a-ly mi-kah kloshe
le-mah pe waw-waw kah-kwa: Ni-kah kow ni-kah tum-yum
ko-pah Sok-a-ly Ty-ee pe ni-kah waw-waw de-late;
kon-a-way de-late waw-waw; ko-pet de-late waw-waw,
Sok-a-ly Ty-ee nanitch.

Translation: Now you must tell as you know truly as if speaking to God. Raise your right hand and say these words: I bind my heart to God; I will speak the truth, the whole truth and nothing but the truth. God witness.

Thus, although a case can be made for the value of Jargon as a mode of official communication, it is important emphasize that it was not necessarily a quick way of getting the ideas across. Here is a description of the use of Jargon in a Yale, B.C., courtroom:

The principal evidence was that of Indians belonging to the encampment where the occurrence took place, and, as they gave their evidence in the Thompson Indian tongue, and that had to be translated into Chinook (Jargon) and then into English, the process was necessarily very tedious, and the case occupied the whole day. (Inland Sentinel, Dec. 8, 1881).

In a less serious vein, this section is concluded with a reported conversation in Chinook Jargon relating to laws and lawmaking. It originally appeared in an Oregon City, Oregon, (Flumgudgeonberg) newspaper called the Flumgudgeon Gazette and Bumble Bee Budget published by Curiltail Coon (Pickett), August 20, 1845. Published in manuscript form, the Gazette was the first newspaper on the Pacific Coast. The article, showing how precisely one can talk about lawmaking (even if there may exist difficulties discussing the provisions of particular laws), is given in its entirety.

Indian Dialogue with a Boston

The Editor was accosted by a savage Tilicum a few days since, with the inquiry, as to what they were doing in the "wawa house" - with that striped and spotted sail waving over it. Now as the Editor would have been at a loss to explain their movements in English, on account of their varied evolutions, manoeuvring, marching, countermarching, double dealing, and tangling up of affairs, it proved a much greater difficulty to translate it into the jargon - a language in the vulgar tongue which he but imperfectly understood, having only acquired enough of it to do the small necessary trading. But as Mr. Tilicum was a particular friend of ours, and paused for a reply from us, we thought we could do our best to enlighten him. So says we - Conoway Willamette Boston Tilicum mammue (mamook) ocke (okoke) tatalum pe clone (klone) tilicum tiero, and wawaed Klaska chokco (chahko)

cuppa Tumwater pe mamue close papier. Icta close papier? says he. Now as we could not undertake to explain all the laws, we commenced telling about one in which they are much interested, as many frauds are committed on them in their trading operations with the Bostons, in the shirt blanket and skin line.

This was the law compelling the payment of debts ... We then told him of the currency bill, with which he seemed pretty well pleased; but offered an amendment ... that ... an addition be made in the variety of the circulating medium, and regarded as legal tender, to wit: olilleis (ollalie), cammas, salmon and salmon skin, mowitch skin, as well as all other kind of skin usually traded by them.

But says he, you told me they come to mammue papier, why do they mamue so much hias wawa? O says we, wake scia conoway ocoke wawa - cultus wawa - cokqua (kahkwa) hias wind; hias pilton wawa; wake scia conoway ocoke tillicum, wake cumtux icta Klaska wawa. Now witka six! says he. Clonas nica cumtux cokqua.

But says he, cotta (kahta) icht man mamue hia (hiyu) hias sollux (sollex) wawa hias poo? That's Buncombe wawa says we. Icta ocoke? Now as an explanation of this would have been unintelligible to our friend from Clackamas City, as they have no such thing known in their legislative proceedings we concluded to drop the subject by saying Clakowayou (Klahowya) six ulta (alta) nica clatawa cuppa theatre."

Cosie

hyas Klose —

Sein laut ~~new~~ new
back service

Klortawa

? rancherie — Indian reserve
jagor

p
~~Frapp~~ cais

Pasingyooks

Sahalie
Shopping center
Kankops

family name

Rach Gray - Kikaville

Shantee Mann - Kluskers

90 Klap Kuntex CW

gumboat Navy -
gumboat painted grey
during world war II for
submarine watch

Talapus } built in
Nenamoah } New Westminster
at Star Shipyard

hysa -

~~ekkoti~~

p. 111

Lab stick - warburt tree -
(fine th. like be) - leaves
mossy, fat base

Kahway stick - oak

(i.e. a tree)

Kahway - a tree

119 the part
spelled diff 120