

Klahowya!

Five decades ago, I was a brand-new professor in UBC's Department of Anthropology. I specialized in learning and documenting Indigenous languages. This included the Northwest Coast "trade language" known as Chinook Jargon—or Chinook Wawa. Many of these were languages "in distress" as a generation of their last speakers was dying off. It became a personal commitment and an honour to work with those remaining speakers. In doing so, I had the opportunity to learn Chinook Jargon from one of the last of the old people who had been raised speaking both his First Nations language as well as Chinook Wawa. I'm now 86 years old and realize the irony that I may be one of the last people who learned this trade language from a Native speaker.

Early in my teaching career, I realized the importance of Chinook Jargon not only as one of the world's "trade languages" but as a unique facet of Northwest Coast history stretching from Fort George on the Columbia River in Oregon, north to parts of Alaska. Starting in the 1860s, prospectors heading for the promising gold fields of the Northwest carried a small, but essential dictionary of Chinook Jargon words. Similarly, politicians, then settlers and missionaries adopted this language as a means of communication up and down the coast. What is particularly unique to British Columbia, is that Chinook Jargon was adopted as the legal language for court proceedings, treaties, and legislative records.

By the time I learned Chinook wawa, it felt like a historic relic. Determined to combat this fading away, I developed and taught a course in Chinook Jargon at Langara College. Students who passed that course earned college credit and satisfied the foreign language requirement for B.C. colleges and universities.

The real breakthrough came when I met former Vancouver Mayor and MLA Sam Sullivan. He was well aware of the wealth of historic documents and recordings that were in Chinook Jargon and was committed to learning what was essentially "the first language of our province". His determination led to a five-year series of Saturday morning jargon sessions and the development of a cadre of like-minded people, all of whom are determined that this unique chain of learning will not be broken.

Together, Sam and I wrote the entry in the Canadian Encyclopedia on Chinook Jargon. Sam organized several immersion weekends and other learning sessions which were covered by local and even international media through the BBC. We recorded the first interview in BC spoken in Jargon, a video that has been viewed many thousands of times.

Recently, Sam Sullivan's Global Civic Policy Society has participated in and now partnered with the British Columbia Social Studies Teachers' Association (BCSSTA) to provide a variety of teaching materials for use in BC classrooms, ranging from the Grade 4 level to

Secondary School studies. These materials include historic videos, a map of Chinook Jargon place names, and seminars for the discussion of teaching techniques for this historic trade language. Sam and Global Civic have developed Teach Yourself Chinook Lessons which are made available for free. As well, Sam has translated old recordings of elders and made audio recordings of old documents which can be found on the BC Chinook Jargon website and on YouTube.

This letter comes in support of these efforts. The importance of Chinook Jargon was—and is--the single common feature that enabled speakers of all Indigenous languages to communicate with each other and work with newcomers--traders, government officials, prospectors, settlers and missionaries here in B.C. and the entire Northwest Coast.

Chinook Jargon has played an especially important role in the history of British Columbia. It is my hope that it should continue to be learned and used and have a respected place well into the future of this province. I encourage everyone who is so motivated to join this effort and help bring this vision to reality.



Dr. Jay V Powell, Professor Emeritus
Department of Anthropology
University of British Columbia