Ojibwe: Culture & Writing
Rand Valentine

Design features of language...

- **Arbitrariness**: form of signal not logically connected with its meanings.
  - ajidamoo squirrel
  - chipmunk agongos
- **Interchangeability**: individuals can both send and receive messages. Cf. silkworms, where female emits a chemical re her availability which male can trace.

Discreteness

- **Discreteness**: complex messages are built up out of smaller parts (morphemes, words, idioms, etc). Parts exist in different levels:
  - morphemes are made up of sounds & syllables
  - words are made up of syllables
  - phrases and sentences made up of words
  - discourses made up of sentences
  - communicative interactions made up of discourses

Displacement, Productivity

- **Displacement**: with language, you can communicate about things that are not present in time or space, or even “real.” Note that we can lie with language.
- **Productivity**: the system allows for the production and understanding of any number of messages that have never been expressed before. In many animal languages, the system is fixed to a limited number of messages.

Reflexivity, Cultural Transmission

- **Reflexivity**: We can use the communicative system to talk about the communicative system itself. Cf. most animal languages.
- **Cultural Transmission**: some aspects of system learned through communicative interaction with other users of the system. We learn languages from others.


Language Endangerment

- Human Languages Are Becoming Extinct
  - Of the more than 6,000 languages currently being spoken, fewer than half are likely to survive the next century.
Language Endangerment

- Of the 6,000 languages listed in Ethnologue (Grimes 1992) for which there are population figures,
  - 52% are spoken by less than 10,000 people;
  - 28% by less than 1,000; and
  - 83% are restricted to single countries, and so are particularly exposed to the policies of a single government.
- At the other end of the scale, 10 major languages, each spoken by over 109 million people, are the mother tongues of almost half (49%) of the world’s population. There is agreement among linguists who have considered the situation that over half of the world’s languages are moribund, i.e. not effectively being passed on to the next generation. We and our children, then, are living at the point in human history where, within perhaps two generations, most languages in the world will die out. (Adapted from the Manifesto of the Foundation for Endangered Languages, ibid #2, p.2.)

Language Trajectory

- 28% of languages have fewer than 1,000 speakers
- 52% of languages have fewer than 10,000 speakers

Global and Local

- Globalization is very importantly a relationship between the global and the local. The key issues often involve how the local fares as it interacts with the global.

Algonquian Language Family

- Words from some Algonquian Languages...

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Language</th>
<th>English Equivalent</th>
<th>Meaning</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Menominee</td>
<td>&quot;pigeon, partridge&quot;</td>
<td>small</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Menominee</td>
<td>&quot;quail, partridge&quot;</td>
<td>small</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Ojibwa</td>
<td>&quot;pigeon, partridge&quot;</td>
<td>small</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Shawan</td>
<td>&quot;pigeon, turkey, quail&quot;</td>
<td>small</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Apsahc</td>
<td>&quot;chase, turkey, quail, geese&quot;</td>
<td>word</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Proto-Algonquin</td>
<td>&quot;pigeon&quot;</td>
<td>*unknown</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

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Adapted from "The Woodland Culture of the Mississippian Lakes"
Numbers of Speakers: Algonquian

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>ALGONQUIAN LANGUAGES</th>
<th>MAJOR SPOKEN</th>
<th>NUMBER OF SPEAKERS (ESTIMATED)</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Algonquin</td>
<td>Ottawa, Ojibwa</td>
<td>75,000</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Cree</td>
<td>Ottawa, Ojibwa, South Dakota</td>
<td>66,000</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Micmac</td>
<td>Nova Scotia, New Brunswick</td>
<td>1,300</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Montagnais</td>
<td>Quebec, Ontario</td>
<td>2,000</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Ojibwa</td>
<td>Ontario, Wisconsin</td>
<td>2,000</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Eastern Algonquian</td>
<td>Ontario</td>
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</tr>
<tr>
<td>Lake Superior</td>
<td>Wisconsin, Minnesota</td>
<td>10,000</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Lake Winnipeg</td>
<td>Manitoba</td>
<td>10,000</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Woodland Cree</td>
<td>Saskatchewan</td>
<td>40,000</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Slavey</td>
<td>Northwest Territories</td>
<td>500</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Borrowings into English

- moose - Natick moos
- moose - Algonquian otchek
- muskrat - Natick musquash + 'rat' pemmican - Cree pemkîn
- skunk - Massachusetts squnck
- wapiti - Shawnee wapi 'white rump'
- squash - Massachusetts asko:o:tasquash
- moccasin - Natick mohkissin
- tomahawk - Algonquian tamahâk
- toboggan - Micmac toba:kan
- tobem - Ojibwa nînî te:m
- squaw - Massachusetts asko:o:tasquash
- wampum - Algonquian wampeage
- wickup - Fox wikiyapi
- wigwam - Abnaki wikwam
- 'caucus' - Algonquian cauwasaua 'counselor'
- Great Spirit - loan translation of Ojibwa kitchi manitou

Placenames

- Massachusetts, Michigan, Wisconsin
- Manhattan
- Milwaukee, Chicago, Wausau
- Mississippi

Ojibwe

- An Algonquian language spoken in Michigan, Wisconsin, Minnesota, Montana, Quebec, Ontario, Manitoba, Saskatchewan, Alberta and British Columbia.
- Also spelled Ojibwa, Ojibway, Chippewa
- Spoken in many dialects: Algonquin, Nipissing, Ojibwe, Mississauga, Odawa, Saulteaux, Oji-Cree, etc.

Ojibwe Dialects

Land and Language: Two (Niízh/Niízjin)
Three (Niswi vs. Nisin)

Isogloss Bundles

Social Interaction

Crucifix / Cross

Ojibwe Morphology: Derivation

- Geographical Terms
  - -(aa)gamaa, ‘pertaining to lakes’
    - waasaagamaa ‘the waves froth white on the lake’
    - zhaaboongamaa ‘the lake is navigable for its whole length’
  - -agonagaa, ‘pertaining to snow conditions’
    - zeseganaagonagaa ‘the snow is favorably textured for walking’
  - -izikwaa, ‘pertaining to ice conditions’
    - gaakaabizigwaa ‘the ice creaks & makes cracking noises’
    - ojigwaa ‘the ice is suspended over the water at breakup’

Derivation: Classifiers

- /-aabik-/ ‘inorganic solid’ (rock, glass, plastic)
  - dakwaabikizi ‘be short (something mineral)
- /-aakw-/ ‘organic solid’ (bone, tooth, horn)
  - dakwaakozi ‘be short (something stick or treelike)
- /-eg-/ ‘sheetlike’
  - dakwegizi ‘be short (something sheetlike)
- /-aabiig-/ ‘stringlike’
  - dakwaabiigizi ‘be short (something stringlike)
- /-minag-/ ‘berrylike’
  - *dakominagizi ‘be short (something berrylike)

Ojibwe Semantics

- Terms for people at various ages...
  - English
    - baby
    - boy girl
    - young man young woman
    - man woman
    - old man old woman
  - Ojibwe
    - abinojijens
    - gwiiwizens ikwezens
    - oshka na oshkiniijikwe
    - inini ikwe
    - akiwenzii mindimooye gichi-ahaa gichi-ikwe
    - The term for ‘year’ in Ojibwe is biboon, which also means ‘winter.’
**Ojibwe Morphology: Inflection**

- Ojibwe has a stunningly complex inflectional morphology for verbs, marking (partial list)...
  - subject [1s, 2s, 3s, 4s/p, 1p, 2p, 3p, 0s, 0p, X]
  - direct object [ditto]
  - tense (past, present, future)
  - aspect (completed or not; conjecture or not)
  - direction (towards speaker, away from, all around, etc.)
  - positive/negative
  - prepositional notions (like, so, from, to, as much, as many...)
  - completely different system for verbs in main clauses, vs subordinate clauses, vs commands

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**Language and Land**

**Petition on birchbark**

- In the month of January, 1849, a delegation of eleven Chippewas, from Lake Superior, presented themselves at Washington, who, amid other matters not well digested in their minds, asked the government for a retrocession of some portion of the lands which the nation had formerly ceded to the United States, at a treaty concluded at Lapointe, in Lake Superior, in 1842. They were headed by Oshcabawiss, a chief from a part of the forest-country, called by them Monomonecau, on the head-waters of the River Wisconsin.

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**Petition in Detail**

**Letter of Invitation**

**Writing among N.A. aboriginal languages**

- Came about through three avenues...
  - 1. introduced from the outside, often by missionaries
  - 2. created by native speakers, who modified systems developed by Europeans.
  - 3. developed by native speakers, after witnessing writing in a European language
Sequoyah

- Cherokee, inventor of the Cherokee syllabary
- Born: 1776 near Tuskegee, Tennessee
- Died: 1843, near Tyler, Texas.
- Monolingual, illiterate Cherokee speaker

The development & spread of writing...

- Working as a silversmith, Sequoyah was enjoined to sign his name to his works; later, as a soldier, he regretted the fact that Cherokee speakers weren't able to write letters home, send communications, etc.
- Sequoyah invented a syllabic system and gave a powerful demonstration of its effectiveness to a group of Cherokee leaders in New Echota, Georgia, in 1821
- Within a few months, thousands of Cherokees were literate in the system, have taught each other in informal contexts (there were no classrooms).

Using writing...

- “People wrote letters, kept accounts, and copied sacred songs and curing formulas. A weekly newspaper, The Cherokee Phoenix, was printed by the Cherokee national press as early as 1828.”
- The press was confiscated by the Georgia Guard in 1835, as part of a forced removal of Cherokees to Oklahoma.
- The press was immediately re-established in Indian territory (Oklahoma) in 1835, and between 1835-1861 produced 13,980,000 pages of books, tracts, pamphlets, and passages from the Bible... an Annual Almanac, The Cherokee Messenger, a bi-monthly religious magazine, as well as many other publications.

Source of letters...

- Many of Sequoyah's letters resemble English capital letters, but their values in Cherokee have no relationship to English capitals.
- Some letters appear to be borrowed from Greek.
- Some letters appear to be borrowed from the Cyrillic alphabet, used to write Slavic languages.
- Other letters are unrelated to the writing systems of any known languages.
Uses of the syllabary

- Since the Cherokee nation was dissolved and incorporated into the state of Oklahoma at the end of the 19th century, the Cherokee syllabary functioned only in two major areas of Cherokee life:
  - 1. Participation in religious activities
  - 2. The practice of Indian medicine
    - Cherokee doctors record their curing practices in handwritten Cherokee for his own future reference. Reading is for content, to make a record of given curing practices.

James Evans and Ojibwe Syllabics

- James Evans was born in 1801 in Hull, and named for his father, a merchant captain. Although eager to enter a similar career when he was young, James Evans was discouraged from the sea by the experience of sailing with his father, and was to return to his studies after only two voyages.

A missionary life...

- In 1820 Evan's family moved to La Chute, Québec, while James remained in England to try his hand at business. When he later emigrated in 1822, he taught at L'Orignal and met the woman he would wed, Mary Blithe Smith. After two years the couple moved to Augusta, Upper Canada, where James made the decision to enter into missionary work, teaching among the Ojibway Indians.

Writing in Ojibwe

- In 1827, James Evans received the responsibility of the mission post at Rice Lake. After a year there were some 40 native students, half of whom could read English. Evans himself was becoming familiar with the local languages, and wrote in Ojibwe, and in 1830 was preaching sermons in the local Ojibwe language. By 1831, Evans had produced an original orthography and the beginnings of a writing system for the native language to replace the only current representation for the language which was in the Latin script. As the Ojibwe were being taught both in English and in their own tongue, it was confusing for them to use the same script, especially as English was so different from Ojibwe.

Syllabics is born...

- Evans devised a new syllabic system, probably borrowing the idea from Sequoyah's system for Cherokee. Evans also used shorthand symbols he had learned in England.
- However, the new syllabic script was rejected by the Toronto Bible Society.

Norway House, Manitoba

- In 1840, after two years of expedition and missionary work around Lake Superior, Evans was appointed to the post of General Superintendent of the North West Indian missions. To take up his new post, he moved to Norway House, on the shores of Playgreen Lake about 650km north of Winnipeg, Manitoba, arriving there in August of 1840.
Thinking about Syllabics

- Evans was interested in sharing his Christianity with Cree people who traded at Norway House, but Cree traders only spent a very short time at the post before returning to the bush. So he needed a system that could be learned quickly.

James Frere

- There was a great interest in developing practical writing systems in the early 1800s.
- In 1837, James Frere developed a system using simplified symbols, which could all be made with a single stroke, for use with blind people.

Cree Syllabics

- So Evans invented a syllabic system that had simple symbols, and went further, by making his system extremely rational. Basically, each symbol represented a consonant + vowel combination.
- The consonant value was indicated by the shape of the character.
- The vowel was indicated by the orientation of the character.

Shapes and Orientations

- /e/ /i/ /o/ /a/
- /t/ /u/ /n/ /c/ /c/
- /p/ /v/ /\/ >/ <

Orientation II

- /e/ /i/ /o/ /a/
- k
- c
- m
- n
Writing /h/ (or glottal stop)

- The sound /h/ (or glottal stop in some dialects) is written as a separate character, "", as in:
  - mazina'ige ‘write’
  - Lr’a "Δ9
Finals are small characters used to represent consonants at the end of a syllable. There is an Eastern and a Western set. The Eastern are little versions of the 'a' series. The Western are special little symbols, involving a half-circle and a small stroke.

Dealing with w

- The sound /w/ has a special status in syllabics, being indicated with a dot that...
  - ... precedes the syllable it’s associated with in the Eastern tradition.
  - ... follows the syllable it’s associated with in the Western tradition.

Abwi ‘paddle’

1. pull out the /w/ and you have a – bi
2a. if using Eastern tradition, write: 
   \[\text{\textlangle} \cdot \text{\rangle}\]
2b. if using Western tradition, write: 
   \[\text{\langle} \wedge \cdot \text{\rangle}\]
Bakwezhigan ‘bread’

• Write this in Eastern...

• Write this in Western...

Punctuation

• The only punctuation character commonly used is that for a period, spelled .

• Ajidamoog wiisiniwag. ‘the squirrels are eating’

• Awenen niin?

Problems with Syllabics...

• Syllabics serves an extremely important function among northern Ojibwe and Cree people, in that it is used as the principal writing system.

• The biggest problem with Syllabics is that you must be fluent in the language in order to read it, because a single CV symbol can stand for four distinct syllables in Ojibwe...

Ojibwe Phonology: Southern Dialects

Consonant Phonemes

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Stops/aff, +vce</th>
<th>b</th>
<th>d</th>
<th>j</th>
<th>g</th>
</tr>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Stops/aff, -vce</td>
<td>p</td>
<td>t</td>
<td>ch</td>
<td>k</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Fricatives, +vce</td>
<td>z</td>
<td>zh</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Fricatives, -vce</td>
<td>s</td>
<td>sh</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>Nasals</td>
<td>m</td>
<td>n</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>Glides</td>
<td>w</td>
<td>y</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

• Vowel Phonemes

  • Short | a | i | o | e |
  • Long | aa | ii | oo |

Ojibwe Phonology: Northern Dialects

Consonants

| Stops/aff | p | t | ch | k | h |
| Fricatives | s/sh |
| Nasals | m | n |
| Glides | w | y |

• Vowels

  • Short | a | i | o | e |
  • Long | aa | ii | oo |
Relationship of Northern to Southern

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Southern</th>
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<th>Southern</th>
<th>Northern</th>
<th>English</th>
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<td>s</td>
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<td>sookihpon</td>
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<td>zh</td>
<td>sh</td>
<td>zhigwa</td>
<td>shikwa</td>
<td>and</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>sh</td>
<td>hsh</td>
<td>mishi</td>
<td>mhishi</td>
<td>firewood</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

This symbol stands for /bi/ in
- \(^{\wedge} \) `abi` ‘ANsg is sitting’

This symbol stands for /bii/ in
- \(^{\wedge} \wedge \) `abiitaw` ‘share a house with AN’

This symbol stands for /pi/ in
- \(^{\wedge} \) `ju` `baapi` ‘ANsg is laughing’

This symbol stands for /pii/ in
- \(^{\wedge} \wedge \) `apii` ‘when’

Diacritics to the Rescue

- Syllabics can be made fully phonemic in its representation with diacritics:
  - Use `\(^{\wedge}\)` before a “hard/voiceless” consonant
  - Put a dot over any syllabic when its vowel is long:
    \(^{\wedge} \) vs \(^{\wedge} \wedge \)

Problems with learning...

- The ambiguity in unpointed Syllabics would not be so much of a problem if it were not for the fact that Ojibwe is so endangered, and that so many people in the south do not speak the language, but want to learn.
- However, lots of aboriginal languages in Canada use syllabics as an act of identity, to distance their writing from English and French scripts.

The Origin & Identity of Syllabics

- Many Cree and Ojibwe people claim that Syllabics was not invented by James Evans:
  - Syllabics are characters attached with alphabetical sounds. Historians credit the invention of Syllabics in 1840 to James Evans, a Methodist Minister. Cree Legends hold a different version. Cree Legends indicates that the syllabic characters were a gift from Kisemanito (Creator) to the Cree people. Kisemanito is said to have given the characters to two Elders namely; Mistanaskowew and Machiminahtik. Mistanaskowew, Badger Bull, was from Western Canada while Machiminahtik, Hunting Rod, was from Eastern Canada. These two Elders received this gift of Syllabics at the same time but independently of each other. James Evans learned about Syllabics from these Elders. He used these Syllabics in the teaching of Christianity to Native People. (from a website)

Another Cree Account

  - According to the Montana Cree, the spirits came to one good man and gave him some songs. When he had mastered them, they taught him how to make a type of ink and then showed him how to write on white birch bark. He was told that he must not put down any bad words, for there was great power in his writing. Hence he must exercise every care in the subject matter that he wrote. For a long time, he possessed this ability to write and guarded his secret carefully.
The man grew old. Finally, another spirit came to him and gave him further instruction. This spirit wrote down the names or the initials of all the spirits. When that was done, the spirit showed the old man how to make a little book out of birch bark and how to fasten it onto a piece of wood. In this book, the old man wrote what amounted to a Cree Bible under the direction of the spirit. He recorded all of the things that happened from the time of Creation down to the present. He faithfully detailed all of the teachings of Ki-sei-men-to so that there was a record of how the Creator wanted his people to live properly. Toward the end of the instruction period, the spirit mentioned the Wind and said that the Wind was the last of the strong spirits. It can teach man many things, said the spirit, who also warned that the Wind can destroy. The old man put all this material together in his little birch-bark book and returned to his people. From time to time on his way home, he stopped and read all of the material.

When the old man returned to his camp, he taught the people how to read and write. The Cree were very pleased with their new accomplishment, for by now the white men were in this country. The Cree knew that the white traders could read and write, so now they felt that they too were able to communicate among themselves as well as did their white neighbors. More than that, they were particularly proud of this splendid record, directly from a spirit, who had dictated the teachings of Ki-sei-men-to, and that it was done in their own language.

The old man died. Before his death, however, he gave this book to one of his friends. He told the friend that the teachings were from the Creator and that the Wind was the last of the strong spirits. He told the friend that the Wind can teach many things, but also warned that the Wind can destroy. The friend put all this material together in his little birch-bark book and returned it to his people. From time to time on his way home, he stopped and read all of the material.

Many problems arise when one attempts to use a non-Roman script on a computer:
- You need a special font.
- There is rarely cross-platform compatibility.
- Keyboard layouts vary wildly.
- Characters often map to English punctuation, creating editing problems.
- There is usually no system-level support of your script and language.

"The Unicode Standard is a character coding system designed to support the worldwide interchange, processing, and display of the written texts of the diverse languages of the modern world. In addition, it supports classical and historical texts of many written languages." (from www.unicode.org)
The Problem of Obsolescence

- The year is 2045, and my grandchildren (as yet unborn) are exploring the attic of my house (as yet unbought). They find a letter dated 1995 and a CD-ROM (compact disk). The letter claims that the disk contains a document that provides the key to obtaining my fortune (as yet unearned).
- My grandchildren are understandably excited, but they have never seen a CD before—except in old movies—and even if they can somehow find a suitable disk drive, how will they run the software necessary to interpret the information on the disk? How can they read my obsolete digital document? [Jeff Rothenburg]

Electronic Media vs Petroglyphs

- Petroglyphs Provincial Park is located near Peterborough, Ontario. It is the site of a vast number of petroglyphs, which, according to archaeologists, were likely carved by Algonkian-speaking Aboriginal people between 600 and 1,100 years ago.

Technology and the local...

- According to a leading expert on electronic storage, in less than 10 years mankind will have the capability to store all of its knowledge on a cube that can fit in the palm of a hand. But what good will that do us if we can't access the information in 20 years?
- As we develop technology, we face many issues:
  - older data formats quickly become obsolete, because both the hardware and software (operating systems and software) used to read them are no longer available
  - text representation
  - audio representation
  - video representation
- Technology, which allows for globalization, potentially does a double-whammy on local information: it supplants it on one level, and damages the capacity to store it on another.
- But technology also greatly empowers people by allowing for the replication and distribution of materials.