

## *Chinook Songs*

by Franz Boas (1858-1942)

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## CHINOOK SONGS.

WHEN the traders of the Hudson Bay Company first entered that part of our continent which is now known as Oregon and Washington Territory, they found an enormous number of languages spoken in this district, which made intercourse with the Indians extremely difficult. The needs of the trade were such that a means of readily conversing with the natives of all parts of the country was necessary, and out of the clumsy attempts of the Indians and of the French and English traders to make themselves understood sprang a *lingua franca*, which is known as the Chinook jargon, and which has rapidly spread northward. At present it is spoken from Washington Territory to Lynn Channel, in Alaska; the older Indians only do not understand it. It is used as well in the intercourse between the Indians and whites as between members of tribes speaking different languages. [The jargon consists principally of English, French, Chinook (proper), Nutka, and Sahaptin words. The Chinook proper is spoken on the lower Columbia River, Sahaptin in the interior of Washington Territory, and Nutka on the west coast of Vancouver Island.] In course of time the number of English words contained in the jargon has increased, while the other elements have become proportionally less prevalent. The structure of the jargon, so far as it has any structure, shows certain characteristics of the Chinook.

In the early part of this century attempts were made by Catholic priests to compose hymns and sermons in this jargon, and this did not fail to increase its importance and to develop it into a better means of communication. Vocabularies and collections of phrases were published from time to time, but it is not generally known that the jargon is even used by native poets.

My attention was first called to this fact when I saw a number of Indians from the northwest coast of America, who were exhibited in Europe. Later on I found a song printed in a third-class novel, "For Love and Bears," published a few years since in Chicago. When visiting British Columbia in 1886, I paid some attention to this subject, and principally to the origin of these songs. The following remarks and collections are the result of this study:—

The Indians are at present in the habit of living part of the year in Victoria, Vancouver, or New Westminster, working in various trades: in saw-mills and canneries, on wharves, as sailors, etc. In the fall they go to Puget Sound hop-picking. At these places members of numerous tribes gather, who use Chinook as a means of communication. They have their own quarter in every city. The Indian is very hospitable, and particularly anxious to make a display of

his wealth to visitors. Thus it happens that their little shanties are frequently places of merriment and joy; invitations are sent out, a great table is spread, and whiskey helps to stimulate the humor until the day ends in stupid drunkenness. It is at such feasts that songs frequently originate. If they happen to strike the fancy of the listening crowd they are taken up, and after a lapse of a few years known all over the country.]

[Here are some songs of this class.] I have to remark first that the spelling is not strictly phonetic. [English words, except when modified by the natives, are printed in italics, and spelled in English form. The exploded *k*, which is not used by the whites speaking Chinook, is rendered by *k'*, the exploded *l* by *tl*. The guttural *x*, which the English ear does not distinguish from the ordinary *k*, is printed *k*. The German *ch* in Bach is rendered by the letter *q*.]

- |  |   |
|--|---|
| 1. Tlaksta <i>sweetheart</i> haiu patlem?<br>Naika <i>sweetheart</i> haiu patlem!<br>Wëk maika yūtl kopa naika,<br>Wëk maika yūtl kopa naika,<br>Wëk maika yūtl kopa naika!<br>Naika kumtuks kada maika! | Whose sweetheart is very drunk?<br>My sweetheart is very drunk!<br>You do not like me,<br>You do not like me,<br>You do not like me!<br>I know you! |
| 2. Ka'nowē <i>sun</i> naika kelai'!<br>Saia ē'li naika mitlait alta.   | I cry always.<br>Far away is my country now.  |
| [ A great many of these songs refer to the parting of friends and greetings sent to those staying at home. ]   |   |
| 3. Kakoa naika telhum memalos<br><i>Steamboat</i> tlatowa, naika kelai.  | Because my relations are dead,<br>(When) the steamboat leaves, I cry.   |
| 4. <i>Good-bye, barkeeper!</i> naika tla'towa<br>alta okok <i>sun</i> .<br>Dja! Potlatch pätlem <i>cocktail</i> naika.   | Good-bye, barkeeper! I am going now<br>to-day.<br>Come! give me a full cocktail.  |
| 5. Tlōnas kada naika tumtum.<br>Naika nanitch <i>Godsroad</i> tlatowa<br>Pe Chali mitlait. Tlaqauya naika.   | I do not know, how my heart feels.<br>I have seen Godsroad (a steamer) leave,<br>And Charlie on board. I am very un-<br>happy.                      |
| 6. Tlōnas kada naika tumtum<br>Kwansum naika tiki nanitch maika.<br>Atlki naika wawa tlaqauya. Ya ā'ya.  | I do not know, how my heart feels.<br>Always I wish to see you,<br>(But) soon I (must) say good-bye. Ya<br>ā'ya.                                    |
| 7. Hayaleha, hayaleha, hayaleha!<br>Spos maika nanitch naika telhum<br>Wëk saia naika memalos alta.<br>Kōpa Kunspa eli. Yaya.  | Hayaleha, hayaleha, hayaleha!<br>If you see my friends<br>(Say), that I had almost died<br>In New Westminster [Queensborough].<br>Yaya.             |
| 8. Ya kanowē <i>sun</i> naika <i>sick</i> tumtum.<br>Kopa naika man kopa California.   | Ya, always I long<br>For my husband in California.  |

The following song has been composed by a Nutka sailor who was left behind by a sealing-schooner in Alaska : —

9. Haias lēlē naika *sick* tumtum,      A long time I felt unhappy,  
Pe okok ~~sax~~ elip haias k'al,      But to-day is the hardest day,  
Kada Entelplaize yaqka *leave* naika.      For the Enterprise has left me.

The greatest number of songs of my collection are songs of love and jealousy, such as are made by Indian women living in the cities, or by rejected lovers. ]

10. Ya, tlōs kakoa !      Ya, that is good !  
Ya, tlōs kakoa !      Ya, that is good !  
Kaltas tlōtchman      That worthless woman  
Wēk tiki naika.      Does not like me.
11. Haias tlaqauya      Very unhappy I was  
Kunamokst naika oleman,      With my wife,  
Kopa Bictoli.      In Victoria.  
Hēlo tlaksta      Nobody  
Wawa tlaqauya nesaika      Said good-day to us  
Kopa Bictoli.      In Victoria.
12. Yāya.      Yaya.  
Spos maika iskum tlōtchman      When you take a wife,  
Yaya      Yaya.  
Wēk maika soleks naika.      Don't become angry with me.  
Kaltas kopa naika.      I do not care.
13. Ka Chali tlatowa alta ?      Where is Charlie going now ?  
Ka Chali tlatowa alta ?      Where is Charlie going now ?  
Ky'elapai nanitch      He comes back to see me,  
Naika tumtum.      I think.
14. Naika nanitch *Johnny* tlatowa      I have seen Johnny go  
Pē naika tumtum yeke mitlait *house*      And I think he is at home  
Naika haias pelton tumtum kakoa.      I am very foolish to think so.
15. *Good-bye, oh my dear Charlie !*      Good-bye, oh my dear Charlie !  
Spōs maika iskum tlōtchman,      When you take a wife,  
Wēk maika ts'ēpe naika.      Don't forget me.
16. Ikta mamuk, naika *sister*,      Why, oh my sister,  
Wawa naika ! maika *mash* naika ?      Tell me, why will you cast me off ?  
Ya ūn aya !      Ya ūn aya !
17. Ikta maika tiki ?      What do you want ?  
Kwansum maika soleks.      You are always cross.  
Maika ōleman,      Your old wife  
Hēlo skukum alta.      Is very weak now.
18. Ikta mamuk Billy alta ?      What is Billy doing now ?  
Yeke tlatowa *beerhouse*.      He is going to the beerhouse.  
Boston wawa : *Get out o' way !*      The American says : Get out of the  
way !  
Yeke tlatowa. Haiu kelai.      He goes and cries aloud.

19. Tlōnas kada naika tumtum  
Kopa *Johnny*.  
Okok tenas man, mamuk pelton  
naika.  
Aya.
- I don't know, how I feel  
Towards Johnny.  
That young man makes a fool of me.  
Aya.
20. Kyiti *Apples* haias tlaqauya  
Okok kōl eli.  
Tlōnas tlaksta isikum yeke ?  
*Hope steamboat*.
- Kittie Apples is very unhappy  
This winter.  
Who will take her away ?  
The steamboat Hope.
21. Kaltas kopa naika,  
Spōs maika hēhē naika,  
*Dirty boy !*
- I do not care,  
If you laugh at me  
Dirty boy !
22. Kaq mesaika tlatowa alta ?  
Potlatch lē'mā !  
Tlaqauya ! *George Bell !*
- Where are you going now ?  
Shake hands !  
Good-bye ! George Bell !
23. Haias tlaqauya naika  
Spōs *steamboat* tchā'ko yakwa.  
Tlōnas naika kē'lai  
Spōs *steamboat* tlatowa.
- I am very glad  
When the steamboat comes here.  
I think I shall cry  
When the steamboat leaves.
24. Tawun gūd naika tlatowa,  
Naika nanitch naika *sister*,  
Naika tlōs tumtum.
- I went to town,  
I saw my sister,  
My heart was glad.
25. Tlōs maika tchā'ko ahiya ya !  
Pō'latli alta aya ā !  
Naika tiki wā'wa ! aya.
- Oh, come here  
To-night !  
I want to speak to you !
26. Kanowē *sun* naika kelai.  
Saia naika mitlait alta.
- Always I cry,  
For I live far away.
27. *White man* alta kopa maika man,  
*Mary*.  
Dja ! Tlōs kā'koa maika māsh  
naika.  
Kaltas kopa naika alta.  
Ya aya aya.
- A white man is now your husband,  
Mary.  
Ha, cast me off thus !  
I do not care now.  
Ya aya aya.
28. Wēk tlaksta mamuk sick naika tum-  
tum.  
*Annie* mamuk kakoa.
- Nobody can grieve me !  
That is Annie's work.
29. Tlōs kapet maika tiki naika alta iaur.  
Wēk atiki weqt maika nanitch ka  
naika kuli.
- All right, if you do not like me any more  
now.  
You shall not see where I go.
30. Dja ! Kada maika tumtum ?  
Kwansum maika soleks naika.  
Dja ! Tlōs delē't mash naika.  
*I don't care* alta. Ya.
- Dja ! What do you think now ?  
You are always cross with me.  
Dja ! You had better desert me alto-  
gether.  
I don't care now. Ya.

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|--|--|
| 31. Spōs <i>steamboat</i> tlatowa<br>Wawa nesaika <i>good-bye, Jimmy.</i><br>Tlaqauya Billy tumtum.  | When the steamboat leaves,<br>Say good-bye, Jimmy!<br>Billy will feel very sad.  |
| 32. <i>My dear Annie,</i><br>Spōs maika māsh <i>Jimmy Star,</i><br>Wēk maika <i>forget</i><br>Kada yeke tlaqauya tumtum.<br>Kopa maika.            | My dear Annie,<br>If you cast off Jimmy Star,<br>Do not forget<br>How much he likes<br>You.  |
| 33. Kuli, kuli, tenas taii!<br>Kuli, kuli, tenas taii!<br>Tlaqauya maika, tlaqauya.<br>Aya, aya, a.  | Go, go, little chief!<br>Go, go, little chief!<br>Fare you well, farewell.<br>Aya, aya, a.   |
| 34. <i>Ah, you my dear!</i><br><i>Where have you been all day?</i><br>Kakoa Billy wawa naika.  | Ah, you my dear!<br>Where have you been all day?<br>Thus Billy said to me.   |
| 35. Aya, aya!<br>Elip naika nanitch<br>Sitka mesaika ēli.<br>Kaltas spōs naika memalos<br>Yakwa ēlip.  | Aya, aya!<br>I have seen<br>Sitka your country.<br>Never mind, if I die<br>Now soon.   |
| 36. Qat kawawē'tl! <i>my dear!</i><br>Wawa tlaqauya<br>Naika alta.   | I broke down! my dear!<br>Say good-bye!<br>To me now.  |
| 37. Kaltas kopa naika<br>Spōs maika mash naika.<br>Haiu puty <i>boys</i> kuli kopa <i>town.</i><br>Atlki weqt naika iskum.<br>Wēk k'al kopa naika. | I don't care<br>If you desert me.<br>Many pretty boys are in the town.<br>Soon I shall take another one.<br>That is not hard for me! |
| 38. Dja! Tlōs kakoa Billy! Aya.<br>Iskum <i>Chinaman</i> Kiddie! ya ā'ya.<br>Yeke <i>way up</i> kopa maika.  | Dja! That is all right! Billy! Aya.<br>Take Chinese Kiddie! ya ā'ya.<br>She is far better than you.                                  |

These songs convey a better idea of the character and life of the Indians living in the cities of British Columbia than a long description could do. It is a remarkable fact that these ditties, though frequently alluding to a single event, and notwithstanding their insignificance, remain in use for many years. The greater part of those I have collected was composed by women. The composer either makes a new tune to each song or uses old well-known tunes. It is worth remarking that songs in the native languages are also conveyed from tribe to tribe. Thus the Tsimshian sing many Haida songs, although they do not understand the meaning of the words, and the same songs are found still farther south. It may be that this custom of borrowing songs accounts for the great number of tunes, the text of which is only a meaningless burden. I give here the tunes of three of the above songs, two of which have the same tune.

*Moderato.*  
No. 34. 

Ah you, my dear, where have you been all day? *Kakoa Billy wawa nalka.*

*Moderato.*  
No. 33. 


Ku - li ku - li tenas tai - i ku - li ku - li tenas



tai - i, tla - qau - ya mai - ka a - ya a - ya a.

*Moderato.*  
No. 24. 

Ta - wun gūd nai - ka tla - to - wa nai -



ka na-nitch nai - ka sis - ter — nai - ka ——— tlōs tum-tum.

The Chinook songs are also of some interest from a philological point of view. In some instances the natives add certain elements of their own language to the Chinook. In song 24, for instance, we find in the first line the syllable *gūd*. This is Haida, and means: *on*; the Haida saying, I go *on* the town, *i. e.*, on the street.

The first word of song 36 is Tlingit, while the rest of the song is Chinook. Finally I give a song in Tlingit, the last line of which is Chinook.

Tlēt ta koé'sa aq torū' tēnutē' yaridā't. Nothing shall bother my mind now.  
Tc 'es ī renakaré' an qat kuga nā. Don't speak to me. I wish I were dead.  
Naika sister. With my sister.

## GLOSSARY.

Following is a list of the Chinook words occurring in these songs; the English words printed in italics are not included in the list. It is of interest to see that not more than seventy-four words occur in the collection of thirty-nine songs:—

alta, now.  
atki, later on.  
Boston, an American.  
delé't, right away.  
dja! interjection, go on!  
ē'li, land.  
ē'lip, first.

haias, large, very.  
haiu, many.  
hē'hē, to laugh, to mock.  
hē'lō, nothing.  
hē'lō tlaaksta, nobody.  
ikta, what, something.  
iskum, to take.



kada, how.	pē, and.
kā'koa, the same, thus, because.	pe'lton, foolish.
k'al, difficult, heavy.	pō'latli, dark.
kaltas, good for nothing.	potlatch, to give.
ka'nōwē, all.	putty, pretty.
kapet, to finish, that is all.	saia, far.
kaq, ka, where.	sister, brother, sister.
kelai, to cry.	skukum, strong.
kōl ē'li, winter (cold country).	soleks, angry.
kopa, in, on, to, etc.	spōs, supposed, if.
kuli, to walk, to go.	sun, day, sun.
kumtuks, to know.	taii, chief.
kunamokst, together.	tawun, town.
Kunspa, Queensborough (New West- minster).	tchā'kō, to come.
kwansum, always.	telhum, people, relatives.
ky'e'lapai, to return.	tenas, small, young.
lē'lē, a long time.	tiki, to like.
lē'ma, hand.	ts'ē'pē, to forget.
maika, you (sing.).	tumtum, mind, to think.
mamuk, to make.	tlaksta, who.
māsh, to throw away.	tlaqau'ya, happy, unhappy.
me'malos, dead.	tla'towa, to walk.
mesai'ka, you (plur.).	tlōnas, I do not know.
mitlait, to live, to remain, to be.	tlōs, good, imperative.
naika, I.	tlōtchman, woman, wife.
nanitch, to see.	wā'wa, to speak.
nesaika, we.	wēk, not.
okok, this, that.	weqt, more.
ō'leman, old man, old woman, husband, wife.	yakwa, iaur, here.
pā'tlem, full, inebriated.	yeke, yaqka, he.
	yūtl, glad.

*Franz Boas.*