Texts in Chinook Jargon collected by Melville Jacobs:
14. "The Origin of Death**"**
Told by Coquille Thompson, an Upper Coquille Athabaskan
Put into "northern" dialect; spelling standardized
by David Douglas Robertson, PhD[1]

1. Tlaska mitlait;[2] tenas-sayaa, tlaska hous.[3] Wel, iht
They lived there; not far apart, their houses were. Well, the one

tilikum[4] yaka mitlait iht tenas-man; yaka, okok[5] sayaa,[6] mitlait iht
person had one boy-child; he, that one farther off, had one

tenas-man. Wel, iht man yaka tenaas, okok chako-sik; wel,
boy-child. Well, one man's kid, that one got sick; well,

tenaas, tl'onas mokst sun yaka sik; alta yaka mimaloos, tenas-man.
the kid, maybe two days he was sick; then he died, the boy-child did.

(ii) Wel, okok man skookum[7] sik-tumtum. Yaka klai. Wel, yaka
Well, that man was awfully sad. He cried. Well, he

---

1 See end of story for a guide to "Spelling rules".
2 **Tlaska mitlait** is a real classic story-opener in Chinook Wawa. You don't need to know who **tlaska** 'they' is (you'll find out). And this **mitlait**, the word for 'be (located someplace)', is being used in one of its other common meanings, 'be there'.
3 **Tenas-sayaa, tlaska hous** literally means 'a little-far, their houses were'. Because we're already talking about where everybody lived, this expression winds up meaning that their houses were 'a little far apart' from each other.
4 **Iht tilikum:** because **iht** 'one; the one particular one' is here, we can tell that **tilikum** isn't being used in its other meanings of 'people; family'.
5 Coquelle Thompson sometimes uses **okok** in an unusual way, as a pronoun 'this one; that one'. You'll see more examples of this as we read through the story, and they'll show that this odd **okok** can refer either to people or to inanimate things.
6 Adjectives and adverbs in CW can often be used in a "comparative" sense, so this **sayaa** means 'farther away'.
7 Like a lot of other CW adjectives, **skookum** can be used as an adverb too. Here it means 'powerfully; extremely'.

mash[8] Ø[9] kopa ilahi,[10] yaka mamook-ihpooi okok ilahi. Wel,
put it [the body] into the ground, he covered up that place. Well,

k'ilapai[11] kopa hous, yaka sik-tumtum.
going back home, he was sad.

2. Wel, alta lakit sun[12] yaka tlatawa kopa Kayooti[13] Jim,[14] yaka
Well, then on the fourth day he went to Coyote Jim, he

tlatawa-nanich.[15] Yaka tl'ap kopa[16] hous. Wel okok man yaka
went visiting. He got to the house. Well that man he

wawa, "Tloosh,[17] tilikum mimaloos,[18](ii) tloosh k'ilapai[19] kwinum
said, "How about, people who die, should return on the fifth

sun, okok tilikum mimaloos; okok k'ilapai[20] kwinum sun." day,
those people who die; those ones can return on the fifth day."

---

8 **Mash** can mean not just 'throw; throw away' but also 'leave (a place or thing); put (down)'.
9 Here we have the classic "silent it" object of Chinook Wawa. This one is really interesting because it refers to the dead body of the son, who just previously was being referred to with the living-humans pronoun **yaka**!
10 **Ilahi** has a number of meanings. In this story, we'll see it as 'ground/dirt', 'place', and 'space/room'.
11 This **k'ilapai** has no subject, so it works like an English "present participle", '(while) going...'
12 In Chinook Wawa, any time noun can be used all by itself (without **kopa** 'on') like an adverb, telling the time when something happened. So here we have 'on the fourth day'. Later in the story you'll often see 'on the fifth day'.
13 Coquelle Thompson uses **Kayooti** for 'coyote', as do BC speakers. The usual word in southern areas like the Siletz Reservation where he lived would be **t'alapas**.
14 **Kopa Kayooti Jim** (literally 'to Coyote Jim') is the usual Chinook Wawa way of saying 'to Coyote Jim's place/house'.
15 **Tlatawa-nanich** (literally 'go-see') is the common expression for '(go) visit'.
16 **Tl'ap kopa** (literally 'get/find to') is a normal way to say 'reach; arrive at'.
17 Starting with this **tloosh**, we have another sequence where Coquelle Thompson's CW is kind of unusual. I'm taking this **tloosh** as something like the usual command/suggestion marker. (We might expect **tloosh pos** here.)
18 To make as much sense as I can out of this unusual sentence without changing anything, I'm interpreting **tilikam mimaloos** as a normal CW relative clause, 'people who die'. I feel like the recurrence of this expression several words later supports this idea. What do you think?
19 We would usually expect **tloosh (pos) tlaska k'ilapai** for the meaning that the storyteller seems to have in mind here, 'they should return'.
20 In the context, I take this **k'ilapai** as a somewhat hypothetical 'will return / can return'.

Kakwa[21] yaka wawa kopa Kayooti Jim.
That's what he said to Coyote Jim.

3. Wel Kayooti Jim yaka heilo k'ilapai[22] ikta[23] wawa.
Well Coyote Jim he didn't give back any kind of words.

Wel, leili pi Kayooti Jim yaka k'ilapai-wawa, "Yakwaa
Well, it was a long time and (then) Coyote Jim he answered, "Here

maika wawa tilikum k'ilapai, pos[24] kwinum sun
are you saying people will return, so that on the fifth day

mimaloos[25] k'ilapai?" "Wel, kakwa naika tiki[26] wawa."
the dead will come back?" "Well, that is what I'm trying to say."

(ii) "Wel, naika tilikum, naika wawa maika: Pos kwinum sun
"Well, my friend, I ask you: If on the fifth day

tilikum k'ilapai, ka atlki maika mitlait?
people come back, where are you going to live?

Atlki pos Ø[27] kwinum sun k'ilapai, heilo ilahi![28]
In the future if (they) come back on the fifth day, there'll be no room!

---

21 **Kakwa** is literally 'in this way; like that'. When used with **wawa**, the best English translation is usually 'that's what he said', etc.

22 **K'ilapai** here has the sense of 'returning / giving back' something. We might expect **mamook-k'ilapai**, but there's no confusion about the meaning here. The storyteller may have had the common expression **k'ilapai-wawa** 'answer' in mind; we see exactly that, a few words later.

23 Another important use of **ikta** 'what' is as an adjective, 'some kind of'.

24 This **pos** seems to be the verbal purpose marker 'for; in order to; so that'.

25 Thompson's use of **mimaloos** 'dead; die' as a noun 'dead people' is kind of new to us in CW, but we should note that several of the regional tribal languages, such as Lower Chehalis Salish, seem to have the same metaphorical usage. Besides that, certain already known phrases like **mimaloos-ilahi** 'cemetery' are evidence that **mimaloos** can indeed be a noun.

26 **Tiki** 'want' can often mean 'try to'.

27 The lack of a pronoun for 'they' here, symbolized by the **Ø**, is unexpected.

28 **Heilo ilahi,** literally 'no ground', is a mighty useful expression for 'no room!' Remember that you don't always have to say a word for 'there is...'

Tilikum kopit kaaaakwa mitwhit,[29] ...
People will be juuuuust staaaanding aroooouuuund,...

WE GOT THIS FAR ON 9.12.2020

...hayoo-heilo-mukmuk;[30] weik-kata maika moosum, heilo ilahi."
...starving; you won't be able to (lie down &) sleep, there'll be no room."

(iii) Kákwa[31] Kayooti Jim yaka wawa kopa okok man:
So Coyote Jim he said to that man:

"Wel, alta kwinum sun heilo k'ilapai, okok mimaloos,
"Well, now on the fifth day they won't come back, those dead ones,

heilo k'ilapai kwinum sun."[32]
there'll be no coming back on the fifth day."

4. Wel, alta Kayooti Jim yaka tenaas yaka sik, alta yaka[33]
Well, now Coyote Jim's child was sick, then he [SIC]

mimaloos. Wel, alta Kayooti Jim skookum[34] sik-tumtum. Wel, alta
died. Well, now Coyote Jim was mighty sad. Well, now

---

29 As some of the members of our Saturday study group observe, Coquelle Thompson pretty likely was making some kind of gesture while he said this. Chinook Wawa speakers are famous for waving their hands around. His expression **kopit kaaaakwa mitwhit**, literally 'only like-that stand', also involves the classic CW voooowel leeeengthening for dramatic effect. So it means 'just staaaanding aroooouuuund', unable to move or do anything!

30 **Hayoo-heilo-mukmuk** is a very interesting and fluent use of Chinook Wawa. **Heilo mukmuk** is literally '(there's) no food' or 'to be without food', and **hayoo-** makes it an ongoing situation, so all together the phrase means 'starving'.

31 **Kakwa** can seem like it has a big variety of unpredictable meanings. To help out, we can look at the difference between stressed **kákwa** versus unstressed **kakwa**. Unstressed **kakwa** is usually a preposition meaning 'like; as'. (See footnote 46 for an interesting other use.) But the story we're reading contains mostly stressed **kákwa,** which is a verb. The two main uses of stressed **kákwa** can be translated into English as:
#1 'that's how; in that way; being like that' (and as 'that's what', when used with **wawa** 'speak' or **tumtum** 'think') and
#2 'so; for that reason', with a synonym being **kopa okok** ('for that'; you'll see it later in this story).

32 The start of this sentence is straight Chinook Wawa, with a verb followed by the subject 'those dead ones', but this last phrase oddly has no subject. So it winds up sounding like a typical Coyote / Creator / Transformer thing to say in this type of traditional story: '(There'll be) no coming back...'

33 We know that the child who died was a son, from the start of this story.

34 **Skookum** 'strong' can be used as an adverb, so here we have something like the informal English 'mighty'.

yaka mash[35] kopa ilahi.[36] Kákwa, yaka tlatawa tlahani, sik-tumtum;
he buried it (the body). Being like that, he went out, upset;

kopa ilahi[37] yaka fal dawn.[38] (ii) Wel, alta chako lakit sun.[39]
right to the ground he dropped. Well, now it got to be the fourth day.

Yaka pardner[40] mitlait tenas-sayaa. Wel yaka tlatawa kopa okok
His pardner lived a little ways off. Well he went to that

man yaka hous.
man's house.

5. Wel yaka wawa, "Naika tiki[41] naika tenaas k'ilapai.
Well he said, "I want my kid (to come back).

Wel lakit sun alta; tumaala kwinum sun. Kákwa naika tiki[42] naika
Well it's the fourth day now; tomorrow is the fifth day. So I want my

tenaas k'ilapai kwinum sun. Kákwa naika tiki.
kid coming back on the fifth day. That's what I want.

(ii) Weik-kata naika moosum, naika sik-tumtum.[43]
I can't sleep, (because) I'm (too) sad.

---

35 There's a "silent it" here, reflecting the fact the the son is no longer alive.

36 **Mash kopa ilahi** is the usual Chinook Wawa way to say 'bury'. Used in its more literal sense, it was also remembered by Grand Ronde tribal elders as a crowd's yelled suggestion of what to do with a drunk and disorderly person, who would be tied up and thrown into a dry well!

37 **Kopa ilahi yaka fal dawn** uses a neat CW grammar trick of moving one part of the sentence "up front" to emphasize it. Here we have an adverb 'to the ground' put up front, implying that Coyote Jim was so very sad that he couldn't stand up. (Without any special emphasis, you'd say something like **yaka fal dawn kopa ilahi**.)

38 **Fal dawn** is the northern dialect CW way to say 'fall'. Coquelle Thompson's original southern-dialect wording was **yaka tl'ooh**.

39 Another way to understand this sentence would be 'Well now the fourth day came', if you see it as a classic CW intransitive with the subject placed last.

40 **Pardner** is a new word in our knowledge of CW, but we can figure that lots of Jargon speakers knew it, because this language was always taking in a lot of informal English expressions.

41 Here is another sentence where we would usually expect **tiki pos** 'want (it to be) that'.

42 And here is another place where **tiki pos** would be more expected.

43 As one of our study group members rightly noted, it would be good to translate this **sik-tumtum** as 'too sad'. That would reflect CW's habit of only implying the concept of excessive degree 'too'.

Alta kopa okok,[44] naika chako nanich maika, naika sik-tumtum.
Now because of this, I came to see you, I'm grieving.

Pos k'ilapai kopa kwinum sun, mimaloos tilikum, kakwa naika
For dead people to come back on the fifth day, that's what I

tiki alta."
want now."

6. Alta okok man yaka k'ilapai-wawa, "Wel, yakwaa naika
Now that man he answered, "Well, here I've

chako-tli'il alta! *{bug}*[45] Naika kakwa[SIC][46]-kopit-sik-tumtum;
turned black now! I've pretty much gotten over my sadness;

alta naika tumtum tloosh." (ii) Wel, alta okok man wawa,
now my heart is fine." Well, now that man said,

"Maika patlach okok wawa[47] kopa naika; wel, ikta maika wawa,
"You gave that talk to me; well, what you said,

okok deleit. Naika chako-tli'il alta *{bug}*; alta chako-la."[48]
that's real. I've turned black now; now it's become the law."

---

44 **Kopa okok**: here is the synonym of stressed **kákwa,** 'for that (reason); therefore; this is why'.

45 Melville Jacobs's publication of this story puts this unexplained English word {*bug}* into the flow of the Chinook Wawa story. From Coquelle Thompson's own telling of this same story in his native Athabaskan (Dene) language, in the book "Pitch Woman and Other Stories", we learn that the idea here may have been a comparison with cockroaches (2007:234, 294). Another book, "Badger and Coyote Were Neighbors", shows us that another western Oregon tribe, the Clackamas Chinookans, have a similar story that involves a horrible centipede-like bug (2000:114-115).

46 Here I suggest we see a less common third use of **kakwa**, as a prefix 'sort of'. **Kakwa-kopit-sik-tumtum** would be good Chinook Wawa grammar, giving us 'pretty much finished (being) sick-hearted'.

47 **Wawa** is not just a verb 'say; talk; speak', but also a noun 'a talk; some words'.

48 The reasoning here is that due to Coyote Jim's previous decision, his unnamed friend has already been transformed, that is, he has already become what he and his people are going to be forever. (That's just what happens in this kind of traditional story.) So now it's literally impossible for his friend to stop being a bug, and it's impossible for dead people to return.

Spelling rules:

Stress:

- Assumed to be almost always on the first syllable.
- Any stress coming later in a word is indicated by a 2-vowel spelling (examples *tanaas, sayaa, la-miyai*).

Words from Canadian/Métis French: Spelled as close to the French original as possible without deviating from common Chinook Jargon pronunciations. You may be surprised how much certain words differ from their Canadian French source! (Examples *lamiyai* 'old lady' from French 'la vieille', *ninamoo* 'turnip' from French 'le navot'.)

Indigenous sounds: most Chinuk Wawa words are from Pacific NW Native languages, so you'll need to know their proper pronunciations.

- The "slurpy L" is spelled *tl* (examples *tlaska, patlach*). NOTE: Many BC Indigenous/elder speakers vary here between saying a simple slurpy-L & having a slight "t" (or even "k") sound before it.
- Apostrophe ('):
  - After a vowel = glottal stop [ʔ] (examples *tiyaa'wit, k'o'*).
  - With a consonant, forms a "popping" sound (examples *k'ow, tl'onas*).
- Underlined consonants are made in the back of the mouth (examples *kata, tlahani*).
- The combination *wh* is like the careful/older pronunciation "HW" at the start of English "what", "why", "which", etc. -- not a plain "W" sound (examples *mitwhit, tlwhap*).

Vowels:

- Single vowels *a, e, i, o* are said generally as in French / English (examples *aha, dlet, hihi, O!*), but *u* is reserved for the schwa sound as in English "sun" and "chuck". NOTE: In BC Indigenous/elders' speech, stressed *a* is frequently /æ/ as in English "ash" (examples: *yaka, hayaas*).
- Two-vowel spellings (diphthongs) are *ai* as in English "eye" / French "taille", *ei* as in English "hey" / French "vieille", *oo* as in English "boo", *ou* or *ow* as in English "house", "how". NOTE: In BC Indigenous/elders' speech, *e & ei* are often said as *i* (examples: *dlet ~ dlit*, *leili ~ lili*), and *o* is often pronounced as *oo* (examples: *spos ~ spoos ~ poos*, *tl'onas ~ tl'oonas*).
- Wherever you see a *y* or a *w*, those are not vowels but consonants, as in English "yes", French "yeux", and English "we".
- *Don't read this :)* I try to avoid most 3-vowel & 4-vowel sequences (thus **haioo*, **mouich*, etc.), as they are confusing to English-readers & would lead French-readers to strange pronunciations.

Consonants: generally said as in English, except for the rules above.

Hyphens are used when two or more words combine to form an idiomatic meaning (examples *kakwa-spos, tanaas-yaka-tanaas*).

Traditional Chinook Jargon spellings have influenced my choices. Many learners are familiar with these, from the classic dictionaries, from BC place names, and from BC English words like *skookum* & *saltchuck*. I'm trying to write CJ that's both recognizable (which traditional spellings should be honoured for), and easy to pronounce well (which they're not wonderful at). Part of my strategy is to change similar-looking traditional spellings, so they're more distinct from each other. Examples –

- Traditional <*nesika*> 'we, us, our' versus <*mesika*> 'you (plural), your' have been confusing English-readers for 150 years. So I spell these *nesaika* & *masaika*.
- The traditional <*wake*> 'not; no!' versus <*weght*> 'also; again; some more' also have a long history of mix-ups, even though they've never sounded similar! So I spell these *weik* & *wuht*, to reduce confusion.