

Community-Based Lexicography

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The topic of lexicography generates interesting and diverse opinions and emotions about languages, not only within academics but also among the very people whose heritage languages are being preserved or, in some cases, revitalized. Some speakers and learners of heritage languages do not relate to linguistic terms found in academic works, but at the same time, junior dictionaries do not contain enough linguistic information to satisfy the academics. Can these issues be resolved?

There are many types of dictionaries, grammars, and phrase books available for heritage languages. Some examples of dictionaries are 1) CD ROM--*Chinantec Project CD ROM* (Merrifield & Anderson 2000); 2) topical-- *Dictionary of the Dena'ina Athabaskan Language* (Kari 1995); 3) unabridged--*Koyukon Dictionary* (Jetté & Jones 2000); 4) abridged--*Gwich'in Junior Dictionary* (Peter 1979); 5) nouns--*Van Tat Gwich'in Gijik Noun Dictionary* (Montgomery 2000); 6) verb--*Tlingit Verb Dictionary* (Story, Naish 1973); and 7) technical--*Analytical Lexicon of Navajo* (Young & Morgan 1992).

Below are some opinions about what a dictionary should contain from academics and from those who are of heritage language ancestry and are interested in learning to speak their respective language. Some overlapping of opinions may occur. The first group consists of Gwich'in bilingual teachers, who were participating in a language workshop in Fort Yukon in 1995. The second group includes the participants in the *Athabaskan Languages Conference & Workshop on Athabaskan Lexicography* held in Fairbanks, Alaska, June 16-18, 2002.

In 1995 I went to Fort Yukon, Alaska, which is about 150 air miles from Fairbanks, and co-taught Gwich'in language-specific courses for bilingual teachers. Gwich'in is one of the Athabaskan languages spoken in northeastern Alaska and northwestern Canada. One request that reoccurred during this two-week training was for the creation of a Gwich'in dictionary. This was an excellent opportunity to ask what users and speakers would like to see in a dictionary. As bilingual teachers with varying degrees of fluency and who were from various Gwich'in villages in Alaska, the workshop participants had the following concerns, ideas, and suggestions:

1. Elders: Elders bring authenticity to the information being provided. They are the ones who have lived the life and know intimate details of vocabulary for the land, plants, animals, survival skills, food, etc. With the onslaught of technology (video games, store-bought items, computers, etc.) within the villages, this valuable information is being lost as we continue to lose our elders. As elders get attuned to modern-day living, they are losing the old vocabulary

for technical cultural knowledge. Some of this loss is due to old age, and some occurs because elders no longer live exclusively off the land.

2. Dialects: Alaska Gwich'in has six villages, each with a distinct way of saying the same things. Does that mean that Alaskan Gwich'in has six dialects? Even if it were so, the participants unanimously agreed that all of these distinct ways of speaking should be included in a Gwich'in dictionary. Each of these communities should have a preview of the dictionary so that specific suggestions, ideas, or concerns could be incorporated, thus making the dictionary a complete community effort.
3. Glossary: There should be two glosses with the first part being Gwich'in-to-English and the second part being English-to-Gwich'in. The main reason for putting Gwich'in-to-English first is that sometimes a person will hear the Gwich'in but might not know the English equivalent; therefore, this type of gloss would be very helpful to speakers and teachers. For those who are learning to speak, the English-to-Gwich'in gloss would be more useful. The group would like to see each entry with colloquial sample sentences and questions.
4. Person: The Gwich'in have an Alaskan Gwich'in Junior Dictionary where all the entries are written in the third-person singular. Many Gwich'in users and learners find this confusing because in learning, they want to say "I" plus verb. This is consistent with how language acquisition works, as learners talk about their immediate surroundings and what they are doing. The participants therefore would like to see the first-person singular used.
5. Mode: To avoid confusion for speakers and teachers, the number of modes should be limited to three: the imperfective (present), perfective (past), and future. In Athabascan languages, the combinations of mode and aspect can become overwhelming. In addition to limiting the modes, the aspect should also be limited to a single aspect.
6. Synonyms: Ideally, any synonyms would be cross-referenced.
7. Illustrations: Any and all illustrations should depict Athabascan-looking people, foods, animals, tools, culture, etc. In the past, the Alaska Native Language Center has used the same illustrations in both Indian and Inuit dictionaries or books. The Koyukon and Gwich'in Junior Dictionaries depict these same illustrations. Therefore, any future Gwich'in dictionaries should include those changes.
8. Terms: Linguistic or academic terms should be explained in laymen's terms. What is a root or stem? What is a theme? What do the various symbols mean? What is meant by glottal stop, disjunct, indefinite, nasalization, deletion, assimilation, postpositions, inflection, paradigms, syllabification, semantic, morphology, transitivity, aspect, fricatives, mode, and locatives?

The Athabascan Language Conference held in Fairbanks, Alaska, in June 2002 featured many fine and interesting presentations and ideas about different works in progress at the *Workshop on Athabascan Lexicography*. It is hoped that these worthwhile works will be presented in these

proceedings. The very last item on the agenda was a roundtable called *Community-based Lexicography*. The roundtable consisted of many Athabascans representing their individual languages, and academics from various parts of the world. Three main groups were formed: 1) Speakers; 2) Learners, and 3) Non-Speaker-Learner-Linguists. By far, the largest group was the Learners. The task of each group was to answer the following questions (each question will be followed by answers from the three groups):

1. What types of information would you like to see in a dictionary?

Speakers: *We would like to see a topical dictionary that can be used in the schools, one that is easy to use and with technical knowledge. Examples of technical knowledge are modern and traditional tools. Once the technical knowledge is obtained, then detailed illustrations need to be inserted by using a combination of graphics, diagrams, and clip art. Drafts of the dictionary should be made available for comments, additional information, or clarification.*

In cases where a dictionary is in the process of being made, any cultural information should be written in both the Athabaskan and English languages. Because the languages are being lost, many archaic terms, such as fish terms, are no longer used. If these could be well documented, these lost words could be revitalized. Additionally, documentation should be placed on the computer so that potential learners may hear the spoken language.

Since many users do not know how to read or write in the Athabaskan languages, a literacy class should be offered to those who are interested. This class can be taught in tandem with learning how to use the completed dictionary.

Learners: *The dictionary should be arranged topically with a pronunciation guide and appropriate pictures. For example, butchering animals, cultural and seasonal activities, etc. Dual translations from Athabaskan to English and English to Athabaskan. Sentences should have free and word-by-word translations. A practical example of how a word is used, then alternative answers to how to respond to questions pertaining to that word. With verbs, paradigms should be listed.*

Non-Speaker-Learner-Linguists: *For people reading a body of texts, and wanting to find out what a word means, corpus-based glossaries would eliminate the need to have to choose basic forms to enter. Though corpus-based glossaries look a little strange with gaps, they are easy to make because every word is entered.*

This group was concerned about access to computer-based dictionaries. Do people have access to computers, especially in the smaller communities? Paper is more easily available but can be very expensive. Conversely, printing an online dictionary is a by-product of the computer. When using software, be sure to avoid the use of proprietary software, as it will cause financial problems.

2. What types of information would you not want to see in a dictionary?

Speakers: Grammar rules that are predictable.

Learners: The dictionary should be sensitive to cultural values such as idioms (circumlocutions). For example, one does not say "I'm going to hunt for moose." Instead one would say "I'm going to look around." Other items that do not belong in a dictionary are highly religious prayers, words to sacred song, and curse words. Loanwords should be in the dictionary but need to be explained as loanwords.

Non-Speaker-Learner-Linguists: Sexual and taboo words. Though there can be a section on these words, users need to know that these are words one should **NOT** say. Sacred material is another topic that should not be in a dictionary.

For non-linguists, phonetic transcriptions and linguistic terminology are not necessary, though certain terminology cannot be completely avoided, such as aspect.

3. How would you like to see the dictionary organized?

Speakers: Topically. Athabascan-to-English, then with an English index.

Learners: Topically, in alphabetical order and with appropriate pictures. The font should be readable with **no small fonts**.

Non-Speaker-Learner-Linguists: Make smaller dictionaries into thematic units, such as animals, plants, placenames, etc. For general access, it would be nice to have monthly subscriptions in fascicles, that is, in smaller parts.

Jeff Leer (ANLC linguist) likes the idea of verbs as themes, but questions which citation form should be used. He believes that **at least** the imperfective (present) **and** perfective (past) forms should be included to represent the verb. There are currently three systems for citation of verbs:

1. Young and Morgan (Navajo) use
 - a. 1.sg. (I), if subject can be one person
 - b. 1st dual (we) if subject must be several persons
 - c. 3.sg. (it) if subject cannot be a person
2. Phil Howard (Slave) uses
 - a. 4.sg. (one) if subject can be one person
 - b. 4.pl. (people) if subject must be several persons
 - c. 3.sg. (it) if subject cannot be a person
3. Others (Dogrib, Jicarilla Apache) use only the 3.sg. (he/she/it/they) form

Many prefer the third-person forms because they have a higher frequency use. First-person singular forms tend to be very opaque. When using the third-person, one can tell if the verb is transitive.

Jeff gave the following Alaskan Athabascan examples in imperfective and perfective:

(Koyukon) "to drink"

- a. k'esenoonh/k'aaghseenoh'
- b. k'ets'edenoonh/k'ets'odenoon'
- c. k'edenoonh/k'odenoon'

(Gwich'in) "to drink"

- a. ch'ishinji/ch'ishini'
- b. ch'iriinji/ch'ireeni'
- c. ch'iinji/ch'eeni'

Nouns which must be possessed involve similar decisions. Young & Morgan (Navajo) use the indefinite (a-) for body parts but the 4th person (ha-) for kin terms.

With postpositions, Young & Morgan (Navajo) use the third-person (bi-).

4. As a speaker, what would be the most helpful in a dictionary?

Speakers: Set shorter goals and obtain them. Use the elders as resource people.

5. As a learner of the language, what would be most helpful in a dictionary?

Speakers: Many elders know that at one time or another, a dictionary existed for their language because of their involvement in language work with linguists. Where are these dictionaries? Did they get printed? If they were printed, and there are no more in print, should they be reprinted?

Learners: The dictionary should be helpful and does not necessarily have to be in a book form. If it is in a book form, then it should be kept simple with sections that concentrate on the sounds of the language and can build on stems. Audio tapes, video clips, or a CD ROM should be provided with the book so that the sounds are enunciated and clear. Initially, a pocket dictionary would be helpful, but this can be expanded to a more elaborate dictionary at a later time. A pocket dictionary should contain frequent words only, common phrases, and cultural differences, be easy and quick to reference, English-to-Athabascan, and only be large enough to carry in one's pocket.

Non-Speaker-Learner-Linguists: *A pocket dictionary, like the one for Navajo by Garth Wilson. This dictionary should only go from English to Athabaskan, using relatively frequent words, such as what one might find in a phrase book. An example is if one wanted to say, "I would like to buy..." This dictionary **must** fit in the pocket.*

At the back of a dictionary, it would be very useful to have common phrases, such as greetings of immediate use, and also cultural differences.

A picture dictionary, or a picture section would be good, such as pictures of birds, animals, types of canoes, tools, etc. This would also serve the purpose of elicitation as well.

It would be useful to have actual paradigms in the body of text.

*Sample sentences, **at least one** for every entry or subentry. This would also give one the syntactic (sentence) frame.*

Sound files would be ideal for adults and children.

Below is a recap of all the various answers with the Athabaskan Language Participants as Q1, etc., referring to the questions above:

Language-Specific Users (Bilingual Teachers)

- | | |
|--|---|
| <ul style="list-style-type: none"> 1. elders: intimate knowledge 2. dialects: all 3. gloss: ATH-ENG (speakers),
ENG-ATH (students) 4. subject: 1.sg. (I) | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> 5. mode: limit to three 6. synonyms: cross reference 7. appropriate illustrations 8. terms: laymen's |
|--|---|

Athabaskan Language Participants

Speakers	Learners	Non-Speakers- Learners-Linguists
<p>Q1. topical easy to use technical knowledge detailed illustrations drafts (intermittent) cultural information in ATH and ENG class: literacy and how to use dictionary</p>	<p>topical pronunciation guide appropriate illustrations dual translations: ENG-ATH and ATH-ENG free and word-by-word translations, verb paradigms word usage: practical and alternative</p>	<p>corpus-based glossaries</p>

Q2. predictable grammar rules	cultural sensitivity highly religious prayers words to songs curse words loanwords explained	sexual words taboo words sacred materials non-linguists: phonetic transcriptions and/or linguistic terms
Q3. topical ATH-ENG ENG index	topical: alphabetical appropriate pictures no small fonts	smaller thematic units monthly subscriptions: fascicles verb themes: citation form?, present & past examples
Q4. shorter goals use elders		
Q5. out-of-print dictionaries reprinted?	keep simple sound files with book clear & enunciated build on stems pocket dictionary, then expand high frequency words common phrases cultural differences easy & quick reference ENG-ATH must fit in pocket	pocket dictionary ENG-ATH high frequency words must fit in pocket common phrases cultural differences picture dictionary: good for elicitation paradigms sample sentences sound files

All groups want some type of topical dictionary, one that is easy to use, and with the gloss being ENG-ATH, and vice versa. Speakers also want to have an English index. However, the learners would like the topical dictionary to be alphabetized with pictures and a larger print.

The learners and the non-speakers-learners-linguists groups almost parallel in their ideas about a pocket dictionary. Both groups want it to be simple, with common phrases, high frequency words, cultural differences, and an ENG-ATH gloss. In a dictionary with more entries, both groups want a pronunciation guide, verb paradigms, sound files, and sample sentences. To this list, learners and speakers would like to add appropriate illustrations. On the practical side, non-speakers-learners-linguists thought having a picture dictionary would also be good for elicitation. Learners would like free and word-by-word translations, word entries should be practical, and when possible the sentences or questions should reflect alternative answers. Non-speakers-learners-linguists like the idea of verb themes, but then which citation form should be

used? 1.sg. (I)? 1st dual (we)? 3.sg. (it)? 4.sg. (one)? or 4.pl. (people)? The Gwich'in bilingual teachers preferred the 1.sg. (I).

What information should not be in a dictionary? Across the board, everyone agreed that the dictionary should be culturally sensitive and should respect sacred materials, including songs. Sexual words, taboo words, curse words, phonetic transcriptions, and/or linguistic terms were other entries that do not have to be in a dictionary. Learners wanted loanwords to be explained.

Non-speakers-Learners-Linguists voiced their concerns about access to a computer-based dictionary. How many people have computers? Another concern they had was the use of proprietary software. Using this type of software inevitably runs into financial expenses.

In analyzing the responses of the speakers, they seem to be looking out for the learners and future generations by insisting on technical knowledge, cultural information in ATH and ENG, and a literacy class combined with how to use the dictionary which was created. Also, they would like drafts to be circulated amongst the community members for comments or corrections. Non-speakers-Learners-Linguists thought circulating a monthly subscription of fascicles would be a good idea.

This roundtable seemed to have created more questions than answers, but it is important to know what each group would like to see in a dictionary. Each group had many good points and was mutually respectful of the intended audience. I hope that all who read this will take into account the needs of the audience for whom the dictionary is intended.

Resoundingly, all participants agreed that making a dictionary requires knowing who the audience or users will be. Whether the dictionary will be targeted for children, adults with no college background, adults with a college background, teachers, or community members should be reflected by the dictionary. For those of you who are in the process of making a dictionary, I hope you will make the best use of technology that can be manipulated in such a way to please all audiences. Ako' t'ee.

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