Wa Níchim Skexwts:
The Squamish Language Talking Dictionary
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Skwxwú7mesh Úxwumíxw & the University of Victoria (Squamish Nation & UVic)
Background

- Skwxwú7mesh sníchim is spoken in Vancouver, Squamish Valley, Howe Sound and Cheakamus Valley, B.C., Canada
  - 28 recognized villages
- Membership of ~4000
- Less than 10 first language speakers
- 100’s of language learners in public school programs and in Nation run schools
- Possibly half the Nation has taken some language classes
- 14 language teachers
Ten skwálwen Wáyatan k’an wa níchim
What I Intend to Say

1) Ta Syétsems ta Skwxwú7mesh Skexwts:
   History on the Squamish Dictionary Project

2) Ta na kw’áchnexwat
   Our observations (on the published dictionary)

3) Ta wa níchim skexwts
   (The Talking Dictionary Project)
Ta na wa Nexwníwen ta a Ímats
Those Teaching Your Grandchildren
(Elders Advisory)

In 1993, we began the Skwxwú7mesh Language Dictionary Project

- Prayer group – the God Squad
- language teachers
- other language speakers in the community
  - Some joined the group and others participated at home.
- A continuation of word lists previous collected

Elders Advisory Team
Ta Skexwts

- Field testing:
  - By language teachers with Grades 1-12 students
  - Notes were taken about which formats worked best.
  - Some issues were:
    - The size of the fonts
    - The layout
    - A brief intro of the grammar for learners
Ta Skexwts

- Published and Launched
  - i) One at University of Washington, to create the opportunity for press releases (2011)
  - ii) community launch at the Squamish Nation
Design Considerations

• For community learners
• Enough info to help learners in Skwxwú7mesh Sníchim classes
• Words only (no morphemic breakdown)
  – Some info in the introduction about suffixes and prefixes
• Basic to intermediate vocabulary – a high intermediate level
  – Not all the lexical items that we had collected
• Very few sentences in anticipation of an electronic version
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Ta na kw’áchnexwat
Our Observations (on the published dictionary)

Ta na wa i’yímentem – Things that are being strengthening

• Increases status of language
• Increase status of official orthography
• Nation led project increases status of Skwxwú7mesh Language Team
• Increased interest in language learning
• Building vocabulary
• Companion for language classes
• Independent learning
• Some learning of grammar
Ta na kw’áchnexwat
Our Observations (on the published dictionary)

Ta na7xw wa sheshé’way (Things that are still growing)

• Kwi men tut-tl’i7 (Some difficulties)
• Taught how to use the dictionary
• No oral component
Kwi men tut-tl’i7 (Some difficulties)

Skwxwú7mesh vs. English (Lexical ambiguity)
- smáts’en
  - proud, arrogant, stuck-up
- mets’entín
  - honourable pride

Confusion on multiple meanings:
- skwáyel
  - day; blue; sky; the next day
Struggles in Dictionary Use

Thimbleberry Translations

- Require background language to fully navigate
- Not enough information given

Excerpt from the Dictionary

thimbleberry
[see t’ákw’ema’y and t’kw’t’akw’ema’y]
st’ákw’em
thimbleberry bush
[see st’ákw’em and t’kw’t’akw’ema’y]
t’ákw’ema’y
thimbleberry shoots
stsá7tskay
thimbleberry tree
[see st’ákw’em and t’ákw’ema’y]
t’e kw’t’akw’ema’y
Taught How To Use the Dictionary

• The order of letters: k, k’, kw, kw’, k, k’, kw, kw’

• The meaning of abbreviations:
  p’áyaken ‘to fix (something)’ (vt)
  p’áyak ‘be fixed, be better, to recover (vi)"
No Oral Component

• But, can’t help with:
  ▪ Intonation
  ▪ Speaker variation
  ▪ Influence of other Coast Salish languages
  ▪ Non-English consonants
  ▪ Feedback for learners
  ▪ Typos
  ▪ Need to be taught to use the dictionary
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• Government funding (SSHRC Partnership with SFU)

Team
• Platform designer
• Project lead by Squamish Nation
  – Teachers
  – Admin
  – Elders
• Assistance by:
  – University partners
  – Contract linguists
Design Of the Project

Full sentence examples:
• Range of sentence types
• Collected from existing literature
• Created by language teachers

Recording four voices:
1. Elders
2. Teachers
3. Adult learners
4. Youth learners
Recording Process

I. original platform designed for language teaching apps

II. new platform for e-dictionaries

III. learning how to use equipment properly:
   • Rode microphone and preamp onto laptop

IV. database management
   • getting the files names ahead
   • how to use the microphone
   • converting the files to MP3
   • technical difficulties
Sentence Examples

Provide more sentence examples to make explicit varieties of meanings

- An very, too, excessive
  
  An chen lhchiws
  “I’m very tired.”
  
  An kex tálas
  “He’s got lots of money.”
  
  An kw’as ti mesh
  “This mush is too hot.”
  
  An wa tsixtsám
  “S/he is talking too fast.”
Next Steps for Talking Dictionary

1. Start with full searchable dictionary without sentences or sound
2. Then, build sets of 1000 words with sentences and recordings
   - Start out with elders’ sentences first
   - Then record other groups
   - Add a graphic designer to the team
   - Train team members on recording, database management...
3. Test each stage with community learners and teachers
   - Focus groups
   - Reports from teachers and students
   - Seek independent reviewer(s)
Timá tkwétsi ta sníchim-chet

Chet kw’enmántumiyap
References