

REVIEW OF *TSI KARHAKTA: AT THE EDGE OF THE WOODS*

Name of Product	Tsi Karhakta: At the Edge of the Woods; Mohawk Language: Part I
Authors	David Kanatawakhon-Maracle (Contents, Organization, and Concept) MultiMedia Consultant Group: Troy Lepple (Design, Graphics, Programming); Season Lepple (Data)
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Platform	Windows 95/98
Minimum Hardware Requirements	Unknown
Support Offered	Contact David Kanatawakhon or Troy Lepple dmaracle@uwo.ca Tel: (519) 471-8874 (Troy Lepple)
Target Audience	University-level, introductory Mohawk students
Price	\$129 CAD

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OVERVIEW

Tsi Karhakta is a CD-ROM designed to accompany a first-year university course in [Mohawk](#), an Iroquoian language spoken in Ontario, Qu bec, and New York State. The author of the CD, David Kanatawakhon, is a Mohawk speaker from [Tyendinaga](#), near Kingston, Ontario. Kanatawakhon has taught first- and second-year university-level Mohawk courses for approximately a decade at the [University of Western Ontario](#), [Brock University](#), and elsewhere in Ontario and Qu bec.

As a linguist working on a related Iroquoian language (i.e., [Cayuga](#)), and as a second language learner, I can comment on the linguistic content and structure of the CD, as well as on the extent to which the CD is user-friendly.

Tsi Karhakta is organized into seven modules: two that discuss Mohawk grammar; three that provide practice in understanding and producing Mohawk structures; a dictionary; and an index for navigation. Instructions and explanations are in English.

DESCRIPTION

The CD opens with a main menu which provides the user with three options: a) read instructions for how to use the CD, b) use the program, or c) quit the program. The detailed instructions provide an overview of the scope and purpose of the CD, as well as the philosophy behind the CD. Each of the seven modules on the CD are illustrated on the instructions screen, and the user can click on the icon of any module or position the cursor near the module for pop-up help screens in order to find out what the module contains. The seven modules are Supplements, Index, Textbook, Lexicon, Practice, Exercises, and Drills.

The Supplements module contains material additional to that covered in each chapter; in the example shown in Figure 1, a detailed description of Mohawk sounds is overviewed. (One of the many pop-up help screens -- yellow -- is also shown in the screen capture.)

TSI KARHAKTA *Pronunciation*
Press the Next button below (or the right-cursor key) to proceed.

Vowel Sounds Nasal Vowels Consonants Consonant Combinations Accent Stress

Looking at Vowel Sounds

There are six (written) vowel sounds in the Mohawk language. Four represented by single letters **a**, **e**, **i**, and **o**, and two as combinations **en** and **on** (nasal vowels). They are considered to be pure vowels, unlike English vowel sounds which often occur as combination sounds. Consider the word **day**. It consists of two vowels, an **a** sound and an **i** (y) sound. A Mohawk would pronounce the word as if it had no **i** sound, only the **a**.

A
E
I
O

Any Blue text (Mohawk words) can be clicked on to hear them spoken. (There are no keyboard methods to access audio in the Pronunciation supplement)

Previous Next

Mohawk entries (in blue) can be heard by clicking on them.

Click Here to Return to Course

SUPPLEMENTS (i.e. Pronunciation, Vocabulary, Numbers, Colours)
NOTE: The other supplements are quite different, but are essentially mouse driven.

[Return to Instructions](#)

Figure 1. Supplements module

The Index module provides an overview of the CD's 16 chapters, as well as hyperlinks to each chapter. The textbook module (see Figure 2), provides grammatical explanation on individual screens, an example form, and then a few related grammatical notes.

CHAPTER 1 KINSHIP
SECTION 1 CREATING SPECIFICNESS

TSI KARHAKTA

To create an environment of specificity, the word **ne** is placed directly before the nominal it is to modify. The resulting nominal phrase constructed is often interpreted as "the..."

ne Rokstenha the old man

NOTE:
Ne is also used, in most occasions, before personal names.
ne Sewatis John or **ne Wari Mary**

AUDIO REFERENCE PRACTICE DRILLS EXERCISES INDEX

TEXTBOOK
NOTE: See the Example Box (teal area) for the use of the spacebar to highlight text.

[Return to Instructions](#)

Figure 2. Textbook module

The Lexicon module (see Figure 3) consists of a dictionary of 250 entries listed thematically, and also contains a search engine. Each entry in the lexicon is accompanied by a sound file of the Mohawk pronunciation.



Figure 3. Lexicon module

The Practice module (see Figure 4), allows one to hear Mohawk, record one's own pronunciation of Mohawk (with the appropriate hardware), and compare it to that of a Mohawk speaker. (David Kanatawakhon's voice is used for all audio files.) As a method of feedback, this is great, *if* the user is the type of person who can hear Mohawk reliably and self-diagnose his or her own pronunciation.



Figure 4. Practice module

The Exercises module (see Figure 5), consists of Mohawk-to-English and English-to-Mohawk translation. As discussed later, the program spell-checks the Mohawk answers to accept only Kanatawakhon's Mohawk spellings. This is perhaps the most frustrating module to use, as only answers that are entirely correct are accepted.

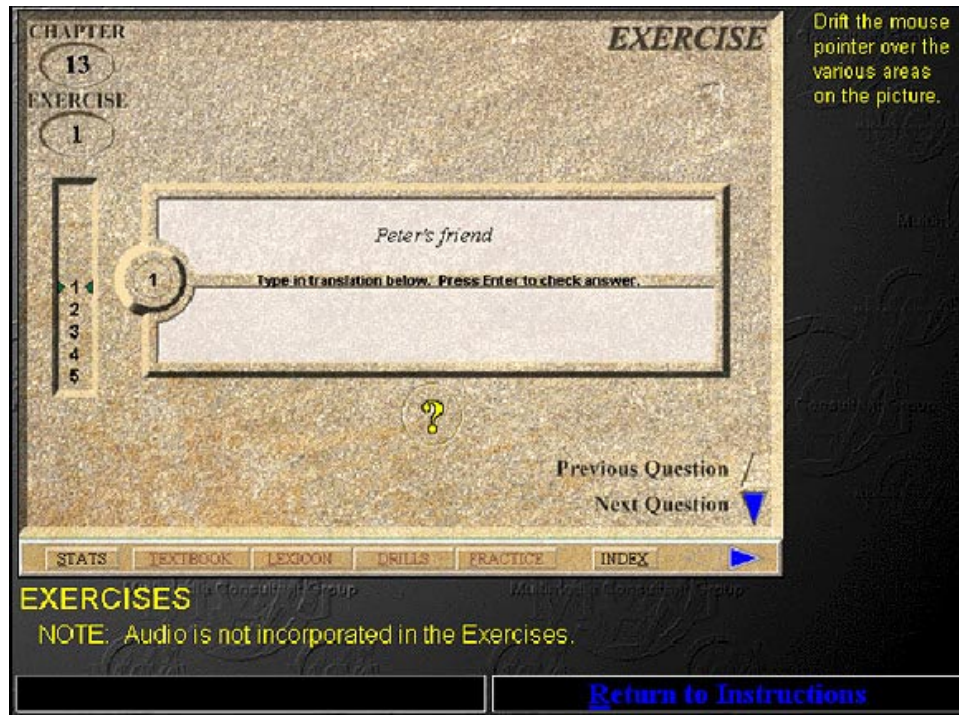


Figure 5. Exercises module

The Drills module poses questions in Mohawk and requires typewritten Mohawk answers in the form of context-free, isolated sentences. Like the exercises, exact answers are required. The drills are designed to give the user practice in "thinking Mohawk" without the aid of English.

EVALUATION

Teaching Mohawk is a complex task because the core vocabulary is richly structured: For example, many nouns and verbs can take 11 to 15 prefixes expressing relationships between individuals or groups to actions or objects (Michelson, 1988, 45-46). Additionally, while nouns always function as such, verbs can function like verbs, nouns (including kinship terms), adjectives, and enumerating expressions; particles can serve as demonstratives, quantifiers, adverbs, interjections, and so forth. Consequently, the second-language-learner is faced not only with acquiring the complex word-formation rules of Mohawk, but also with putting words and sentences together in a manner that is functionally different from English and other Indo-European languages.

There is no consensus on the grammatical objectives for Iroquoian second-language courses. Linguists largely identify the goal to be one of teaching word formation *processes* (see, e.g., the [Mingo--Seneca-site](#)); in contrast, many educators view their task as teaching *words* -- especially culturally significant ones -- and social vocabulary such as greetings (see, e.g., <http://www.ohwejagehka.com/lang.htm> and <http://aboriginalcollections.ic.gc.ca/language/lang.htm>). Largely ignored by both groups are detailed treatments of Mohawk sentence structure and particle usage (except for statements such as "Mohawk is a free-word-order language").

Tsi Karhakta adopts the former approach, and it gives a reasonable introduction to some aspects of Mohawk word formation. However, it also has an extensive dictionary (though social vocabulary is

neglected) and it does a good job of introducing the related topics of sentence structure and particle usage. Further details are provided [below](#).

Analysis of word-internal structure is deliberately kept to a minimum; only a fraction of Mohawk's word-formation possibilities are explored. For example, the CD limits itself to the use of a few pronominal prefixes -- the ones conveying the meanings "I/my," "you/your (singular)," "he/his," and "she/her." According to the introduction on the CD, the remaining 50-odd pronominal prefixes (and their numerous pronunciation variants) are not discussed in order to reduce the complexity of the concepts introduced and to avoid overwhelming the learner. Given that *Tsi Karhakta* is designed to be used in a class setting, with a Mohawk speaker or linguist present, additional explanations of Mohawk word-formation can be provided by the instructor as necessary. However, to avoid giving learners an over-simplistic impression of Mohawk word-formation, some indication of the complexities to be expected could have been included on the CD, perhaps in a separate module.

The Dictionary

Approximately 250 lexical items are included in the dictionary, including a balance of high-frequency nouns (*ohaha*, road; *Anen*, Anne), pronouns (*akaonha*, she, her), verbs denoting actions (*-yena'onh*, to have received something; *-atenhnonh*, to have sold something) and states (*niwa'ah*, it is small; *-serenhtara's*, to be sleepy), particles (*thiken*, that one; *onhka*, who) and particle combinations (*akwah iken tsi*, very, really). (Hyphens before Mohawk words indicate incomplete words -- prefixes have not been added.)

While more words could have been included in the dictionary, the size of the dictionary is consistent with the CD's focus, which is not memorization, but rather, the ability to form new sentences using the vocabulary that the learner currently commands. For an introductory-level Mohawk course, the size of the dictionary is appropriate.

Pronunciation and Transcription

Sound files of Kanatawakhon's pronunciation of Mohawk are included with most of the Mohawk words. Kanatawakhon speaks at a conversational speed, which will likely present some difficulty for novice learners, at least initially. To enhance the sound files, slower versions of longer words and sentences, alongside the conversational-speed versions, would have been useful. It would also have been worthwhile to include recordings by more than one speaker, or at least by a female speaker as well, so that learners would be exposed to more variation in speech and would perhaps learn to hear Mohawk better as a result.

Mohawk spelling systems (like many others) omit certain distinctions crucial to accurate second language learning. Glottal stops, length, and high pitch accent are often omitted. (Mohawk fonts can be found at <http://www.ohwejagehka.com/fonts.htm>.) However, novice Mohawk learners must learn to pronounce the omitted information, which is very important for meaning. For example, the presence of a glottal stop ['] at the end of the verb can signal an event that takes place at one point in time; in contrast, the absence of a final glottal stop in the same verb signals a command. Using the International Phonetic Alphabet (IPA), Kanatawakhon includes accurate phonetic transcriptions together with all spellings, in the process compensating for the omissions in the spelling system.

Complicating the spelling situation, Mohawk speakers use several orthographic systems, and differences between these systems are difficult to reconcile (for a discussion of these issues, see the report of the [Mohawk Language Standardization Project](#)). As explained in the introduction to the CD, Kanatawakhon uses his own Mohawk spelling system. However, various Mohawk speakers might object, as this is not an uncontroversial decision. For example, some speakers would dislike Kanatawakhon's use of the letter *y* for the "y" sound in *yes*, since in the (French-influenced) Ahkwesasne Mohawk spelling system, the letter *i* is used to represent this sound: The verb *-iyo* (to be good, nice, etc.) would be spelled *-iio* in Ahkwesasne, and would be pronounced by all Mohawk speakers as [-:yo:]. As mentioned earlier in this

review, the CD accepts as correct only Kanatawakhon's modified spelling system, and this may give the false impression that there is only one Mohawk spelling system, or that one is superior to others. Although the introduction does warn the user that a modified spelling system is employed on the CD, learners of Mohawk will likely want to learn several spelling systems if they want to interact with Mohawk speakers or read available Mohawk materials.

Finally, the link to the description of the glottal stop in the spelling guide doesn't appear to work, at least not on my version of the CD, a technical problem.

Social Vocabulary

Phrases equivalent to "hi," "how are you," "where are you from," and so forth, are absent from the CD. (For some examples, see <http://www.ipl.org/youth/hello/mohawk.html>). While not necessary for learning Mohawk language structure, the presence of such phrases and vocabulary is satisfying to the second-language-learner, and would increase learners' ability to interact socially with Mohawk speakers.

Sentence Structure and Particle Usage

One of the strengths of the CD is its functional treatment of syntactic topics, and a sentence-based, rather than a word-formation-based approach. For example, *Tsi Karhakta* begins with a discussion of how to use the particles *ne* (the), *ne'e* (it is), and *ken* (question): Using *ne'e*, one can form sentences such as *raksa'a ne'e* (It's a boy!), *ne'e ronkwe* (It is a man / That's a man!), *ne kentsyonk ne'e* (It's the fish!), *ok sere ken ne'e* (Is it a car?).

This strategy immediately enables the learner to form simple sentences consisting of a noun and some particles. Such essential information on sentence structure is missing in many of the other Iroquoian language sources I have examined.

Kanatawakhon's functional organization of the grammar means that the use of any particles, prepronominal prefixes, pronominal prefixes, and sentence frames needed to perform a given function are discussed in the same place. For example, discussion of how to modify verbs describing states (such as the verb meaning *to be hungry*) is found mainly in one chapter. To modify the verb *katonhkarya'ks* (I am hungry), one can add particles before the verb -- *akwah iken tsi katonhkarya'ks* (I am very hungry) -- or one can add particles and a prefix to the verb -- *yah othenen tekatonhkarya'ks* (I am not at all hungry). Kanatawakhon's sentence-based technique gives the learner a set of useful structures expressed in a Mohawk manner. An advantage to this approach is that it seems likely to help minimize the English-speaking learner's tendency to anglicize Mohawk structure: It provides non-English-like sentence frames which users model repeatedly in the drills, exercises, and so forth. In contrast, other approaches to teaching Mohawk provide only isolated words, which the learner might (incorrectly) tend to insert into English sentence structures.

Metalanguage

Iroquoian speakers who have been required to learn Iroquoian linguistic metalanguage, often dislike it. It includes non-intuitive terms such as *translocative*. Partly for this reason, the metalanguage used in the CD is not standard Iroquoianist terminology. For example, the term *adjectival suffixes* is used for stative verbs (such as [-i:yo:], to be good) which incorporate nouns (examples of such verbs can be found at <http://www.tyendinaga.net/mwotw/Tawit/vocab0159.htm>). The metalanguage used in the CD is fine for the purpose at hand -- distinguishing classes of verbs, for example -- but it could be misleading in some cases. For example, the "adjectival suffixes" are not adjectives (although they function as such) nor are they suffixes (although they typically occur word-finally). In summary, users of the CD will learn about Mohawk, but not about Iroquoian linguistics.

Format and Navigation

The organization of the CD is hierarchical. As a result, it is often not possible to move directly from one module to the next. For example, if one is in the textbook module, one can access the practice, drills, and exercises modules, or the index. However, from the textbook module, one can only access the lexicon by returning to the index, clicking on the Main Menu link, and then clicking on the lexicon link. In other words, the user has to spend considerable time learning to navigate the CD.

Some fine-tuning is needed in the CD's format. Several of the links don't work properly. For example, a few of the links lead to the wrong sound files.

Finally, there are a few typos which would be confusing for the learner. For example, the phrase *Is this (thing) hers?* should be "*Akaonha ken akaowenk ne kiken?*" but the first word is wrongly spelled as *Aha*, rather than as *Akaonha*; and the word *I cough (kahshakha')* is wrongly spelled as *kahshkha'*. However, the few spelling errors would be apparent if the user were able to hear the Mohawk sounds reliably.

For moderately proficient computer users, it would not be difficult to work around the complexities of navigation and so forth mentioned above. However, novice computer users might find such factors very frustrating.

SUMMARY

This is currently the only CD available that attempts to teach Mohawk in a systematic linguistic fashion. (For other Mohawk language products, see <http://www.worldlanguage.com/Languages/Mohawk.htm>). *Tsi Karhakta* would be most useful for a moderately proficient computer user with some knowledge of linguistics, or with some awareness that languages can have different structure than English, or with some aptitude for language-learning. If the CD is intended for use by completely novice computer users and language learners, it would be best to have a moderately computer-literate Mohawk teacher available. In other words, this CD would be most useful for an introductory, post-secondary language course.

ABOUT THE REVIEWER

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REFERENCES

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