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"As Our Elders Taught Us to Speak It": Chinuk Wawa and the Process of Creating Authenticity

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Abstract

Chinuk Wawa (also called Chinook Jargon) began as a trading language of the Pacific Northwest in the late eighteenth century. As it developed, it became the major heritage language of the Confederated Tribes of the Grand Ronde, an intertribal nation located in Oregon. Now, as older speakers of the language pass on, there is an effort by the Grand Ronde to revitalize this language not only on the Grand Ronde Reservation, but also in nearby Portland, Oregon. However, revitalization can be a complicated process, as tribal leaders attempt to define Chinuk to maintain its traditions while adapting its vocabulary for the twenty-first century. This research thesis examines the process of creating authenticity through an ethnography of Chinuk Wawa speakers. Results indicate that revitalization of indigenous languages takes many forms; authenticity is difficult to maintain as the language is used in a number of environments and adapted for the twenty-first century.

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