

Loanword Adaptation in Coastal Tlingit

This paper examines the phonological adaptation of loanwords in Tlingit, a Na-Dene language spoken in Alaska, BC and the Yukon. Coastal Tlingit, especially, presents an interesting case study in loanword adaptation because it completely lacks plain labials, having only /w/ and labialized velar and uvular stops and fricatives. As a result, loans from other languages, such as Chinook Jargon (henceforth CJ) sometimes undergo drastic changes in consonantal phonology.

(1) Loanwords in Tlingit (from Crippen forthcoming).

Form ¹	IPA	Meaning	Origin
gishóo	ki.ʃú:	pig	CJ <i>košó</i>
dóosh	tú:ʃ	cat	CJ <i>puš(puš)</i>
sánákw	sá.nák ^w	syrup	CJ <i>sáləp</i>
wasóos	wa.sú:s	cattle	CJ <i>mosmos</i>

This paper uses Optimality Theory (Prince & Smolensky 1993) as a primary theoretical framework. Optimality Theory (henceforth OT) can be a useful model for phonological changes in that output forms are judged on universal markedness constraints as well as faithfulness to the underlying form. The application of OT to loanword adaptation can shed light on how languages seek to balance faithfulness to the borrowed word's original form with reducing the markedness of the borrowed form by adapting the word to fit the borrowing language's phonological inventory and phonotactics.

An analysis of these adaptations in OT provides information relevant not only to linguists working on the Tlingit language, but also clues to universal tendencies regarding the markedness and faithfulness of individual phonemic features. Besides being of linguistic value, the unique phonological adaptation present in Tlingit provides a means of tracking the spread of loanwords, especially the borrowing of Tlingit loans into neighboring languages such as Haida, Coast Tsimshian, and Tahltan/Kaska. In addition, investigations into loanword adaptation can provide clues to what phonetic and phonological features are most salient to the learner.

References

- Crippen, James A. forthcoming. Chinook Jargon and Tlingit: Contact, borrowing, and change. *International Journal of American Linguistics*.
- Leer, Jeff, Doug Hitch, & John Ritter. *Interior Tlingit Noun Dictionary*. Whitehorse: Yukon Native Language Center.
- Prince, Alan & Paul Smolensky. *Optimality Theory*. MS, Rutgers University & University of Colorado.

¹ Tlingit words are given in IPA and the "Revised Popular" orthography as used by e.g. Dauenhauer & Dauenhauer.