

# Alexander Francis Chamberlain and *The Language of the Mississauga Indians of Skūgog*

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In 1889 Franz Boas came to the then two-year-old Clark University in Worcester, Massachusetts. It was his first university position, following six years in the field, first among the Inuit of the Northwest Territories and then among several different First Nations peoples of British Columbia. Clark was the first university in America to offer a program of study in anthropology.

In 1890 Alexander Francis Chamberlain came to Clark as a doctoral student in anthropology. On 12 June 1891 he presented his thesis, *The language of the Mississauga Indians of Skūgog*, to Franz Boas. He was Boas' first student, and the first American Ph.D. in anthropology.

## BACKGROUND

Alexander Francis Chamberlain was born in Norfolk, England, in 1865. When he was still young his family emigrated to Peterborough, Ontario, by way of upstate New York. He was educated at the University of Toronto, earning a BA in modern languages and ethnology in 1886. In 1887 he was appointed Fellow in Modern Languages at University College, Toronto, and became an examiner in German and modern languages at several universities in Toronto, including the University of Toronto, and in German and French for the Department of Education of Ontario. As a graduate student, he began fieldwork among the Ojibwes living on Scugog Island, just north of Oshawa. This initial fieldwork formed the basis of his Toronto master's thesis, with the degree awarded in 1889. In 1890 he accepted a fellowship in anthropology at Clark. The following year he was awarded the first Ph.D. in anthropology in the United States. That summer he went to British Columbia to begin fieldwork among the Kutenai, and when Boas left Clark the following year, 1892, he was appointed to fill Boas' position as lecturer in anthropology. He remained at Clark until his premature death at the age of 49 of complications arising from undiagnosed diabetes. He was a prolific scholar. In a career that

spanned less than thirty years, he published over a hundred articles and several books on native languages of both North and South America, Canadian French, and folklore. As a student of Native languages, his extensive work on Kutenai overshadowed his early work on Ojibwe, which was all but forgotten. To the extent that he is still remembered in the field of anthropology, it is for his work on the anthropology of childhood. In an age which wanted to believe that primitive peoples were like children, he argued extensively against that view. An informative obituary can be found in the *American Anthropologist* (Gilbertson 1914).

#### *The Mississaga of Scugog*

Scugog Island dominates a small lake just north of Oshawa, Ontario, and is now connected to the mainland by a causeway. The band of Ojibwe who live on Scugog call themselves Mississaga. Their early history is part of Chamberlain's introduction. Peter Jones's journal in the late 1820's mentions a small settlement of Indians around Lake Scugog, but the ancestors of the Mississaga of Scugog that Chamberlain studied came from Balsam Lake and bought their land on Scugog Island out of their annuities in the 1840s. The community has always been small. In 1884, just a few years before Chamberlain first went there, they numbered only 43.

#### *Chamberlain's thesis*

Chamberlain's thesis is 84 pages long, with opening remarks on the history of the community and what one might today call a grammatical sketch. The biggest section is the vocabulary, which will be the focus of this paper.

The rest of the work contains several sections on texts, songs and names. The text section contains eight texts, given all first in English and then in Ojibwe. The song section contains 13 song fragments only the first six of which were collected by Chamberlain himself. The next four sections are onomastic – one on tribal and ethnic names, one on place-names, one on names of mythological characters, and one on personal names. Chamberlain then closes with four sections that comprise a literature survey including both comparative data and other Mississaga and Ojibwe sources, including a translation of a French-Mississauga manuscript dating from the late 18th or early 19th century.

#### THE ETYMOLOGICAL VOCABULARY

Chamberlain's work on the language of the Mississaga presents some particular challenges in interpretation. The wordlist that is at the core of it contains 662 articles containing Ojibwe words. Because the list was developed from an English word list, there are a number of articles that have no Ojibwe gloss.

#### *Chamberlain's transcription system*

Chamberlain's work is pre-phonemic, and Boas was still in the process of developing his approach to transcriptional practice at the time he supervised Chamberlain. Boas's approach was also apart from the line of research which the then recently formed International Phonetic Association had just begun to develop. Thus there are many inconsistencies in transcription that arise from an attempt transcribe impressionistically, without the established reference points that are implicit in today's fully developed transcription systems. As we will see, there are many apparent inconsistencies in Chamberlain's transcription. He also records a lot of variants. I would argue that such inconsistency is a product of Boas' approach, and not a weakness in Chamberlain's technique. Chamberlain was a talented polyglot, and it is not likely that he would have had problems in transcription. It also seems safe to assume that his knowledge of several languages would provide an adequate grid of distinctions for general transcription purposes.

Furthermore, there is reason to believe that the language Chamberlain described was in the middle of two significant sound changes – the voicing of lenis consonants and the reduction of vowels that is the precursor of the vowel deletion that spread eastward across Michigan and southern Ontario in the middle of the 20th century.

#### *The vowels*

Chamberlain gives the following transcription system for vowels (1892:11):

- (1) a as in English *hard*
- ā as in English *father*
- â as in English *law*
- e as in English *pen*

- ě as in English *fresh* (but more strongly uttered)  
 ē as in English *there*  
 ĩ as in English *pin*  
 ī as in English *pique*  
 o as in English *not*  
 ō as in English *note*  
 u as in English *luck*  
 ū as oo in English *boor*  
 ɛ between the u in *run* and the final vowel  
 of German *haben* or English *flower*  
 āū as in the New England *cow*  
 īū as in English *new* (not nū)

Unnoted is the fact that he marks stress. When the stressed vowel has no diacritic, he writes an acute accent, as in (2a); when there is a diacritic, he writes an accent following the vowel, as in (2b):

- (2a) nīgik for *nigig* 'otter'  
 ōmúkēsín for *omakizin* 'his shoe'  
 cikóg for *zhigaag* 'skunk'
- (2b) pě'cik for *bezhig* 'one'  
 mīgwen for *miigwan* 'feather'  
 pimū'sɛ for *bimose* 'he walks'

The transcription of stress is the weakest point of Chamberlain's work. Occasionally he writes stress on unexpected syllables, but mostly he fails to write it on syllables on which it would be expected.

Based on the fact that Chamberlain was Anglo-Canadian and living in eastern Massachusetts, I propose that the transcription be interpreted as follows:

- (3) a [a]  
 ā [ɑ]  
 â [ɒ]  
 e [e]  
 ɛ [ɛ]  
 ě [e]  
 i [i]  
 ī [ī]  
 o [ɒ]  
 ō [o]  
 u [ʌ]  
 ū [u]

- ɛ [ə]  
 āū [ɑw]  
 īū [iw]

Several of these interpretations require some discussion. Firstly, I believe that the macrons represent quality rather than length. There are numerous examples of phonemically short vowels which Chamberlain transcribes with macrons, e.g.,

- (4) nīpī for *nibi* 'water'  
 nāmē' for *name* 'sturgeon'  
 ōtē'min for *odehimin* 'strawberry'  
 pimū'sɛ for *bimose* 'he walks'

Contemporary Eastern Ojibwe has prominent quality distinctions redundant to length distinctions, as reported in Rhodes (1976). So it is not surprising that Scugog, which is close to Peterborough and Rama, should share this trait.

Second, the vowel of *hard* in much of New England is a slightly fronted low vowel, IPA [a], in contrast to that of *father*. While most of the instances of ⟨a⟩ represent phonemic *a* or *aa*, there are a few examples of ⟨a⟩ for phonemic *e*:

- (5) ássens for *esens* 'shellfish' (Chamb. 'clam') (also: éssens)  
 nā'bīcābīcēn for *naabishebishon* 'earring'  
 wā'watāsīweg for *waawaatesiwag* 'fireflies'  
 wāmītigū'cī for *wemitigozhii* 'Frenchman'  
 wā'wabēnēbenāk for *wewebinibinaak* 'fishing rod'  
 papā'djīkōgēcī for *bebezhigoogazhii* 'horse'

This line of reasoning is somewhat weakened by the fact that there are more instances of *e* that are transcribed with ⟨ā⟩:

- (6) okwā'mic for *okwemizh* 'cherry tree'  
 (Chamb. 'black cherry tree')  
 ōsésēwā'min for *azasawemin* 'chokecherry'  
 ōdā'nē for *oodena* 'town'  
 mīskwā'gin for *miskwegin* 'red cloth'  
 wā'wacgā'cī for *waawaashkeshi* 'deer'  
 wā'wabēnēbenāk for *wewebinibinaak* 'fishing rod'  
 ekwā'sens for *ikwezens* 'girl'  
 papā'djīkōgēcī for *bebezhigoogazhii* 'horse'  
 wābīcā'cī for *waabizheshi* 'marten' (Chamb. 'martin')  
 gāgō for *gegoo* 'something' (Chamb. 'not')

ékwā	for	ikwe 'woman'
óckinékwā	for	oshkiniigkwe 'young woman'

Nonetheless, the vast majority of instances of (ā) represent either *a* or *aa*. It is entirely credible that many inconsistencies of the sort in (6) involving diacritics are typographical errors. There are some glaring cases that point to a lack of adequate proofing or correction:

(7)	Chamberlain	actual
	ōtcī'pik	ojuibik 'rock, root'
	mískwā	miskwaa 'green' 'it is red'
		(Chamb. notes "(properly, 'it is red')")

Given that the difference between vowel plus accent and vowel plus macron is at least as subtle as the difference between the glosses in (7), it is entirely possible that some (or perhaps all) of the examples in (6) are typographical errors.

Next, the (o) is used relatively rarely, but it represents either *o* or *oo* as in (8a) or *a* or *aa* as in (8b):

(8a)	ōtōnden	for	odoondan 'his heel'
	móckēō'sī	for	mooshkahosi 'bittern' (C. 'heron')
	nī'binong	for	niibinong 'last summer'
(8b)	ondék	for	aandeg 'crow'
	cágenóc	for	zhaaganaash 'Englishman'
	cikóg	for	zhigaag 'skunk'
	ickwóndem	for	ishkwaandem 'door'

Lastly, the single biggest inconsistency in Chamberlain's transcription of vowels is his treatment of final syllables. A large number of forms have schwa or one of the transcriptions of *a* in final syllables where long low vowels are expected. Examples of open syllable cases are given in (9a), closed syllable cases in (9b):

(9a)	ōtā'kē	for	odaake 'he steers'
	pimū'sē	for	bimose 'he walks'
	pīmā'takē	for	bimaadagaa 'he swims'
	ōsā'wē	for	ozaawaa 'it is yellow'
(9b)	ickwóndem	for	ishkwaandem 'door'
	acā'mek,	for	azhaawameg 'salmon'
	acawā'mek		
	wigwēs	for	wiigwaas 'birchbark'

ōpúkwen	for	apakwaan 'roof'
sásekō'kwēn	for	zaasagokwaan 'frying pan'

The fact that Chamberlain transcribes so many examples of reduction in final syllables suggests that it was probably a real phenomenon. To the best of my knowledge, the closest similar thing in Ojibwe is that long vowels in final syllables in Manitoulin Ottawa are shortened, but without any quality adjustment.

#### *Precursors to vowel deletion*

Chamberlain's record of Scugog Ojibwe prefigures the vowel deletion that swept eastward across Ontario in the mid-twentieth century. In his word list there are a number of words that have the wrong vowel quality in short initial vowels, as in (10), suggesting that vowel reduction had begun at least in initial syllables:

(10)	ókwetā'cī	for	agwadaashii 'sunfish'
	ōnít	for	anit '(fish) spear'
	ekwě'sens	for	ikwezens 'girl'

Further evidence is found in those few forms which Chamberlain transcribes with a reduced initial syllable, as in (11a), or without an initial syllable, as in (11b):

(11a)	n-dō'dōn	for	nindoodoom 'my mother'
	ntě'	for	nindeh 'my heart'
(11b)	kāwin nícicin	for	gaawiin wanizhishin 'it isn't good'
			(NB: no negative inflection)
	sē'mē	for	asemaa 'tobacco'

#### *The consonants*

Chamberlain's transcription of consonants has as many problems as his transcription of vowels. In the case of consonants, he not only undertranscribes the contrast of lenis and fortis, but he has trouble with the quality of sibilants, as these examples show:

(12)	sesā'gī	for	zhashagi 'crane (bird)'
	misā'kwodō'n	for	miishaakwadoon 'beard'
	ōsawáskōgině'bīkons	for	ozhaawashko-ginebigoons 'green snake'
	pī'djinkins	for	bizhikiins 'calf'

This is particularly true in *shk* clusters, which Chamberlain frequently transcribes as (sk):

- |      |                |     |                                     |
|------|----------------|-----|-------------------------------------|
| (13) | měskīmut       | for | <i>mashkimod</i> 'bag'              |
|      | máskewā        | for | <i>mashkawaa</i> 'it is hard'       |
|      | meskwátě       | for | <i>mashkwade</i> 'prairie'          |
|      | wābiske cō'nīa | for | <i>waabishki-zhooniyaa</i> 'silver' |

#### Consonant voicing

At the time when Chamberlain was doing his fieldwork, the sound change which voiced lenis consonants was just starting in the southern Ojibwe-speaking region. As late as 1939, the change was not yet complete in Walpole Ottawa, where Bloomfield (1958:8) notes:

The lenes are usually voiceless; between vowels and especially after a nasal they are often partly or wholly voiced ...

Chamberlain's transcription has a significant proportion of voiceless symbols for lenes:

- |      |                   |     |
|------|-------------------|-----|
| (14) | (k) for <i>g</i>  | 40% |
|      | (t) for <i>d</i>  | 44% |
|      | (p) for <i>b</i>  | 46% |
|      | (tc) for <i>j</i> | 33% |

#### DIALECT AFFILIATION

There are several lexical items which point to the expected view that Chamberlain recorded a variety of Eastern Ojibwe (cf. Rhodes 1976), e.g.:

- |      |             |  |                  |
|------|-------------|--|------------------|
| (15) | Chamberlain |  | Ottawa           |
|      | ningga      | <i>ninga</i> 'my mother'                   | <i>ngashi</i>    |
|      | n-dō'dōn    | <i>ndoodoom</i> 'my mother' (child's form) | <i>nmaamaanh</i> |
|      | tētě        | <i>(n)dede</i> 'my father' (child's form)  | <i>nbaabaanh</i> |
|      | ā'ninā'tik  | <i>aninaatig</i> 'sugar maple'             | <i>sinaamizh</i> |
|      | nictigwen   | <i>nishtigwaan</i> 'my head'               | <i>ndib</i>      |
|      | nīpīwa      | <i>niibiwa</i> 'much'                      | <i>niibna</i>    |
|      | mě'-nwičě   | <i>mewinzha</i> 'long ago'                 | <i>zhaazhi</i>   |

Particularly telling is the last form, *mewinzha*. Eastern Ojibwe has a very odd phonological process that nasalizes a stressed vowel when a following nasalized vowel is in an unstressed syllable.<sup>1</sup> Chamberlain's tran-

scription of the stress notwithstanding, his segmental transcription reflects the application of that process. This alone should be enough to show that Scugog Ojibwe is Eastern Ojibwe. However, we must note that Chamberlain has one distinctively Ottawa form:

- |      |             |                                  |                |
|------|-------------|----------------------------------|----------------|
| (16) | Chamberlain | Ottawa                           | Eastern Ojibwe |
|      | māndě       | <i>maanda</i> 'this' (inan. sg.) | <i>ow</i>      |

This could mean that there was Ottawa influence around in the area, or it could mean that the choice of *maanda* over *ow* has only recently become characteristic of Ottawa. Note that Baraga (1880:217) does not mention any dialect variation in the citation of *māndan*.

#### Remaining problems

For about a dozen words in Chamberlain's vocabulary the analysis is unclear:

- |      |                 |                            |                        |
|------|-----------------|----------------------------|------------------------|
| (17) | elm bark        | wesángū                    |                        |
|      | gate            | násákwénīgen               | (?) nas-aakonigan      |
|      | (war-)hatchet   | tcikámīgen,<br>tcikámīkwen | (?) jūgamahigan        |
|      | mother          | aibī'genūb;<br>gebīč' nwěs |                        |
|      | nephew          | ánicwī'ni                  |                        |
|      | Nonkon Island   | mínisinónkon               | minisi- ...            |
|      | Skugog lake     | pidjō'gen...               | pidjō'gen skū e'gog    |
|      | sleigh          | cī'bóggen                  |                        |
|      | stocking        | cībignōmītā's              | (?) ji(i)bigano-midaas |
|      | tree (species?) | ákakwō'nic                 | ... -aakomizh          |
|      | tree-frog       | gī'kībingwákwa             | (?) gi(i)kiingwekwe    |
|      | trolling line   | ōdā'djīkō'ken              |                        |
|      | want (v.)       | nīwidje                    | niwii- ...             |
|      | water lily      | ókita'bek                  | (?) agidaabiig         |
|      | yarn            | ōwā'tuk; ōwā'tug           |                        |

#### CONCLUSION

There are a number of late 19th-century sources on Eastern Ojibwe which have yet to be worked through. These include works by Wilson (1874)

1. This is the correct version of the process mentioned in Rhodes 1976:137 and Rhodes 1985:xxxiv.

and Jones et al. (1877), as well as Chamberlain's thesis. Since this dialect is moribund and underattested, a more serious look at these sources is warranted, in spite of weaknesses in the quality of the materials.

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