
Cowlitz—more accurately, Lower Cowlitz (Upper Cowlitz is Sahaptin)—is a Salish language of the Tsamosan branch, closely related to Upper Chehalis. Although it was widely believed to be extinct as early as 1940, K. was able to locate two "rusty" but knowledgeable speakers in 1967. In addition to the extensive data he and an assistant were able to collect that summer, K. includes in this compendium all other known lexical material on Lower Cowlitz, ranging from a vocabulary collected by Hale in 1846 to five words remembered by one of K.'s Upper Chehalis consultants in 1960.

The Cowlitz-to-English section of the dictionary is basically organized by root, with particles and unanalyzable forms (mostly from older sources) interpolated. The English-to-Cowlitz section contains much of the same information, rearranged, and is designed to be of maximum use to non-linguists. In the 65-page grammatical sketch that is appended to the dictionary—a miracle of lucid distillation—K. relies heavily on his comprehensive knowledge of Upper Chehalis and general Salish to fill the many gaps in the attestation. Due to the paucity of texts, the section on syntax is limited to a few pages of general remarks. A long appendix lists all attested Cowlitz affixes, including lexical suffixes, prefixes, grammatical suffixes, and a number of uncertainly analyzed infixes and suffixes.

At the end are three short appendixes with vocabulary of specific cultural significance: placenames (about 100), personal names (about 50), and loanwords (about 90, the majority from Chinook Jargon).

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