SALISHAN LANGUAGES

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The twenty-three languages of the Salishan family are spoken in the U.S. Northwest and neighboring British Columbia, along the Pacific coast in Washington, Oregon, and British Columbia, and inland to interior British Columbia, the Idaho panhandle, and northwestern Montana. The languages fall into five distinct branches, according to the most commonly accepted subgrouping schema (Czaykowska-Higgins & Kinkade 1998a:3): **Bella Coola,** the northernmost language and a one-language branch; **Central** (or **Coast**) **Salish,** comprising Comox-Sliammon, Pentlatch, Sechelt, Squamish, Halkomelem, Northern Straits, Klallam, Nooksack, Lushootseed, and Twana; the **Tsamosan** languages, Quinault, Lower Chehalis, Upper Chehalis, and Cowlitz, located primarily south of the Central Salish languages; **Tillamook**, a one-language branch, spoken in Oregon; and **Interior Salish**, which is divided into two branches: the three Northern Interior languages—Shuswap, Lillooet, and Thompson River Salish—are spoken in interior British Columbia, and the four Southern Interior languages, Colville/Okanagan, Columbian, Coeur d'Alene, and Montana Salish (a.k.a. Flathead)-Kalispel-Spokane, are spoken primarily in the interior U.S. Northwest (although Colville-Okanagan is also spoken across the border in Canada). In several instances, as with Montana Salish-Kalispel-Spokane, different tribes speak closely-related dialects of a single (nameless) language.

Various proposals have linked the Salishan family genetically to other Northwest languages, but none of these is widely accepted. The isolate Kutenai, which has long been in close contact with some of the Southern Interior languages, is one candidate for a distant relative. Other proposed congeners are the Wakashan and Chemakuan families, also located in the Pacific Northwest; together, Salishan, Wakashan, and Chemakuan comprise the core of the famous Pacific Northwest linguistic area. A number of striking typological features are found in all three of these families (and some of them also in Kutenai); most of the features mentioned below for Salishan also occur in the other two core Pacific Northwest families.

All Salishan languages have rich consonantal inventories that include ejectives, lateral obstruents, velar vs. uvular obstruents, labialized dorsal consonants, and (in some of the languages) glottalized resonants and pharyngeal consonants. Table 1 shows a widely (though not universally) accepted set of Proto-Salishan consonant phonemes (modified from Kroeber 1999:7, partly on the basis of comments in Czaykowska-Higgins & Kinkade 1998a:51-52). Vowel inventories, in sharp contrast, are relatively simple: Proto-Salishan is generally believed to have had just four vowel phonemes, /i ə a u/.

TABLE 1. **Proto-Salishan consonant phonemes.**

p	t		c	k	k^w	q	q^w			ʔ
p'	t'	ƛ'	c'	k'	k^w'	q'	q^w'			
		ɬ	s	x	x^w	x̣	$x̣^w$			(h)
m	n									
	(r)	l	y	(ɣ)	w			ʕ	$ʕ^w$	
	(r')	l'	y'	(ɣ')	w'			ʕ'	$ʕ^w$'	

Salishan phonology displays other striking features as well, notably the presence (in almost all the languages) of very elaborate consonant clusters, as in e.g. Montana Salish *Ta qesm'l'm'él'čstmstx^w!* 'Don't play with that!' Another widely shared phonological phenomenon is a sound change, in most of the languages and apparently independently in at least two subgroups, from the velar consonants *k k' x* to alveopalatals *č č' š* (and then sometimes to other consonants later).

Morphologically, Salishan is heavily agglutinative, or polysynthetic. All the languages have many suffixes, including both grammatical suffixes—e.g. transitivizers, subject markers, and object markers—and lexical suffixes by the dozens, primarily indicating concrete objects (e.g. 'hand', 'face/fire', 'nose/road/cost', 'round object', 'root/berry'). Prefixes are not so numerous, though most of the languages have locative prefixes and several others as well. An affix-loaded Montana Salish word, for instance, is *q^{w}o č-tax̣^{w}l-m-nt-cút-m-nt-m* 'they came up to me' (lit. 'me to-START-derived.transitive-transitive-reflexive-derived.transitive-transitive-indefinite.agent'). This word contains one locative prefix and six suffixes, with one suffix set, *-m* 'derived transitive' plus *-nt* 'transitive', repeated after the reflexive suffix detransitivizes the stem.

Reduplication is a prominent morphological process in Salishan, used for such purposes as distributive plural (e.g. Montana Salish *qe č'uč'úw* 'all of us are gone, we left one at a time' vs. *qe č'úw* 'all of us are gone, we left in a group') and diminutive. Salishan languages have pronominal clitics that mark certain subjects (e.g. in intransitive predicates), suffixes that mark other subjects (e.g. in transitive predicates), suffixes that mark patients, and pronominal possessive affixes (see e.g. Czaykowska-Higgins & Kinkade 1998a:31).

Word classes include at least full words and particles. Because every full word can serve as the predicate of a sentence, some scholars have argued for the absence of a lexical distinction between verbs and nouns (see e.g. Kuipers 1968, Kinkade 1983, and Jelinek 1998; for the other side of this controversy, see e.g. Van Eijk & Hess 1986 and Kroeber 1999:33-36). There is general agreement that, if the distinction exists, its morphological and syntactic ramifications are weaker than in most or possibly all language families outside the Pacific Northwest. Salishan languages have suppletive lexical pairs of roots with singular and plural reference, e.g. Montana Salish *čn ʔúɬx̣^{w}* 'I went in' vs. *qeʔ npílš* 'we went in'.

Nearly all Salishan languages are predominantly predicate-initial, mostly VSO but in some languages VOS; word order is rather free. In all the languages transitivity is a major morphosyntactic category, with transitivizing and detransitivizing suffixes, applicatives, causatives, and other complexities; they are head-marking. Jelinek (e.g. 1984) and Jelinek & Demers (e.g. 1994) have proposed that these are pronominal argument languages, with full noun phrases having the status of adjuncts rather than arguments. This claim has been debated vigorously, on both sides of the issue, by Salishanists and other theoreticians.

Research on Salishan languages began early, with wordlists collected by travelers as early as 1810 and the first grammar and dictionary published later in the 19th century—a grammar and a thousand-page two-volume dictionary of Montana Salish (Mengarini 1861, Mengarini et al. 1877-79). Modern Salishan linguistics has been flourishing for over half a century, and three especially important surveys have appeared: Thompson 1979, Czaykowska-Higgins & Kinkade 1998a, and Kroeber 1999 (in particular ch. 1). An annual conference on Salish and Neighboring Languages is held each August, and the conference preprints are a major source for information on the languages. A sizable number of descriptive grammars and dictionaries of various Salishan languages are now available, together with a great many more articles on specific theoretical and descriptive issues, a large monograph on comparative syntax (Kroeber 1999), and an etymological dictionary (Kuipers 2002).

All the Salishan languages are gravely endangered. Czaykowska-Higgins & Kinkade (1998a:64-67) report speaker figures that range from about 500 (for four languages) to fewer than 10 (for nine languages) and 0 (for several now-vanished languages). Language-revitalization efforts are under way, however, for many of the Salishan languages.

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p’	t’	ƛ’	c’	k’	k^w’	q’	q^w’			
		ɬ	s	x	x^w	ẋ	$ẋ^w$			(h)
m	n									
	(r)	l	y	(ɣ)	w			ʕ	$ʕ^w$	
	(r’)	l’	y’	(ɣ’)	w’			ʕ’	$ʕ^w$’	