

Blackfeet Vocabulary Terms for Items of Material Culture

Dedicated to Annie Mad Plume Wall

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Introduction:

This project was conducted in the summer of 2004 by Rosalyn R. LaPier and Shirlee Crow Shoe at Piegan Institute in Browning, Montana. Piegan Institute is a private not-for-profit organization with its national office and community-based programs located on the Blackfeet Indian reservation in northwest Montana. The Piegan Institute's community-based projects include operating the Nizi Puh Wah Sin school, a Blackfeet language immersion school for grades K through 8, conducting seminars and conferences, producing written, audio and video materials and carrying out extensive research on the Blackfeet language and history. The mission of Piegan Institute is to serve as a vehicle to research, promote and preserve Native languages.

Blackfeet ancestral territory extends along the eastside of the Rocky Mountains from the Yellowstone river in southern Montana, north to the North Saskatchewan river in Canada. Anthropologists believe that the Blackfeet originated in the northeast and migrated to their present location only a few centuries ago while archaeologists are persuaded that their residence reaches back thousands of years. The Blackfeet believe they have always lived in their present location and their complex history speaks of their origin and continued intimacy in this area of North America.

The Blackfeet continue to live today, as they always have, on what remains of their ancestral homeland: one reservation in northern Montana and three reserves in southern Alberta, Canada. This Blackfeet confederacy is made up of four tribes who share a common language: the *Kainai* or Blood, the *Siksika* or Blackfoot and the *Pikani* or the *Apatohsipikani* (North Piegan in Alberta) and the *Amsskaapipikani* (South Piegan in Montana).

The Project:

This list is an initial effort to collect names or terms for material culture items used by the Blackfeet, especially items that may be found in museum collections. This list is not complete. In the future we hope to add to this list to make it more comprehensive and to make any corrections.

The research for this project was carried out in two parts: first, we conducted a review of the major published works on the Blackfeet language using both vocabularies and dictionaries to develop a list of material culture names or terms; and second, we reviewed these terms with contemporary speakers of the Blackfeet language. The contemporary speakers assessed the list and added information on pronunciation of terms or its literal translation. An audio recording was made by Shirlee Crow Shoe of the majority of the terms. The pronunciation of some terms could not be found, at this time, because they were either ancient or fallen into disuse.

There are no standard spellings for Blackfeet words or terms. This work uses a variety of spellings from the various resources listed below. In addition, a phonetic pronunciation is included to help non-Blackfeet speakers to pronounce the terms. The vocabularies and dictionaries used for this project are:

J.H. Bradley. Blackfoot Vocabulary. (Helena, Montana Historical Society, Ledger Book H, 1860)

C.M. Lanning. A Grammar and Vocabulary of the Blackfoot Language. Fort Benton, Montana Territory, 1882. (Original translations by Joseph Kipp and W.S. Gladstone, Jr.)

Rev. J. W. Tims. Grammar and Dictionary of the Blackfoot Language. (London: Society for Promoting Christian Knowledge, 1889)

C.C. Uhlenbeck and R.H. Van Gulik. An English-Blackfoot Vocabulary: Based on Material From the Southern Peigans. (Verhandelingen Der Koninklijke Akademie Van Wetenschappen Te Amsterdam, 1930)

Peigan Board of Education. Blackfoot Developmental Dictionary. (Brocket: Peigan Board of Education, 1986)

Donald G. Frantz and Norma Jean Russell. Blackfoot Dictionary of Stems, Roots, and Affixes, Second Edition. (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1995)

Bradley and Lanning's original vocabularies were developed in 1860 and 1882 primarily for English language speakers coming into Blackfeet territory to conduct trade or military operations. The purpose of these two original texts was to present basic Blackfeet vocabulary for basic communication. Both the Bradley and Lanning works are based on the South Piegan dialect.

Rev. Tims' 1889 vocabulary was developed for Blackfeet speakers to learn English. The purpose of this text was twofold: 1) to develop religious materials for Blackfeet speakers; and 2) for new priests to learn the Blackfeet language. Rev. Timms is based on the Siksika dialect.

Uhlenbeck and Van Gulik's vocabulary researched in 1912-13 and published in 1930 was the first work by trained linguists to study and document the Blackfeet language. Their purpose was not for communication but for documentation. Uhlenbeck's work was based on work with the South Piegan dialect.

The Peigan Board of Education's 1986 word list consists of common Blackfeet words and terms. It included various terms for material culture items.

Frantz and Russell's 1995 dictionary is the most recent addition to the works done on the Blackfeet language. Frantz, a trained linguist, worked with contemporary Blackfeet speakers, most closely with Russell to develop his dictionary. Frantz's work is based on the Kainai or Blood dialect.

Next to the Blackfeet names, in the following vocabulary of material objects, is an abbreviation of their origin (see above). Each name or term is listed in chronological order of the published date of its source. The abbreviations are:

BD – Bradley, 1860

LN – Lanning, 1882

TM – Tims, 1889

UH – Uhlenbeck, 1930

PE – Peigan Board of Education, 1986
FR – Frantz, 1995

This list of terms is divided into material object descriptive sections. As stated earlier this work is not complete and each section does not include a complete list of material items. These sections were chosen because they provide a general overview of known material items. Each entry is listed only once within the following sections.

Ceremonial Items
Clothing
Guns & Gear
Horses & Gear
Household Items
Lodge & Interior
Tools & Weapons

Each entry includes four categories of information: 1) the Blackfeet term, using all variations of spellings, 2) the phonetic pronunciation, 3) the English word for the term, and 4) the literal translation in Blackfeet. The Blackfeet language is descriptive. Words and terms are often made up of other words describing an object or the action of the object. Most entries have information in all four categories. However, an entry is incomplete in cases where the information could not be corroborated during the brief project period. If the entry is not complete the category line is left blank, to be completed at another time. Below is an example for the term for “gun case.”

Blackfeet Term: Asso'tsenamau (TM)
Asó'siinaamaa (FR)

Phonetic: A soo tsee naa maa

English Word: Gun case

Literal Translation: Sootsimaan = parfleche
Naamaa = gun or weapon

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