Northern Research Institute Grant: Final Report
Project Title: Kaska Grammar
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This project was carried out from May, 1999 to February, 2000. The primary goal has been to document and analyze the grammatical structure of Kaska, a Northern Athabaskan language spoken in the Yukon Territory and Northern British Columbia. In particular, the project focused on the morphological structure of the Kaska verb, laying out the order of verb prefixes and describing the morphophonemic alternations affecting certain prefixes. Additionally, this project also documented dialect variation; at least four dialects are represented in the data collected.

The research was conducted in Whitehorse, Watson Lake and Ross River. Participants were primarily Kaska Elders. Many were compensated for their contributions as participants in language workshops organized by Kaska Tribal Council and sponsored by Aboriginal Language Services. The NRI grant was used to compensate Elders who participated in this project outside of the language workshops, allowing us to come into their homes and further refine the data already collected.

Over 300 verbs have been collected, written down and conjugated. Of these, 150 have been checked, re-checked and entered into a growing data base of Kaska verbs. There are of course many verb forms yet to be collected. The following is the list of verbs that make up the data base and have been analyzed. A number are still being entered, stored on a computer at Kaska Tribal Council, awaiting further analysis.

(1) List of Analyzed Verbs (in English)

Get dressed	Cut hair	Knit with stick	Put up (2)	Sleep	Untangle again
Arrive	Dance	Know	Return	Smoke hide	Untangle net
Be cranky	Dig out	Land	Rip apart	Soften hide	Walk
Be cute	Dig out 2	Laugh	Rip in half	Sour	Want/need
Be fine	Dig out vigorously	Lazy	Rip up	Speak	Want
Be lazy	Dip out	Learn	Run	Split root	Warm up
Be lonely	Drink	Listen	Sad	Split roots	Weak/slow
Be scared	Drink quickly	Live at	Say 1	Spread fat	Win
Be stubborn	Drum	Love/like	Say 2	Start fire	Wring
Be surprised	Eat	Mad	Scared	Stick-gamble	Yell
Be the same	Eat quickly	Make	Scrape with knife	Stretch	
Be weak	Fine/good	Marry	Scrape with scraper	Stubborn	
Be happy	Fix net	Mix	Scrape with scraper 2	Suck	

Boil	Flesh	Nauseate	Scrape with bone	Take care of self	
Break loose	Get wood	Pack	See	Take down net	
Break vigorously	Get wood for self	Pick up (6)	Sell	Take out many	
Breathless	Go again	Play	Set fishnet	Take out of water	
Bring	Go around	Pour out	Set snare	Teach	
Carry (7)	Fetch wood	Pray	Set snares	Tell story	
Check net continually	Go by boat	Pull out	Sew	Think about	
Cold	Go	Pull out 2	Shoot with bow (2)	Throw	
Cook	Hot	Pull out vigorously	Shoot with gun (2)	Tie to frame	
Cranky	Hungry	Put down	Sick	Tie to self	
Cry	Hunt	Put in water	Sing	Tired	
Cut moosehide	Knit fishnet	Put net in water	Sit	Twist	

There are four entries per verb, each entry corresponding to a change in mode/tense. The different modes are noted below. Each verb stem is also conjugated by person, typically resulting in 9 different forms.

From these conjugations, a clearer understanding of the verb structure has emerged. The following diagram represents the order of verbal prefixes established so far.

(2)   Diagram of the order of verb prefixes

Adverbial - Distributive - Deictic - Direct Obj. - Theme - Mode - Subject - Classifier - Verb Stem

Expanding on this, four modes have been identified: imperfective, perfective, optative and future. Additionally, the following types of prefixes have been identified: three classifier prefixes (0-, h-, d-), four subject prefixes (s-, n-, 0-, eh-), one thematic prefix (de-), one direct object prefix (ye-), two deictic prefixes (dze-, ge-), one distributive prefix (ne-) and three adverbial prefixes (te-, ke-, łe-).

This work is on-going, as there remains much yet to be explored, documented and analyzed. We thank you for your support and your patience.