

**ESSAY OF AN ONONDAGA
GRAMMAR: OR, A SHORT
INTRODUCTION TO LEARN THE
ONONDAGA AL. MAQUA
TONGUE**

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Essay of an Onondaga Grammar: Or, A Short Introduction to Learn the Onondaga Al. Maqua Tongue by David Zeisberger

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OF AN

ONONDAGA GRAMMAR,

OR

A SHORT INTRODUCTION TO LEARN THE

ONONDAGA *al.* MAQUA TONGUE.

BY

REV. DAVID ZEISBERGER.

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ESSAY OF AN ONONDAGA GRAMMAR,
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A SHORT INTRODUCTION TO LEARN THE ONON-
DAGA *AL. MAQUA* TONGUE.

[A minute of a church council, held at Bethlehem 15th July, 1742, recommends the study of the Delaware Indian dialect, in order to facilitate intercourse with individuals of that nation, whose visits to the settlement were then of almost daily occurrence. This was within two years followed by the establishment of a school for the instruction of missionaries in both of the Delaware and Mohawk dialects. The Rev. John C. Pyläus was appointed tutor; and among the members of the first class was David Zeisberger, who for upwards of forty years was employed in the Indian mission of his church. This distinguished missionary probably did more than any other man of his time to develop both the Delaware, and the Onondaga dialect of the Iroquois. Fourteen of his manuscripts are preserved in the library of Harvard University, and among those in the Moravian Archives at Bethlehem is his German-Onondaga Lexicon, vii. vols., 2367 pp. We are indebted to the courtesy of the Rt. Rev. Edmund de Schweinitz, S.T.D., for the use of the manuscript and English translation, by Bishop John Eitwein, which we have transcribed to these pages, the original title of which we have also retained.—J.]

§ I.

The Indians have no Characters or Letters of their own, but borrow them from the English, as they did from the Latins.

As they have no Writings or Books & no Schools amongst them, the sound of those Letters is not determined amongst them, the Author of this Essay, being a German, thought it convenient to spell their Words in the German or Latin way, where every letter is pronounced & none needlessly used in their Syllables or Words, according to that, This Tongue has no more than

(a) 21 Letters viz: 5 Vowels: *a, e, i, o, u.*

16 Consonants: *c, d, g, h, j, k, l, n, q, r, s, t, w, u, x, z.*

NOTE. *b, f, m, p & ph* are not usual in their Words, and the Onondagos cannot well pronounce them in the English Words, they turn commonly *p* into *q* & *F* into *W*, e.g.

Peter, Quiter.

Frederick, Wredrick.

They use Diphthongs *ae, ai, ee, ei, eu, ü.*

(b) Pronunciation of the Letters:

a, awe, e, eh, i, ih (not *ei*), *o, u, uh* (not *ju*), *c* before *e* & *i* as a *z*, else as a *k*.

g, neither as *J the* nor as *jot*, but as a mild *k*. *t*, always as *t* (& not *sh*) tho' before *i* and after that another Vowel, e.g. *Jentie* (to come again) as *Jentie*. *Watidge*, to make water, as *Wathidge*.

§ II.

Accents are 3. Acute, grave & circumflex: the first lies always upon antepenultima or penultima—

the second on ultima—

the third on ultima & penultima.

§ III.

Words are either simple or compound. *Wachtandi*, to go. *tenta wachtandi*, to go back, *jorke*, to-morrow—*ojantshiorhe*, the Day after to-morrow.

Ganiatare, the Sea. *Ganiataregóna*, the open or great Sea.

either primitives or derivatives *Otshishta*, Fire, *tioschisch-tacherong*, fry. *Ochna*, fat, oil, *ochnara*, fatty, oily. *Ochnecanòs*, water. *ochnecátschi*, watery.

Parts of Speech or *Partes orationis* are 7. Noun, Pronoun, Verb, Adverb, Preposition, Interjection, Conjunction. (the Participle is wanting.)

A) The Noun signifying the Name or Quality of a Thing, is either Substantive or adjective [*Note*]

1.) Substantive the Name of a Thing; as Unque, *Man*. Ganataje, *a Town*. Garōnta, *a Tree*. Joháte, *the way*. Geihuháte, *the River*.

2.) An Adjective signifies the accident, quality, or Property of a Thing, as: Ojáneri, *good*. Wahótke, *bad*. jos, *long*.

3.) A Substantive Noun is either Proper or Appellative. a proper Substantive, is in this as in other Tongues, that which agrees to one particular Thing of a kind, as: Onondage, Delaware, Susquehannah, Kaekaakung.

4.) an Appellative Substantive is that which is common to a whole kind of Things, as:

Ganataje, *a Town*.
Unque, *a Man*.
Geihate, *a River*.
Garonta, *a Tree*.

5.) The Genders are 3. Masculine, feminine and neuter. The two Genders of Nature, viz. male & female are known by the name or word itself, as: Etschinak, *a Man*. Echro, *a Woman*. Onogaronto, *a Buck*. Tionhósquarunt, *a Cow*.

Note. They are only declined by Genders & Number and have no cases.

²⁰⁷ by the Præfixis, as: Sajadat, *a male Person*. Sgajadat, *a female Person*, t'hiátage, *2 persons* (masc.) t'giátage, *2 Persons* (femin.), achso nihanati, *3 Persons* (masc.), achso negunati, *3 Persons* (femin.), The præformative *g* is not only used in the females by Nature in the Singular & plural number, as: Echro, *a female or Woman*, *Singul.* Géchro, *plur.* Guntíéchro; but in the plural number, to all cattle & game, where the sexes is not purposely distinguished.

Neuter are all Words which have no Præfixes nor accept any.

6.) The Onondagos have two Numbers as the English: The Singular & plural. the plural number has always a Syllable added to the singular, *e.g.* schóh.

Ganhóchwa, *the Door*, pl. Ganhochwaschóh.
 Garonta, *the Tree*, pl. Garontaschóh.
 Echro, *a female Woman*, pl. Echroschóh.

2.) nnie. In such words that end with *a, e, & o*, & signify Rivers, Hills, Country's, Marshes, Springs, Roads, viz :

Ononta, *the Mountain*, pl. Onontannie.
 Geiháte, *the River*, pl. Geihatennie.
 Ganistáre, *the Sea*, pl. Ganiatárennie.
 Ganawáte, *the Morass*, pl. Ganawátennie.
 Joháte, *the Way*, pl. Johaténnie.
 Jochnawaróto, *the Spring*, pl. Jochnawarotónnie
 except: Tiogachrahnte has tonnie.

3.) hogu or ogu,
 as : unque, *man*, pl. unquehogu, *men*, *mankind*.
 Garochia, *the Heaven*, pl. Garochiahogu.
 Ochnéca, *the Water*, pl. Ochnécahogu.
 Otschistenochqua, *the Star*, pl. Otschistenochquahogu.
 Achsónta, *the Night*, pl. Achsonthógau.
 Ozháta, *the Cloud*, pl. Ozhatahógu.

7.) The Nouns compounded with the adjectives *ios* long, change both the Vowels of *ios* into *es* & in plural *eso*, *e.g.*

Garonta, *a Tree*.
 Garontes, *a long Tree*.
 Garontéso, *long Trees*.
 Onónta, *a Mountain*.
 Onontès, *a long Mountain*.
 Onontéso, *long Mountains*.

8.) In the proper Nouns where a certain Number is compounded with the final Syllable *age* is added, as :

Ganatáje, *a Town*.
 T'ganatage, *two Towns*.
 achso ne ganatage, *three Towns*.
 gajéri ne ganatage, &c.
 Unque, *Man*.
 tiunquetage, *two men*.
 achso ne unquetage, *three men*, &c.
 onochsáje, *the House*.
 v'ganochsage, *two houses*.

9.) Declensions of Onondago Nouns and Adjectives, by Cases, are not found except that sometimes the Vocative case in Words beginning with a Vowel is distinguished as

well in the singular as the plural number by prefixing of *S.*,
as :

Unque, *Man* ; Sunque, *thou man*.
Sunquanis, *thou our God*.
Sajaner, *thou Lord*.
Sunquajaner, *thou our Lord*.

and the Ablative by adding a Præposition, as :

Ochneca, *the Water*.
Ochnecége, *in the Water*.
garochiáge, *in Heaven*.

10.) *Personæ orationis* are Three, which are expressed by
Præfixis, as well in the Nouns as Verbs, as :

giatattige, *my brother*.
tschiatattége, *thy brother*.
hatattage, *his brother*.
pl. unqua or t'watattége, *our brother*.
S'watattége, *your brother*.
hunnatattége, *their brother*.
geháwak, *my child* ; Saháwak, *thy child*.
heháwak, *his child*.

b.) Adjectives mostly coalesce with the Substantives, as :

Eniage, *the hand*.
Ostwi, *little*.
Eniastwi, *a little hand*.
Ochsita, *the foot*.
goano, *big*.
ochsitowano, *a big Foot*.

1.) They are flexible [declinable] as well as the Verbs
they coalesce with the Subst. as :

Wagenckstws, *my hand is little*.
Saniástwi, *thy hand is little*.
honiástwi, *his hand*.
gachsitowáno, *I have a big foot*.
sachsitowano, *thou hast a big foot*.
ástwi, *little* ; gástwi, *I am little*.
Sastwi, *thou art little* ; hostwi, *he is little*.

2.) Some indeclinable, but have yet the present and future
Mood, as :

Agajung, *old* ; præ. agajúchne.
orhéta, *while* ; præ. orhestachqua.
tiógaras, *dark* ; præ. tiogarásqwa ; fut. 'njogarak, *it will be dark*.

ochnótés, ochnótong, *deep*; pres. ochnotéehqua; fut. 'njochnotong.
 otariché, *warm*; pres. otarichéehqua; fut. 'njotariche.
 ios, *long*; pres. idéqua.
 ochranuwe, *wet*; pres. ochquanuwésqua.
 Warochiocu, *blew*.
 ozitquarolu, *yellow*.
 ochnára, *greasy*.

3.) The indeclinable either coalesce with the Substantives or stand by themselves.

In the first case the singular and plural differ in the last syllable, as :

Garšnta, *the Tree*; and agšjung, *old*.
 gárontagšjung, *an old tree*.
 pl. garontagšjungeschöh.
 ase, *new*; garontáše, *a green tree*.
 pl. garontaseschöh.
 Ochšita, *the foot*; ochšitše, *a long foot*; pl. ochšitéšo.

the others make no difference in the singular & plural number, as :

esowa, *many*. Tschíóchara, *Pidgeon*.
 esowa harriochne Tschiochara.—*He shot many Pidgeons*.
 otšchíónta, *Fish*.
 esowa honawichne otšchíónta.—*He caught many fishes*.
 gáhris tíochriro, *torn stockings*.
 Hachtšéhqua tíochriro, *torn shoes*.

4.) Most of the Adjectives distinguish the masculine and feminine gender, as :

Jonnochwactani, *sick*.
 honnochwactani, *he is sick*.
 gonnochwactani, *she is sick*.
 Unquetahétke, *a bad man*.
 hunquetahétke, *he is a bad man*.
 gunquetahétke, *she is a bad creature*.
 Unquetio, *a good man*.
 Junquetio, *he is a good man*.
 gunquetio, *she is a good creature*.

5.) a few adjectives of the indeclinable who do not coalesce with the Substantive, make no Difference between the male & female kind, as :

Orhéstá, *white*.
 tíógaras, *dark*.