

# Nurturing a Faint Call in the Blood: A Linguist Encounters Languages of Ancient America

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This is a recounting, in my mid-fifties, of an indigenous journey: from growing up in Los Angeles as son of fundamentalist Arkansas hillbillies to becoming a trusted voice for the still misunderstood languages and worldviews of Native North America and an organizer of yearly dialogues among Indians, quantum physicists and linguists.

That I knew nothing of my small Cherokee and Osage background when I began the journey will act, I hope, as a clarion call to all of Native America's "lost children" -- all of us with even a drop of Indian blood who were raised, monolingual English speakers, in cities and otherwise apart from tribal influence -- to follow your family's stories, find the Native within, and reconnect as soon as possible with your ancestral tribes; they'll probably be more accepting of you than you've imagined, so long as your heart is loving and respectful, and your mind open.

## **Background**

When I was a child in the 1950s, in a historical port town of Los Angeles named Wilmington, my parents Mack and Lucille, were deacon and deaconess in a small Assemblies of God church -- meaning church every Sunday morning, Sunday evening, Wednesday evening, and any other night an evangelist was passing through. Mack's mother was a preacher with her own church in neighboring San Pedro, and he earned money as a dockworker, while Lucille went through a local junior college to become a licensed vocational nurse. Struggling to save up, they managed to put their two children through UCLA -- one becoming a mathematician in space programs and the other a linguist in Native America. With my training in African languages, it literally took the threat of being sent to war in southeast Asia to move my lazy butt from comfortable southern California livin' into the alternatively freezing and frying climate of Montana -- to meet my destiny, in ways I couldn't even yet imagine.

When my brother and I asked the inevitable "what kind are we" family history questions, we were always told, "a little bit of this and a little bit of that," "a duke's mixture," "just like the steak sauce -- 57 varieties," and the like, often ending with, "You're a little bit of everything, so there's nobody you can hate" or "So just remember: in this world, there's nobody better than you, and there's nobody lesser than you. We're all just human beings." One of those geneological bits -- that my great-great-great-grandmother dropped out of the Cherokee Trail of Tears in Arkansas to have a baby as the tribe was heading north to Oklahoma -- wasn't told or just wasn't that relevant to me until I

entered Native America in Montana, after teaching for a year in Bozeman, becoming a linguist and administrator for a federally funded bilingual and bicultural education program on the Northern Cheyenne Reservation for four years in the early '70s.

Throughout my years of junior high school, high school, and junior college, I had no idea whatsoever what I wanted to be or do with my life, usually assuming I'd be an English teacher, since grammar and literature somehow came easily to me -- but halfway through my first class in linguistics, and especially after reading required articles from the pioneering anthropological linguist Benjamin Lee Whorf, I suddenly knew that I wanted to be a linguist for the rest of my life. Throughout all my schooling before, what I was looking for wasn't even taught; almost nobody gets introduced to linguistics before the junior year in college. My life is thus a good example of the most important reason why our children should always go as far in schooling as they possibly can: maybe what they'd wind up really having a passion for is only taught in higher education!

My four years on the res were profoundly life changing for me in ways that percolated through my life the next few decades. I cut my teeth, professionally speaking, by doing primary fieldwork on an indigenous language and creating an alphabet and writing system which became the basis for classroom literacy lessons and a dictionary (more about the fieldwork later). More personally important to me, however, was my surprising discovery of Natural spirituality -- surprising because I wasn't looking for it!

### ***Religion and Spirituality***

If a goal of being Christian is to pass the religion on to your children, then my folks struck out -- twice; zero for two.<sup>2</sup> My brother declared himself an atheist after a few years of UCLA, but my shutting down was quieter. From about 12 or 13 years old, I knew I really didn't believe what my parents and church wanted me to believe, which was a fundamentalist interpretation of history and reality, but there wasn't much I could do about it; I felt trapped -- so much so that at my first opportunity, at 20, I married someone two years older and with a job so that I could achieve escape velocity from the church. I'd seen my parents go drag my brother from UCLA and back every weekend for years so he'd be in church on Sunday mornings -- and this was before the freeways! -- until he got married, so that's how I decided to do it. All that to say: five years later, on moving to the res, I was most definitely not looking for another religion to fill any yearning hole in my being. I'd had enough of religion and was doing quite nicely without wasting hours of my life in church, thank you!

Having discovered alternative states of consciousness only in my twenties, first with alcohol and then a succession of various illegal substances as they

crossed my path, it was undoubtedly the lure of peyote that enticed me to my first Native American Church ceremony and three others while on the res. And I can't even say there were any deep revelations or visions as an immediate effect of those meetings on my consciousness; long term, who can tell?

What I do remember realizing after my third or fourth meeting, however, with some degree of cognitive dissonance, was that -- underneath all the fundamentalist Christian dogma of my childhood church and, as well, underneath the unimaginably different Earth Mother teachings and cosmology of the Cheyennes -- where the rubber meets the road, there was in both a belief that *Spirit has the ability to manifest physical healings right now!* That realization was probably my first baby step into the spiritual ways of our Earth Mother and away from the controlling and blaming Father Sky religions. Had I been raised in the more formal Methodist or Episcopal forms of Christianity, for instance, I might not have had anything for the spiritual understanding to resonate with.

As one Cheyenne told me at a meeting, "That Sky energy is too hot; grab it and you get burned! The Earth is the transformer of Sky energy, so we take that energy instead from the earth, air, fire, water, and green that She provides us for Life." Where Supernatural Christianity the way it was taught to me made no sense, this gentle and Natural spirituality made a deep, simple but elegant sense from the beginning -- of a kind that reconnected me to the rest of Life on Earth rather than estranging me from my ultimate physical Source. Decades later, when I was suddenly initiated as an Algonkian Pipe Carrier in 1992, I protested to my mentor, Sákéj Youngblood Henderson<sup>3</sup>, that I was completely personally unworthy for such an honor; to which he replied, "It's not an honor -- it's a goal to work towards."

### ***fieldwork: had I known then what I know now ...***

In the ideal linguistics training trajectory, the students know what language(s) they'll be studying, get solid advice and training from experts in that language family, and then go out into the world and do what they were trained to do. From my perspective, that's a nice fairy tale but it wasn't true for me.

In my case, the major syntactic paradigm into which I was trained, the Chomskyan transformational model, was worse than useless for the fieldwork on Cheyenne that I found myself facing; Chomskyan training was for abstract theorizing in a comfortable armchair, making up sentences in a known or familiar language which tested the theory -- not learning how to be accepted and to carry out nuts-and-bolts fieldwork face to face with anthropological Others!

Indeed, in languages where a single word can be a complete sentence, **syntax** (roughly, the ordering of words to create a complete sentence)

becomes of minor importance, while **morphology** (how individual words are constructed) begins to loom ever larger in importance. Proposed "universals of language," when seen after a while from the American Indian languages perspective, began to look instead like specific Euro-language habits projected onto the rest of the world's languages.

### **Nouns and Sentences**

For instance, Chomskyan trees were generated from a universal **S --> NP + PredP**, the symbolic way of saying that all grammatical **Sentences** in all human languages (past, present and future) have a **Noun Phrase** and a **Predicate Phrase**; without one of them, you can't have a complete sentence in any human language -- nor can you have, according to Aristotle, a complete thought. All Euro-languages, including English, work like that.

Just imagine my surprise, then, on first hearing Algonkian language speakers say that **they can speak all day long and never utter a single noun!** And speakers from other language families were agreeing! Gone -- *poof!* -- was Chomsky's so-called *universal NP*. I then remembered, sickeningly, how much professional time I'd wasted during those four years on the res eliciting and comparing nouns! Sure, they CAN make nouns when they need to, for instructional purposes, interrupting the normal verb-verb-verb flow of speaking, but these are separate states of consciousness -- normal conversational flow versus instructional explanation, the social and the formal.

This was astounding information: no nouns except when you stop to explain, as to a child or someone who can't quite keep up -- exactly the plight of most adult linguists learning the language, who need maximally explicit stranger-talk, which then accounts for all the nouns I found in professional Algonkian languages wordlists! And that's not all: it breaks the grammatical so-called universal about NPs being required for complete sentences and complete thoughts. Not only that: the logic of classical science demands these same noun phrases, and falls apart completely without them; science glossaries and dictionaries have almost nothing *but* nouns. We not only can't write or speak without them -- we can't even truly *imagine* doing so!. But talking day in and day out without using nouns is no big deal, nuthin' special, for speakers of many indigenous American languages. They have to *slow down* when talking to Westerners.

Had I but known, I would have focused more heavily on verbs from the beginning of my four years; but because of my Chomskyan training about human language, I never knew this was an important option to at least explore. I would call this essential importance of NPs in Euro-languages such as English the most pernicious unquestioned and thus hidden "commonsense" assumption that was never addressed during my formal and

informal linguistics training -- even by my fellow Native American languages specialists -- and thus hindered my scant four years of fieldwork.

### **Picture-in-the-head vs. Kinesthetic Languages**

Here's the second most pernicious hidden assumption of which my training failed to abuse me: that all human languages work normally by making pictures in the head. It's one of those things you'd just never think about unless pointed out rather clearly by someone who knows more than one language -- as Blackfoot speaker Amethyst First Rider did at the 1999 and 2000 Albuquerque "Language of Spirituality" Dialogues, telling us that when she says even the simplest things in English, such as "The man is riding a horse," pictures come up in her head; but when she says the equivalent in Blackfoot, no pictures: just feelings of riding (using horse-riding body motion).

If we remember the no-nouns caveat, we can analyze what she did as an embodied translation: since there's no gender importance in Blackfoot (i.e., no he/she pronouns or man/woman, boy/girl, or other words dichotomous by gender only -- so "person" and "child" instead -- at least, pre-Contact), we're left with a human who is horse-riding, which is exactly what her riding motion translation showed us. That is, her translation went way below formal syntax to a universal human knowledge level of anyone with the experience of riding (or even watching others riding) horses: a kinesthetic (body-feeling) level.

If we look at the five physical senses, as commonly accepted in Euro-cultures (not linguistics per se), only one of them -- sound, in speech -- is generally assumed to be involved in language. On the non-physical side, however, two inner senses<sup>4</sup> are involved: the inner voices in our heads and the inner visual images their utterances evoke<sup>5</sup>, in which the NP participants of the sentence loom large in focus. This particular sensory bias is so entangled with European cultural languages that to first discover that it's not that way for all humans can come as quite a shock. Oliver Sacks, for instance, in *Seeing Voices*, points to American Sign Language users who think, rehearse, talk to themselves -- and even others in dreams -- in kinesthetic gesture instead of an auditory voice in the head.

Amethyst's comment seems to send us in this same direction, but with a crucial difference: where Euro-languages are produced **O**rally, perceived **A**uditorily, and understood **V**isually, and Sign is produced **K**inesthetically, perceived **V**isually, and understood **K**inesthetically, Blackfoot and other Native American languages are produced **O**rally, perceived **A**uditorily and **V**isually, and understood **K**inesthetically -- a sensory sequence for language never before, to my knowledge, noticed as a possibility in linguistics for how human languages can be wired.

An example from Cheyenne is appropriate here. If you hear **Se?Se** [*where S = sh and ? is the glottal stop, which we mark with 'h' in the middle of oh-oh!*]

in the flowing talk, our picture-in-the-head translation would be "duck" -- unless, that is, it was followed by *-novOtsE* [where capitalized vowels are whispered], meaning "goes down in hole," in which case our nouny picture-in-the-head translation is supposed to be ... "rattlesnake"! Oops! Our picture translation of a duck going down a hole certainly doesn't equal a rattlesnake -- not even metaphorically! So what's going on?

For the answer we must enter the *langscape*<sup>6</sup> of Cheyenne to find the *kinesthetic point of view the words come from, where Se?Se* actually refers not to a thing, a duck, but to animate patterned vibration: the combined sound/motion you experience when either one is going away from you -- *sh-sh-sh-sh (with simultaneous zigzag motion by hand)*. In Blackfoot, as an interesting contrast, the same similarity holds instead between birds flying in sensuous synchrony and snakes -- kinesthetic without Cheyenne's concomitant auditory component. What I had to get used to in Native America, which I will return to soon in more detail, is that **sounds**, not just our level of words and pieces, have meaning.

What's intrigued me since more fully understanding Amethyst's comment is the question of whether knowledge can be collectively remembered longer kinesthetically than visually. After all, what's pictured in the head varies between individuals and within the same individual over time; is it just the same with kinesthetic knowing? Some examples from different sides of Turtle Island, the ancient name for North America, persuade me that it can be remembered much longer.

The Míkmaq (a.k.a. Micmacs) of Nova Scotia remember a time when they were forced out of their original homeland further north by a glacier, and they went south to Mexico and beyond until it got warm again; this could have been 4000 years ago or over 12,000. If the latter, when things warmed up, but before they went back, a great inland sea had been formed down the middle of the continent by melting glacier water that couldn't be carried out to the oceans quickly enough by the Mississippi and Colorado Rivers, so the Míkmaq -- or so I surmise -- had to go back north following the Pacific Coast, turning right when they reached the Canadian Rockies, in order to return home. I surmise this mostly because of the Blackfoot creation story I've heard saying how Napi the Creator came from the south and headed east -- a perfect encoding of a trans-generational tribal map for how to help their eastern cousins and all their generations of stragglers get back home.

Also, in the early 1990s some Míkmaq were talking about that ancient homeland and noticed a deep, gravelly, rumbling sound in the homeland name -- a sound that, as far as they could tell, occurred in no other "word" in the language; so they decided to caravan up to the old homeland to find out what that sound meant, and at the exact spot described by the elders found a



glacier-carved valley: the sound itself referred to the earth-carving noise their distant ancestors had experienced!<sup>7</sup>

Now, about that inland sea: the American Euro-culture discovered less than two centuries ago that it even existed, but the River People of WA State say that although the tribal designation seems to refer today to their proximity to the mighty Columbia River, it anciently refers to the time when they used to migrate up and down the Great River emptying the inland sea into the Gulf of Mexico and the Pacific Ocean (and that River was merely the terrestrial equivalent of the Great River in the sky, the Milky Way). Their language, too, is of the auditory-kinesthetic variety, and I'm told that when they sing one especially ancient song, they kinesthetically become the song's originating ancestor, who is sitting on top of the Rocky Mountains, looking East, and seeing nothing but water.<sup>8</sup> The sea finally drained to create the Great (Glacier-Scraped) Plains maybe 9000 years ago, so the song is obviously older.

Contra the history of Western knowledge, which has been marked by constant warfare and destruction followed by cultural amnesia and quickly changing languages (we can't understand the English of 1000 years ago), the above examples -- from both Eastern and Western parts of this continent called Turtle Island -- suggest quite strongly that these kinesthetic languages can hold onto accurate historical knowledge for 10,000, 13,000 years, or even longer! Perhaps this comes as a shock to the assumed cultural superiority of Western Euro-consciousness -- but there you go! Nouny picture-in-the-head knowledge seems to be more fragile and short-lived than verby, kinesthetic, embodied knowing.

Had I known then what I know now, I wouldn't have spent so much fieldwork time and effort translating Cheyenne sounds into nouny pictures in my head. I would've listened instead for what each of the sounds meant kinesthetically -- diving for roots instead of the easier, habitual pictures.

### ***A Worldview Where Almost Nothing's Inanimate***

Knowing, as you do now, that these Algonkian languages and many more specialize in roots pointing to dynamic process and relationships instead of things, it should perhaps not surprise you that the cultures, grammars, and thus worldviews<sup>9</sup> of these people is almost completely animate. All of reality -- the very cosmos itself and every localization within its organic whole -- is alive! Compared to our basically inanimate cultural linguistic view (quick: what picture did you see when I said "cosmos" above -- lifeless space with floating rocks and burning stars?), Native America focuses on the opposite -- The Greatest Mystery of all.

When I once asked my colleagues, then students, Drs. Nancy Maryboy<sup>10</sup> (Cherokee-Navajo) and David Begay (Navajo), if there was anything that MUST be referred to as inanimate in Navajo, they talked with each other and elders, finally reporting back months later that there was nothing, except maybe plastic --- but that was only because they didn't know what it was made of!

Weaned on nouns<sup>11</sup> in an inanimate worldview -- and little knowing how pervasive the knowing is in other cultures that reality itself is alive from the largest to smallest parts, or how other languages handle animacy grammatically -- people of Euro-cultures have actually been known to be a bit intolerant and even make fun of this "nonsensical" indigenous way of seeing reality!

The punch line to an old anecdote in anthropology has an anthropologist informing his old Native friend that the outside world labels his people as *animists*; asked for clarification, he explains that an animist would say that (sweeping his arm around) "all these trees are alive, with spirits in them." The Native doubles over, laughing hysterically, and on recovering says it's the funniest thing he's ever heard! Of COURSE he didn't think every tree there had spirit: "But *that one* does, and *that one* does, and *that one* over there does!"

When an anthropologist asked an elder who went every morning before sunrise up a hill outside the village to drum and sing the Sun up, "You do know, don't you, that if you didn't go beat the sun up one morning that it would still rise?" After a while the elder replied, "Sure -- but it wouldn't be the SAME Sun!" His reply indicates the elder's dual awareness of form and *meaning*, as well as his scientific visitor's ignorance of it.

But this *spirit* thing isn't so "spooky" once we realize that we too actually have one usage of the word that's unspooky: when we talk about going by "the *spirit* of the law, not the letter of the law" -- the intended *meaning* of a law, or anything else, not the specific wording, which can be hair-split to death by good lawyers. As we'll soon see, this spirit/meaning linkage is an important stepping stone to an even larger understanding!

### **Are Songs Alive?**

Songs being alive doesn't seem as strange inside an animate worldview as it does in a basically inanimate one. And maybe it's not even strange to you when you think about it. I'm sure you've had an unbidden song get loose in your mind and run wild before.

That's what happened to anthropologist Jack Norton (Hupa) last decade, which he reported to the Society for the Anthropology of Consciousness. Early one week he was drumming and singing, practicing for a weekend



ceremony, and once when he paused, a song he didn't come into him and started running around in his head; he drummed and sang it away, getting back to his practicing, but when he stopped it returned. He got through the ceremony and immediately went to an elder he thought might be able to help, and told him what'd been happening. "Sing it for me." Then the elder sat quiet for a long time, finally breaking silence with, "Oh, yeah -- that was [personal name]'s song; he died in 1910, and nobody's sung that song since then. I guess it was getting lonely!"

Then, about five years ago, I'd arrived in Calgary for a Science Dialogue earlier than other participants, so Leroy Little Bear (a Blackfoot legal professor who'd been Chair of Native Studies at Harvard) and I sat and talked as we waited for others. He mentioned that [personal name] had passed, and he'd known 200, maybe 250 songs for raising tobacco. At first, where we were -- in the frozen Canadian Rockies -- completely escaped my attention as I marveled at the sheer number of songs and how they'd have to be sung in exact sequence. And then it hit: "Tobacco?! I thought you could only grow tobacco in the southeast, like Virginia, not up here in the cold mountains!" Leroy turned calmly to me and said, "That's why it takes over 200 songs!"

If I'd known then what I know now about songs, I would have begun learning Cheyenne, during those four fieldwork years immersed in the culture, by going to the grandmothers and asking them to teach me to sing Cheyenne baby songs! The earliest and most effective beginning language-teaching tool there is for a baby's central nervous system, songs hold the baby's interest while gently sensitizing the sound/meaning connections to the meaningful sounds of *this* human language. As for adult songs ... we're not in Kansas anymore: they're alive in an alive universe.

### ***Plains Indian Sign Language***

As well I would've paid more attention to the often simultaneous signing going on in Plains Indian Sign Language during elicitation and storytelling on the res. Following my training at the time, I ignored this alternate kinesthetic avenue of linguistic expression, and focused only on speech. In older times, all Cheyennes (and presumably those of other tribes on the Plains as well) knew Plains Indian Sign Language. Its primary use was within the tribe, keeping "in the loop" all those who were deaf or hard of hearing -- a human-technology solution rather than a mechanical one -- and a secondary though important use was communication between tribes with different languages, all of which translated into Sign, a universal language of kinesthetic meaning which is four dimensional (three dimensions of space through time), with signs being simultaneous at times, not just a linear string, one sound or letter after another (if we ignore, as linguistics does, the simultaneous emotional tones and tunes they're intricately embedded in)<sup>12</sup>.

Native Sign, as we saw, is sender's [Kinesthetic meaning \_ Kinesthetic expression] \_ receiver's [Visual perception \_ Kinesthetic meaning], while the spoken languages appear from Native reports to be sender's [Kinesthetic meaning \_ Oral expression] \_ receiver's [Auditory perception \_ Kinesthetic meaning]. In both Native systems, that is, spoken or signed, the meaning base is at the kinesthetic level!

And Plains Sign was so powerful that it could even change a tribe's spoken name for God! As I recount in "God is not a noun in Native America" (see my website, final footnote), either Cheyenne or Lakota (a.k.a. Sioux) must have changed their word for God after arriving on the Plains and encountering Sign. Without that assumption, it's impossible to imagine how, with languages as different as English and Chinese, on a continent with names as different as "Dwells Above" (Chickasaw) and "Thinks Breath Creates" (Tsalagi), these two languages came up with names that, though sounding completely different, have morphemes (word pieces) for the same exact meanings: Cheyenne *ma?heo?o* is composed of *ma?he-*, meaning "big, large, great," and *-o?o*, an animate plural pointing to the sacred mystery of life (not a spirit 'thing'), while the meaning pieces are reversed in Lakota's *wakan tanka*, where *wakan* points to sacred mystery and *tanka* means "big, large, great." We can get our more familiar "Great Spirit" or "Great Mystery" from either, and the difference in the ordering of the two ideas is, on one level, no more important than English *green house* and Spanish *casa verde*.<sup>13</sup>

But here's the kicker: having pondered this paradox, off and on, for more than a decade, I stumbled into an illustrated popular book on Plains Indian Sign one day and found --that proverbial light bulb going on over my head! -- that the sign for "God" consists of a piece meaning "big, large, great," a piece meaning "medicine"<sup>14</sup>, and then pointing up!<sup>15</sup>

The significance is this: we have the same meanings of, let's say, *Great(ly)* and *Mysterious(ing)* showing up in three supposedly unrelated languages -- sign and two spoken, from completely different language families! This is more than coincidence. The kinesthetic meaning basis and expression of sign mixes with and seemingly translates faithfully between (formally) unrelated tongues -- and logically must have shifted one group's earlier verbal label for one aspect of Greatly Mysteriousing to another agreeing with Plains Indian Sign, once they moved to the Plains from the East Coast, fleeing the slow encroachment of the Settling Invaders and the much swifter shadow of previously unknown forms of pestilence that they cast before themselves.

### ***A Periodic Table of ... Sounds!***

Blackfoot elder Leroy Little Bear told an Albuquerque Dialogue audience in 2001 that if "human language" is what Western linguistics declares it to be -- a set of rules creating nodes into which words are dropped that have been

pulled from a lexicon (dictionary) of pre-formed verbal units -- then *Blackfoot must not be a human language after all!*

All we have, he said, are sounds -- kind of like a Periodic Table of Elements in chemistry, but with sounds instead. Some morphemes, mostly grammatical markers, are single sounds, but most are syllabic, consonants and vowels together. From these pieces, words -- which can be complete thoughts and sentences, alone or connected -- are made up from patterned sounds *on the fly* to represent *the speaker's awareness of experienced kinesthetic patterns*<sup>16</sup>, *whether of relationship or process, as we saw with the duck/rattlesnake example.*

### **No 'Time'**

The kinesthetic piecing together above is done without recourse to our grammatical concept of linear time, or nouns promoting picture-in-the-head meanings, or even a reality populated by fixed, static objects at all! The focus is on "the dancing," not "the dancers" in daily events; and instead of *tense* (a marking of past/present/future linear time) being obligatorily stated for every single grammatical sentence spoken in the language, what's obligatory in many is technically called an *evidential*: a validity marker showing with each verb *exactly how it is you have come to know what you're saying!* Roughly, that you came to know from your own experience (the most highly preferred), or someone told you (and maybe levels reflecting their past accuracy of reports), or general knowledge; or, on the other hand, maybe you dreamed it, or daydreamed it, or had a vision, or deduced or inferred, or expect what you're saying. To us, it would be like footnoting each sentence we speak or write!<sup>17</sup>

We can easily translate the first grouping above (own experience or told) into our English past tense and the second (dreamed, thought, expect) into our non-past (present/future<sup>18</sup>) or past -- perhaps more easily on being told that "mental" doings often don't qualify for the past tense of spacetime events in these languages -- but it's impossible to reverse that process, starting from tense, and arrive at the correct evidentials! A world of important Native information -- about how you came to know it -- is squished out of existence in the translation to Western languages, never to be recovered.

To say there is no linear time, our own verbal hallucination foisted onto reality, is not to say there was no concept of 'time' at all -- it's just that one major indigenous conception of time (or better, **timing**) we find in these languages, as in Nature Herself, is cyclical and round, not linear and flat. Think of yearly seasons and the day/night revolving -- in cycles, never static, where the far past and far future meet at the far end of the circle from where you are: this is what creates time! It just wasn't talked about very much, since

evidentials kept all that straight in a more complexly meaningful and relevant way.

### **Who Sez There Was No indigenous North American Sound Writing?**

As a good student and learner of culture, I "learned" with everyone else growing up in the U.S. that Indians on this continent had no writing before the coming of Europeans -- the Cherokee linguist Sequoyah developed a syllabary after seeing the missionaries' *talking leaves*; one missionary created the Cree syllabary and another the birchbark hieroglyphs of the Míkmaq. Just what missionaries teaching The Word of God were doing creating pagan symbols from scratch to teach literacy when The Word is written in roman alphabetic letters still is unclear, but you see a certain thread present, common to all: that Indians weren't smart enough or motivated enough to develop writing on their own. Well, don't believe it -- you've only heard the stories of the so-called victors who write history books!

I was the same way -- even after my linguistics training! In the '70s, when I was teaching for six weeks with Crees at Blue Quills School in St. Paul, Alberta, Canada, I worked with the Cree syllabary, even writing Cheyenne in it for fun, and the Crees told me that it was very old, and had been around for a long time before the missionary *invented* it; it's just that he took credit for it after writing scriptures in it. In the '80s, I heard the same story from Dr. Marie Battiste (Míkmaq), about their ancient birchbark writing being co-opted and thus *invented* by Catholic missionaries.

And then in 1993, at a Bohmian Science Dialogue in Banff, Canada, a mild-mannered Indian researcher named Stanley Knowlton (Blackfoot) showed me some work he'd been doing with linguist Buff Parry on the ancient Blackfoot Syllabarium: a mixed syllabic/alphabetic writing system matching the complex syllable structure of Blackfoot. He handed me two transparencies: the first explained something about the syllabarium, and at the bottom was a table of four rows (two continued on the next page) and eight or nine columns across. I looked at the first row, labeled Blackfoot Syllabarium, and the symbols looked very familiar; I mentioned how it looked like Cree and Stanley said, "Yeah, they stole it from us!" I chuckled, recognizing it as the punch line to countless Indian jokes. He jumped in, "No, really -- we know it's ours because it's always belonged to one family, and we always told them, 'You guys camp way over there!'" In later years I realized that this is why Native writing systems were never found when the main tribe was discovered: "Nope -- we don't have any writing. See?"

Next I looked at the second row of symbols, comparing them to the first -- pretty similar -- and looked to the label on the left, expecting it to be another American Indian script. Instead, it said **Ancient Arabic!** "Whoa!" I muttered. I quickly pulled up the second sheet to the bottom of the first, aligning the columns, examined the variations in each column of now four symbols --

mostly slight, some more major -- and then noticed the labels to the left: **Ancient Sanskrit** and **Cypriote Script** (related to the Phoenician syllabary, which the Greeks modified into our alphabet)! Yikes!

The implications are enormous for this writing system not yet to be found in reference books on writing systems.<sup>19</sup> Just exactly *what* IS a writing system with strong similarities to the oldest known examples of Old World sound-writing (but not exactly the same as any) doing in the New World, hidden away up in the Canadian Rockies?! Wait, I know -- an erudite missionary in the 19<sup>th</sup> Century who knew one of the progenitors, maybe the ancient Arabic script, found himself in Blackfoot territory bringing The Word to pagans and heathens<sup>20</sup> and said to himself, "Hmm! I think I'll use archaic Arabic syllabic characters for writing The Word of God in Blackfoot, instead of Latin, or King James English alphabetic letters!"

That, basically, was the explaining-away suggestion I got from someone to whom I related this story. A more interesting alternative -- one I've learned over the past three decades to trust as a usually excellent starting point for further research -- is what the Indians tell me about something that's theirs: in this case, *it's always belonged to one family and we told them, "You guys camp way over there!"* If we take that as a guiding principle and then listen carefully, we may hear that not too long ago, maybe less than two hundred years, way up in the remote recesses of frozen Canadian Rockies<sup>21</sup>, huge boulders with shelves carved into them are said to hold stone tablets<sup>22</sup> with Blackfoot syllabics carved into them which told details of what we ignorantly call the "pre-history of North America." Then someone dynamited this Library of the Northern Rockies; government and missionaries of the time are the usual suspects. Fragments of tablets and other stones with ancient writing are still found from time to time all over the reserve (often with the writing facing the Earth, as if deliberately placed and useful only to those who knew) and passed on to Stanley.

If we accept the ancientness of Blackfoot writing, the mystery only deepens: if the Old World syllabic writing systems go back 3000-4000 years or more, then this New World one must too! And then -- crucially! -- how did it get from the Old World to the New, or vice versa? That part's easy: through the trans-Atlantic trade of the time.

Last decade, Brigham Young University researchers published DNA analyses of Egyptian mummies' hair showing the presence of THC, cocaine and tobacco (those Egyptian party animals!) -- the last two of which are known quite definitively to only have been grown at that time in the Americas! And an 800 BC dig in Davenport, Iowa, turned up a stone cylinder with hieroglyphs traced to a 1400 BC Egyptian temple.<sup>23</sup>

As to which way the syllabary went -- well, that remains a mystery for now. But I will say, in favor of its spread from New World to Old, that the Blackfoot version is more elegantly complex, with a feature not found in the Old World versions: in Blackfoot, which like most other Algonkian languages has four distinctive vowels, the writing systematically twirls symbols around to four positions, as if honoring the sacred Four Directions, to show both vowels alone and consonant-vowel syllables. If the Blackfoot didn't *invent* syllabic writing, they still deserve great linguistic honor for doing something systemically profound with what they would have received so many millennia ago.

If we add a writing system into the systems of Sign and meaningful syllables noticed before in Algonkian speaking, we discover a profound possibility, previously never even linguistically imagined before, as far as I know, of a *system of systems -- sound, sign, and symbolic writing -- all expressing the same dynamic, kinesthetic meanings of process and relationship!* That is, the **sounds** refer to these meanings; the **signs** also refer to them, no matter the particular language sounds (*ma?heo?o* and *wakan tanka*); and the **symbols** refer to the sounds in one particular language. So in one particular language, say Blackfoot, we have the unheard of possibility of all three expressions referring to the same kinesthetic meanings -- a far cry from the fragmentation we find in English, where our writing no longer bears any close resemblance to the sounds we speak, and there is of course no integrated Sign: ASL (American Sign Language)<sup>24</sup> is what "Others" do, and its grammar and internally related words ("church," "pious," and "intolerant" are related) bear no resemblance to English.

Before moving on, I should mention more about the Cherokee syllabary generally said to have been *invented* by my tribal ancestor Sequoyah -- the only American Indian, if I remember rightly, to be honored by the linguistics profession as an untrained "one of us". I'm a linguist, and a little bit Cherokee -- so why can't I just shut up and leave well enough alone? Well, the trouble is that's there's a dissenting faction from Cherokees -- Sequoyah's descendants, as written by Traveler Bird in *Tell Them That They Lie* -- telling one of those pesky Indian alternative accounts again: that their ancestor didn't invent anything, but just relaxed ancient minor tribe requirements so that the major tribe could become literate.

According to them, long ago a minor Taliwa<sup>25</sup> tribe joined the major Tsalagi tribe, bringing with them a writing system (said to be pre-Invasion) on thin gold sheets<sup>26</sup>, thus beginning a new Cherokee clan, the Scribe Clan<sup>27</sup>, drawn from all the other clans. Sequoyah<sup>28</sup>, at some dreadful moment after one or another senseless massacre of his people, realized the profound predicament he was in: since all other members of the Scribe Clan had been exterminated and he was the last knowledge holder of the ancient writing system, however would or could it survive this undeserved genocide? His



brilliant solution: adapt the Taliwa/Algonkian writing system to a language from an entirely different language family, Tsalagi, and then relax the Taliwa bloodline requirement and let everyone learn it who wants to -- which turned out to be nearly everybody! I think the usual figure quoted is that 90% of the Cherokee were literate very quickly.

So here we see competing stories of indigenous writing in North America: one perpetuated by ruthless military, religious, and then cultural victors -- the ones who achieved the right to write history -- and then other stories from those they vanquished. "Well, of *course* the Indians would try to make you believe they had writing -- to make themselves sound important!" is a comment that's been directed at me many times, in one wording or another, since I started following the bread crumbs on this trail -- *as if* the opposite isn't at least as much true in what the so-called victors say!

### ***The Bohmian Science Dialogues between Western and Indigenous Scientists***

In early 1992, I was honored beyond belief to be invited to participate in what I knew would be the most important gathering of my life, with quantum physicists, Indian elders, Indian intellectuals, and a smattering of others, including two other linguists (Alan Clem Ford and Buff Parry), to discuss reality. My Native mentor, Sákéj Youngblood Henderson (who put his own attendance on the line to wrangle me the invitation since no one knew who I was), had given me a copy of David Bohm's *Wholeness and the Implicate Order* a decade before, and I knew he and his friends felt that Bohm had come closer than any other physicist to describing a process of reality that resonated with what they knew from their most ancient teachings.

There is much that I could say about this first Dialogue and the nine so far that have followed organically from it since Bohm's death shortly before the second<sup>29</sup>, but I'd like to focus on a Grand Consensus that emerged from the First Dialogue, most importantly between Indians and physicists but also insofar as possible with the linguists, about the nature of the invisible reality (by whatever name) that generates the visible: in it, everything that exists vibrates (reality is of an essentially vibratory nature); the only constant is flux (ceaseless change and transformation); everything is inter-connected and inter-related in part/whole relationships; there are no fixed "things," easy to hang nouns on; and therefore the no-noun language structure of Algonkian and other Native American languages seems better suited to the structure of the no-thing quantum realm than English and other so-called 'superior' noun-dependent European languages!

This consensus of commonalities and its implications left me staggering. In a scenario thick with irony, it was as if the Indians had been patiently waiting through 500 years of generations for the Invaders' so-called science to get past its infantile 'classical' stage, focused on physical motion alone (*skan* in Lakota), and get to the good stuff -- the motion *behind* the motion (*skan skan*

in Lakota). And that's when I realized, as if in a blinding flash, that four of the major foci of my life -- linguistics, Native American thought, consciousness and quantum physics -- were like four facets that had just brilliantly synthesized into a diamond in front of my very eyes! A Cross-Linguistic Equation bubbled up in my mind: that **when quantum physicists say the word *quantum*, it's like when Indians say *Spirit*, and when linguists say *meaning*!**

And, as if the commonalities by themselves weren't enough excitement, this *quantum/spirit/meaning* analogy was exactly the piece I needed for a jigsaw puzzle I'd been working on since the mid-70s concerning the role of *telepathy* in our everyday ordinary languaging with each other. It started in earnest when my new friend Sákéj (then Youngblood) related to me what I've since come to call the Cheyenne Tower of Babel Teaching:

*Long ago, people and animals and spirits and plants all communicated the same way. Then something happened. After that, we had to talk to each other in human speech. But we retained The Old Language for dreams, and for communicating with spirits and animals and plants.*

As futurist Robert Anton Wilson once wrote, reality is the line in the sand left by the last two great shamans who fought to a standstill. Somewhere in dim pre-history, all of humanity took one giant step forward over the line -- some into the state of cultural amnesia of a kind that perpetuates itself by needless destruction of ancient knowledge wherever it's encountered, and those few others who remember that languaging is state-specific, differently done in different so-called 'states of consciousness' (a fancy term for Ways of Being in Reality). The consciousness of talking to someone or taking notes at a lecture is significantly different than that of dreaming, or 'praying' to spirits, animals and/or plants. Thousands of miles away, the West Coast Wishram people say that Wishram is their *second* language, the first being the one shared by babies, coyotes, and shamans who speak with spirits.

The awareness of a differently consciousnessed level of telepathy -- or prayer, or whatever term you might prefer -- is forgotten by some cultures, but not gone from the human race. The key, I've found, is *rapport*, a moment-by-moment, intentional linkage of invisible fields between any entities that exist by vibrating; and *telepathy*, a **non-local** sharing of meaning rather than a mechanism, is a function of that rapport, even in everyday speech. Telepathy thus shifts from being some dramatic, possibly staged effect that people *believe in* or not, to a mild mannered, garden-variety lowest-common-denominator field effect underlying all experienced communicative reality.

I stressed the term **non-local** above because that's physics-speak for telepathy, as found in Einstein-Podolsky-Rosen, Bell, Aspect, and other physicists' work. Experimentally shown so far to be true only of photons split

apart from relationship and sent in opposite directions, such that when you flip the spin on one, the other also flips -- knowing in a faster-than-light way what's happened to its partner -- the kicker comes when a quantum theorist like Jack Sarfatti says, interpreting Einstein's famous  $E=mc^2$  equation, that *matter is gravitationally trapped light!* So WE are gravitationally trapped light as well! This echoes what my River People colleague Lloyd Pinkham related in purification lodge (a.k.a. "sweat lodge") as we gazed in complete darkness at the fading lights of superheated river rocks: an admonition to always handle light gently, with respect, because that's what we come from and what we return to, and that's the way we'll want to be treated someday.

### ***The Albuquerque "Language of Spirituality" Dialogues***

After six Dialogues had occurred, one in Kalamazoo and the rest in Banff (funded in whole or in part by the Fetzer Institute), in 1998 there was an unexpected lull in the meetings, undoubtedly from a lack of financial sponsorship. I'd been doing weekend seminars on "God is not a noun in Native America" in Albuquerque for a few years by then, and when Glenn Parry (former student of mine and Executive Director of SEED, the non-profit adult education organization sponsoring my seminars) told me he'd been itching to do something grander than the usual small classes, I mentioned there hadn't been a Dialogue for a year and a half, so maybe we could explore that.

Mind you, this was a bold move that could've backfired on me! There was the matter of financial sponsorship: try as we might, we couldn't find anyone to fund such a Dialogue of 18-24 leaders meeting in private -- and all the Dialogues to date had been held in private. If I could set aside the privacy precedent, then a paying audience -- people who'd pay for the privilege of listening to the Dialogue -- could act as the traditional financial sponsor! So here I was, anticipating what some might see as a misappropriation of a venue initiated and "owned" by Indians (I saw it as "picking up the torch"), turning a small, private free event into something large, public, and commercial!

It was thus with no *little* apprehension that, at the appropriate time of planning, I approached Leroy Little Bear -- whose original idea the Dialogues with Bohm had been, and the moderator of every one -- to ask his blessing on my tradition over-turning idea by way of being the moderator for what has become known as the Southern Circle Dialogues during the summer in Albuquerque, NM.<sup>30</sup> When he said yes, mighty feelings of relief, joy, appreciation and more flooded through me. I learned that new leaders in Native America often emerge just by someone stepping out on a limb!

Many of the Native American language insights I've related here were brought up and discussed in the Albuquerque Dialogues, to the delight and edification of the invited Inner Circle and sponsoring Outer Circle participants

alike! At present, the sponsorship allows free room and board for the Inner Circle, and we're still seeking further private sponsorship -- to help with their related travel costs, something that's prevented some indigenous invitees from attending, and to provide scholarships for other Indians who want to attend but can't afford the sponsoring tuition fee involved for the weekend (about \$200).

### ***Quantum Linguistics: A New Ancient Beginning***

In the late '70s, in a small but international newsletter I produced called *Not Just Words*, I wrote about the QLAOT of language -- Quantum Linguistic Aspects Of Telepathy -- tying together for the first time the quantum physics I'd been reading about and the Cheyenne Tower of Babel Teaching. Two decades later I picked up the topic again, bolstered by years of dialoguing with experts in both camps, and reported to a group I helped found twenty-some years ago, now called The Society for the Anthropology of Consciousness<sup>31</sup>, and as well as to a Flagstaff AZ physics conference on Quantum Approaches to Consciousness, on my preliminary thoughts concerning a new, evolutionary approach to language which I call Quantum Linguistics.

Don Watson, M.D., a good friend who's published my articles on the web<sup>32</sup>, posted the remarks onto a website he created and maintains for me, and -- impossibly! -- people who needed to find me actually did, people who'd been thinking along some of the same lines; and, thus, the summer of 2001 also saw in Albuquerque the First International Quantum Linguistics Dialogue, with over twenty participants, many Native American -- and two participants from as far away as Australia! As a quantum/indigenous/linguistic synthesis posited as a new though ancient orientation toward the phenomena of language, quantum linguistics provides an inside-out approach to languaging which complements the usual linguistic outside-in approach to what is more narrowly defined as "language" (called *formal language* in my more comprehensive model).

Since this inside-out approach to phenomena is what typifies the place Native Americans never budged from and our most sensitive scientists have only recently begun to rediscover, I intend quantum linguistics as an approach to languaging that's indigenous friendly -- taking ancient language insights as fodder for further research rather than instant candidates for the circular file. I want this approach to linguistics to bring together Natural language insights from ancient ways all over the globe, reconnecting them at deeper levels in a kind of Babel-Inverted way.

Perhaps as importantly, I intend quantum linguistics as a place where the ways in which language creates experienced reality can be explored<sup>33</sup>-- both how habitual, "senseless" phrases such as "I can't stand to see that!" and the

like can profoundly affect our own health, and how saying hurtful or loving things to our selves and others actually discharges someday-measurable quanta of emotional energy that can harm or heal others through rapport linkage. Experimental evidence in consciousness research confirming this hypothesis might go a long way towards helping teach us why it is to our benefit as a species to at all times treat each other -- and all Life we share this skin of our Mother with --with dignity, respect, and even love. When the inside of all reality is seen as interconnected, the literal meaning of "What goes around comes around" becomes more apparent -- both intra- and inter-personally.

## **Conclusion**

"*Ya never know!*" seems to be the best phrase describing my journey to the Native Within. Even on leaving UCLA with an M.A. in linguistics, I knew only vaguely what I wanted to do, and had no clear idea about who I was or would become! From grandson of hillbilly preacher woman to a narrator of exotic indigenous langscapes for monolingual English speakers, I find myself sitting here right now reflecting on insights from the past three decades of experiences -- imagining idly what I'd know now if I'd only known back then what I know now.

And the reasons I'm doing it? First, to alert those of you who care that here's another example of how different worlds exist superimposed on this one solar planet, that it's not just one world of "objects" with different language labels attached. Second, I'm writing this to the me I was when I chose Montana's Indians over Viet Nam, and by doing so I write these thoughts as well to anyone already working, or planning to work, with Native American languages -- passing along as well the following tips:

Believe nothing you learn about Native American languages in your training; nobody was listening to and making sense of the Indians' inside-out insights about their own languages until recently.

Don't believe anything you read here either -- *it could be archetypal Trickster whispering in Moonhawk's inner ear!* This shouldn't be about belief at all, but about more or less fruitful paths of research, if the goal is a deeper understanding of what it means to be human and use language. I've tried as best I can to be specific about which languages certain traits belong to and not generalize (more than warranted) about what ALL Native American languages have or do. And -- be assured! -- these findings will be hotly disputed by non-invitees with academic turf to protect.

Benjamin Lee Whorf was a linguistic prophet, for me a linguistics mentor, who for generations after his death was academically pilloried and professionally ridiculed for saying (in the essays collected as *Language, Thought, and Reality*) many of the same things I'm saying here. Linguistics,

anthropology, sociology and psychology -- a regular Social Sciences Gang of Four! -- jumped Whorf and gang-banged his corpse under the name "The Sapir-Whorf" or just "Whorf Hypothesis" during the '60s and '70s. Distrust anything about Whorf under that code-name from that period -- read him in the original, in English, instead! Or, if you have already been tainted by the Hypothesis infrastructure laid out for interpreting him, visit my website or see my forthcoming book for an antidote.

Learn to listen more and more deeply, which can be done by the same technique we use in Dialogues: leaving our 'tacit infrastructures' at the door and listening with a minimum of internal dialogue silently answering back. I don't know what might do it for you, but I credit my four years of intensive fieldwork on Cheyenne, with probably half its vowels systematically whispered, for teaching me how to listen carefully.

If Indians find by your actions that you are listening with a closed mind or are untrustworthy, they'll never open up further and get to "the good stuff"! *Casting pearls before conquering swine* comes up as an apt though mixed metaphor.

One of the most stunning insights of 20<sup>th</sup>-century physics was that of the "experimenter effect" -- the realization that there is no truly detached observer, that the experimenter irrevocably influences the experiment. In the same way, my background -- the "always already listening" which accompanied me to every reservation encounter during my fieldwork years, whispering what I was fleeing away from and toward -- shaped what I listened to or merely heard, remembered or forgot, as I studied a language no training had prepared me for. The experience forever changed me, which is a reciprocal relationship not yet encompassed within physics' experimenter effect, as pointed out by my friend Andy Hilgartner, M.D.: the experiment (or action) can have as much or more influence on the experimenters as they have on it!

So, finally, don't be afraid to take loving risks! Winter Solstice 2012, according to the premier indigenous calendar of the New World (the Mayans'), is when the present Age passes away and the new Age of Consciousness begins -- and what's done with the pending new energies manifesting for humankind right now may have long-term consequences. For me, following the faint call in my blood to find my roots has been inextricably intertwined with understanding more and more deeply the roots of languages that have emerged organically from the land of these ancestors of mine.

Apprehensively, nonetheless, I bring what to some of you is absolutely new information from the frontiers of knowing, and lay it at your feet -- wondering what you'll do now. [34](#)



## *Notes*

1 Words fail when I try to express the magnitude of my thanks, gratitude and love to my wife, Dr. Marilyn Silva, not the least for her long-suffering patience with me both in my wild younger days and my current ALS-diagnosed health challenges — and for listening to my ideas and making me laugh for so many years! [\[return\]](#)

2 For international readers, that's a baseball metaphor for not succeeding. [\[return\]](#)

3 If words fail for my wife, imagine my undying gratitude for one who, by offering his friendship, changed my life and the rest of my career, reintroducing me to a gentler side of Indian America than I'd seen on the res — a highly educated (yet still traditional) pan-tribal subculture of indigenous leaders in North and South America, Australia, and more. With them I've been able to do the most astounding fieldwork over the last twenty-five years under the guise of having the time of my life -- some of which I present here, dedicated to my mentor Sákéj Youngblood Henderson, currently Director of the Native Law Centre in Saskatoon, Saskatchewan, Canada. [\[return\]](#)

4 Other senses not mentioned, such as taste and smell, are also open for language use but not known to be used as a human language medium — though human pheromone research could one day be shown to disprove that. [\[return\]](#)

5 An African proverb, "When you are warned, warn yourself!", points to the primacy of your own voice repeating to yourself something you hear others say in order for it to become truly important to you. [\[return\]](#)

6 This word was a gift to me from its creator, Sákéj Henderson, as a substitute for my clumsier term "wordworld". Langscape points to how the world looks through one language, and the role of language in how we even conceive reality to be. [\[return\]](#)

7 I offer my deepest thanks to Dr. Marie Battiste for this teaching, and for all she's done for me for over two decades — not the least of which has been putting up with the antics of Sákéj and me when we get together to play! She's currently Professor of Education at the University of Saskatchewan, and some of her graduate students may be reading this right now. (Coyote moment!) [\[return\]](#)

8 My deepest thanks as well to Dr. Lloyd Pinkham, colleague and former student, for this and all he's shared with me over the past decade, helping me in my growth and understanding. [\[return\]](#)

9 Benjamin Whorf seemed to think, and I concur, that a people's worldview, science, philosophy and more grow organically from the grammar of their cultural language. My CIIS colleague Jim Ryan points out, for instance, that the Sanskrit philosophical concept of karma comes from the original use of the term in grammar as the direct object! [\[return\]](#)

10 Nancy and David, while posing as doctoral students along with Lloyd Pinkham, initiated me into Diné (a.k.a. Navajo) thinking, and Nancy is currently introducing me into Cherokee society to find my tribal roots — for which I'm deeply grateful. [\[return\]](#)

11 I contend it starts as early as when, child on knee, a ball bounces by and we may say something like, "Look — a ball!" while Natives may say more like, "Look — bouncing!" [\[return\]](#)

12 Actually, I'm one that doesn't ignore but integrates gestures and expressions, emotional tones and tunes, and more, under the big umbrella I call language. Evolutionary in approach, my model is based on the qualitatively different speeds of brain processing called brainwaves — giving us four speeds, four minds and four languages going on at once, only the evolutionarily newest of which is considered to be "language" by most linguists. [\[return\]](#)

13 On a deeper level, however, reversing the order of the existing sounds for something specific, like a pipe or a name, is a Plains Indian way of turning something ordinary into something sacred, according to Sákéj Henderson when I changed my Hawkmoon name to Moonhawk. [\[return\]](#)

14 The American Indian use of the word "medicine" is much more general than in the dominant Euro-culture, pointing to the animate essence with the ability to heal which resides in all living forms, including you and me and plants, animals and other spirits) rather than just pills and shots. [\[return\]](#)

15 The "up" is obviously a post-Contact translation artifact, since either no direction, or down (toward Earth Mother — not our theological Satan in Hell), would have been the more Natural pre-Contact meaning. [\[return\]](#)

16 For those enamored of Western philosophy, notice my wording carefully: Algonkian speech reports the speaker's awareness of eventing and does not make statements declaring what is true of reality. Instead of saying, for instance, "There's a coyote out by the shed," it might be more like, "(I experienced being) aware of coyote-ing near storing." This verby way of talking doesn't "collapse the wave function" -- physics-speak for collapsing energy into a measurable thing; instead, it allows for error or disguise -- after all, it could be a shape-shifter! Leroy Little Bear recently likened this way of speaking to running along the edge of the surf as it ebbs and flows, speaking an awareness of ever-transforming movements. [\[return\]](#)

17 (like this) I conclude. J [\[return\]](#)

18 We don't have a future tense in English, technically speaking — only past and a non-past form for everything else. Tense changes the verb's form (fly, flew), but for future meaning we often use a modal or adverb instead: "I will go tomorrow." "I fly to Chicago next week." [\[return\]](#)

19 You can email Stanley Knowlton at knowsc@uleth.ca for Mac or PC versions of the Blackfoot Syllabarium font and User's Guide. [\[return\]](#)

20 If you don't know, neither of these words originally had the present (co-opted) anti-Christian meaning. Coming from Latin pagus, "forest" and the remote English heaths, pagan and heathen go back to an older prejudice of citified (civil-ized) folk against rural folk of their region. [\[return\]](#)

21 Stanley also showed me an artifact found with a bunch of others in an Alberta archaeological dig that looked identical to ones pictured in a newspaper with the headline "Found, Mesopotamia, from 6000 years ago," or the like, explaining about these ancient economic transaction packets. Again, why were they underground in the Canadian Rockies?! [\[return\]](#)

22 I'm ironically aware of the similarity to Moses' bringing stone tablets down from the mountain. [\[return\]](#)

23 Both of these were recounted in a 2001 ABC-TV special on Atlantis, and have been mentioned in various specials on Discovery Channel. [\[return\]](#)

24 If what I'm saying about Native American languages makes you want to learn such an exotic language, but going to live with a tribe for many years and immersing yourself in their culture isn't feasible, the next best alternative is to check with nearby colleges and universities to find who's teaching ASL; it has some of the differences I've mentioned, as well as its own unique syntax — which not only fills the need for the exotic but opens up the possibility of new friendships in the Deaf culture. [[return](#)]

25 A possibility I was researching is whether the Taliwa could have been Delaware Algonkians with a version of the ancient Algonkian syllabary. If so, this Old Taliwa syllabary would look more Algonkian and less like Cherokee. Nice theory, but a close comparison of pre-printing symbols, the oldest Sequoyah forms, shows no similarities. And the Taliwa are said to have come from the southwest -- exactly the wrong direction from the Cherokee homeland. [[return](#)]

26 Another dissenting opinion -- I can't find where now -- believe that these same golden plates were stolen by Joseph Smith, after he'd hung around a while then disappeared, and passed them off as the writing of the Angel Moroni -- strange, because Moroni must've been assigned to Turtle Island duty (a place God never let on about to his true believers, since it isn't mentioned in the Bible -- except perhaps under the code-name Eden) since the Mormon Plates were described last decade as being "in a primitive script" and filled with detailed information about the so-called "pre-history" of this North American continent. If true, the Cherokee Nation should begin publicity calling for repatriation of those gold plates! [[return](#)]

27 The Scribe Clan is deserving of special linguistic acclaim: it may be properly called, from what I understand from Traveller Bird, the first American School of Linguistics! Taliwa-speaking Scribes not only knew how to write, they also went to live with other tribes to learn the languages and teachings in order to then be able to act as interpreters when those tribes came to visit. [[return](#)]

28 who'd been convicted as a "witch" and had the tops of his fingers removed, so that wasn't and couldn't be him depicted in turban with manicured fingers pointing to the syllabary chart in the famous pictures, but a chap named Thomas Maw instead, posing for missionary-conspired pictures, according to Traveller Bird. [[return](#)]

29 I've posted some reports on these to my website (see final footnote), and you can find out more when the book I'm finishing comes out, hopefully under the name The Secret Life of Language. [[return](#)]

30 For current Dialogue information, and ordering the Transcripts of these historic meetings (1999, 2000, 2001) and the First Quantum Linguistics Dialogue, go to <http://www.seedopenu.org>, website of the sponsoring non-profit educational organization, SEED Open University, phone 888-818-7333 (in NM 505-792-2900), email [seed@seedopenu.org](mailto:seed@seedopenu.org), or write SEED at 1700 Atrisco NW, Albuquerque NM 87105. [[return](#)]

31 See our webpage at <http://www.sac-aaa.org>. This organization holds annual spring meetings (as well as sessions of the American Anthropological Association, celebrating the universal human passion for practices inducing alternative states of consciousness. This group has been my primary speaking and publishing audience for over two decades, and has more exciting meetings than just about anybody! [[return](#)]

32 See final footnote for website info. [[return](#)]

33 see "Shamantalk: A Medicine Way of Speaking" on my website, below. [[return](#)]

34 You may contact me at [moonhawk@mac.com](mailto:moonhawk@mac.com) with comments, seminar invitations, offers of Dialogue sponsorships or scholarships, etc. My website filled with past articles and more is at <http://www.enformy.com/alfordIndex.htm>.

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