

Reading and Writing the Lakota Language

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Based on extensive research and pedagogy on the Rosebud Reservation, this elementary grammar of Lakota, one of the three languages spoken by the Sioux nation, is the first written by a native Lakota speaker. It presents the Sicangu dialect using an orthography developed by Lakota in 1982 and which is now supplanting older systems provided by linguists and missionaries. This new approach represents a powerful act of self-determination for Indian education.

Though Reading and Writing the Lakota Language is thorough in its inclusion of conjugation, syntax, and sentence, it emphasizes vocabulary and pronunciation. Author Albert White Hat Sr. presents Lakota philosophy as it applies to specific grammar lessons. Moreover, he documents the impact of the acculturation process on the language, showing how Lakota evolved as a result of non-Indian influences. The textual example offers new information and interpretation of Lakota society, even to scholars who specialize in Plains cultures. Beyond language instruction, readers will value the book for its cultural insights, humorous stories, and its entertaining tone.

Albert White Hat, Sr. is a professor at Sinte Gleska University. It is easy to confuse the distinction between male and female speech. In recent times, many visitors have come to the reservation who attempted to use greetings and acknowledgments without learning the proper usage from local Lakota speakers. One time, in an inipi ceremony (a purification ceremony), a woman was visiting the lodge. Every time the Medicine Man prayed or made a comment, she responded loudly, "Hau, hau," instead of saying, "To!" or "Haye!" like the other women. As the Medicine Man continued with his prayers, he expressed a message from the spirits and this woman responded loudly, saying, "Hokahe," a male expression meaning "Let's go. It's time to start." The Medicine Man couldn't control himself any longer. He started to laugh and almost forgot to convey the rest of the messages.

Other Books

The Year the Stars Fell, Winter counts? pictorial calendars by which Plains Indians kept track of their past? marked each year with a picture of a memorable event. The Lakota, or Western Sioux, recorded many different events in their winter counts, but all include "the year the stars fell," the spectacular Leonid meteor shower of 1833-34. This volume is an unprecedented assemblage of information on the important collection of Lakota winter counts at the Smithsonian, a core resource for the study of Lakota history and culture. Fourteen winter counts are presented in detail, with a chapter devoted to the newly discovered Rosebud Winter Count. Together these counts constitute a visual chronicle of over two hundred years of Lakota experience as recorded by Native historians. A visually stunning book, The Year the Stars Fell features full-color illustrations of the fourteen winter counts plus more than 900 detailed images of individual pictographs. Explanations, provided by their nineteenth-century Lakota recorders, are arranged chronologically to facilitate comparison among counts. The book provides ready access to primary source material, and serves as an essential reference work for scholars as well as an invaluable historical resource for Native communities.

By the 1880s Lakota people, who speak a mutually intelligible dialect with their Dakota neighbors to the east, were reading and writing their own language in personal letters, Native-language newspapers, and ethnographic notes for ..."