The Meaning and Pronunciation of "Lheidli T'enneh"

Meaning

Lheidli T'enneh means "the people of the confluence". It is based on the verb root -li "to flow". "lheidli" means "they flow into each other". As a noun, it means "confluence". In this case, it refers to the confluence of the Fraser and the Nechako.

In the Carrier language you can make the name of a place into the name for a person from that place by adding -t'en or -whut'en. For example, a person from Nadleh (Nautley) is a Nadleh Whut'en. When we add -t'en to Lheidli, we get Lheidlit'en, a person from the confluence. [1]The final -neh is the plural suffix. Most Carrier nouns do not have distinct singular and plural forms: koo can mean "house" or "houses. In general, only nouns referring to people and dogs have distinct singular and plural forms. Lheidlit'en can therefore mean either "person of the confluence" or "people of the confluence". Adding the suffix -neh makes it clear more than one person is meant.

Pronunciation

There are three main points at which the word Lheidli T'enneh is pronounced in ways that are unfamiliar to speakers of English. One of them is the first consonant, spelled "lh". This sound, what linguists call a "voiceless lateral fricative", does not occur in English or the more familiar European languages. It is, however the sound spelled "ll" in Welsh, as in the name "Lloyd". It is made with the tongue in a similar position to the one used when making an "l" but with the tongue closer to the roof of the mouth, which results in the generation of turbulence noise. It is also made without any vibration of the vocal cords. To English speakers "lh" often sounds like it begins with a "k" or "g", but it does not. Probably the best way to learn to say it is to start by saying the sound of the "th" in "thin" followed by an "l" and then gradually trying to say the "th" and "l" at the same time rather than one before the other.

The second point to pay attention to is the pronunciation of the "dl" sequence. In the word "lheidli" the division between the syllables is **lhe-i-dli**.

The third point of difference is the sound written "t'". This is what linguists call an "ejective t'" or, using less specific term, a "glottalized t'"|. It is made like an ordinary English or Carrier "t" sound, but with a different source of air pressure. When you make an ordinary "t", you press the tip of your tongue against the alveolar ridge, which is the bony ridge behind your upper teeth. Then you use your lungs to increase the air pressure within your mouth. When you pull your tongue away from the alveolar ridge, you open up the closure of your mouth and release the built-up air pressure.

When you make an ejective "t" you do the same thing with your tongue, but you also close your glottis, which is the space between your vocal cords. By clamping your vocal cords together, you prevent any flow of air through your windpipe. Your vocal tract is now closed at two points - your alveolar ridge and your glottis, so the air is trapped within it. If you now raise your larynx about 1cm (you didn't know you could do this, but you can) the trapped air is forced into a smaller space and so its pressure rises. If you now pull your tongue away from your alveolar ridge, you get a little pop like in a regular "t", but with a somewhat different sound.

Further Information

An introduction to the sounds and writing of Lheidli T'enneh Carrier with audio is available at:
   http://www.ydli.org/dakinfo/LheidliAudio/LheidliPronounciation.html
A written explanation of the sound system is available at:
   http://www.billposer.org/CLCT110/SoundSystem.pdf
The Lheidli T'enneh dictionary is located at:
   http://www.billposer.org/LheidliCarrierDictionary/
Many of the words and example sentences have accompanying audio files that you can listen to.
In particular, the entry for the word "Lheidli" is at:
   http://www.billposer.org/LheidliCarrierDictionary/Entries/000005.html

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1   People sometimes notice the similarity between -t'en and the noun dune "man, person". The similarity is a coincidence.