

Dear Editor,

Tłıchǫ or Tǎıchô?

In their recent paper focused on the effects of diamond mining on Tłıchǫ youth of Behchokǫ, Northwest Territories (NWT), Davison and Hawe (*Arctic* 65(2):214–228) incorrectly identify the indigenous group they are writing about as “the Tǎıchô,” while correctly noting that it is “also seen written as ‘Tlıcho,’ ‘Tłıchǫ,’ or ‘Dogrib’” (p. 216). They go on to make the extraordinary claim that “even the name of the First Nations group was changing in common conversations from the previously more common Dogrib to Tǎıchô (or Tlıcho, as it went through a number of written iterations)” (p. 222). Though there has indeed been a stronger preference for the ethnonym Tłıchǫ (over its English translation, “Dogrib”) since Tłıchǫ self-government was achieved on 4 August 2005, the term “Tǎıchô” is the result of a common computer character-substitution problem and in no way reflects a change in group name. Please see the website of the Tłıchǫ Government at www.tlıcho.ca for authoritative information about the group’s name and the spelling. As we detail below, diacritics are a vexing issue in indigenous language orthography and the authors show no sense on the matter.

In Tłıchǫ orthography, the letter ł, commonly referred to as a “barred l,” denotes a voiceless alveolar lateral fricative, the grave accent (as in Behchokǫ) indicates a low tone, while the ogonek (.) indicates that the vowel is nasalized (as used also in Polish orthography). In the Tłıchǫ alphabet, the character ł, is pronounced like the “tle” in “settle” or sometimes the “cl” in “clue”; the vowel ı is pronounced similarly to the “ean” in “mean,” while ǫ sounds like the “on” of “don’t.” Many indigenous peoples have struggled to find Unicode-compliant fonts for use in computer environments in order to represent their languages in accordance with standardized orthographies. For the five Dene languages in the NWT (which include Tłıchǫ), the first dedicated font package, called “Vowel First Dene,” was created in the 1980s by Doug Hitch, a linguist then working for the Language Bureau of the Government of the Northwest Territories (GNWT). Designed for use in a Macintosh environment, Vowel First Dene became obsolete in the mid-1990s when the GNWT adopted a Windows operating platform, requiring all of their interpreter and translator contractors and educational staff to comply. To fill the gap that this transition created, Jim Stauffer developed a cross-platform font package called WinMac Dene Font. Widely adopted throughout the Dene language communities, the font package allowed Dene words to be shared between Macintosh or Windows computers that had installed WinMac Dene Fonts. However, because most of the characters with diacritical marks were not Unicode compliant, problems arose when Dene words were sent to computers that did not have WinMac Dene Fonts installed. When this happens, the

word processing software generates substitutions for the non-compliant characters and, in this way, Tłıchq becomes Tăıchô.

More recently, linguist Christopher Harvey created the Aboriginal Unicode Fonts, available as a free download at his website (<http://www.languagegeek.com/>). Though this font is fully Unicode-compliant and available for both Mac and Windows platforms, many writers and organizations, especially in the smaller communities in the NWT, have yet to make the transition from WinMac Dene Fonts to Harvey's Aboriginal Unicode Fonts and, as a result, the character substitution problem is still common. Some authors try to avoid the problem by using "Tlıcho" (without any of the required diacritics) to ensure that "Tăıchô" does not appear on the destination computer. This shorthand, however, is also incorrect and should not appear in published form, despite the fact that that is the form used in the federal legislation creating Tłıchq self-government (http://laws-lois.justice.gc.ca/eng/AnnualStatutes/2005_1/page-1.html). Representing the diacritics in database or web applications can also be challenging, though recent software advances have made this much easier. For example, the Tłıchq Government website referred to above (www.tlıcho.ca) is a prime example of how diacritics can be successfully displayed in a website. See also the website of the GNWT Department of Aboriginal Affairs and Intergovernmental Relations: http://www.daair.gov.nt.ca/_live/pages/wpPages/Tlıcho.aspx.

In Davison and Hawe's paper, their problem with diacritics is evident in almost all of the Tłıchq words they use. Though ensuring that Dene diacritics appear correctly can be challenging in a print environment, to suggest that the Tłıchq are settling on Tăıchô as their ethnonym represents a significant error. To be clear, the Tłıchq are the Tłıchq.

Sincerely,
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