

Sarcee is an Athapaskan language spoken on a reserve at the western limits of Calgary, Alberta. The language is, unfortunately, dying; Sarcee is spoken with reasonable competence by about 15 speakers aged 40-60, and around 20 elders (all over 60). How Sarcee is related genetically or otherwise to other Athapaskan languages is still far from clear, although its affinity to Beaver has been suggested by several researchers (Cook 1984).

Sarcee exhibits a large and complex consonant inventory, most of which is exemplified in this recording. Plosives come in three classes: plain lenis, aspirated, and ejective or glottalized. There are only four vowel phonemes, however, two high and two low. These exhibit considerable phonetic variation, however, and it is often difficult to be sure which vowel is being spoken. Any of three level tones may be applied to the vowels, and the vowels also show phonemic lengthening, or gemination.

The recorded utterances are those of a male member of the Sarcee band, 47 years old. The speaker said that he did not speak the "old tsúùtína"; in other words, his form of the language is considerably different from that of the elders of his community.

#### Sarcee Consonants:

Lenis		d	dz	dʒ	dl	g	
Aspirated		t <sup>h</sup>	ts <sup>h</sup>	tʃ <sup>h</sup>	tɬ	k <sup>h</sup>	
Ejective		tʼ	tsʼ	tʃʼ	tɬʼ	kʼ	ʔ
Fricatives			s	ʃ	ɬ	x	h
			z	ʒ	l	ɣ	
Sonorants	m	n		j		w	

[l] and [ɬ] are classified here as lateral fricatives rather than liquids. This classification is justifiable on the basis of the phonological rules to which all the fricatives are subject (Cook 1984).

It has been a common practice for Athapaskan linguists to use such symbols as d, dz, g, etc. for plain (unaspirated, unvoiced, unglottalized) stops and affricates (Cook 1984). Those who are not familiar with this practice should not misunderstand the phonetic properties these symbols represent here.

Sarcee Vowels:

Four phonemes	i	u		
	a	ɑ		
Three tones	low [ˉ]	mid [ˊ]	high [ˋ]	

The vowels show lengthening which is contrastive. The phonetic quality of a long vowel may vary depending on the tones it carries. Specifically, a long vowel with two different tones (contour tone) will be realized as [V:]. A long vowel with identical tones will be realized as an overlong vowel, shown phonetically as [V:V̄] (Cook 1971). This phonetic variation is quickly disappearing in modern speech, and the recorded examples designed to illustrate the effect do not consistently do so. In the word lists that follow, the long vowels are written as geminates (two vowel symbols) in order to show the tone carried by each.

Sapir's recognition of three level tones has never been challenged, nor has there been a thorough argument to establish their phonemic status (Cook 1984). We here assume that there are in fact three tones, but our speaker does not consistently employ them. Sarcee is usually characterized as having a low-marked tone system (Cook 1984).

I. Word ListsConsonants:

## Plosives

1	[d]	[dāɬ]	"crane"
2	[dl]	[dlùùná]	"mouse"
3	[dz]	[dzínīs]	"day, daylight"
4	[dʒ]	[dʒìdʒá]	"berry"
5	[g]	[gàh]	"spruce tree"
6	[tʰ]	[tʰú]	"water"
7	[tɬ]	[tɬàà]	"child, grandchild"
8	[tsʰ]	[tsʰij]	"crying, weeping"
9	[tʰʰ]	[tʰʰá]	"thunder; rain"
10	[kʰ]	[kʰūh]	"fire, firewood"
11	[tʰ]	[tʰàs]	"powdered charcoal, gunpowder"

12	[tʰ]	[tʰúúw]	"medicine"
13	[tsʰ]	[tsʰí]	"mosquito"
14	[tʃ]	[tʃʰààsúwá]	"Crow-Indians"
15	[kʰ]	[kʰí]	"saskatoon bush"
16	[ʔ]	[ʔáh]	"snowshoe"

## Fricatives

17	[ʈ]	[āʈùh]	"you two lasso him"
18	[s]	[sùh]	"star"
19	[x]	[xín]	"song"
20	[h]	[tsʰhūā]	"porcupine"

## Vowels:

1	[i]	[mìs]	"river bank"
2	[i:ʰ]	[ídzínī]	"the one that was singing"
3	[i:]	[dìjí-ìsà]	"maybe this is it"
4	[a]	[mas]	"knife"
5	[a:ʰ]	[tʰààs]	"white clay"
6	[a:]	[gwāádžá]	"it became"
7	[u]	[sùh]	"star"
8	[u:ʰ]	[tʰákúúkʰájí]	"fox"
9	[u:]	[tsʰùtʰínà]	"Sarcee"
10	[ɑ]	[zās]	"snow"
11	[ɑ:ʰ]	[íʰúá átʰà]	"it's my father"
12	[ɑ:]	[dāādítʰíjí]	"over there" (covert or private manner)

## References:

- Cook, Eung-Do (1971) "Vowels and tones in Sarcee," *Language* 47: 164-179.  
 Cook, Eung-Do (1984) *A Sarcee Grammar*, Vancouver: UBC Press.  
 Hoijer, H. and J. Joël (1963) "Sarsi nouns," in H. Hoijer et. al. (eds.) *Studies in the Athapaskan Languages*, Berkeley and Los Angeles: University of California Press.

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