

Shpendazo miinwaa Kchizheyaa (Pride and Prejudice)

One student, Brooke Simon, was asked to translate the very first sentence of *Pride and Prejudice* into Anishinaabemowin for a Literature assignment. Trying to translate the sentence became an interesting task where cultural differences between Jane Austen's time and Anishinaabemowin became apparent.

"It is a truth universally acknowledged, that a single man in possession of a good fortune, must be in want of a wife."

An interpretive translation would be:

"It is true living knowledge that when a man alone has something of value, women may want to walk with him."



The following is a literal translation into Ojibwe:

Debwebmaadziwin kendamowin
Truth living knowledge

nishkezid nini bangi gego ednid
single man little something of value

minogshkeweziwin kwean igo gonemaa
good fortune women maybe

daandewenmaan ge wii wiinsemigad.
to want each other will walk with.

* **Cultural Note:** The concept of wanting a wife as a possession (noun) is not readily translatable into Anishinaabemowin. Instead, the Anishinaabe way of viewing relationships is through action. For this reason, the common metaphor for marriage is two people who want to walk with one another. Of course, this does render the subtle humor of the British English unreadable. The joke in Austen's words is that a single man with money is viewed by others as more marketable and therefore needs a wife, perhaps to help spend his treasure. If a very fluent translator were to wish to write a similarly humorous line in Anishinaabemowin the humor would have to be found in the walk, perhaps along a road. Caring nothing for fortune, one might write, "When a man walks alone, it is universally understood that he is looking, and most likely he is looking for a woman willing to walk with him."

** *Pride and Prejudice* was written between 1796 and 1797 and was first published January 28, 1813. At this time The United States of America was a small nation, not yet reaching west of the Mississippi. But part of the humor of the novel's opening phrase, "it is a truth universally acknowledged," is that Jane Austen was alluding to and making fun of the Enlightenment, universalizing political language that flourished in the North American anti-colonial struggles of the late Eighteenth Century (such as, the Declaration of Independence's "We hold these truths to be self-evident..."). There are more connections, and more ironies: many have argued that the "Founding Fathers" of the United States who drafted some of the language of these late eighteenth-century documents, such as for example the United States Constitution, were influenced by ideas about governance that they learned from Native Nations, such as the Iroquois; at the same time, however, the "universal truths" of such documents were never very universal in practice, but often excluded native people, African-Americans, women, and others. Thus, when Jane Austen poked fun at the "universalizing" tendencies of the political language that was popular in her time, she was participating in a dialogue about language and truth that affected peoples on both sides of the Atlantic. This is just one of many examples of cultural comparison possible in the context of colonization.