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Malian’s Song – *Abenaki Language Glossary*

Margaret Bruchac

*University of Pennsylvania, mbruchac@sas.upenn.edu*

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Abstract
The tribal name Abenaki is adapted from the original Wôbanakiak, a noun that combines the morphemes for dawn or white light (wôban), and land (-aki) with an animate plural ending to indicate the people who dwell in that place (-ak). During the 1700s, English, French, and Dutch attempts to pronounce Wôbanakiak or Wôbanaki resulted in many different spellings - Abnaki, Abanaki, Abenaki, Banakee, Wabanaki, etc. - that appear in colonial records. The most common modern pronunciations of Abenaki are the following:

1) Abenaki (stress the first syllable, and pronounce “a” as in “lab” and “e” as in “end”)
2) Abénaquis (stress the second syllable, and pronounce “a” as in “ah” and “e” as in “end”)
3) Abnaki (stress the first syllable, and pronounce “a” as in “lab”)
4) Abanaki (stress the first and third syllables, and pronounce “a” as in “lah”)

Disciplines
Anthropology | Social and Behavioral Sciences
Malian’s Song – *Abenaki Language Glossary*

By Marge Bruchac

**The Name Wôbanakiak or Abenaki**

The tribal name *Abenaki* is adapted from the original *Wôbanakiak*, a noun that combines the morphemes for dawn or white light (*wôban*), and land (-*aki*) with an animate plural ending to indicate the people who dwell in that place (-*ak*). During the 1700s, English, French, and Dutch attempts to pronounce *Wôbanakiak* or *Wôbanaki* resulted in many different spellings - Abnaki, Abanaki, Abenaki, Banakee, Wabanaki, etc. - that appear in colonial records. The most common modern pronunciations of Abenaki are the following:

1) *Abenaki* (stress the first syllable, and pronounce “a” as in “lab” and “e” as in “end”)
2) *Abénaquis* (stress the second syllable, and pronounce “a” as in “ah” and “e” as in “end”)
3) *Abnaki* (stress the first syllable, and pronounce “a” as in “lab”)
4) *Abanaki* (stress the first and third syllables, and pronounce “a” as in “lah”)

**Alnôbaôdwa – Speaking Western Abenaki**

During the 1700s, the Native population at Odanak (Saint Francis) was mixed, with Native people who originally came from Cowass, Missisquoi, Pennacook, Pequawket, Pocumtuck, Sokoki, Woronoco, and elsewhere. Many of the words and family names in the Western Abenaki language today are directly traceable to these older Abenaki communities and other dialects.

Native Abenaki speakers could easily understand each other when speaking face to face, since specific pronunciations, gestures, and context gave meaning to the words, and dialects identified where the speaker came from. A fluent speaker could form compound words and phrases that would clearly indicate the speaker’s intent, the relationship of the speaker to the audience, the time of the events being spoken of, and the importance of this information. There were, however, distinct differences between the “Western Abenaki” languages (spoken in New Hampshire, Vermont, parts of northern Massachusetts, southeastern Canada, and upstate northeastern New York) and the “Eastern Abenaki” languages of Malecite, Mi’kmaq, Passamaquoddy, and Penobscot (spoken in Maine and the Maritimes). These languages are all part of a larger language family called “Algonquian,” that includes all of the Native people of New England, the Great Lakes, and most of Canada.

The following is a *very* simple introduction to a very sophisticated language. Here are just a few tips on pronouncing the Western Abenaki language for English speakers:

**Vowels:**
- the letter “a” sounds like “ah” (as in pa)
- the letter “e” sounds like “eh” (as in set)
- the letter “i” sounds like “ih” (as in sit)
- when the letter “i” is preceded by the letter “a” it sounds like “eye” (as in mine)
- when the letter “i” is preceeded by a consonant it sounds like “ee” (as in see)
- when the letter “i” is followed by the letter “a” or “o” it sounds like “ee” (as in see)
- the letter “o” sounds like “oh” (as in no)
- the letter “o” with an accent - “ô” (which can also be spelled “8”) - is a unique Abenaki sound, a nasalized “ohn” made by pursing one’s lips and forcing the sound through the nasal cavity
- the letter combination “ou” sounds like “ow”
- when the letter “u” begins a word, it sounds like “u” (as in you)
- when the letter “u” is preceded by the letters i, g, or k, it sounds like “u” (as in you)
- when the letter “u” is preceded by any other letter, it sounds like “eh” (as in net)

Consonants:
All consonants in a word must sounded; there are no silent letters.
- as the first letter in a word, “b” is sounded like the letter b
- as the final letter in a word, “b” is sounded like the letter p
- as the first letter in a word, “c” is sounded like “ts”
- as the first letter in a word, “d” is sounded like the letter d
- as the final letter in a word, “d” is sounded like the letter t
- the letter “g” is sounded like a hard letter g
- the letter “j” is sounded as a hard “ch” (as in watch)
- the letter “w” is sounded with a breath of air as “wh”
- the letter combination “ch” is sounded as a soft “ch”
- the letter combination “dz” (which can also be spelled “tsi”) is pronounced “tsee”
- any double consonants are sounded slightly longer

Please note that it can sometimes be difficult to read the written Abenaki language today, since different linguists may choose to spell the same words in entirely different ways. For example, one writer may use the letter “b” where another uses “p” for the same sound, or “d” for “t”. There are several different ways to spell Abenaki words, based on the many different orthographies (spelling systems) that try to convey the sound of the spoken language. There is not one spelling system that everyone agrees on – the sound is the most important thing. For proper pronunciation, it is best to listen to Native-born Western Abenaki speakers.

The following are some select Western Abenaki names, words and phrases that refer specifically to the people, objects, places, and events recounted in *Malian’s Song*. These particular words and phrases come from Gordon Day’s fieldnotes about Elvine Obomsawin’s story and several other printed sources listed in the bibliography that follows.
### Glossary and pronunciation: Abenaki names and words used in *Malian’s Song*

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Abenaki Word</th>
<th>Pronunciation</th>
<th>Meaning</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>akwi</td>
<td>ahk-wee</td>
<td>stop; do not</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Alsigontekw</td>
<td>ahl-sih-gon-tek-wh</td>
<td>river of many shells</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>anakwika</td>
<td>ah-nahk-wee-kah</td>
<td>trees are growing up</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>awanagiak</td>
<td>ah-wah-nah-gee-ahk</td>
<td>strangers</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>bemômahla</td>
<td>beh-mohn-mah-lah</td>
<td>run</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Cowass</td>
<td>coh-wahs</td>
<td>pine-tree place</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>idam</td>
<td>ee-dahm</td>
<td>he said</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>madahôdo</td>
<td>mah-dah-hohn-doh</td>
<td>bad spirit</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Malian</td>
<td>mah-lee-ahn</td>
<td>personal name (Marian in French)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Maliazonis</td>
<td>mah-lee-ah-zoh-nees</td>
<td>personal names (Marie Jeanne in French)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Msadoques</td>
<td>mh-sah-doh-kees</td>
<td>personal name</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>namassaak.</td>
<td>nah-mahs-sahk</td>
<td>fish</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Nanibôsad</td>
<td>nah-nee-boh-sahd</td>
<td>the night walker</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>nda</td>
<td>un-dah</td>
<td>no</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>nemikwaldam,nana</td>
<td>neh-mik-wahl-dahm-nah-nah</td>
<td>we remember</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>nôbamiskw</td>
<td>nohn-bah-meesk-wh</td>
<td>old beaver</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>ndodana</td>
<td>un-doh-dah-nah</td>
<td>in our town</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Nokomis</td>
<td>noh-koh-mees</td>
<td>grandmother</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>nziwaldam</td>
<td>un-zee-wahl-dahm</td>
<td>I am lonesome</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Obomsawin</td>
<td>oh-bohm-sah-ween</td>
<td>one who leads or guides</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>oziwaldam</td>
<td>oh-zee-wahl-dahm</td>
<td>very lonesome</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>pita</td>
<td>pih-tah</td>
<td>she is</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Sibosek</td>
<td>see-boh-sehk</td>
<td>little river</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Simôn</td>
<td>see-mohn</td>
<td>personal name (Simon in English)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>skamôn</td>
<td>skah-mohn</td>
<td>corn</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>tôrôô</td>
<td>tohn-mohn</td>
<td>not any; none</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>widôba</td>
<td>wee-dohn-bah</td>
<td>her friends</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>wlioni</td>
<td>wh-lee-oh-nee</td>
<td>thank you</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
wôbi  wohn-bee  white
yokeag  yoh-keg  ground corn (New England dialect)

Glossary and pronunciation: Samadagwis’ words in *Malian’s Song*

NOTE: In the story told in *Malian’s Song*, a young Abenaki girl named Maliazonis is warned by a Stockbridge Mohican man who is a scout for Robert Rogers. According to Abenaki family traditions, this man did not speak Abenaki very well. Even though the words that he speaks in *Malian’s Song* are not correct Abenaki, they would still have been understandable to an Abenaki speaker. Samadagwis’ words are listed below, alongside the correct word in Abenaki:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Samadagwis’ word</th>
<th>Pronunciation</th>
<th>Abenaki word</th>
<th>Pronunciation</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>akwi</td>
<td>ahk-wee</td>
<td>akwi</td>
<td>ahk-wee</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>sagez</td>
<td>sah-gaze</td>
<td>sagezo</td>
<td>sah-geh-zo</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>ndapsizak</td>
<td>ni-dahp-see-zahk</td>
<td>nidôbasizek</td>
<td>nee-doh-bah-see-zek</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>kwawimleba</td>
<td>k-wah-weem-le-bah</td>
<td>k’wawidokawa</td>
<td>k-wah-wee-doh-kah-wah</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

[in English, this means “stop”, or “do not”]

[in English, this means, “to be afraid”]

[in English, this means “my little friend”]

[in English, this means “you are being warned”]
**Glossary – Select Abenaki place names, personal names, and family names**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Abenaki Place Name</th>
<th>Description</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Alsigontekw</td>
<td>river of many shells (St. Francis River)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Azon</td>
<td>personal name (Jeanne in English)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Bitawbakw</td>
<td>waters in-between (Lake Champlain)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Cowass</td>
<td>pine-tree place (upper Connecticut River, eastern Vermont)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Iglismôn</td>
<td>Englishman</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Kebek</td>
<td>obstructed current (now Quebec in French)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Kwinitekw</td>
<td>long tidal river (Connecticut River)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Magwak</td>
<td>man-eater (Abenaki term for Mohawk or Iroquois)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Mali</td>
<td>personal name (Marie in French, Mary in English)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Marian</td>
<td>personal name (Marian in French, Mary Ann in English)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Maliazonis</td>
<td>personal name (Mary Jeanne in French, Mary Jean in English)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Malgelit</td>
<td>personal name (Marguerite in French, Margaret in English)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Missisquoi or Mazipskoik</td>
<td>place of the flint (northwestern Vermont around Swanton)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Msadoques</td>
<td>big river person (family name)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Obomsawin</td>
<td>fire-tender (family name)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Odanak</td>
<td>the dwelling place (St. Francis)</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
| Pastoni            | American man (based on the English word “Boston”)
| Pennacook          | place of ground-nuts (central New Hampshire) |
| Pequawket          | broken, cleared land (eastern New Hampshire into Maine) |
| Plachmon           | Frenchman |
| Pocumtuck          | swift, sandy river (around Deerfield, Massachusetts) |
| Samadagwis         | personal name (one of Rogers’ Stockbridge Mohican scouts) |
| Sibosek            | little river in a ravine |
| Simôn              | personal name (Simon in English) |
| Sokoki             | southern place (northern Massachusetts, southern Vermont) |
| Winooski           | onion-river place (northwestern Vermont around Burlington) |
| Wôbanakiak         | dawn-land people, Abenaki Indians |
| Wôbi Madahôdo      | white bad spirit, “White Devil” (Abenaki name for Robert Rogers) |
| Woronoco           | winding river (Westfield, Massachusetts) |
Glossary – Abenaki months and seasons

In the region between southern New England and southern Canada, there are four distinct seasons of the year: winter, spring, summer, and autumn, each lasting approximately 91 days. The Western Abenaki names for the seasons are:

- **Pebon** winter season
- **Sigwan** spring season
- **Niben** summer season
- **Tagwôgo** autumn season

For generations, Native people measured the year by a lunar cycle of 13 full moons, visible every 28 days, over the course of the 365 days that make up a year. In Abenaki, the word “kesos” or “kisos,” which also means “sun,” is used to refer to the full moon only when it looks like a fully round orb. The names of the full moons varied from tribe to tribe, and from region to region, since each full moon was known by whichever natural resources were most abundant at that time. By 1759, the Abenaki people at Odanak had adopted the English and French calendar system, using 12 months (instead of 13 moons) to measure the year. The names they used for each month reflected the activities that were most important during that time.

- **Alamikos** new year’s greeting month (January)
- **Piaôdagos** boughs-shedding month (February)
- **Mozokas** moose-hunting month (March)
- **Sogalikas** maple sugar-making month (April)
- **Kikas** planting month (May)
- **Nokkahigas** hoeing month (June)
- **Temaskikos** hay-making month (July)
- **Temezôwas** harvesting month (August)
- **Skamonkas** Indian corn-reaping month (September)
- **Benibagos or Penibagos** leaf-falling month (October)
- **Mzatanos** ice-forming month (November)
- **Pebonkas** winter month (December)
Glossary – Select Abenaki terms for relatives

alôgomômëk a relative
awissisak children
awissisimëk your children
môdzakwnewak she that raised us
mziwi everybody, all our relatives
nadôgwsis my female cousin, daughter of mother’s brother or father’s sister
nadôgwseskua my male cousin, son of mother’s brother or father’s sister
ndaawôsizemôwô their children
nigawes my mother
nigawesega my late mother
nigawesenogak our late mothers
nidokan my older brother
nijia my brother
nijia my female cousin, son of mother’s sister or father’s brother
niswiak my spouse (married partner, wife, husband)
niswiidiji his or her spouse
nitsakaso my sister
nitsakaso my female cousin, daughter of mother’s sister or father’s brother
n’mahom my grandfather
nmessis my older sister
nmitôgwes my father
nmitôgwesega my late father
nmitôgwsenogak our late fathers
nokemesis my mother’s sister (aunt)
nokomes my grandmother
noses my grandchild (granddaughter or grandson)
odawôsozmôwô their children
okemessa his or her grandmother
Glossary – Select Abenaki words and phrases

aiamihawigamigw  house of prayer, church
abazenoda  basket
abaziak  trees
abonek  on the bed
adalgadimek  dancing place
adebôlagw  a rifle
adiogoodbye
agema ahlômekek he told
agema  he or she
agômekek  on the other side
ahaiagwa  when we lived
akwisagezo  do not be afraid
alakwssak  stars
alemos  dog
alôdokaogowak  she that tells us
alosada  let us go
alnôbak  Abenaki people
alnôbaôdwa  to speak Abenaki
amkuôn  spoon
anakwika  trees are growing up
askwa  still
asolkwônsis  a small hat or cap
awanagia  who are you
awanagiak  strangers
awanii  someone
awanocewiwigwôm  French-style wooden house
awasiwi  beyond
awazonal  firewood
awighigan  a book
awôsis  child
awòsizwit  she was young
bakwasataizatal  dried blueberries
bamegizegak  today
bemômahla  run
gawi  to sleep
gedakinna  our homeland
gejokôn  doll
iglismôniwi  to speak in the English style
jimeli  brick or stone fireplace (based on the English word “chimney”)
kagwesa  what
kagwi lla  what is the matter
kalozimuk  to speak
kawakeniga  to harvest or gather by pulling or picking
kikawôgan  to cultivate and harvest a field by digging and cutting
kina  look
kiptôômek  he was shot down
kita  listen
kizos  the sun
koaikok  at the pines
kôkanilinto  calmly singing
kôtlizidiidep  they were hiding
kôtlôôdit  they hide
kowawtamenô  you understand
kpiwsi  in the little woods
ktsi psakaigan  big ravine
ktsi wigwôm  big house
kwai kwai  greetings
kwalaskonigan  cornhusk
kwatiz  small container or pot
kwidôbawô nia  I am your friend
kwilawatôzik  to search
kwutguabizon a belt
labizowan petticoat, skirt
leguasowôgan a dream
linto to sing
lintowôgan song
lômpskahigan any decorated leather or cloth, fancy clothing
madahôdo a bad spirit
mahlakws ash tree
maji bad
makezenal my shoes (moccasins)
malisjômuk to weep
maksa a blanket
manazaawimuk to save
maskwa birch bark
maskwamozi birch tree
menahan island
migakamuk to fight
miji or mitzi to eat
mijowôgan provisions
mizôwimônînîôkwkil jewelry
mkezenal shoes, moccasins
môdzoldimek leaving
môjimuk to go away
môni silver (based on the English word “money” and French “monnaie”)
msali nthlôk many were killed
nadawaha a scout or spy
nadialin to be hunting
namaskan to be fishing
namassak fish
namiogwzo he is seen
nanibôsad night-walker (moon)
naodzi some
nda no or none
ndakinna my homeland
ndodonna in our town
negôni gamigw an old house
nemikwaldamnana we remember
ni aodîmek at the time of the fight
nidoba my friend
nidobaskwa my female friend
nikskwasisak young girls
nita at once
n’namihôb I saw
n’wajônônôb we had
nodahlôt she is left behind
nodamagwôgan fish spear
nônegôni very old
nônegwetsi alone
ntodziwi at that time
nziwaldam I am lonesome
ôbamiskw old beaver
odagimônô they counted them
odasolkwôn his hat
odebestawônô they listen to
ododonak in their village
odoka to be speaking
odzanego he stopped her
odzeksemenô they burned it
odzizawôbin she was looking out
o’gemak snow shoes
olinamiôn well-seen
olitonô they made a song
olómawalmoônôp they did not believe her
onamiôwi she could not see him
onkawódokaogowak she who passed the story on to us
onôdzi they went
ôtalinto she was singing
o’wdesis a path
oziwaldam she is lonesome
paakuinôgwzian greetings, you appear new to me
pamgisgak today
paskhigan an exploding implement (gun)
patlihôz priest
pezgelôgwihišla it is dark
pezgiwi in the dark
pilewakak strangers
pita very
pitigat go in
pkagôt sibo he crossed the river
podawazwigamigok council house
pmekhadimek people dancing
psakwlata shining
saagad how sad
sagezo to be afraid
saksahon earring
sanôba the man
senomozi maple tree
sibos a brook or stream
sibosis a little brook
siziwan a dance rattle
skamôn corn
skamônal corn (plural)
sogal sugar (based on the English word “sugar”)
sôkhipozit kisos        at sunrise
spozidoki              wake up early in the morning
tabat                  be quiet
tagwôgwiwi             during the autumn
tawipodi               table
tawzôganek             the window
tawszôganek            on the window sill
tebinawônô            to see about
tmakwaawa              beaver pelt
tokima                 to awaken
tokop                  awake
todziwi                at that time
tômô                   not any; none
wagin                  wagon (based on the English word “wagon”)
wagitôzik             to break or damage
waniadôzik            to lose
wanialôbenop           we lost her
wawaldamôwen         she or he does not know
wawôdokawa            to be warned
wawôdokawômek        she had been warned
wawôdokawôn           she warned
wdupkuanal            hair of the head
wednôn                 he took her away
widôba                his or her friend
wigwam or wigwôm     a dwelling place, house
wijokadimuk          to help each other
wiwizô               suddenly
wiwzômôdzin           quickly he left
wli                  good; gentle (also spelled oli)
wlibomkanni        travel well
wligo                it is good
wli nanawalmezi  go in good health
wlioni  thank you
wlógwiwi  during the evening
wôhôbaks  shirt
w’paskhigan  his gun
wskidakuam  tree sap
wskinôkskwa  their young girl
wzômi  because
yokeag  ground corn for corn porridge (in southern Algonkian dialect)
Bibliography – Sources for the Western Abenaki Language

The Western Abenaki language was first recorded in print during the early 1700s by Jesuit missionaries. Abenaki tribal members have been publishing their own dictionaries and grammars for generations; Peter Paul Wzokhilain published the first written Abenaki grammar in 1832. Some linguists believe that the Abenaki language is dying or extinct, but there are more Abenaki speakers today than there were a generation ago, thanks to the efforts of elders like Cecile Wawanolet, her son Eli Joubert, and others who have conducted language classes for Abenaki people at Odanak and Missisquoi. A few print sources are listed below.


