

T'it'elemettset te st'ilems the skw'okw'qá:q: Singing the Robin's Song

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This article affirms that for the Stó:lō, language, identity and worldview are inextricably interconnected, and by reconnecting with what that means, we may restore wholeness to our communities. The most obvious way that our Halq'eméylem language connects us to our identity is in the term we call ourselves, Stó:lō, or River, which is central to our lifeway and our culture. In essence, the place where the River People and River environment intersect is where we derive our understanding of creation, and our Halq'eméylem language is its best expression. River world ways permeate the Halq'eméylem language, blended in terms for time, in general directional terms, and in human body parts. Terms for animals incorporate word pictures related to Stó:lō creation stories. By breathing life into our Halq'eméylem language, we aim to reconnect with our collective memory that is distinctively Stó:lō.

Grand Chief Mike Mitchell of the Mohawk Council of Akwesasne, at the 1988 Assembly of First Nations Aboriginal Language Policy Conference, captured beautifully the essence of what it means when we say that our languages are from the Creator in the following statement,

"What would happen to the Creator's law if the robin couldn't sing its song anymore?" he asked. "We would feel very bad; we would not understand that something snapped in nature's law. What would happen if you saw a robin and you heard a different song, if it was singing the song of the seagull? You would say, 'Robin, that's not your language; that's not your song.'

*"That's what my grandfather used to say to me," Mitchell said. "It was not meant for us to lose our language; we broke the cycle, and today we have nothing to stand on if our language is going to die (AFN, 1988, cited by Kirkness, 1998:74)."*¹

¹ Verna J. Kirkness. (1998). *Aboriginal Languages: Collections of Talks and Papers*. Vancouver: Verna J. Kirkness. p. 74.

This chapter explores in Stó:lō terms the concept that “language is a gift from the creator,” asserting that the place where the River People and River environment intersect is where we derive our understanding of creation, and that our Halq’eméylem language is its best expression. I will illustrate how Riverworldview permeates the Halq’eméylem language, blended in terms for place, time, in general directional terms, and in human body parts. Terms for animals incorporate word pictures related to Stó:lō creation stories. By breathing life into our Halq’eméylem language, we aim to reconnect with our collective memory that is distinctively Stó:lō, to reconnect with the legacy of our ancestors and their relationship to the River, to *sing our own song*.

In 1975, the 24 Bands of the Stó:lō Nation came together and prepared a Stó:lō Declaration, which includes the following in its statement:

We, the people of the Stó:lō tribes know the Creator put us here. The Creator gave us laws that govern all our relationships to live in harmony with nature and mankind...

...The Creator gave us our spiritual beliefs, our languages, our culture and a place on Mother Earth which provided us with all our needs.

We have maintained our freedom, our languages and our traditions from time immemorial...²

Immediately, by this passage, we can see how all aspects of Stó:lō identity, is represented in an interrelated system of beliefs a) in a Creator, b) that the Creator gave us laws, languages, culture and place, and c) that all these gifts, including language, have been a part of the Stó:lō people since time immemorial. Rarely, is the importance of language spoken about without mention of these three interconnecting factors which altogether define us as Stó:lō people.

Aboriginal people across Canada believe in the notion that our languages come from the Creator. This broadly based belief is incorporated in documents that represent First Nations people nationally. In 1992, the Assembly of First Nations (AFN) summarized the importance of Aboriginal languages as follows:

The Aboriginal languages were given by the Creator as an integral part of life. Embodied in Aboriginal languages is our unique relationship to the Creator, our attitudes, beliefs, values, and the fundamental notion of what is truth... Language is the principal means by which culture is accumulated, shared and transmitted from generation to generation. The key to identity and retention of culture is one's ancestral language.³

² The Stó:lō Declaration is included in Public Relations packages given to visitors to Stó:lō Nation, and is also included in Stó:lō Nation's Employment Policy manual.

³ Marianne Ignace. (1998). *The Handbook for Aboriginal Language Program Planning in British Columbia*, A Report prepared for the First Nations Education Steering Committee, Aboriginal Language Sub-Committee. p. 25.

The interconnectedness of Creator, language and identity speaks clearly to a spiritual aspect in an Aboriginal worldview and possibly what Dauenhauer & Dauenhauer (1998) were referring to in their requirement for language survival that the effort must "feel spiritually good." In plain language, one might say that the Creator gave us our languages to tell us who we are, to distinguish us from one another, celebrating our diversity. Along the same vein, a 1991 Report by the First Nations Congress titled *First Nations Aboriginal Languages Policy and Program Considerations* noted that

*"to speak your Aboriginal language means more than just speaking. Our languages are tied to knowing who you are in the core of your soul (cited in Ignace, 1998)."*⁴

How can we know who we are if we cannot learn our history, beliefs and stories from our elders told to us in our Aboriginal languages? So much of what is inherent in our Aboriginal languages is untranslatable. Elder and Language Teacher Instructor, Catherine Bird, Nakazkli Nation, in a statement to the graduates of the Carrier language teachers program, states

*It is important for the people to know their mother tongue. This is how our elders talked to the people and passed down our history, beliefs and stories. When we started to lose our language the older generation could not communicate with the younger generation in our language and the meaning was lost when they tried to communicate in English (Ignace, 1998)."*⁵

Our histories, beliefs and stories are embedded in the languages themselves, in the very ways that our languages have evolved to include the meanings inherent in them. How will we pass this legacy of our Creator's gift to our future generations if we do not have a language with which to tell them of our rich heritage?

The chief of an Interior First Nations community looking toward the future affirms how important language is to identity when he remarked that

*"Thirty years from now I do not want my children to know by their status card only that they are Indian. Knowing their language is what will give them their identity (Ignace, 1995, cited in Ignace 1998)."*⁶

And so it is clear in the minds of Aboriginal peoples, including Stó:lō, that language, identity and worldview which includes a creator and creation are inextricably interconnected, and that by learning them we may restore wholeness to our peoples and communities from the trauma inset by their very erosion. From 1975 and certainly before that time until today in the year 2000, the statements

⁴ Ibid., p. 24.

⁵ Ibid., p. 28

⁶ Ibid., p. 24

from Aboriginal peoples ring a common note continuously and passionately, even more so today than before. The following is from the Vision Statement on Languages from the Language Secretariat of the Assembly of First Nations:

In spite of a history that could have destroyed our cultural survival as Peoples, we have continued to express our culture through the deepest appreciation, respect, commitment and celebration of our unique relationship with this Earth, One Another and all of Creation. It is our languages that provide us with the finest words and the context for expressing, recognizing, understanding and living in this special relationship with the world. The survival of our languages is essential to our cultural identity, whether we speak with full fluency and eloquence or are among those who are just beginning to learn our first words (AFN, 2000).⁷

Durante (1997) says that “to have a language,” means being part of a community of people who participate together in a shared range of ways of communicating, of being part of a tradition, of sharing a history, and thus, of having access to a collective memory which includes stories, innuendoes, opinions, recipes, and other things that make us human. Without our language, or with only limited knowledge of our language, we cannot access our collective memory.⁸ As Aboriginal peoples, who in a drastic way have been stripped of our languages, stripped of our rightful Aboriginal identities inherent in our collective memory, the consequences have been devastating to our very livelihoods. In many ways, we have continued to “have a language” even in the ways we distinguish ourselves through our own unique ways of communicating using English.

By *breathing life* into our Aboriginal languages, we want to and aim to reconnect with our collective memory that is distinctively Stó:lō, to reconnect with who we are as defined by our ancestors through our ancestral language, to redefine our world today in our own terms, and to achieve the wholeness we long for that is inherent in knowing who we are collectively. I quote Durante at length as he elaborates further on what it means “to have a language,”

To have a language... we could say that language is in us as much as we are in language. By connecting people to their past, present and future, language becomes their past, present, and future. Language is not just a representation of an independently established world. Language is also that world. Not in the simplistic sense that all we have of our past is language but in the sense that our memories are inscribed in

⁷ Assembly of First Nations Language Secretariat. (July, 2000). *Vision Statement - Languages*. Posted on the AFN website.

⁸ Alessandro Durante. (1997). *Linguistic Anthropology*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press. p.334.

linguistic accounts, stories, anecdotes, and names just as much as they are contained in smells, sounds, and ways of holding our body. If language is action, as proposed by Malinowski, and the ways we speak provide us with ways of being in the world, as suggested by Sapir, Worf, and many others, linguistic communication is part of the reality it is supposed to represent, interpret, and evoke. If language is, in Wittgenstein's words, "a form of life," then to have a language not only means to have an instrument to represent events in particular ways, it also means to have the ability to interact with such events, affect them or be affected by them (Durante, 336).⁹

How much more closely interconnected can we, our identities, and our languages be if languages truly become our "past, present and future." And if language is "a form of life," then it is the embodiment of meaning created by the life form which is ourselves as humans *in concert with* the environment in which we create it. That is, to say, that we cannot name something, for example, without that something telling us what it is, by its touch, feel, smell, sound and look. What other means do we have to know our world, other than *interacting with it*? Language, having been born from this interactive process, takes on a life of its own, affecting us in ways beyond our conscious awareness. Lakoff and Johnson (1999) elaborate more fully the idea of the embodiment of reason,

First, [findings of cognitive science] tell us that human reason is a form of animal reason, a reason inextricably tied to our bodies and the peculiarities of our brains. Second, these results tell us that our bodies, brains, and interactions with our environment provide the mostly unconscious basis for our everyday metaphysics, that is, our sense of what is real¹⁰.

A sense of what is real for the Stó:lō is the River and its environment, which in Halq'eméylem is intimately reflected in terms for place, general directional terms, body parts, social system, time and probably in other ways not examined in this study. What a strong sense of identity in being Stó:lō it will be for those who choose to learn the intricate nuances in our Halq'eméylem language that reflect the Stó:lō, reflect us.

River People, River Culture

Our identity is embedded in the very name we call ourselves, the Stó:lō, or River People. The River is our lifeway, our culture, and is deeply interconnected to our spiritual beliefs of a Creator and creation. Our language connects us to the

⁹ Ibid., p. 336.

¹⁰ George Lakoff and Mark Johnson. (1999). *Philosophy in the Flesh: The Embodied Mind and Its Challenge to Western Thought*. New York: Basic Books. p. 17.

River and its environment and is reflected in the names we give our places.¹¹ The place names we use today for our communities submerge the rich Stó:lō meanings which describe vividly aspects of the River or River environment.

<u>Common usage</u>	<u>Halq'eméylem</u>	<u>Meaning</u>
Aitchelitz	<i>Áthelets</i>	“edge at bottom” or place where two rivers meet”
Cheam	<i>Chiyó:m, Xwchiyó:m</i>	“always wild strawberries”
Lakahahmen	<i>Leq'á:mel</i>	“level place” or “place that is visited”
Peters (Squatits)	<i>Skw'átets</i>	“water trickling through”
Seabird Island	<i>Sq'éwqel</i>	“turn in the river”
Shxw'owhamel	<i>Shxw'ōwhámél</i>	“where the river levels and widens”
Squeah	<i>St'élxweth'</i>	“to move in a semi-circle with the current”
	<i>Skwíyò</i> ¹²	“waterfall”
Tzeachten	<i>Ch'iyáqtel</i>	“fish weir”
Yale	<i>Xwoxwelá:lhp</i>	“willow tree place”

We have retained these names, yet many Stó:lō and other people today are not aware of the Halq'eméylem meanings we have for these places. I was born in *Skwíyò*, a place I always knew as Squeah. Little did I know until today that the name of the place I was born held a special significance defined by a natural

¹¹ Keith Thor Carlson. (1997). Ed. *You are asked to witness: The Stó:lō in Canada's Pacific Coast History*. Chilliwack: Stó:lō Heritage Trust. pp. 197-199.

¹² Galloway (1993) in his Grammar, lists Squeah as possibly derived from *skwèl*, waterfall, or from the Thompson (Nlakapmx) language. But Galloway (2002 p.c.) notes that the Thompson word for waterfall in an exhaustive Thompson dictionary by Thompson and Thompson (1996) is completely different, while the Lillooet word for waterfall (from Jan van Eijk p.c.), is a more plausible source, that would be written in the Stó:lō orthography as *skwístqw-'om* (which is analyzed as s- nominalizer, root *kwis* 'fall,' '-tqw-' 'water,' -am 'intransitive'), and *kwis* can easily be heard as *kwiys*; if the suffix for water is dropped as we drop water in our clipped version “falls” for waterfalls, we are left with *skwíysom*, not far from *Skwíyò*.” Carlson (1997), on p. 198, lists Squeah as *St'élxweth'* “to move in a semi-circle with the current.”

phenomenon. It is also understood that it might be derived from the Lillooet term “*skwistqw-om*” (Stó:lō orthography), “waterfall.” This revelation gives Squeah special meaning to me, more special than the vague notion I previously held of this place. Recently, I attended a celebration of the education achievements of the children of the Cheam First Nation, and was delighted to hear some of the history related there. The master of ceremonies played a little trivia game with the children where one of the questions asked was “What is the meaning of Cheam, or *Chiyó:m*?” Many hands went up from the children who showed anxious determination in their faces to respond, “always wild strawberries.” The pride shone through the children’s faces at their knowledge of this little bit of important trivia.

Siyémches telí te Yeqwyeqwi:ws (Chief Frank Malloway of Yakweakwouse) tells eloquently the meaning of Chilliwack,^{13 14} the place, and its meaning to the people of the area. He illustrates how the place is defined by a function of relationship between River People and the River.

*When you go up the river there was a method of poling. You know that was a skill in itself. A person would pole right up the Fraser along the edge of the river. I think that there was a real skill in it because I tried it and I couldn't keep the canoe straight. I would push on one side and the canoe would head out the other way. You had to have a skill to learn how to do that. They used to talk about the meaning of *Ts'elxwéyeqw* (Chilliwack). “What does *Ts'elxwéyeqw* mean?” But if you heard our Chief Louie, he would say, “*Ts'elxwéyeqw* means as far as you can get up the river using a paddle. Then when you had to switch to a pole, and that's where *Ts'elxwéyeqw* was.” So that made sense to me, and that was the name of our tribe - my people.*

Imagine, a name based on the place on a River where one switches from using a paddle to a pole to move in it, and naming a people by this very function of the name of the place. Language, identity and culture are interconnected so obviously here. This account shows clearly why Aboriginal people whose language, identity and culture are interconnected in this obvious way would understand so strongly the deep meaning of these interconnections. Without the language the interconnections are not grasped easily. Cheam, removed from the original name, *Chiyó:m*, is just a name. And what is “Chilliwack” without knowledge of Halq'eméylem? One may have some vague notion that it comes from the people of the area, usually no more. But, for *Siyémches*, “Chilliwack” holds greater meaning related not only to its Halq'eméylem name, and to Stó:lō identity, but to

¹³ Carlson, p. 9.

¹⁴ Galloway (2002, p.c.) in his dictionary, lists *Sis'elxwíiqw-Ts'elxwíiqw-Ts'elxwéyeqw* as Chilliwack River and Chilliwack Indian People, and the literal translation of the word as “slough/backwater/quieter water at the top of the head (or) something to go into slough/quieter water from the river at the top of the head.”

the lifeway of the River, to River culture. "Chilliwack" defines a relationship based on interaction between River people and the River, and defines the people as the *Ts'elxwéyeqw*.

The River further defined us in determining how our social structure was developed.¹⁵ *Smelá:lh*, for example, is the Halq'eméylem word for high status people from high status families. To be *Smelá:lh*, meant to be from a family who "knew their history." Being from a *Smelá:lh* family meant that the family knew which productive fishing or berry picking sites the family had access to, and that the family knew the legends, or *sxwōxwiyám* related to these places and resources. *Smelá:lh* people knew special information about plants and other resources, and had relationships with spirits of prominent family ancestors.

Being *St'áxem* refers to a low status family, or "poor people." *St'áxem* implies "people who have lost or forgotten their history." Without knowledge of history, one could not access the hereditary privileges of high status families. To be upper class, or lower class, then, was determined by the access one had to the River and its resources and to the rich spiritual resources associated with it. Today, many of us are "lower class," or *St'áxem*, because we do not have a deep understanding of our culture and how it is embedded in our Halq'eméylem language. Our language was stripped from our tongues by the colonial imperative. *Skw'iyéth* were slaves and had no direct access to any of the River resources.

Despite the declining use of our language, River culture thrives. River resources continue to be managed through family connections today. Fishing spots and berry and root locations are managed by families who have ancestral obligations to these places, and these rights and privileges are acknowledged through naming ceremonies. During the naming ceremonies, a speaker describes the places and resources to which the previous owner of that name had access. River resources are considered ancestral relations to people living today. The *sxwōxwiyám*, or legends of *Xexá:ls*, the powerful Transformers who changed the world in ancient times, tell of our ancestors who were transformed into River resources such as the salmon, eulachon, sturgeon, cedar tree and so on.¹⁶

Siyémches shares how his family is descendant from the original *Ts'elxwéyeqw*,¹⁷ delineating how identity, place and social status are interconnected.

I don't think there was any movement. You were born into your class you know...I guess if you go back in history, well it's like Chief Ken Malloway said: "we're the original chiefs of the Ts'elxwéyeqw people. He meant himself, his uncle, my brother and myself. We trace our history right back to Chilliwack lake. We're the oldest families here, but we don't say we're higher up. Our history says we're from the first families. The names that we carry are from the first family; from the four brothers who started the Chilliwack tribe. Kenny Malloway carries that

¹⁵ Carlson, pp. 89-90.

¹⁶ Ibid., p. 167.

¹⁷ Ibid., p. 15.

name Wili:lég, and I carry the name Siyémches, my son carries the name Th'eláchiyatel and my uncle carried the name Yexwéylem but now his son Cecil carries that name. So the four names are still in our family and Kenny Malloway always says that if you're looking for chiefs, you look towards our family because we're hereditary chiefs.

This account is an example of a family who knows their history. The following stories¹⁸, also from Siyémches, depict knowledge of *sxwōxwiyám*, of the stories of the time of creation related to the River Culture. *Smelá:lh*, or high class people, were well versed in this knowledge.

*I questioned Ed Leon about it [First Salmon Ceremony], and he told me about the teachings behind it and the prayers. He used to tell a lot of stories that were passed on to him about when the world was created. You know that it went that far back. And he was talking about why we got salmon. He said, "Us Indian people in the Fraser Valley and the tributaries of the Fraser never ate meat very much. We only ate meat when we ran out of salmon." He said, "That when the creator first made mother earth, he had all kinds of meat around here, bear, deer, elk. When you eat meat you get that heavy feeling and you don't want to move too much because meat weighs you down. They used to pray to the creator to send them food that didn't bog them down..." He said that one of the *shxwla:m* [Indian doctors] had a dream that the creator was sending something up the river and told him to go down to the river and scoop their dip nets, and it was the salmon.*

It was not enough to know the origin stories of the salmon. In the continuing relationship between the Stó:lō and the salmon food supply, it was important to always remember to be thankful to the creator by maintaining a deep respect for this gift which sustained our people.

They told them how to respect the salmon and thank the ones that sent the salmon. The salmon people from out in the ocean, you pray to them and thank them for what they sent. The salmon people sent their children up to you so you'd have something different to eat that gives you better energy... You have to just thank them; take the bones and send them back after you have eaten the first salmon. He said that if you didn't do that you weren't showing your respect for the salmon people and they would quit sending their children out to you.

¹⁸ Ibid., p. 3-4.

The deep respect that the Stó:lō had for things in nature can be associated with how they viewed nature. Stó:lō understood that they were only a small part of nature, dependent on nature for all that nature provides, and in many ways, at the mercy of nature herself. The anthropomorphizing of salmon and other things in nature, referring to them as people, as human, places those aspects of nature on a level equal to humans.

A spiritual interrelationship with the “Other-than-human beings” in our environment is echoed by Jocks (1998), a self-professed scholar of religion and a student of the religious life of North American First Peoples specifically. As a Native person himself, he shares his deep concern for the loss of Native languages in this respect.

There is no way to decide which is more devastating: the loss of practical knowledge in such realms as history, natural science, and social organization; the loss of stories and jokes and all the richness of human experience they carry; the loss of skills of perception trained by Indigenous linguistic structures; or the loss of depth in our relationships with Other-than-human beings (Jocks, 1998: 218).¹⁹

This type of relationship with “Other-than-human beings” features strongly in Aboriginal peoples’ worldviews and can be recaptured in a way that makes sense for us today by reconnecting with our languages and our *sxwoxwiyám*, or creation stories. Lakoff & Johnson (1999), in their development of the theme that “reason is evolutionary,” postulate that since abstract reason builds on and makes use of perceptual and motor inference which is also present in “lower” animals, rather than separating us from other animals, their line of “reasoning” places us on a continuum with them²⁰. This notion is not new for Aboriginal peoples, and is an integral part of our Stó:lō worldview, a Riverworldview.

The word *smestiyexw* in Halq’eméylem is particularly revealing. “*Smestiyexw*” means “soul,” “life spirit,” or “power of one’s will,²¹” or “power of thought combined with vitality.²²” It was believed that plants, animals and even rocks possessed *smestiyexw*. In Halq’eméylem, one can create a noun by adding a prefixed “s” to a verb. For example, adding this “s” to the verb “*t’i:lem*,” “to sing” creates the noun “*st’i:lem*,” which means “song.” The Halq’eméylem word for person, or “to be a person” is “*mestiyexw*.” That which is the spiritual essence of a person is “*smestiyexw*.” Therein lies the spiritual interconnection between

¹⁹Christopher Jocks. (1998). *Living in cartoon translations: Longhouse “texts” and the limitations of English*. In *Endangered Languages*. Ed. Lenore A. Grenoble & Lindsay J. Whaley. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press. p. 218.

²⁰Lakoff & Johnson, p 4.

²¹Brent D. Galloway. (1999). *Finderlist for Upriver Halkomelem Dictionary*. Unpublished document.

²²Diamond Jenness. (1989). *The Faith of a Coast Salish Indian*. Victoria: British Columbia.

Stó:lō people and the River environment - *smestiyexw*, inherent in the very word spoken.

Salmon 'people' are an integral aspect of River culture. Not surprisingly then, that terms for salmon are well developed in Halq'eméylem, including sixteen different types with eighteen names. Each salmon species (coho, dog, humpback, sockeye, and spring) are divided into small (fry, small in size, or kokanee [landlocked]) and large; the spring and sockeye (and perhaps others) have further terms specifying the time of year they run and the river they spawn in or run up.²³ The 'small adult coho' is referred to as 'little berry'; its origin story links the coho to a berry that dropped into the lake or water. Thus, the spiritual relationship between the Stó:lō and their environment is inherent in names given to animals, names associated with their origin stories. 'Speckled trout' is called 'little berry of red-flowering current'; its origin from a red-flowering currant having dropped into the water.²⁴ This kind of naming links our everyday understanding of the world to the time of creation, and what a delightful way for children to learn about their environment.

River Ways, or River Culture, is inherent in River People's terms for time, apparent in the names for months, or moons. *Syilólem*, the Stó:lō year starts in the month (*skw'exó:s*) equivalent of October. Each year begins at about the first quarter of the moon in October, and the moon beginning in October is the first of each year. The *-o:s*²⁵ suffix refers to face, and the root *kw'ex* means 'to count,' and the *s* prefixed turns it into a noun. Specific years were probably referred to by describing some event. In giving someone's age, the number precedes either *syilólem*, or *máqa*, 'fallen snows.'²⁶

Each month, a lunar month, begins on the first quarter of the moon visible after the new moon. Each name refers to a time for some activity or event as follows:

<i>tempó:kw'</i>	October , time to smoke dry Chehalis spring salmon
	or
<i>temchálhtel</i>	...Time to dry salmon
<i>xets'ō:westel</i>	November , time to put away canoe paddles for winter
	or
<i>telxwits</i>	...leaves are falling
<i>meqó:s</i>	December , fallen snow season

²³ Galloway, Brent D. (1993). *A Grammar of Upriver Halkomelem*. Berkeley: University of California Press. P. 513

²⁴ Ibid. p. 512

²⁵ "-o:s" is semantically extended to round objects including coins and moon. Galloway (1993), pp. 203, 206, 213, 218, 488, 549.

²⁶ Ibid. pp 571-573, gives an elaborate description of time and tense in Halq'eméylem, including the names and meanings for months.

<i>pelóqes</i>	January , dried sockeye head, torch season
<i>temtl'í:q'es</i>	February , time to get jammed in as in a trap, a box, referring to snow on pithouse or
<i>temt'elémsts</i>	...Time one's hand sticks to things from the cold
<i>welék'es</i>	March , little frog season, when they start talking or
<i>qweloythí:lem</i>	...Birds making music
<i>temkwikwexel</i>	April , time for baby sockeye salmon or
<i>lhemt'óles</i>	...Time of spring showers in one's eyes
<i>tem'elile</i>	May , time for salmonberries
<i>temqoqó:</i>	June , time for high water or
<i>temt'ámxcw</i>	...Time for gooseberries
<i>epóléstel</i>	July , tenth month or
<i>temqwá:l</i>	...Time for mosquitoes or
<i>temchálhtel</i>	...Time to wind dry fish at Yale
<i>temthéqi</i>	August , time for sockeye salmon
<i>temkw'ó:lexw</i>	September , time for dog salmon

Eight of the terms for months relate to gathering and processing food; four relate to activities of fauna; seven relate to the weather or are caused by it directly; and one is numbered, allowing the calculation of when the year begins. All relate to the River system.

The River system is so central to Stó:lō people that river terms are the main set of general directional terms besides demonstratives and phrases such as *lí te smá:lt*, 'to the mountain²⁷.' There are several types of these terms: directions toward and away from the river; upriver and downriver; both preceding types used at once (i.e., regarding sides of a house); and up and down movement in the river. Numerous such terms are used. Here are a few of the basic ones.

²⁷ Ibid., p. 568. Describes directional terms based on the river system.

<i>tó:l</i>	toward the river (on land)
<i>chúchu</i>	away from shore (on the river)
<i>chó:leqw</i>	toward the backwoods, away from the river.
<i>wōqw</i>	drift downstream, drown
<i>lhós</i>	drift downriver
<i>ahíw</i>	upstream
<i>tiyt</i>	upriver
<i>lhósexel</i>	downriver way, down that way, downriver below
<i>tiytexel</i>	upriver way, up that way, way upriver
<i>tellhós</i>	from downriver
<i>teltiyt</i>	from upriver
<i>slhéq'qel</i>	way upriver

House terms are coined with the river as a reference point. For example, *slhéq'qel*, 'way upriver,' appears to be related to the term *lhéq'ewilh*, 'opposite side of the house (on the inside).' *Chuchuwaxel*, 'front end of house (inside or out)' is literally 'side toward the river.' *Stselqwáxel*, 'back end of house (inside or out)' refers to the 'side away from the river,' and is also related to the word for Chilliwack, *Sts'elxwéyeqw*. *Stiytáxel*, 'upper end of house (inside or out)' is literally 'upriver side,' and *sewqw'áxel*, 'lower end of the house' literally translates as 'downriver side.'

River Culture is embedded even in Halq'eméylem terms for body parts. For example, *t'óxw*, 'going downriver' is embedded in the words *xwt'óxwestses*, 'hollow of the hand' and *xwt'óxwexsel*, 'arch of the foot,' and literally translates as 'the part that is going downriver on the face of the hand' and 'the part that is going downriver on the face of the foot.'²⁸ In Halq'eméylem, words for people and human body parts and aspects of the environment are folded into each other as in the above examples of 'hollow of hand,' 'arch of foot,' and 'sides of a house.' The integration of these aspects of the River in Halq'eméylem words truly illustrates the worldview of interconnectedness between humans and their surrounding environment. The word for land, earth, and world is *téméxw*; the word for Stó:lō people is *Xwélméxw*, and the word for umbilical cord is *méxweya*²⁹. The 'mexw' in each word may link us *Xwélméxw* to our ancestors

²⁸ Ibid. p. 468

²⁹ I have asserted some poetic licence here. However, I was interested in the word "*méxweya*" to see if it had some relation to the "*mexw*" in "*Téméxw*" and "*Xwélméxw*." I asked Rosaleen George about a possible relationship, and she stated "*Méxw*", that's everything, eh? But that's in the beginning of everything there." In a formal linguistic analysis by Galloway (2002 p.c.) there is no relationship between *mexw*- in *méxweya* and the suffix *-mexw* in *téméxw*. Rosaleen's statement may be the formation of a folk etymology. Galloway goes on to suggest that Rosaleen may also have been saying "*Mékw*" that's everything" since *mékw*' is the normal word for 'all, everything,' and while it sounds a bit like *mexw* or *méxw*, Galloway also does not believe it is related either. For example, *ikw*' means 'get lost,' *ixw*' means 'you (subordinate subject),' and *ixw* means 'sweep.'"

who are of the land, and through our umbilical cord, the “mexw” in *méxweya*, we are connected to our future generations, to the beginning of all things yet to come.

Riverworldview

River People believe in a Creator who created us and our environment, including a protocol of respect for interacting with that environment, an environment of shared power. Our Halq'eméylem language was born out of our interconnecting interrelationship with the River environment which defined us, gave us our identity. The interconnecting relationships between River People and our River environment permeates our Halq'eméylem language, in our terms for world, *S'ólh Téméxw*; in origin stories, or *sxwōxwiyám*, in 'time' terms, in 'body' terms, in 'house' terms, and in *smestiyexw*, the shared power of vitality and thought which requires a protocol of respect in “all our relations.” And so it is, that for River People to speak our Halq'eméylem language is as natural as it is for the Robin to sing its own song.

In essence, the place where River People and our River Environment meet is where our understanding of the creator comes from, and is the same place our Halq'eméylem language is derived. Halq'eméylem expresses best the relationship Stó:lō people have with the Creator, with our world, *S'ólh Téméxw*, and with each other as *Xwélmexw*. This way of understanding our Halq'eméylem language and its relationship to our River identity and worldview, is “Yú:wqwlha!” I say, “How Beautiful!”

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