

Objections to Franz Boas' Referring to Eating
People in the Translation of the Kwakwaka
Terms of bax^ubakwālanux^usiwē^ε and hamats!a

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Recently the present writers had the pleasure of completing their editorial work on a collection of texts from Rivers Inlet, B.C. The texts, in Oowekyala Wakashan, were taperecorded from the late Chief Simon Walkus Sr. and transcribed and translated by his daughter, Evelyn Windsor née Walkus. Under the title of Oowekeeno Oral Traditions, they are currently in press at the National Museum of Man, Ottawa. One of the texts relates the encounter of the sons of /nuuwaqawa/¹ with a being called /bax^wbak^walanusiwa/. The latter is attributed the human characteristic of being male (it has a wife and children) and the non-human characteristic of anthropophagy. Searching for more details on /bax^wbak^walanusiwa/, we turned, among other things, to the literature in the related Kwakwaka language collected and translated by Franz Boas and/or his Indian assistant George Hunt. In it, frequent mention is made of a being called bax^ubakwālanux^usiwē^ε, ba^x·bakwā[·]lanux^usiwē^ε,

bāx^ubakwā[·]lanux^usi[·]we --the transcription varies from publication to publication; these are only a few variants. What struck us is that Boas-Hunt not just connects this being with anthropophagy, but that Boas, for his part, in addition commits himself explicitly to the idea that anthropophagy is part of the literal meaning of the term. Boas writes (1935:141),

The name of the Cannibal spirit means literally "Having man eating at the mouth of the river." (Bax^ubakwālanux^usiwē^ε). Since north is down river, the location is conceived as the north end of the world, and I translate, therefore, Cannibal-of-the-North-End-of-the-World.

In Boas' Kwakwaka dictionary (Boas 1948:114) a different gloss is given for the name:

"having the quality of eating human flesh at mouth of river (Cannibal-at-North-End-of-the-World)".

The dictionary entry in question is preceded directly by a slightly shorter but otherwise identical word, bāx^ubakwā[·]lanuk^u (spelled bax^ubakwā[·]lanuk^u in Boas 1935:143), which is glossed as

"having the quality of eating human flesh".

We find fault with these various meaning explications and in this article would like to explain why.

1. Boas seems to go from "at the river mouth" to

"downriver" to "at the north end of the world", but why so is not obvious. "At the river mouth" is just not the same as "downriver". Further, maybe Boas relies on the fact that in some (not all) North Wakashan languages, words referring to "down the river or inlet" and "up the river or inlet" can in fact also be used to refer to "north" and "south", respectively.² Nevertheless, the words in question cannot be used to refer specifically to "at the north end of the world" and "at the south end of the world".

2. But let us give Boas the benefit of the doubt and assume that a thorough study of Kwakwala literature would reveal the rationale of interpreting "at the river mouth" as "at the north end of the world". Then one has the problem that the study of Oowekyala Wakashan word structure gives no ground to believe that the literal meaning of Oowekyala /bax^wbak^walanusiwa/ is as stated by Boas for the Kwakwala cognate bax^(u)bakwā^(u)lanux^usiwē^(é) (to summarize the spelling variants in this way). Boas no doubt "subtracted" the word form of bax^(u)bakwā^(u)lanuk^u from that of bax^(u)bakwā^(u)lanux^usiwē^(é), and held over a suffix "siw" and a suffix "ē^(é)". The former suffix indeed means "at the river mouth" in Kwakwala, whereas the latter is a frequently occurring formative the meaning of which is not defineable beyond "to be a ..." in some cases, "to do" in others. But Oowekyala words referring to "at the river mouth" feature a suffix allomorph /aktis/. And although Oowekyala words, like Kwakwala words, can contain an allomorph /siw/, the latter means "through a passage, opening, surface, or obstruction" in Oowekyala.

3. Boas assumes that "nuk^u" in the Kwakwala word bax^(u)bakwā^(u)lanuk^u, and "nux^u" in the derivate

bax^(u)bakwā^(u)lanux^usiwē^(é), are alternants of a suffix that broadly means "to have"; see Boas' meaning definitions quoted above. Such a suffix occurs in all North Wakashan languages indeed, but cannot be followed by "siw". Nor is there any known reason (i.e. morphophonemic rule) why this suffix meaning "to have" should take the form of /nu/ (with /n/ instead of /n/) in Oowekyala /bax^wbak^walanusiwa/. More likely, "nuk^u" and "nux^u" in the Kwakwala names mean not "to have" but "object, manifestation, or materialization of". One can infer this latter type of meaning from, for instance, the difference between the (Oowekyala) words /tax^wi/ "local title to something, authority, physical or spiritual power" and /tax^winuk^w/ "sweetheart, lover". (To the latter word one can join the suffix that means "to have".) Other examples of the meaning in question are North Wakashan place names ending in /nuk^w/, for instance the Heiltsuk name /tq^wánuk^w/ (˘ denotes high tone). It derives from /tq^wá/ "devilfish". If its meaning is not "having devilfish", but "manifestation/materialization of devilfish", or perhaps more precisely "manifestation/materialization of the essence (or: the spirit) of devilfish", we get an inkling of why people avoided the place called /tq^wánuk^w/ in the old days, and why it is called Superstition Point on maps. Also take the Oowekyala original of the river name Wannock; according to some it is /wanuk^w/, according to others /waanuk^w/). Initial /wa/ or /waa/ means "river", and rather than "having a river", the whole of the Oowekyala name seems to mean "manifestation/materialization of a river" or perhaps "manifestation/materialization of the essence (or: the spirit) of a river". A terse but appropriate gloss could also be "River Spirit".

4. There are more Oowekyala words ending in /nusiwa/

than just /bax^wbak^walahu^siwa/. All of these words occur only in myths and refer to personifications of animals and forces of nature. Examples: /x^wax^waq^walahu^siwa/ (also with /x^w/ instead of /q^w/), which refers to Raven personified, and /zaq^walahu^siwa/, which refers to the personification of a wind called /zaq^wala/ in everyday language. To Mrs. Windsor, the transcriber and translator of the above mentioned text collection called Owekeeno Oral Traditions, the ending /hu^siwa/ carries the meaning element of "incarnation, personification, or manifestation of the spiritual world on earth". This suggests analysis of /hu^siwa/ into /hu/ (related to the suffix discussed in the preceding point) and /siwa/ meaning "through" or "emerging". It has to be added, though, that it is not usual for /siwa/ to occur after /u/ or any Owekyala vocalic resonant; normally it is separated from the latter by an epenthetic phoneme (from /u/ more particularly by /x^w/).

5. Finally, Boas appears convinced that initial "bax^(u)bak^w" of the Kwakwala names means "to eat people" or "to eat human flesh". In other words, he assumes that (a) the root "bak^w", of which "bax^(u)bak^w" no doubt represents the complete reduplication, means "human", and (b) that the complete reduplication more particularly serves to express the eating of the matter denoted by the root "bak^w". Now, as for the second assumption, it is true that in North Wakashan languages the concept of eating a particular food is expressed by the complete reduplication of the root (or polymorphemic stem) denoting this food. But the problem is that complete reduplication can mean other things as well. At least as far as Owekyala and Heiltsuk Wakashan are concerned, complete reduplication is in fact primarily a device to indicate that something happens repeatedly or intermittently, in various instances with the additional connotation of "progressively effec-

tively". An example is Cowekyala /bax^wbak^walahu^siwa/. To the transcriber and translator of Cowekeeno Oral Traditions, the component /bax^wbak^wala/ is reminiscent of "to assume human form intermittently and progressively effectively". Clearly, in itself this meaning has nothing to do with anthropophagy. But it does confirm Boas' first assumption, namely that we are dealing with derivatives from a root meaning "human". Thus, the literal meaning of Cowekyala /bax^wbak^walahu^siwa/, and its Kwakwala counterparts, would seem to be "ever more perfect manifestation of the essence of humanity" or "...of the essence of a person". Similarly, the literal meaning of the Owekyala name /x^wax^waq^walahu^siwa/ would be "ever more perfect manifestation of the essence of a raven"; this name derives from a root meaning "to croak" and "raven". Boas, for his part, is committed to connecting this latter name with the eating of ravens. The implausibility of such a connection is an additional argument against Boas' translation for Kwakwala bax^(u)bakwā'lanuk^u and bax^(u)bā'kwalanux^usiwē^(ε). This is not to deny that there is a connection between the names and anthropophagy, but we want to point out that the connection is a cultural one, and not a linguistic one. Thus, the eating of humans could have been the means of a /bax^wbak^walahu^siwa/ to the end of reaching ever fuller human form. Ritual enactments of the entity of /bax^wbak^walahu^siwa/ may therefore have involved the real or symbolic eating of human flesh. As for the latter, the theme of consuming a particular food to achieve or express union with a supernatural being, is also known in e.g. Christianity.

Another problem we should like to raise, in this connection, is Boas' translation of the Kwakwala term hamats!a (his transcription type; the Owekyala cognate is otherwise

identical: /hamača/, and will be used henceforth). The translation "Carnival dancer" or "Cannibal dance" at best reflects the cultural datum that a /hamača/ dancer bites people or eats human flesh really or symbolically, and that he/she embodies /tax^wbak^walan^wusiwa/. But linguistically there does not seem to be a clear justification for this translation. Surely, the word form of /hamača/ fits into the following paradigm,

/h ^h ta/ "to shoot with bow and arrow"	/hana ^h a/ "to try or tend to shoot with bow and arrow; to be about to shoot with bow and arrow, to prepare for shooting with bow and arrow"
/huta/ "to leave someone or something, to divorce"	/hawata/ "to try or tend to ... , etc."
/h ^h sa/ "to eat"	/hamača/ (?)

Thus, logically speaking the literal meaning of /hamača/ could be "to try or tend to eat", "to prepare for eating", "to be about to eat". But knowledgeable consultants do not themselves give this meaning for /hamača/. Also, this meaning has no specific connection with anthropophagy. Such a connection is needed to justify the translation "Cannibal dance(r)" linguistically. One can, in fact, only guess at the literal meaning of /hamača/. Possibly, the word derives from a root with the same form as the root of /h^hsa/ "to eat" but a different meaning. The root in point is h^hsa-. Which meaning this root could have in the case of /hamača/ is again a matter of speculation. For instance, in the light of the /h^h/ - /hl/ alternation exhibited by Cowekyala /h^humu/ and Heiltsuk /hlulu/ (both meaning "but-

terfly"), the root h^hsa- in /hamača/ could be related, historically, to the root h^hsa- which occurs in all North Wakashan languages and has the meanings "weak, hesitant, insecure, reluctant, wavering, precarious".³ Also, /ii/ in /hamača/ could result from dissimilation of the reduplicate of root-initial /m/, a morphophonemic phenomenon occurring relatively frequently in Kwakwala and Haisla Wakashan, and occasionally in Cowekyala and Heiltsuk Wakashan. Then, if /hamača/ stems from */mamača/, the root would be mas- or ms-, formally speaking.⁴ The latter possibility is the more interesting, as the meaning of ms- is "to crave, desire, long for something". Interestingly also, there is a Kwakwala word /mzis/ glossed as "Cannibal's whistle", which could derive from this root ms-.⁵ However this may be, these considerations show that one should be careful with translations of cosmological and religious terms by Franz Boas.

Notes:

- 1 For details on phonemic transcriptions in this article, see the introduction of Lincoln-Rath 1981.
- 2 See Lincoln-Rath 1980, p. 132 root no. 575, and p. 380 root no. 2424.
- 3 See Lincoln-Rath 1980, p. 386, root no. 2471.
- 4 This possibility was first suggested by Neville Lincoln.
- 5 See Lincoln-Rath 1980, p. 72 root no. 147.

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Conjunctive /so?/ in Cowichan

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