SOME THOUGHTS ABOUT TRANSLATING MAKAH INTO ENGLISH

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The Makah Language Program produces linguistic material in written form for two distinct audiences: technical linguists and language learners. While the former group is certainly important, the MLP must take great pains to keep linguistic material accessible and interesting to the more important of the groups — the Makah people who currently study the language. It would be counterproductive to both enterprises to develop different sets of terminology and standards for representing Makah, so written material generated for each group is reconciled by a single set of generalized principles.

One of the principles which receives the most attention is the English translation which accompanies Makah stems, words, phrases, and sentences. Because Makah is radically different from English in the way it interprets and presents reality (Gill and Renker 1984; Renker and Gill 1984), translation into English can obscure salient facts about Makah unless great care is taken to remove English semantic bias from the translation. This care becomes more important when considering the purpose of the MLP — to teach and revitalize the language in the Makah community. Unless the new language learners really *understand* the way Makah relates to the physical and metaphysical, only a portion of the language is saved. Presenting Makah to English translations with as little English bias as possible can aid language learners to acquire Makah cognitive schemes. Technical linguists also benefit from this MLP preoccupation with non-biased translations, especially when applying data to questions regarding linguistic universals.

A very good example emerges from many early translations of Makah stems. These early English renditions gloss Makah stems such as haʔu, ḵup-, and dač- as 'to eat', 'to point', and 'to see', respectively. This discussion submits that the use of the infinitive form in the English translation imparts an unnecessary verbal quality to the Makah stems. This point becomes more apparent when considering other constructions which utilize these stems: haʔub 'food', ḵupu-yak 'pointing stick', and dada-čeyik 'fortune teller'. Unless the stems are represented as semantically neutral, the process of building contextually appropriate Makah words suited to syntactic placement is a difficult task for language learners. While linguists are trained to recognize the pitfalls which accompany for class distinctions in Northwest Coast languages (Jacobsen 1979b; Kinkade 1983; Renker 1985), the variability of these categories confuses language learners. This confusion is exacerbated by indicating that a stem resides in one form class because of the English translation. Consequently, the three stems listed previously are best translated as haʔu- 'eat', ḵup- 'point', and dač- 'see'.

Another source of confusion for language learners comes from attempts to translate elements in Makah which cannot be approximated by English constructions. In this case, the MLP finds the most

productive translation is a gloss which describes the nature of the stem, rather than a gloss which produces an English equivalent not suited to the variety of Makah combinations (Gill and Renker, under review). The stem ʔuxu-- provides a good example of this point. Translated originally as 'to be (so and so)' (Jacobsen 1979a), the stem actually indicates the emphasized existence of the subject of a sentence. While ʔuxu-- is the appropriate stem for Makah sentences which convey names, i.e., ʔuxu-s 'I am John', the stem is not used to produce other constructions which approximate TO BE sentences in English. 'I am happy', for example, is constructed with the stem for happy, ču-puk- and the pronominal suffix -s: ču-puks. By glossing ʔuxu-- as 'to be (so and so)', language learners are confused as to how to apply this stem in their own attempts to construct grammatical Makah sentences. Because the verb TO BE is a complex English phenomenon, many language learners carry this complexity to Makah as well. When the gloss for ʔuxu-- is shifted to 'existential stem' the semantic connotations associated with English TO BE are alleviated. Language learners find it easier to understand that ʔuxu-- specifies the existence of and emphasis on the subject of the sentence than to account for the fact that a 'to be' translation applies only in restricted circumstances.

Some of the examples to this point can be structurally deduced by linguists with little native speaker input. Other intricacies of the Makah to English translation quagmire require many hours of discussion with native speakers, often accompanied by vigorous bouts with a thesaurus to find a subtle English word which best typifies the Makah concept. While but-, butq-, pal-, qat-, and čik- can all receive the generic gloss 'cut', this assignation later confuses language learners when speaker specifications are assigned to the simple English translation. According to MLP staff speakers, these stems are best defined as 'generic cut', 'amputate', 'fillet', 'cut with one stroke', and 'cut small single objects', respectively. Simple English translations do not do justice to Makah perceptual complexity, and provide opportunities for confusion in the language learner at a later point.

This brief paper is not meant to be a definitive discussion of the problems which arise from the process of translating an American Indian language into English. But because of the longevity of the Makah Language Program, certain interesting facts about translation which affect language learning have emerged. This subject is one which merits additional investigation, from both the educational and linguistic perspectives.

Acknowledgements

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3

A Note on Nitinaht Numerals[1]
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With one exception the numerals from one to ten in the three Southern Wakashan languages reveal the same system of counting in the first decade.[2]

	Makah	Nitinaht	Ahousaht (Nootka)
1.	ċakʷaˑʔk	ċawaˑʔk	ċawaˑk
2.	ʔaλ	ʔaλ	ʔaλa
3.	wiˑ	qakaċ	qaoċa
4.	buˑ	buˑ	muˑ
5.	šuč	šuč	šuča
6.	čiˑχpaˑλ	čiˑχpaˑλ	ńupu
7.	ʔaλpu	ʔaλpuˑ	ʔaλpu
8.	ʔaλasub	ʔaλasib	ʔaλakʷaλ
9.	ċakʷaˑsub	ċawaˑsib	ċawaˑkʷaλ
10.	λaχʷ	λaχʷ	ḥayu

This system, like many others throughout the world, "fills in" the numerals for six through nine by figuring from the units for five and ten. Eight and nine are formed by back-counting from ten; the suffixes -sub, -sib and -kʷaλ all mean *lacks* or *needs*. Thus eight is literally *two lacking* and nine is *one lacking*.

Like the eighth numeral, the words for seven are also built upon ʔaλ(a) *two*; but the added element -pu must have been an old suffix meaning something like *left*, *more* or *extra*.[3] So ʔaλpuˑ/ʔaλpu is *two more (than five)* or *two left (after five)*. Nootka has also ńupu *six* derived from ńu(p), a second word for *one*, and -pu. Thus, the Nootka count from ċawaˑk *one* to šuča *five* and then *one left*, *two left*, *two lacking*, *one lacking*, *ten*.

Counting to ten in Nitinaht and Makah follows the same system as Nootka except for the sixth numeral, čiˑχpaˑλ, which has no known etymological connection with the other number words. This numeral does not fit into the system and is most likely an innovation[4]; for it would be strange to count *two left* without a preceding *one left*. (We return to čiˑχpaˑλ below.)

Although all three sets of number words are very similar, the Nitinaht and Makah vocabularies appear to have shared a common evolution apart from Nootka. In the next decade, however, Nitinaht is the odd man out. Both Makah and Nootka count *ten and one*, *ten and two*, etc., while Nitinaht adds a special "teen" suffix[5] to the numeral stems of the first decade like English.

	Makah	Nitinaht	Ahousaht (Nootka)
11.	λaχʷ ʔiš ċakʷaˑʔk[6]	ċawayuˑkʷ	ḥayu ʔuḥiš ċawaˑk
12.	λaχʷ ʔiš ʔaλ	ʔaλayuˑkʷ	ḥayu ʔuḥiš ʔaλa
13.	λaχʷ ʔiš wiˑ	qakaċayuˑkʷ	ḥayu ʔuḥiš qaoċa
14.	λaχʷ ʔiš buˑ	buyuˑkʷ	ḥayu ʔuḥiš muˑ
15.	λaχʷ ʔiš šuč	šučayuˑkʷ	ḥayu ʔuḥiš šuča
16.	λaχʷ ʔiš čiˑχpaˑλ	čiˑχpaˑλayuˑkʷ	ḥayu ʔuḥiš ńupu
17.	λaχʷ ʔiš ʔaλpu	ʔaλpayuˑkʷ	ḥayu ʔuḥiš ʔaλpu
18.	λaχʷ ʔiš ʔaλasub	ʔaλasibayuˑkʷ	ḥayu ʔuḥiš ʔaλakʷaλ
19.	λaχʷ ʔiš ċakʷaˑsub	ċawaˑsibayuˑkʷ	ḥayu ʔuḥiš ċawaˑkʷaλ