Cowlitz (Salish) Place Names

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Cowlitz (Salish) was formerly spoken along the Cowlitz River in southwestern Washington from near its confluence with the Columbia River nearly up to the present community of Mossy Rock. The upriver (eastern) neighbors of the Cowlitz were the Tsimshian (sometimes called Upper Cowlitz), a Sahaptin-speaking group who had presumably migrated from the east side of the Cascade Mountains; their southern neighbors were Kiksht (or Upper Chinook). To the north were the Upper Chehalis, who spoke a language quite similar to Cowlitz. The name Cowlitz (kəwˈlɪts) apparently referred primarily to the river; the origin of the name is unknown. The Cowlitz called themselves səkʷələm meaning something like 'the lower people' or 'the people below'. The language had become moribund by the 1970s; no known speakers remain. The language was apparently quite homogeneous, and no dialect variation is known to have existed. However, Cowlitz may have shifted off into Upper Chehalis, particularly to the west along the south fork of the Chehalis River, and south of the Newaukum River to the north (a major tributary of the Cowlitz rising in the Cascades; note that the Chehalis River itself rises in the Willapa Hills of southwestern Washington, not in the Cascades).

I worked on Cowlitz in the summer of 1967 with the help of Erik Beukenkamp (then a graduate student at the University of Kansas), collecting data from Mrs. Lucy Northover James of Yakima, Washington and Mrs. Emma Northover Mesplie of Brownstown, Washington. Mr. James was then 81, and Mrs. Mesplie was 77. These two sisters, along with Mrs. Susan Olney, were the only persons who had any knowledge of more than a handful of words of Cowlitz. All three are now deceased. We were unable to work with Mrs. Olney because of her poor health. Mrs. James was born at Cowlitz Prairie in October 1887, Mrs. Mesplie near Toledo in December 1894. The family moved to the Yakima Reservation about 1895 and lived in the Simcoe Valley. Both daughters attended school for a few years at Fort Simcoe. There were also two older sisters and a brother; none of the next generation of this family learned to speak Cowlitz. Their mother, Frances Northover was raised by an uncle who spoke Cowlitz; she died in 1963 at the age of 105. Her mother (Mary) was Wishram-Yakima, her father (George kté) was Yakima-Cowlitz. The father of Mrs. James and Mrs. Mesplie was Joe Northover. His mother was born in Klickitat County and was part Yakima; his father was William Northover, an Englishman. Mrs. James’s first husband was Andrew Foster; she had two sons by him. Her second husband was Walter James (part Puyallup), and they had four sons and four daughters. She moved to Vashon Island in the early 1940s, and did not return to the Yakima area until about 1952. Mrs. Mesplie’s husband was August Mesplie (Wishram-French). She lived her entire life on the Yakima Reservation. By 1967 neither Mrs. James nor Mrs. Mesplie had used Cowlitz actively for a number of years, and were somewhat rusty in it at first, but remembered more and more as the summer progressed. However, they were unable to provide more than two or three place names in former Cowlitz territory. It has therefore been necessary to glean what few Cowlitz place names that can be found from a number of earlier sources, mostly poorly transcribed. The data obtained from Mrs. James and Mrs. Mesplie make it possible to make guesses as to a reasonable phonemicization of many of these names; in addition, names taken from the work of John P. Harrington and Melville Jacobs are well transcribed, and can generally be taken as correct by today’s standards.

I have included in the list given below place names from all earlier sources that I have found. When my own data did not include these names, I have attempted to provide their probable phonemic form according to the transcription system I use; most of these guesses are based on known cognate forms in Upper Chehalis (see Kinkade 1991) or from the manuscript materials of John P. Harrington (1942), whose phonetic transcriptions of Cowlitz were quite accurate. These sources of data (with the abbreviations used in citing their forms) are the following (these sources contain vocabulary in general; not all include place names):

(a) Horatio Hale (1846) gives about 169 words of Cowlitz; his transcriptions are consistent and reasonably good, except that he does not write glottalization of consonants and does not distinguish front and back velars (these are both failings of all nineteenth century transcriptions of Cowlitz).

(b) Albert Gallatin (1848) lists 56 Cowlitz words for comparative purposes; they are copied from Hale, with some orthographic changes.

(c) Robert G. Latham (1862) lists these same 56 words, copied from Gallatin, and with the same changes.

(d) George Gibbs (1853-60) has five words copied from a letter from U. G. Warbass (see Warbass 1858).

(e) Gibbs (n.d.) is a list of nearly 160 words, presumably collected by Gibbs himself (although his informant’s name, and the date and place of elicitation are not given); his transcriptions are consistent, but not as accurate as those of Hale.

(f) Gibbs (1863) includes one Cowlitz word.

(g) U. G. Warbass (1858) was an early settler at Toledo who provided Gibbs with some information on Cowlitz in a letter in answer to a request from Gibbs; his transcriptions are poorer than those of Hale or Gibbs. The letter includes 15 words in Cowlitz and a rough map of Cowlitz territory with several place names on it. Warbass gives as his sources Hoh-hoh and Bonaparte Plomondon; this Hoh-hoh is probably the same person as the How-How (or his father) mentioned by Ross (1855:191-196) as a Cowlitz chief.

(h) Warbass also provided Gibbs with material which is contained in another manuscript by the latter (Warbass 1857-58); it contains 23 words copied from Warbass.
(i) F. L. O. Roehrig (1870 and n.d.) put together two lengthy manuscripts of comparative Salish; they include between 110 and 115 words of Cowlitz taken from the manuscripts of Gibbs, and include a few words from Warbass.

(j) Edward Curtis (1911) gives 188 words of Cowlitz and 29 village names (some of which are Kikah); these were actually written down by his assistant, W. E. Myers, and are reasonably accurate and well transcribed. The place names were collected from Esther Millett, "born about 1835 at the village of Wiyamitli" (Curtis 1911:172).

(k) The Franz Boas collection at the Library of the American Philosophical Society in Philadelphia includes a large manuscript of comparative Salishan vocabularies (Boas 1925). Mostly these are not in Boas' handwriting, and were probably compiled by James A. Teit and Herman K. Haeberlin. The Cowlitz materials, consisting of roughly 640 words, were almost certainly collected by Teit sometime during the first decade of the twentieth century; the transcriptions are fairly good.

(l) Boas himself collected a large body of Upper Chehalis material in 1927; these incidentally include nearly 50 Cowlitz words scattered through his notebooks, and the transcriptions are quite good.

(m) An article by Boas and Haeberlin (1927) includes 33 items taken from the comparative vocabularies (see k above).

(n) Haeberlin also prepared an article on lexical suffixes which was not published until 1974; this includes 67 Cowlitz words, also taken from the comparative vocabularies.

(o) Melville Jacobs' Sahaptin grammar (1931) includes six Cowlitz place names in a specimen text at the end of volume 2. The text was dictated by Lewy Costima.4

(p) One of Jacobs' collections of Sahaptin folk-tales (1934) contains two Cowlitz words and many place names in texts from Lewy Costima, Jim Yoke, and Mary Iley; several of these names appear to be Cowlitz. Jacobs' transcriptions are quite accurate.

(q) Thelma Adamson is known to have collected a large amount of data on the Cowlitz language, but the original material has all disappeared. She had prepared an unarranged typescript of her field notes (Adamson 1926-27), and a carbon copy (lacking diacritics and special symbols that were probably added by hand to the original copy) is on deposit in the Melville Jacobs Collection in the University of Washington Archives in Seattle.

(r) Adamson did, however, publish a number of Cowlitz folk-tales in English (1934), and 68 Cowlitz words are scattered through them; her transcriptions leave much to be desired. Adamson's sources for these tales were Mary Iley, Sophie Smith, James Chehols, Lucy Youckton, Frances Northover, and Minnie Case.

(s) Verne F. Ray worked with Mrs. Emma Luscier (born about 1871) at Bay Center between 1931 and 1936 collecting Lower Chinook ethnographic data. Mrs. Luscier's source was Esther Millett, Curtis's source of place names. Ray (1938) also includes three Cowlitz personal names.

(t) John P. Harrington also collected data from Mrs. Luscier in 1942. He re-elicited much of the vocabulary in Curtis (1911), and his manuscripts include nearly 130 words from this source and a number of place names and personal names. He also collected about 35 words from Joe Peter, a Cowlitz residing on the Yakima Reservation. Harrington's transcriptions are excellent, but significant discrepancies from other Cowlitz data in his transcriptions of Mr. Peter suggest that the latter had not used Cowlitz for some time, and was quite rusty.

(u) In 1960 Silas Heck volunteered five Cowlitz words (which he had learned from his wife) while I was working with him on Upper Chehalis.

(v) Three sources contain one place name each: Tolmie (1968; Cowlitz), Anonymous (1855-1860; Toutle River), and Anonymous (1956; Toutle River). In citing forms from these various sources, I have retained the transcriptions of the originals except in three respects, all because of the difficulty of printing unusual symbols. I have replaced the small raised epsilon of Boas 1927 with a glottal stop (?); since Boas did not write ? in this manuscript, there is no ambiguity. Boas marked aspiration with an apostrophe the shape of which is inverted from what I use—that is, his had the head down, open to the right. I have replaced Harrington's small, odd capital k with g, since this is now the usual symbol for this sound. My own transcriptions used in this dictionary are phonemic, not narrowly phonetic.

Geographical locations of the sites listed below are shown on the accompanying sketch maps of the Cowlitz River (sites outside this area are more generally known, except for those in Upper Chehalis territory, hence not mapped; for the Upper Chehalis sites see Kinkade 1991). Most indications of locations must be considered approximate, except where a source specifies a stream or prairie name or other location that can be definitely identified. Jacobs's and Harrington's sources located sites only approximately, or in imprecise relation to other sites. Curtis gives distances between villages in miles, but the total of his miles and the actual distance between Kelso and Toledo do not coincide; the greatest discrepancy is between Castle Rock and Toledo. The basis of Curtis's distances is not clear in any case; these may be estimates by Mrs. Millett, or, if he visited sites, they may have meant miles by canoe, or they may be miles by horseback, which could be quite different from miles along the river by canoe (to say nothing of miles based on modern highway distances, which do not follow the meanderings of streams). I have assumed that villages would most likely be located at or near the mouths of tributary creeks and rivers. Virtually no archaeological work has been done along this part of the Cowlitz River, and most traces of sites from the mouth of the Toutle River southward were probably destroyed by the flooding and mudflows resulting from the eruption of Mt. Saint Helens in 1980.
ABBREVIATIONS AND SYMBOLS

DATA SOURCES:
AO - Albert Gallatin 1848
BH - Franz Boas and Herman Haeberlin 1927
CV - Franz Boas 1925
EC - Edward S. Curtis 1911
FB - Franz Boas 1927
FR - F. L. O. Roehrig 1870 and n.d.
GG - George Gibbs 1853-1860
GGa - George Gibbs n.d.
GGb - George Gibbs 1863
HHA - Horatio Hale 1846
HT - Herman Haeberlin 1974
HM - John P. Harrington 1942
MJ - Melville Jacobs 1931
MB - Melville Jacobs 1934
PRR - Robert G. Latham 1862
TA - Thelma Adamson 1926-1927
TAa - Thelma Adamson 1934
UW - U. B. Warbass 1857-1858
UWa - U. G. Warbass 1858
VR - Verne F. Ray 1938

NATIVE SOURCES:
fn - Frances Northover
gs - George Sanders
h - Mary or Peter Heck (Upper Chehalis)
jc - James Cheholts
jp - Joe Peter
ly - Jim Yoke
lj - Lizzie Johnson
ly - Lucy Youckton
mc - Minnie Case
md - Marion Davis (Upper Chehalis)
mi - Mary Iley (Eyley)
ph - Peter Heck (Upper Chehalis)
s - Sophie Smith

OTHER ABBREVIATIONS:
cf. - compare
poss. - possibly
prob. - probably
ENM - Emma Mesplie
LJ - Lucy James
KNM - Kay Merritt

SPECIAL SYMBOLS:
Several unconventional symbols will be found in forms cited from other sources; their phonetic values may not always be obvious. I give an explanation of some of these here:

\( a \) - the same as \( a \), or sometimes \( e \)
\( \varsigma, j \) - the same as \( \vartheta \) (\( \vartheta \) in Adamson 1926-27, 1934, and Jacobs 1931, 1934)
\( b \) - the same as \( p \)
\( l \) - short \( i \) as in bit
\( ll \) - the same as \( f \) (in Curtis 1911)
\( l \) - the same as either \( f \) or \( s \)
\( u, u \) - short \( u \), like \( oo \) in book or \( u \) in put
\( n, n \) - short \( a \) (in Curtis 1911)

Small raised letters are short, murred versions of those same letters when written normal size.

REFERENCES

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Boas, Franz. [1927] [Chehalis Field Notes.] (Manuscript No. 30(S2c.1) [Freeman No. 589] in American Philosophical Society Library, Philadelphia.) [notebook no. X, p. 581; ca. 40 items from Mrs. Youckton, 10 other items] (or n.b.111?) [es]


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