

# ‘Cherchez la femme:’ A Lillooet lexical treasure hunt<sup>1</sup>

Jan P. van Eijk  
First Nations University of Canada

The Lillooet words for ‘woman’ show a rather large number of derivations. As such, they serve as good examples of the richness of Lillooet morphology.

## 1 Introduction

The Lillooet (St’át’imc) language has two words for ‘woman’: *s.múlhats* in the northern (Fountain) dialect, and *s.yáqtsa7* in the southern (Mount Currie) dialect. Both words show a rather large number of derivations and as such they illustrate the richness and complexity of Lillooet morphology. In this article we turn our attention to the two forms for ‘woman’ and their derivations, with comments on structure and rule ordering.

Due to certain font problems, we will be using the practical orthography that is explained in Van Eijk 1978 and various other curriculum materials currently in use on a number of Lillooet-speaking reserves. A conversion table between the practical orthography and the Amerindianist system used in many sources is given in Van Eijk 1997:251-252. A dot in the Lillooet words follows a suffix, and a hyphen follows a reduplicative addition or precedes a suffix. (The dot and hyphen are usually omitted in words in the practical orthography, but are included here for morphological clarity.)

## 2 Roots and derivations

In this section, we list the words *s.yáqtsa7* and *s.múlhats* with their various derivations and individual comments on each form.

*s.yáqtsa7*, *s.múlhats* ‘(1) woman; (2) man’s sister, niece or female cousin.’ The roots *yáqtsa7* and *múlhats* are unanalyzable except that *ts* in both forms may be a petrified hypocoristic suffix (Kuipers 2002:17, 231). The word *s.yáqtsa7* is etymologically related to the Sechelt form *s.yáqcuw* (Amerindianist transcription) ‘wife’ (Timmers 1977:16; Kuipers 2002:231). It does not seem to have Salish etyma outside the the Lillooet-Sechelt area. The form *s.múlhats*, on the other hand, goes back to Proto-Salish, although it is only shared with Thompson (Nlaka’pamux), as listed in Thompson and Thompson 1996:207, and

---

<sup>1</sup> Thanks are due to my Lillooet consultants for their unstinting help, advice and encouragement during my fieldwork on their rich and beautiful language. My contributions to the study of Lillooet would not have been possible without their invaluable assistance. It is my hope that this paper provides at least a glimpse into the many wonders of this endlessly fascinating part of Canada’s First Nations heritage.

with Tillamook (as listed in Kuipers 2002:68). The prefix *s* in both forms is the general Salish nominalizer. The words *s.yáqtsa7* and *s.múlhats* in the meaning ‘man’s sister, niece or female cousin’ always combine with possessive affixes, as in *n.s.yáqtsa7* ‘my (*n*) sister, etc.’ The male equivalent for *s.yáqtsa7* and *s.múlhats* in both dialects is *s.qaycw* ‘(1) man, (2) woman’s brother, nephew or male cousin’ (in the latter meaning always combined with possessive affixes).

*s.y’éy’qtsa7*, *s.y’íy’qtsa7* (the sequence *ey*’ is phonetically identical to *iy*’, as indicated in the alternate transcriptions given here, and to *i7*, which is not written in this form in order to preserve the morphophonemic clarity of the reduplication involved, as discussed below), *s.m’ém’lhats* ‘girl.’ Reduplication of the consonant preceding the stressed vowel, and placement of a copy of this consonant after the stressed vowel, signals the diminutive (Van Eijk 1997:60-61). This process is often accompanied by reduction of the stressed vowel to schwa, and glottalization of the reduplicated consonant if it is a resonant, as is seen in these examples. Since this type of reduplication is prosody-based (targeting the stressed vowel instead of the root), the reduplicated consonant copy may cross a morpheme boundary and be placed in a different morpheme than the targeted consonant itself, as in *máqa7* ‘snow’ > *meq7-á7sulh* ‘any kind of salmon that arrives before the snow melts’ (*-asulh* ‘fish,’ with regular stress shift to the suffix, which then acts as the locus of the reduplication). The same type of reduplication is found in *s.qéqy’ecw* ‘boy,’ with glottalization of the resonant *y* of underlying *s.qaycw* ‘man,’ and predictable epenthesis of *e* to break up a final consonant cluster (see Van Eijk 1997:20).

*s.yeq-yáqtsa7*, *s.melh-múlhats* ‘women.’ Reduplication of the first CVC of the root (usually with reduction to schwa of the reduplicated vowel when it is in the unstressed portion of the word) signals the augmentative (plural/ collective in nouns, repetition/intensity in verbs). CVC reduplication of *s.qaycw* yields *s.qáy-qyecw*, with a predictably different stress pattern from *s.yeq-yáqtsa7* and *s.melh-múlhats*. Details on CVC reduplication in Lillooet are given in Van Eijk 1997:61-66.

*s.yeq-y’éy’qtsa7* (*s.yeq-y’íy’qtsa7*) ‘girls.’ Combination of augmentative and diminutive reduplication. The fact that the augmentative (CVC) reduplication does not read off the second consonant in the targeted stem (*y*’) is due to the fact that this consonant belongs to the prosodic (supra-segmental) tier of the stem, as explained above, while *q* (which is targeted by the CVC reduplication) is part of the root and as such not part of the prosodic tier but part of the segmental tier, like the CVC augment itself, as explained in Van Eijk 1993. The northern form would be \**s.melh-m’ém’lhats*, but this was not recorded. The form *s.yeq-y’éy’qtsa7* is paralleled by *s.qey-qéqy’ecw* ‘boys.’

*yaqts7-áw’s* ‘man’s female relatives.’ The expected northern variant, \**mulhats-áw’s*, was not recorded. Contains the suffix *-aw’s* ‘collective,’ also recorded in, for example, *mam-áw’s* ‘couple (married, lovers)’ (cf. *s.em7ám* ‘wife’). The male equivalent is *qaycw-áw’s* ‘woman’s male relatives.’

*yaqca7-mánst* ‘unmarried woman.’ The northern variant, *nexw-nexw-mánst*, is derived from a root related to Shuswap *núxwenxw* (Kuipers 1975:14) and to Lillooet *nexw-n’én’xw* ‘hen’ and *núxwa7* (more commonly *n’én’xwa7*)

‘(female) sweetheart.’ The male equivalent is *qaycw-mánst* ‘unmarried man, bachelor.’

*yaqts7-án-tsut* ‘to do s.t. like a woman (i.e., a woman doing a man’s job, but not being good at it).’ The expected northern variant, \**mulhats-án-tsut*, was not recorded. Contains the transitivizer *-an* and the reflexive suffix *-tsut*, the entire combination (with stress on *-an* rather than *-tsut*, which usually receives the stress) expressing ‘to act like.’ Other examples include *qaycw-án-tsut* ‘to do s.t. like a man (i.e., a man doing a woman’s job, but not being good at it),’ *k’uk’wm’it-án-tsut* ‘to act like a child (s.k. *’uk’wm’it*),’ and *gel-gel-án-tsut* ‘to act tough, to want to be brave (when one is not), to force oneself to do something’ (*gél-gel* ‘strong’). For a general discussion of Lillooet forms related semantically to those with *-án-tsut*, see Van Eijk 1988.

*n.yáqtsa7-cen*, *n.múlhats-cen* ‘leafstalk of *hákwa7* ‘cow-parsnip’ (“Indian rhubarb”).’ Literally ‘woman-foot,’ with the locative prefix *n* and the suffix *-cen* ‘foot.’ These forms are paralleled by *n.qáycw-cen* ‘budstalk of *hákwa7*’ (derived from *s.qaycw* ‘man’). For the use of female and male designations of leafstalks and budstalks (a general Pacific Northwest phenomenon) see Turner, Thompson, Thompson, and York 1990.

*yaqts7-áqs*, *mulhats-áqs* (*n.mulhats-áqs*) ‘to be a skirt-chaser.’ Contains the suffix *-áqs* ‘attitude, given to s.t.,’ also recorded in *nuk’w7-áqs* ‘friendly’ (*s.núk’wa7* ‘friend, relative’) and *n.qaycw-áqs* ‘chasing after men.’

### 3 Conclusions

As the data presented in section 2 prove, even a single Salish lexical item (in two dialectal variants) yields a wealth of linguistic information. In the forms provided we see examples of two types of reduplication (which can be combined on the same stem, with theoretical implications concerning their interaction), and examples of various lexical suffixes. In addition, the data provide information on kinship terminology (the secondary meanings of the terms for ‘woman’ and ‘man’ where they refer to family members of the opposite sex), folk taxonomy and ethnobotany (the terms for leafstalk and budstalk of cow-parsnip), and work-ethic and verbal humour (the terms for men and women underperforming when they undertake each other’s tasks). As such, these forms are of importance for anthropology as well as for linguistics. Of course, wherever one wends one’s way in a collection of Salish lexical data one finds another sparkling diamond, another shining gem, and I hope this brief article will inspire others to undertake similar meanderings through the treasure house of Salish lexicology.

### 4 Dedication

It is only fitting that a paper with this topic is dedicated to three exceptional women who have played a crucial role in my life. First of all there is my wonderful wife Sonja, who has stood by me through our 32 year-long

marriage, and who raised two great sons with me, of whom we are fiercely proud.

In the second place there is my mother Annigje van Eijk – van der Wilt, who for many years, together with my father, provided the kind of home in which I could nurture my interests in all kinds of intellectual endeavours, leading ultimately to my career in Salish linguistics. If my contributions to the study of Lillooet and its linguistic relatives have found favour with the academic community at large, it is to a large extent due to my mother's unwavering interest in my work, and her moral support.

Finally, I wish to acknowledge my mother-in-law, Angelina van Leeuwen – de Jong, whose wit and scintillating sense of humour made her a most admirable opponent in many a verbal joust I have had with her, but who also, and most importantly, provided her children with a role model that enabled Sonja to further hone her unbounded willingness to always go the extra mile when it comes to helping and supporting others. My debt of gratitude to these three women remains deep and lasting.

## References

- Kuipers, Aert H. 1975. *A Classified English-Shuswap Word-List*. Lisse, The Netherlands: Peter de Ridder Press.
- . 2002. *Salish Etymological Dictionary*. Missoula, Montana: University of Montana Occasional Papers in Linguistics No. 16.
- Thompson, Laurence C., and M. Terry Thompson. 1996. *Thompson River Salish Dictionary*. Missoula, Montana: University of Montana Occasional Papers in Linguistics No. 12.
- Timmers, Jan A. 1977. *A Classified English-Sechelt Word-List*. Lisse, The Netherlands: Peter de Ridder Press.
- Turner, Nancy J., Lawrence C. Thompson, M. Terry Thompson, and Annie Z. York. 1990. *Thompson Ethnobotany*. Victoria, B.C.: Royal British Columbia Museum Memoir No. 3.
- Van Eijk, Jan P. 1978. *Ucwalmicwts*. Mount Currie: Ts'zil Publishers.
- . 1988. 'Lillooet Forms for 'Pretending' and 'Acting Like.' IJAL 54:106-110.
- . 1993. 'CVC Reduplication and Infixation in Lillooet.' Pp. 317-326 of *American Indian Linguistics and Ethnography in Honor of Lawrence C. Thompson* (Mattina, A., and T. Montler, eds.). Missoula, Montana: University of Montana Occasional Papers in Linguistics No. 10
- . 1997. *The Lillooet Language*. Vancouver: UBC Press.

Jan P. van Eijk  
jvaneijk@firstnationsuniversity.ca