

Heiltsuk place names: a Wakashan perspective

Evelyn Windsor Wákas
Bella Bella Community School

This paper provides a telling of Evelyn Windsor's life in a long-term historical perspective: as a Wakashan speaker, as a person who passes on the historical narratives, as a native linguist, and as a colleague with other linguists. It then gives examples of her ongoing work on the morphological analysis of Heiltsuk place names.

1 Background

My name is Núaqawa. This name comes from my family's ancestral beginnings thousands of years back, in stories told from the beginning of time. My English name is Evelyn Windsor Wákas (Great River). Windsor is my married name. I come from chiefly ancestors on both sides of my family¹. The stories from our beginning of time are important to pass on. History was always passed on in story form.

Báxvbkvalaḥusiwa is the story of the origins or life, or Multiple stages of transformation. You will find this some time called Cannibal at the North End of the World². This story³ (mythology, legend, whatever you may call it) comes from the upper end of Oweekino Lake in River's inlet. Both my parents come from this story.

The story (of Báxvbkvalaḥusiwas) was told to me over and over as far back as I can remember by both sides of my parents. This story was (also) told to Boas. We have dances called "The Cedar Bark Dance Series". It was said by the woman (rooted to the earth) (to) use these dances to remember this time. Our stories, language, songs, dances and names are the history of who and where we come from.

I am one of the Wakashan speaking group. I speak the 'Wuik'ala (Oweekino) language. I learned to speak Háil'zaqv'la (Heiltsuk) language, and am now teaching this language. At five years old I was taken away from my parents

¹ Evelyn Windsor's lineage on both sides (as daughter of Chief Simon Walkus Sr. and Elizabeth Humchitt) is recorded in more detail in Oowekeeno Oral Traditions, as told by the late Chief Simon Walkus Sr., National Museum of Man Mercury Series, 1982.

² Oowekeeno Oral traditions cites Boas, 1935 for this translation. The story in its whole form recounts the development of mankind through stages of development.

³ Evelyn Windsor translated this story from her father's narrative telling. It was subsequently published as Oowekeeno Oral Traditions, pp 47-69. Báxvbkvalaḥusiwa refers to a spirit who eventually becomes turned into mosquitoes.

and grandparents. We did not know the English language. So when I went to school, we as children who went to residential school were punished if we spoke our language. Each summer I spoke my language because my family couldn't understand English. I have very little memory of the time I was in school. The devastation was too much, because I came from a kind and loving family and then (was) taken from them.

My home is very isolated, but I managed to teach myself everything I could lay my hands on. I didn't want to be left behind (education-wise). When I married I worked cannery. When the canneries closed on the coast I got a job as a nurse's aid in the hospital here in Bella Bella. It was here that I became a mediator between the elders and nurses and doctors and the linguists who came from Holland to begin to work on the dictionary of the Heiltsuk and Oweekino language.

Fritz Kortland was the first linguist to come here, but couldn't stay for family reasons. John Rath was next. When work needed help he asked for my help. I left my job at the hospital to work with him. When he didn't need my help anymore, he and Jennifer Carpenter told me to go to the University of Victoria to take the Linguistic course there. I came back when I was finished and started teaching the language here at the school. I am now working part time with Susan Russell teaching the new language teachers-to-be. Susan is from Simon Fraser University. She asked me to write this paper on geographical place names for the conference.

2 Heiltsuk place names

We the Wakashan people all live by the shores of the waters and rivers. They have been our highway, our garden and our source of medicinal healing. The lands also provided us with many things, such as house, canoe, food, medicine etc. The cedar tree is the tree of life from the cradle to the grave.

We all have our story about the world flood. There is a story about the two mountains nearby. It is said that 'Mńsǵńłłi asked 'Qáǵńí "Are you still above water?" 'Qáǵńí answered and said "I am almost under". Then Mńsǵńłłi threw a piece of himself to the top of 'Qáǵńí. The nearby people saved themselves on these two mountains. These two mountains are 'Wuyalitaǵv people's flood story. 'Mńsǵńłłi means 'One in the water'. 'Qáǵńí means 'Right to the face (of the mountain)'.

1. 'Mńsǵńłłi
mńn-s-ǵm-łł-i
one- (?) -bulky object/face- (?) - on the water
'One in the water'
2. 'Qáǵńí
qá-ǵm-i
straight.to- bulky object/face -it
'Right to the face (of the mountain)'

3. 'Wuyalitaǎv
'Wuya- la – itǎv
seaward-location-tribe

We live now at Wagłísła.

4. Wagłísła
Wa- gł - is- la
flow river- on –beach- place/location

Farther on the beach is a place called Wabałjsla

5. Wabałjsla
Wa-ba- ł-is-la
flow river-point- (?) -beach-place.location

Another place is called ǎisbais

6. ǎisbais
ǎis- ba- -is
far-point-beach

Across from Wagłjsla is a place called Plbálá.

7. Plbálá
pl- ba - la
narrow-point-place

To go down to the beach is lánċs

8. lánċs
la – nċ - s
go- down-beach

To go up to the forest is láxsýls

9. láxsýls
la- xs- ýl- s
go- straight-forest-ground.land

An inlet is gǎdiǎ

10. gǎdiǎ
glt⁴- iǎ

⁴ glt is an allomorph of gld

long- inland

Głđiɬas Daqvú is the inlet belonging to Daqvú (Spiller Inlet). Daqvú was one of the Chiefs that came from that inlet.

Głłciwális is a long pass (Return Channel)

11. Głłciwális
Głt- siwa –la- is
long- through-go-beach

‘Kvái (is from) ‘Kviyái, Sitting on the water.

12. ‘Kvái
kvi - ya – i
sit.plural- left- they

I have been wondering if this really meant the two people (the son and his grandmother) who were left at ‘Kvai, and the tribe all moved across to an island. This story is in the Bella Bella Tales. Boas gathered stories from the Bella Bella and River’s Inlet people.

Other Heiltsuk placenames are:

13. ‘Háɬiǵvis Port John
háɬ- i- ǵvis
inland/forest- (?)- on – beach
Inland side of an island
14. ‘Haɬsista’áislá
háɬ- sista - áis – lá
wide- circular-beach –location
15. ‘Cábálíla a point in Roscoe Inlet
cá- bá- lí- la
flow- point- location – shore
16. ‘Ciǵvás at Briggs Inlet, a portage place
ciǵv⁵- as
go.over.land- place for
a place for going overland
17. ǵáyaɬli small island near Martins Island
ǵáya- ɬli

⁵ ciǵv is an allomorph of ciǵv

3 Acknowledgements

I would like to thank Jennifer Carpenter and the Heiltsuk Cultural Education Centre, Waglisla, for permission to use the information of place names that we gathered some years ago from the Heiltsuk elders. The Cultural Centre is the place of much of my research.