

POKING FUN IN LUSHOOTSEED

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My students in Lushootseed literature surprise me from time to time by missing humor in the stories which is obvious to me. Possibly this is because they have never been exposed to the literature of the primal people. Now that they have been, they have urged me to present a few examples in a paper such as this. While some of the characters are familiar to a wide audience, each tribe has its own traditional approach to them. While Bear and Raven appear in these stories, some of the students from the north inherited them as family crests and so were defensive about what they did and said in stories. This made the whole class aware of the importance of tribal and cultural differences.

As I have come to realize, once the context of these humorous incidents was made clear, students could laugh from a proper knowledge of what was happening. The reasons for this should be only too clear to the members of the Salish Conference. In most cases, these are inside jokes, poking or making fun of people in the more general context of acceptable behavior and a fine sense of the personality differences typical of any small

community. This is a humor based on familiarity, sometimes more poking and jabbing, sometimes more fun. In general, humor in Lushootseed seems to be based on two terms. The first is sju[?]cut, meaning to joke or have fun, derived from ju[?]il 'happy'. The second is da[?]yusəd, meaning to call down, denigrate, or demean, derived from da[?] for 'to name'.

While some families had rules about telling stories only in the winter, my family told legends anytime and any place they seemed appropriate. Sometimes I had to coax for stories, but that just made them more enjoyable when my parents gave in, as I knew they would. While the stories were told to me in great detail, allowing for my delicate ears, the moral was never, ever explained to me. I had to figure that out for myself and I expect my students to do the same. It is my belief that most of our story tellers followed this practice. Once elders began to lecture to white audiences, I think that they began explaining what they saw as the moral of each story, teaching the audience to realize that our literature was much more complex than some might think initially. I have never followed this new practice and never will. I explain this to each class at the beginning, urging students to find their own message in

each one according to their own traditions and personal philosophy. Students have a right to explore and discover a personal key to each story and relate it to their life and career. Sometimes I will coax and guide, but I try to encourage as much freedom of expression as possible.

The Lushootseed people have always been my teachers and role models, instructing me in the proper ways to act and live. They greatly appreciate someone with the special ability to speak well at any type of gathering, no matter how large or how small. Afterwards, people discussed and evaluated his or her good words, especially as they were medicine when carefully chosen and spoken. The wisest speaker needed the fewest words, using his or her time to speak them slowly and distinctly. Someone who speaks for a long time was also treated with respectful attention, but everyone was conscious of what they were enduring in the process. Our story tellers used all of the richness of their culture and traditions to make the presentation as vivid as possible. Students new to these experiences can have a difficult time at first, but with understanding comes appreciation and a better sense of our shared humanity. It is not that we do or think

some of the unpleasant or embarrassing things mentioned in these texts, only that we know of their existence and avoid them. Our elders were wise enough to teach by negative examples in the stories as well as positive ones in their own life and conduct.

My aunt, Susie Sampson Peter of the Upper Skagit, is probably my favorite story teller, a woman passionately devoted to our literature and to its skillful recitation. She told Star Child to Leon Metcalf in 1950 and he taped it for posterity. As I transcribed and translated it, many examples of the humor of our people emerged.

Two sisters had their wishes fulfilled and were taken up to the sky world. One found herself married to White Star, but couldn't bear to stay with this pus-eyed old man, even though she was pregnant by him. Her sister was married to Red Star, a handsome young man, but nonetheless helped prepare a rope of cedar branches. When it was long enough to reach the earth the woman climbed down. When she got home, she gave birth to a son. Needing a baby sitter while she gathered food during the day, she stepped over several rotten logs until one of them

managed to become a nice old woman on the fourth try. The mother carefully instructed her to croon only lullabies for girls to him so he would not be stolen by women from the East. There were not enough men in the early days of the world, so every male was a prize. The poor old thing was afflicted by a poor memory like some of the elders we have now. She forgot her instructions, absent-mindedly crooned a male lullaby, and attracted the attention of the women from the East. They stole the boy and raised him up to be a provider. As you can imagine, the mother mourned the loss of her only child. Her only memento of him was a used diaper. In her grief she took it to the stream and began to wash it. She wrung it out, twisting it to the right. The Creator showed compassion and gave her another child from the leavings to replace the one that was stolen. She took this child back to her home in Skagit country. Raven lived there along the Skagit River.

- (1) g^wəl lə ʔa qaʔqs ʔal tiʔʔ? x̄^wi x̄^walič
 ʔos̄aʔlil hig^wtx^w. hik^w tiʔʔʔ ʔalʔal
 ʔə qaʔqs, dx^wsaliʔič.

- (1) And there was Raven at Marblemount where he lived in a big house.

Raven's big house was a two fire house.

- (2) siʔab, siʔab, tiʔəʔ qaʔqs.

- (2) High class, high class was Raven.

Everyone in the traditional audience knew Raven only too well and realized that he was incapable of maintaining a big house or acting high class for very long. My aunt was setting up his character from the first time he appears in the story.

Responding to an impulse, Raven got into his canoe and went downstream where he encountered the woman and child. He took them for slaves. He was an unkind master, treating them badly. He used the side of the woman's head as a laboratory.

- (3) siʔab studəq. ʔu. ʔulʔəd^zal tiʔʔʔ
 qaʔqs g^wəl ʔulcupəʔədidusəd tiʔʔʔ
 studəqs.

- (3) High class slaves. When Raven goes out, he relieves himself on the side of the head of his slave.

- (4) huy six^w tuduk^wiləx^w tsiʔʔʔ
 tud^zilid tadiʔ təʔtowaʔs. huy
 ʔaʔaʔil.

- (4) Now this one who had rejected
the far away star was changed.
She became someone without
respect.

The woman was probably demeaned so because she had left the father of her child, and Raven liked to do this kind of thing because it made him feel important. The poor woman was made to suffer the consequences of her actions by forces beyond human control. This is never expressed in any explicit way, but this is the sense of this episode in terms of our traditions. The star or any other supernatural must always be treated with respect.

Later in the tale, the two brothers meet and Star Child develops a plan to get even with Raven. He has Diaper Child relieve himself near the door of Raven's house after eating lots of tallow, knowing that Raven will immediately gulp it down.

- (5) g^wəl ʔuʔəqəd. cutəb k^wi qa^wqs.
təʔ ʔəsčəwit.

- (5) And he will gulp it down. It is
said of Raven. He is truly so
talented.

Wishing to marry, Star Child asks his brother

if there are any likely females in the village. Four are identified, but three are immediately known to be worthless because they are always running around visiting. These are Magpie, Mole and Mouse. Only one was acceptable because she was known to be a good, hard worker. This was Frog, noted for her beautiful blonde hair.

- (6) ʔa ti ʔix^wix^w tu^x pa^ʔa^ʔ. x^wi? k^wi
stab dəx^wləqəʔs. k^waʔad, pu^ʔlyəʔ,
ʔadad. pa^ʔa^ʔ ʔ^wul ʔusax^wsax^wəb.
g^wəl dii^ču? tsi haʔʔ sʔadəy?
g^wəyayus dx^wʔal g^wəsuta^xils. wa^wlis.

- (6) There are three but they are worthless.
They are not good for anything. Mouse
Mole, Magpie. They just run around.
And there is one good woman. She works
until night comes. Little Green Frog.

Star Child arranged a test so that whoever could pack an elk up from the canoe to the house would become his wife. Diaper Child knew that the quickest way for everyone to learn of the test was to let Raven overhear their plan.

(7) yəcəbtx^w ti qawqs. ʔəspalil ʔu,
ʔuwiʔad.

tiləb six^w ʔuwiʔad k^wi qawqs. "q^wimicut ʔi
sʔaniʔ. q^wimicut ʔi, mək^w g^wat
ʔučəmatx^w tiʔiʔə sčəmaʔ ʔə tiʔiʔ
dsčəʔmənaʔəm g^wəl ʔučəg^wasils. q^wimicut ʔi.
q^wimicut ʔi. ʔəmtəmšənyiʔəm ʔi."

(7) Tell Raven. His good sense is so
questionable. He will holler. Right away,
of course, Raven did holler. "Fix your-
selves up women. Fix yourselves up.
Anyone who can manage to pack the game of
my step-son will become his wife. Prepare
yourselves. Fix yourselves up. Braid
your hair."

The women gather at the shore and take turns
trying to pack the elk.

(8) ʔa tsiʔəʔ ʔadʔad ʔu^wl ʔucik^wcik^wicut
tiʔəʔ k^wag^wičəd g^wəl k^waʔəd.

(8) There is Magpie only managing to
jiggle the elk before she abandons it.

(9) ʔa tsi k^waʔad d^zəld^zəlyalus ləcučitid
tiʔəʔ k^wag^wičəd. čitapəd.

(9) There is Mouse running from one end
of the Elk to the other gnawing at it.

She gnaws its rearend.

(10) čag^wʔəx^w ʔəsqilʔux^w tadi
k^wag^wičəd g^wəl ləcuhilibəʔ ʔə
k^wi ʔək^wəd.

(10) At the river still aboard the
canoe was Elk but he [Raven] is
telling everyone to get their
roasting sticks ready.

Frog had no trouble packing up the elk because
she had supernatural help. Raven, of course,
tried to take all of the credit, loudly brag-
ging about providing the elk for the feast.
This did not continue for long because he was
finally punished for all of his deceits. He
was supernaturally made to feel unbearably
hot and he flew toward the smokehole for fresh
air, flapping his wings and cawing.

(11) diʔiʔ tiʔiʔ ssaq^ws. duk^wil.
duk^wutəbəx^w ʔə tiʔəʔ dəbəʔ
ʔətəwaʔs. saq^wəx^w. duk^wiləx^w
ti siʔab. duk^wiləx^w ti siʔab
qawqs.

(11) Suddenly he flew. He was changed.
He was changed by that one who
belongs to the stars. He flew.

The high class one was changed. The high class Raven was changed.

Aunt Susie provided other examples of poking fun in the Flood Story about River Bullhead and Beaver, taped by Leon Metcalf in 1954 and translated by me in 1977.

River Bullhead and Beaver were living there, close to a tiny trickle of water that nevertheless provided people with great supplies of fish for stored food. A powerful supernatural named dəwi? came to visit these two men and asked if there was not some way of increasing the volume of water. River Bullhead and Beaver decided that there was a way, but dəwi? had to build a big canoe first. Once it was finished, they would sing a song calling for rain.

(12) hik^w q̄ilbids ti?iṭ shuyalc ?o ti?iṭ
dəwi? tuṣ^w days tubulq^w.

(12) dəwi? built a huge canoe, and, even so, it became overloaded. [before everyone got on board].

(13) q̄ilag^wil tsi?ə? dədicṣay ?i ti?ə?
bəčac. q̄ilag^wil ti?i?ə? g^wəl
ləṣ^wu?ṣuq^wag^wil. ṣučad k^wi

ṣusg^waltəbčəṣ ?ə tə x^wi?
ləha?ṣ.

(13) Also, Lizard and Snake were invited to come on board and they stuffed themselves into unused dark recesses, wondering at the same time if the dirty [no-good] thing who built the canoe was going to get them capsized. [due to the overcrowding].

The implication is that these ungrateful creatures were cursed ever after because of their lack of respect. In addition, my aunt casts aspersions on dəwi? himself for unwisely including such nasty creatures in the canoe where they survived to plague the modern world.

In her delightful story of Mink's House Party, taped by Leon Metcalf in 1951, Aunt Susie displays her exceptional abilities as a story teller to give full play to her creative imagination, both entertaining us and teaching several important cultural lessons.

During the winter season of religious dancing, Mink invites everyone to his house. Even though all of his guests were not gifted with spirit power, Mink expected all of them to sing and dance at his party. Being polite guests,

they responded, creating songs and dances on the spot. Thus we are treated to Crab, Flounder, Raven, Wolf, Skate, Deer, and Bear singing their songs.

When it is Mink's turn to sing, he can not recall his own song, a valid spirit song. He is embarrassed and turns to his wife Mouse for help, and she uses this occasion to chastize him.

(14) hə, hə, hi, hu. bəq^uucid čəx^w six^w
k^wi adbayayaysčəb.

(14) ha-ha-hey-huu, that's what you get for kissing a menstruant.

Having poked her fun, she then generously saves him from disgrace by quietly humming his song. Then it comes to him and he gets up and dances.

Other examples come from her discussion of the invaders, taped by Leon Metcalf in August of 1958. She recalls that the men who jumped ship came with nothing because they were running away and could not carry much with them. Even so, they more than made up for their lack by what they took from the primal people.

(15) tiləb tučədəg^wcut dx^w?al ti?ə?
?əg^wsbid ?ə ti?ə? ?al?al?al ?ə ti?ə?
?aciłtalbix^w. qa· ti?ił tus?əłəd ?ə

k^wi ?aciłtalbix^w g^wəl čadəx^w ?al
ti?ə? sləčil.

(15) They immediately pushed themselves into the midst of the living areas of the people. The Indians had plenty of food then, but where is it today?

Martha LaMont, a Tulalip-Skagit taped by Thom Hess in 1963, remembered that the first whites brought many strange foods unfamiliar to my people and they used the Chinook Jargon at a time when most of my people did not know it. Some people thought that these were friendly visitors, bringing gifts like our people always do.

(16) k^wa·, č^wuí ləcuq^walatubuł dx^w?al ti?ə?
swatix^wtəd čəł.

(16) However, they were just lulling us out of our lands with their gifts.

The implication is that their gifts and friendship were insincere and devious from the start. The gifts were bait to trap the unsuspecting people into losing most of what they had. The humor resides in the fact that my people would have been kind, considerate, and caring in any event, regardless of the consequences. This philosophy has often worked against us, but we can

poke fun at ourselves for being only too human and gullible.

Martha told Raven and The Hunters to Leon Metcalf and he taped it in 1952. She reminds her audience to be wary of Raven when she remarks,

(17) daʔ tiʔiʔ hikʷ cəqʷs tiʔiʔ
dəxʷəs(h)aydubs tiʔiʔ qawqs.

(17) Raven is best known for his enormous rectum [the result of his devouring great quantities of food from his greedy habits].

Any audience can appreciate what such a biological attribute implies, so her choice of attribute for this character sketch has always been immediately recognized by my students.

Lastly, we return to Aunt Susie, taped by Metcalf in April of 1951, telling Nobility of ʔəcəladi. Bluejay is always talking loudly, although people warn her that this will attract enemy warriors if any are near. She counters that if this happens, she would just pretend to be a dog.

(18) ʔa sus gʷəʔəsistəʔ tsiʔəʔ
diʔəʔ gʷətuxʷilstəbəs ʔə kʷi
tubšədəʔ.

(18) There she would be, indeed,
doing just that when warriors
would drag her off by the hair!

Bobcat is the central figure of this story, smitten with the daughter of the leader, who keeps her carefully guarded. Nonetheless, Bobcat manages to magically impregnate her by means of a fire drill. When it is clear that the girl is pregnant, the father is very angry and demands to know who caused the disgrace of this noblewoman. Bobcat has made his body break out in running sores, and uses them as the excuse for being blameless. After the son is born, he identifies Bobcat as his father so the entire family of three is banished. Bobcat still appears sick and full of sores, but he tries to help out in his weakened condition. The audience knows, however, that this is all pretense. He tells his wife that he is going out to get wood in order to keep his family warm. She says to him;

(19) ʔəʔ ʔəsʔubil ʔə kʷi ʔuʔaʔʔup.

(19) How can a *sickie* like him attempt to get wood?

The younger brother of his wife had always defended Bobcat and when he saw what a successful hunter his brother-in-law had become, he invited

everyone to share the meat, reminding them of their prior insults.

(20) ?əʃaʔti, čəlopa kʷədalikʷ ?ə
tiʔəʔ biac. biac ?ə tiʔəʔ
tudʒilid čələp. ?əʃaʔti, qəbuʔ
ʃutiqʷilabacləp.

(20) Come take meat. This meat from
the one you folks maligned. Come
on you folks, even though you
might get contaminated by his sores.

So much of this humor is obvious to those familiar with our language and culture that they can truly repeat after Coyote when he says so often:

(21) haʔkʷ čəd ?əxʷscutəb.

(21) For a long time I thought that.

I KNEW IT ALL ALONG!!!!!!

Halkomelem and Configuration¹

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0. Introduction

Languages may differ on a parameter of configurationality, according to Chomsky (1981). Although this property is not clearly defined, let us assume that the grammatical relations of subject and object either cannot or, for some reason, should not be defined by tree configuration in nonconfigurational languages, as opposed to configurational languages such as English, where the subject is [NP, S] and the object, [NP, VP] (Chomsky, 1965). We might very well ask the extent to which a language may be nonconfigurational: are there languages with an absolutely flat syntax? Further, are there correlates to configurationality or nonconfigurationality?

I will argue below that Halkomelem is nonconfigurational at least to the extent that the relationships of argument phrases (i.e., putative NPs) to the predicate is not configurationally defined. Possibly argument phrases are, in turn, minimally structured, consisting of an article head plus optional clauses, although the facts may be open to a more conventional analysis.

Given a certain degree of nonconfigurationality, we might then ask whether there are correlates. Chomsky (1981) speculates