

SALISH KINSHIP; WHY DECEDECE ?

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Language, remarkable enough for its internal consistency, nevertheless, serves primarily social ends. Actions do indeed speak louder than words; the second follows from the first. A case in point is kinship terminologies, which are linguistic reflections of the social consequences of biological factors. In his classic statement of these, Murdock (1949:101) listed nine criteria universally used for classificatory systems. These are generation, sex, affinity, collaterality, bifurcation, polarity, relative age, speaker's sex, and decedence: "the last and least important of the nine...based on the biological fact of death"(same:106).

Decedence, terminological changes following upon the death of a linking relative, is a feature of the kinship systems of Puget (Lushootseed) Salish and neighboring regions. While it is listed as one of the nine universals of kinship, its application is usually limited to situations involving the remarriage of a surviving spouse; levirate for a wife and sororate for the husband. In this form, it occurs in many kinship systems. To the best of my knowledge, however, only the Salish and other groups of the southern Northwest region have elaborated it into a hallmark of their overall system (Elmendorf 1961).

Within this system, death introduces different terms, not just modifications of previous ones, although there are some exceptions.

Among the Nanaimo, a suffix (-ei) meaning "late, former" is added to some terms (White and Wilson 1975:167). There are, however, no polite forms for circumventing references to death or actual necronyms defining classes of people mourning specific types of relatives (Buchler and Selby 1968:170). Thus, while Salish, like other languages, has terms for widow(er) and orphan, they do not seem to belong in this discussion. My sense is that widow(er)s and orphans have not so much altered relationships as they have lost or been deprived of them.

I may be mistaken, however. Among the Stalo Salish of the Fraser River, the term for the child of a deceased sibling seems to derive from the term for orphan. Thus, /wələm/ 'orphan' leads to /swələm.yl/ (perhaps) 'orphan child of a deceased sibling' (Galloway 1977:530). Also, Kinkade (p.c.) reported that "the Columbian word for 'widow(er)' is based on the same root as the terms for dPsb and dSbc (meaning something like 'lost,absent').

The situation can only be clarified by careful research. After all, "The terminologies for American Indian cultures are rarely complete with respect to the relationships brought about by death of a relative or by death and remarriage" (Edmonson 1958:13). Every opportunity should be made to discuss these terms and their expected behaviors with native speakers. We need more than just the terms; we need to know their interrelationships. Not all Salishans recognize the same equations, as seen in the final table.

Among the Lushootseed, four terms indicate decedence. These are /yelab/, /sqəla(y)jut/, /sbalucid/, and */ɬəlbaskayu/. Ballard (1935:111), who learned Lushootseed as a child, mentions all of these, but modern speakers are aware of only the first three terms.

According to Hess (1976:631.2), yelab is "either parent's sibling of either sex

when the parent is deceased." The term yel- means "both, pair" (same:631.1) + -ab suffix, which extends a meaning. The designation seems to mean 'embracing both sides'. Of related interest is the use of the term /yelyəlab/ to mean "ancestors" (same:631.3). In English, Skagit speakers will sometimes remark that their geneologies trace the "fathers of our uncles."

The term sqəla(y)jut has been translated as "nephew/niece when sibling link is deceased, reciprocal of yelab" (same:375.2). It is based on the term qel meaning "bad" and may mean "badly off, unfortunate." There is some dialectal variation in the suffixes applied to it. Ballard (1935:116) used (-ei), while the term given to me in Suquamish by Lawrence Webster has (-ut).

The term (sbalucid) has been translated as "in-law when link is deceased" (same:18.3), although the verbal form means "court a girl, be going after someone" (same:18.3). Related words include halbal "confused, mistaken" (same:17.3) and -ucid "lexical suffix 'gap, opening' and 'mouth, language, door, river'" (same:541.5). It seems to mean 'to cover a mistake (or embarrassment)', such as Ruth Underhill (1965: 69) noted that in the Northwest "Death was an insult that had to wiped out, not by avoidance of the dead but by glorifying them." As applied to actual situations, the term connotes 'intended spouse', as English refers to betrothed individuals as 'intended' for each other.

The last term includes reference to the dead: /skayu/ "corpse, ghost" (same:232.1), and the productive prefix of ɬəl "make, build"(same:95), also applied to step-relationships. It seems to mean 'created by death'. Other dialects use other prefixes. At least some of the southern dialects use (ciid), (cf. Ballard (1935) and Hess (1976:52.2)). "Different from some Salish languages such as Squamish, Puget expresses step-kin by compound words rather than with prefixes. In Snohomish the expression for a step-relative is compounded of (ɬəl) 'order, law' plus the regular consanguine term. In Skagit it is (ɬəl) 'make' and the consanguine term" (Hess 1971:69, note 12) (cf. Hess 1976:458.3 where ɬəl is corrected to 'make'). The medial -b- may refer to repetition and so mean 'made anew by death', but it may also derive from -ab- 'belonging to'. It is applied to in-laws, especially parents-in-law who were called /sk'elwas/ during life (same:254.6). The term k'wiiw? (Hess 1976:261.1) means to change residence at marriage, to go to the home of in-laws.

While the other three terms are known and used by present speakers, the last term is not. I have been unable to find a speaker who knows this term, yet all recognize its transparent reference to the dead. I was somewhat inclined to regard it as a fabrication for the benefit of anthropologists, but its listing by Ballard is compelling evidence. The term may have been intended to sever a relationship rather than forge a new one. As Ballard (1935:112-113) wrote, "Any relationship formerly existing between them (the blood relatives of the surviving spouse) and the blood kindred group of the deceased is regarded as severed. They are called tsiabakayu', 'related through the dead'." This suggests that it might actually be more in the nature of an anti-kinship term, as with the English prefix ex- for relationships which have been denied or legally terminated. Terms for widow(er)s and orphans also have something of this character.

As diagrammed by Hess (1976:393), during the lifetime of a parent, a yelab is known as either aunt (ʔəpus) or uncle (qesi), and the sibling is called stələd. In the southern dialects, (pus) is the term for aunt.

The terms yelab and sqəlayjut remain in effect while the uncle or aunt and the nephew or niece still live. When they die, they are again called qesi, ʔəpus, or stələd (same:393).

When I asked native speakers about these terms, their responses were particularly insightful with regard to the collateral terms. People were less clear on the affinal ones. For yelab, people said that it signified that "someone became like a mother or a father"; while a sqela(y)jut "became like a son or daughter." The implication is that the shift to these terms moved the relations closer together. Similarly, sbalucid was said to indicate "the person you're going to marry", "the person you're next in line to marry", "your intended." Of course, given the levirate and sororate, when one of your siblings died, their surviving spouse became a prospective mate.

In her intensive treatment of Skagit terminology, Collins (1974) gives careful attention to important features of this system. What she has said has direct bearing on my general conclusions. She highlighted the equivalence of siblings as a central feature, extending to an equation of parents-in-law with parents. Divorce was uncommon and children highly valued by the families of both spouses.

The rationale for the levirate-sororate was explicitly said to be the welfare of the children. In all, among the Skagit and other Lushootseed, decedence was concerned with children, not merely remarriage. The effect of the terminological changes was "a closing of ranks" to look after the welfare of coming generations. The tight bond among siblings and "families"(kindreds) among the Salish rests firmly on a belief in what Suttles (1968) has called "advice." Among the Lushootseed it might better be called "teachings" since this is closer to the meaning of the native terms. These include /x^wdik^w/, /x^wdiq^wid/, /g^wed^wada/, and /ʔug^wusal/, this last specifically meaning 'teachings' (cf. Hess 1976:681). People who transmit and practice (live) these teachings act as appropriate members of the upper class. People who do not are either low class or, aboriginally, slaves.

These teachings include hereditary names, moralistic narratives, and information about prime resource areas. It is the importance of these inherited teachings that gives the Northwest much of its distinctiveness, providing the basis for distinguishing corporate groups organized in terms of households. In the north, these corporations were characterized by matrilineal sentiments, which established clear channels of responsibility within matriline (Durlach 1928). These are impervious to death because of they perpetuate a stock of hereditary names. Among the Salish and others of the central coast, kindreds were ambilateral. While the system itself recognized bilateral components, choices were limited to the households of acknowledged great-grandparents. In practice, households included three generations of residents, but, minimally, a fourth generation was recalled by the reuse of hereditary names (Aross 1981:237).

Among the Lushootseed, every individual represents the conjunction of several kindreds. In addition to the term for ancestors based on the collateral term, Lushootseed also uses /stax^wšed/ meaning "root (especially cedar root), ancestors (figurative)" (Hess 1976:531.3). Like cedar roots, an individual represents a 'coming together' of links from many different directions. As a tree feeds from diverse roots, so the person comes from many sources. Of these, those of the father and the mother are most important. They are terminologically distinguished as /badaliq^wed/ from the word for father (bad) and for 'on the side of' (aliq^wed), or as /k^wuyaliq^wed/ using the word for mother (k^wuya). Some speakers also associate these terms with the word for born (g^wec).

For ranking families, kinship was(is) a process of replacement rather than succession. Names and possessions belong to the timeless age of myth. Since the cataclysmic change associated in myth with the arrival of human beings, people have been trying to recreate these immortal conditions by giving "people to the names," so the name is said to live again.

The two terms for parental siblings and for niblings, which occur only among the Salish and neighboring Southern Nootkans (now self-designated as the nučanuł). The neighboring Sahaptians do not have such terms. Interestingly, different strategies were used by the Salishan and the Sahaptians to encourage intertribal contact. The Salishans use intermarriage, while the others sponsored large gatherings to bring many tribes together to visit, gamble, and trade. Because the Salishans, especially of important families, expected to marry among diverse groups, the death of a parent would be more disruptive to the transmission of teachings, particularly with the greater distances and cultural differences involved. As a hedge against this, collaterals changed terms to assume greater closeness, at least when speaking Lushootseed. Interestingly, Halkomelem has specific terms /qeye.i/ and /x^wamšiyə.i/, which mean deceased person (other than a parent) responsible for ego. Among those specifically identified are uncle, aunt, and grandmother. "The Stalo way of viewing...these terms is that you are related to a person who dies or you are related to a person through another person who dies. These terms are looked at as a process" (Galloway 1977:530).

Among the Salish, this close/remote considerations pervade the entire cultural system. In Lushootseed, the term used for close(ness) is q^wu 'gather, collect' (Hess 1976:432.2), with a range that includes assembly, meeting, and gathering. Ballard (1935:112) has it signifying "join, unite, assemble." Appropriately, at large gatherings, individuals will donate money to a host through a speaker, who announces that the offering indicates that the donor is "claiming the host as a relative." Given the extensive network of kindreds in the Salishan bilateral system, such periodic reclaiming of weakening links serves to strengthen the relational ties among elite families, albeit more so in the past than at present.

Thompson Salish, similarly, has two terms for affines after the death of the linking relative:

- n^wkei(e)weʔwiy(e)x - 'decedence affine of distant relationship
(cousin or more) (literally, "weep together"),
n(e)q^wict(e)n - 'decedence affine of close relationship
(sibling in law).

Because close/distant are significant symbolic categories for Salishans, they influence all transactions. Safeguarding family knowledge, decedence signals a closing of ranks. The death of the closest relatives, such as parents, expectably would distance survivors unless something like decedence terms were invoked to counteract this.

Other people do the same thing when they adopt the use of kin terms for friends, moving them out the foreigner category. Among the Salish, however, the corporate nature of kin, class, and knowledge transmission has encouraged a more institutionalized solution.

Abbreviations Used:

A)unt, B)rother, C)hild(ren), Cz Cousin, d deceased, D)daughter,
f female('s), F)ather, H)usband, I)ntended, l affine (in-law),
m male('s), M)other, N)ibling, Nc Niece, Nf Nephew, P)arent,
R)relative, s step, S)on, Sb Sibling, Sp Spouse, U)ncle, W)ife,
Z Sister.

CONSANGUINEAL DECEDENCE

Twana: ** dusta.eibad dPSb (Elmendorf 1946)
** stai?eə dSbC
** akwəts dSbSp,dspSb

Chehalis: (s)kax'inut dPSb,dSbC (cf -inut "mind")
swanačəi dSbS(?)
smak'tuain dHM,I (cf mak't "dead")

Klallam: sk'əqəsa?čəyəi dPSb
sqəsa?čəyəi dSpC
k'əiχ'u?uŋ? Rdl,co-mourner
smayəcən dSpR

Samish: qsečə.i dPSb (Galloway 1984:28,55)
sk'ənənəč(ə)i dSbC
čəe.y?ə dSbSp

Nitinat: * bitxta?k dPSb (cf ** had?e.qs PSb)
** qaqa?ə?k dSbC
** ku.?bi?k dSbSp, I

Saanich: ** s.qsečəeəi dPSb
* sk'ənənəčəeəi dSbC
* čəeəə dCSp
** čəəiχ'wə?an PdCl,PSpdC (literally "(those who)
cry together")

Sechelt: ———
wanwanem dSbC
čəyaya dZH
čəmašəi dSbl

Squamish: waisay?x'əi dPSb
swanimayəi dSbC
čəyay? dSpSb,I(?)
šəiq'ayəi dSpP,dCSp

Chilliwack: sməstiyeəi dPSb (Galloway 1977:524,531)
swəlme.yəi dSbC

čəiχə.m dS,dD (literally "(those who) cry along with")
čə.yə dSpR
sk'əmšəiye.i } dR
qəye.i }

Thompson: s?i?tə dPSb,dPCz
ak'ixə? dMZ
skəiweviχ dRl

Columbian: iwəsn dPSb,sS
šəwəlt dSbC,sD
naq'ičtn dSbSp,dSpSb,I
kə?əlp dSpP,dCSp

Except for Elmendorf and Galloway, these terms were provided by Kinkade and Hess, whose list numbers are repeated here.

AFFINAL DECEDENCE: "THE INTENDED"

Ahousat: * čiiŋupsiqəu SbSp (Hess (Webster))
** huu?əawitšəi dSb, levirate
** q'ii?iqəu Pl, Cl, NfW,NCH

Hesquiat: čəi.nucck'wi mZl, levirate (Fleisher:245)

Kootenay: ** qəxətqəxəniyatu?məi dSpP, dCSp (Sapir 1919:98)
** qətiəmətə. dSpSb, dSbSp (cf Boas 1919:100
Turney-High:142,
#41, #45)

Klickitat: ** ədwa'itətil dMP (Jacobs, Schuster:62-64)
** (p)nuk dSbSp
** əwid dSpSb

Nes Perce: ** ciki.wn WB, mZH, (Aoki)
** qəqə.ʔəyət SW, DH, WF, WM, HF, HM

Proto-Sahaptian ** pemuk SbSp (Aoki:365)
** awit SpdSb (cf ?a.wit 'widow')

TABLE

	dPsb	dsbC	dsbSp	dSpSb	dCSp	dSpP	other
Twana	X	X	X = X				
Chehalis	X	dsbS				dHM-I	
Klallam	X	X	dSbR	Rdl			
Samish	X	X	X				
Nitinat	X	X	I				
Saanich	X	X			X		PSbdC=PdCl
Sechelt		X	dZH				dsbl
Squamish	X	X		X(I?)	X = X		
Chilliwack	X	X		dSpR	dR		dc(S,D)
Thompson	X dMZ						dRl
Columbian	X,sS	X,sD	X = X		X = X		
Ahousat			I=dBW				
Hesquiat			I=mZl				
Kootenay			X = X		X = X		
Klickitat	dMP			dSpSb			
Nez Perce							
Proto-Sahap				SpdSb			

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