Excerpts from the Introduction to Gitksan Grammar

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The following are sections from the introductory chapter of my Gitksan Grammar, which has now been submitted to the B.C. Provincial Museum. I thought they might touch on matters of interest to other Northwest scholars, and so I've reformatted them singlespaced for presentation here.

Diane Barwick, Pier De Paola, John Dunn, Dell Hymes, Michael Krauss, Peter Mühlhäusler, Jay Powell and Rosalind Whalley read a draft of the introductory chapter and made thoughtful comments, corrections, and suggestions, many of which I have incorporated and made.

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I alone am responsible for the views I express and the materials I present in this work. I would appreciate comments, suggestions, corrections, etc. from readers, and I'm open to discussion on any points by correspondence.

Is Gitksan a Language or a Dialect?

The present monograph provides a grammatical description of the Gitksan language, and we now turn to the problem of defining just what we mean by the phrase "the Gitksan language". This leads us also to consider the relationships between the terms "language" and "dialect", because Gitksan has been referred to in the anthropological and linguistic literature as a dialect of the Nass-Gitksan language (Rigsby 1967, 1970, 1975). For an even longer period of time, Gitksan has also been referred to as a dialect of the Tsimshian language (Boas 1888, 1911b; Garfield 1939:173, 195-6; Duff 1964a:15; Guédon 1977). I reopen the question here.

There are four sorts of approaches that linguists and anthropologists have followed in defining the concepts of language and dialect. First, there is an older practice of referring to separate language varieties that share a common genetic origin as dialects (Haugen 1966:923). Thus someone might refer to English, German and Swedish as Germanic dialects, or of French, Spanish and Italian as Romance dialects. It is in this sense of shared historical origin that Boas usually referred to the Tsimshian and Nisgha languages as dialects of Tsimshian.

Second, American linguists have generally conceptualized the relationship between language and dialect in terms of mutual intelligibility. Accordingly, dialects are varieties of a language that are either mutually intelligible or are connected by mutually intelligible varieties (Hockett 1958:321-330; Gleason 1961:441-442). It was this sort of definition that I had in mind when I wrote (Rigsby

1970:212):

> ... Nass-Gitksan and its closely related congener, Coast Tsimshian, comprise the Tsimshian language family. Nass-Gitksan, as a language name, subsumes the dialects which are spoken today in a number of villages located in the Nass and Skeena River valleys. These dialects appear to fall into two major sub-groupings; the Nass dialects of the Nass valley and the Gitksan dialects of the Skeena Valley.

By this logic, I should present a full grammatical description of the Nass-Gitksan language in all its dialectal diversity, or else I should restrict myself and present a grammar of the Gitksan dialect(s) of the Nass-Gitksan language. A decade ago, I would have accepted this phrasing of the choice. Today, I cannot accept it because there are theoretical, methodological and practical considerations that lead me to accept and use the people's own phrasing in English that speaks of the Gitksan language, not of the Gitksan dialect.

The theoretical objection to the mutual intelligibility approach is that it assumes the intelligibility of two language varieties is primarily a function of their structural similarity. The closer two language varieties are in phonology, grammar and vocabulary, the more they are intelligible to each other. Some lexicostatistical studies make the same assumption and distinguish separate languages from dialects of the same language in terms of an arbitrary percentage of shared basic vocabulary, generally about 70%. Yet the literature on attempts to operationalize and measure intelligibility show the difficulties of distinguishing intelligibility due to structural similarity from that due to normal language learning. It is important to keep in mind that language varieties are intelligible to people, to speakers of language varieties; language varieties or codes are not intelligible to each other. And too as Wolff (1959, 1967) pointed out, matters of social and cultural evaluation may lead speakers to deny that one or another language variety is intelligible to them. It seems to me that the interesting and important matter of intelligibility should be kept separate from the question of whether language varieties should be considered to be dialects of the same language or not. (See Rigsby and Sutton 1980-82:17-18 for a critical overview of the literature of intelligibility).

Third, the relationship of dialect to language may be cast in terms of speech functions as in everyday English-speaking and European usage (see Haugen 1966:924-925). Thus, a language has a full set of functions, including official use in public settings and education, written literature, and codified norms as set down in a standard orthography, grammars and dictionaries. In this way, modern Standard English, French and German qualify as languages. Dialects, for their part, are generally unwritten and are functionally restricted to domestic and community or regional settings. Cockney (in English) and the various Low German varieties of north coastal Germany count only as dialects, not as full languages. Phrased another way, such functional definitions basically ask whether a language variety is a Standard language or not. By this criterion, neither Gitksan nor Nisgha can be considered to be full languages, although both are in the early incipient stages of standard language development. Finally, these functional definitions often include an implicit negative, denigrating

nt, in that a language is considered to be better than a dialect. It is not surprising the Gitksan people insist on calling their language a language and not a dialect, as linguists sometimes tell them they should.

This brings us finally to the fourth approach to the question of language and dialect. It is one that is implicit in much modern sociolinguistic and linguistic anthropological work, where the relationship(s) holding between social groups and the language varieties they speak is regarded as an empirical question, open to variability and requiring research (see specifically Hymes 1968; Rigsby and Sutton 1980-82; Romaine 1981). For example, speakers of local language varieties on the two sides of the boundary between The Netherlands and the German Federal Republic can understand and converse with one another, yet the people on The Netherlands side say that they speak Dutch, while those on the German side say that they speak German (Moulton 1985:404). A sociolinguist, such as Trudgill (1974:15-16), would say that the local varieties or dialects are heteronomous with respect to Standard Dutch or Standard German, as the case may be, but that the two national Standard languages are autonomous with respect to each other. Thus, the citizens and residents of The Netherlands national state consider the Dutch language to include local non-standard Dutch (but not Frisian) dialects along with Standard Dutch. Their views regarding the inclusion of Flemish and Afrikaans language varieties are more problematic. Germans similarly consider the German language to include non-standard and Standard German varieties.

Briefly put, this fourth approach places great value upon community norms relating to speech forms and their rules of use and upon community perceptions and definitions of language varieties, their intelligibility, and so on. In this respect, it may be said to emphasize "emic" phenomena, often non-linguistic, yet it also requires close attention to the hard "etic" facts of variability of speech forms within a community. Indeed, the very question of whether the social group under study is a community or not is an empirical one to be investigated, and this requires methods of ethnographic, sociolinguistic and sociological research that go beyond traditional dialectology and linguist-informant eliciting sessions. And unfortunately, these methods require more time, funding and research assistance than have been available to me over the period of my Gitksan (and Nisgha and Coast Tsimshian) research, yet I believe I have managed to gain some reliable knowledge about the Gitksan community and their norms relating to language and speech. Bloomfield (1927) offers a perceptive view of such norms among the Menomini, and V. Hymes (1975) presents the instructive case of Warm Springs Sahaptin, which is directly parallel to the Gitksan situation in many ways.

To anticipate, there is indeed a broader Gitksan community that includes the local village communities listed earlier. It can be defined etically by such sociological criteria as marriage patterns (Kasakoff 1970, 1974, 1976) and participation in a common system of ceremonial exchange (Adams 1969, 1973, 1974). And emically it is defined by the people's own belief and public statements in English that they are Gitksan and speak their own language; they are not Nisgha (Nisga'a or Gitxemsim, or simply, Txemsim) nor are they Tsimshian (Ts'imsan), who each have their own distinctive native language.

However, the Gitksan people have no conventional indig___us name for their own language that sets it apart from Nisgha and Tsimshian. They generally refer to their own language as Sim'algax the real or true language, but the Nisgha and Tsimshian people do the same too. There is a term, Gitxsanimx (or similar form) that indeed means the Gitksan language specifically, as opposed to Nisga'amx the Nisgha language and Ts'imsanimx the Tsimshian language, but these locutions are not in common use the way that Sim'algax is, although their construction-type is apparently old. Another term, Amst, also names the language or perhaps (more narrowly) its more formal variety used on public occasions. Amst is thought to be an old name, and fewer people know it than know the name Sim'algax. I don't know whether the Nisghas and Tsimshians use Amst (or cognate forms). A few older Gitksan people call their language Gaanimx, but that term also includes Nisgha. It is a Tsimshian word that means the upstream or interior language; it is a loanword from the Coast Tsimshian language and not an originally Gitksan word.

With respect to language change, the existence of separate Gitksan, Nisgha and Tsimshian communities is significant, for these are the more or less bounded social units within which there are distinctive norms and standards relating to language and speech. Linguistic continuity and change, divergence and convergence, are functions primarily of intra-community culture and social interaction. It is in the Gitksan community that particular speech forms have definite indexical values and functions. Phrased differently, it is within the Gitksan community that old speech forms are maintained or lost and new ones are accepted or rejected. However, the Gitksan community is a bilingual community now, using English (one of the two official national languages of Canada) and Gitksan, so that it is not possible to understand the present currents and processes of change in the Gitksan language without reference to English and the broader European-Canadian society.

The Gitksan Speech Community Today

From a sociolinguistic perspective, the Gitksan community is in a transitional situation as people use English more and more in their social lives to the exclusion of Gitksan, which has come to be restricted mainly to the home or domestic scene and to use alongside English at public occasions, such as feasts, official ceremonies, and church services. The functional dominance of English has been established over the past century as Gitksan people have come to participate more fully in mainstream Canadian economic and social life where the knowledge and use of English are necessary and where native languages have been stigmatized as primitive and not suited to modern life. As well, there was a government policy (Levine and Cooper 1979) that suppressed (or at least discouraged) indigenous languages through the residential school system and excluded them from the classroom and playground until just a few years ago. Many Gitksan parents made a deliberate choice not to speak Gitksan to their children, but to use only English with them, so that they would grow up competent in English and avoid the shame and embarrassment that their parents had experienced from teachers and other Whites.

The functional expansion of English in the Gitksan community has

been accompanied by the development of differences in Gitksan language competence and fluency across the generations to the point where one can say that English has become the vernacular for the great majority of Gitksan people. There are no monolingual speakers of Gitksan any longer, and no children are growing up with Gitksan as their only language. Older people (over sixty) are generally fully competent and fluent in Gitksan. Many of them also have good English, although perhaps with an accent, while others speak English interlanguage varieties that display many transfers from Gitksan. Middle-aged people are variably competent and fluent in Gitksan, and they have excellent English. Most (but not all) of them are surely English dominant, i.e., they use much more English than Gitksan, and English appears to be the language of their personal identity, of their inner private lives and thoughts. Younger adults (over twenty) are definitely English-dominant, and there probably are more semi-speakers (in the sense of Dorian 1977, 1981, 1982) of Gitksan among them than there are fully competent, fluent speakers. Teenagers and children are virtually all English monolinguals by usage, although there are some fluent Gitksan speakers among them, and many of them would have a passive (hearing, but not speaking; comprehending, but not using) knowledge of the language gained from grandparents and older relatives.

The intergenerational continuity of transmission of Gitksan to children has definitely been broken. Children in Kispiox village entered primary school in the early 1940's as Gitksan monolinguals knowing little, if any English (p.c. from Mrs. Anne Michael (nee McDames), the first Gitksan person to become a qualified teacher, who taught there then). As middle-aged adults these people are all English-dominant now, and many of them have become semi-speakers of Gitksan and even passive bilinguals. By 1966, when my family and I spent the summer in Kispiox, English had become the language of children's playgroups, and only a few sibling-sets of children spoke Gitksan among themselves, along with English. People say that only in the past ten years has English become the language of children's play-groups in Kitwancool and Kitseguecla villages, where easy road access has been more recent.

As English has gained more native speakers in succeeding generations, there also has developed a non-standard variety of Gitksan English that has conventionalized a number of constructions and usages that are transfers from Gitksan language structure. These include the transitive verb use in the sense of wear, a construction of dip or dem Personal Name which corresponds to the non-standard English associative and them construction (e.g., dip Fred or dem Fred corresponds to Fred and them; dip is an indigenous C pluralizer, while dem is from English them), and a predicative possessive construction with head own (as in That's Mary's own., rather than That's Mary's.). These features are also found in Nisgha and Tsimshian English (Mulder 1980; Tarpent 1981b; these two papers were reprinted and published in ??).

The present situation of the Gitksan language must be judged as perilous, and its chances for long term survival are not good because it does not have a self-reproducing speech community whose members use it primarily for identity-construction and maintenance and for the full range of social functions. People do accord Gitksan a high measure of value as a salient symbol of their distinctive social identity and cultural heritage, but their ideology is not supported completely by their practice – they lament the loss of the language, yet go on

5

speaking (mainly) English to their children and among themselves. The moves to teach Gitksan in school over the past decade indicate that some people are aware of the impending demise of the language and that they recognize the importance of schooling for cultural transmission in modern life. It is true that bringing Gitksan into the school can help to raise its status, but it is unlikely that the school can be a more effective institution for transmitting the language to new generations of children than are the home and local community.

Michael Krauss (p.c.), the Director of the Alaska Native Language Center, suggests that there are three levels of language preservation which Indian people, linguists, and bilingual educators might seek to achieve in such cases as that of Gitksan. The first is simply to document the language as adequately as possible. This would include the preparation of a comprehensive grammar, dictionary, and collection of texts (including traditional oral literature), both written and taperecorded. The second level of language preservation involves the active cultivation of the language in a restricted number of social domains, such as at ceremonies, church, and school. This requires a knowledgeable class of native language specialists who can carry on the teaching of the language in formal and informal settings, while the majority of the community may have more limited competence and fluency in the language. The third level of language preservation is that found in living languages, where conversational ability in the vernacular is transmitted in the family and the local community. Gitksan parents and leaders might consider whether the maintenance and preservation of Gitksan as a living language is a realistic goal. Certainly the preservation of Gitksan at the first two levels is possible, and indeed it is underway. As Krauss points out, the successful revival of Hebrew as a living language in the modern state of Israel was aided by its preservation over the centuries at the first and second levels, which kept it from total extinction.

There would be great tragedy in the death of the Gitksan language, but I believe that the misfortune of indigenous language loss would not be in the disappearance of a distinctive Gitksan social identity (at least not in the short term over a few generations). There is a simpleminded mainstream view, supported by some weakminded educators and academics and held even by some uncritical native people, that one cannot be a real Indian unless one can speak an Indian language. The weakness of this position is that it confuses external traits, such as speech, dress and appearance, with the inner values and principles that guide people's lives and make up the real substance of their social and personal identity. It seems evident that Gitksan people have taken English over for their own language, as seen in Gitksan English, and they use it for identity-construction and identity-maintenance and other social purposes. However, they don't speak their own Gitksan English around Whites, for they have been too often corrected and shamed for not speaking English properly, i.e., for speaking English that strays from local mainstream norms. The pattern of using "good" English with Whites has the unfortunate effect of reinforcing White suspicions that many Gitksans, especially those of apparent mixed descent, are not really and truly Indian.

The tragedy of the disappearance of the Gitksan language, instead, would be in the loss of cultural heritage, because much traditional Gitksan knowledge of their homeland, customs and history has not been

6

translated into English, and indeed it would suffer reduction and
simplification by unreflective translation. The Whites like to believe
that they occupied a wilderness a century or so ago, which they are
transforming and developing. They also presume to give their own names
to the land, but the chiefs and elders who speak Gitksan know well that
their homeland is a humanized landscape that has a myriad of place names
and associated legends and historical narratives. As well, there is a
rich folk knowledge of animal and plant species and of their origins and
uses, not to mention the high culture of the chiefs and Indian doctors.
Unfortunately, Gitksan children today are learning only a small fraction
of their heritage because they mainly have access only to what they hear
in English.

For the descriptive linguist, the present situation of inter-
generational differences in competence and command of the Gitksan
language presents problems for they add to the range of variability that
a grammar should account for in its coverage. Pacific Northwest
linguists have generally ignored such problems, and this is
understandable in the case of extinguishing languages where the
information provided by a single speaker or small number of speakers who
are willing and amenable to working with a linguist becomes even more
precious. In my Gitksan fieldwork, I have worked mainly with a small
number of older and middle-aged people who are regarded as good
speakers, and I've tried to crosscheck material wherever possible. It's
also been helpful to present my analysis and understanding of various
features of the language to several Gitksan language workshop groups,
for they have corrected me and deepened my knowledge. The example
sentences used in this grammar have all been checked by one or more
older speakers [Some of the checking remains to be done]. Many examples
come from my own observations and from texts, but most come from direct
elicitation. Wherever possible, I try to describe and discuss
variability - its sources are many and varied - for it is the stuff from
which language change is fashioned, but for the most part, my
description is based upon the eastern Gitksan language varieties spoken
in Kispiox and Hazelton.

The Tsimshian Language Family

To judge from historical and oral accounts, the Gitksan, Nisgha and
Tsimshian peoples seem always to have recognized that their respective
languages are similar and are related in the sense of sharing common
ancestry, although they differ in their accounts of which language has
remained closest to its original or "pure" form. The first competent
linguist to recognize the genetic relationship of the languages was
Franz Boas, who began his work on them with two Coast Tsimshian speakers
in Victoria in 1886. Boas (1888:231, translated by G.N. O'Grady) wrote
not long after that "...The Tsimshian is spoken in two dialects, of
which the Nisgha is seen to be the oldest... The following tribal
groupings are distinguished among the Tsimshian. ...the first two
[Nisgha and Gitksan] speak Nisgha, the remainder speak Tsimshian". Boas
here used the term "dialects" in the same sense that nineteenth century
philologists might have spoken of English and German as "Germanic
dialects".

The well-known classification of Major J. W. Powell (1891:139-141)

and his associates included the Chimmesyan [Tsimshian] family as one of
its 58 families of North American Indian languages. The Powell
classification of the Tsimshian languages was based upon Boas (1889),
which repeated Boas' (1888) treatment.

Boas also spent a month in 1894 at Kincolith near the mouth of the
Nass River, where he worked on Nisgha and Tsetsaut Athabaskan (see
Rohner 1969:155-173 for materials on his stay). His Nisgha texts from
the trip were published as Boas (1902). As a result of field research
and desk analysis, Boas became well aware of the similarities and
differences between the Nisgha and Coast Tsimshian languages, for his
Tsimshian grammar (henceforth, TG) in the first volume of the Handbook
of North American Indian Languages, included parallel sketches of the
two varieties. In the opening paragraphs of TG, he located where "the
Tsimshian" was spoken and he referred to Tsimshian, Nisgha, and Gitksan
as its "three principal dialects" (TG:287). Boas apparently did no work
on the Gitksan language although he may have met some Gitksan people and
he would certainly have heard the Nisghas and Tsimshians talking about
the Gitksan people, their customs and their language.

It was George Dorsey, also an anthropologist, who in 1897 first
accurately described the relations among the three languages, Gitksan,
Nisgha, and Tsimshian, as they may be observed today. Dorsey (1897:277)
wrote:

> Boaz [sic, referring probably to Boas (1889)] has divided the
> Tsimshian stock into dialects, those speaking the Nasqa and those
> speaking the Tsimshian proper... It is to be noted furthermore
> that the tribes speaking Nasqa are not confined to the territory of
> the Nass River, but are also found on the Skeena River. As to the
> distinguishing characteristics of the two dialects I had no time
> for investigation. But from various sources I learned that those
> tribes which spoke the Tsimshian dialect proper could not
> understand the Nasqa dialect, whereas the Nasqa tribes could
> understand those who spoke Tsimshian proper. It appears yet
> further that there are two closely related groups of the Nasqa
> dialect, the Nasqa and the Kitksan, the former group being confined
> to the Nass River, the latter to the Skeena river.

In Rigsby (1967), I quoted Dorsey with approval and I summarized
the results of my field inquiries. Gitksan and Nisgha people alike say
that they can understand one another readily upon first contact or
hearing of the other language, although there may be some unfamiliar
words. Gitksan and Nisgha people do not readily understand the Coast
Tsimshian language upon hearing it for the first time. Middle-aged
Gitksan people in the late 1960's told me that they could only
understand "about half" of what the Tsimshian say in their own language,
but they also commented that it was easy for them to learn Coast
Tsimshian. Full comprehension evidently requires second-language
learning, but the task is not difficult because the two languages are
closely related and structurally similar. Dunn (1976a:6) says that "...
Coast Tsimshian people consider that Nass River speech is less
unintelligible to them than is Gitksan. At the same time they feel that
Nass and Gitksan belong to the same language and that both are different
from their own native tongue".

From even before contact with Europeans, the Gitksan people had

opportunities to learn a second language and to become bilingual. People used to travel to the coast and to the lower Nass River area in the early spring for oolachen (candlefish), where they met Nisgha and Tsimshian people and traded, attended their ceremonies, and intermarried with them. Gitksan people considered it to be prestigeful to know and to be able to speak the Coast Tsimshian language properly. Gitksan chiefs often used the Coast Tsimshian language in public speeches and ceremonies, and many ceremonial songs were in it. From about 1900, many Gitksan people had the chance to hear and learn Coast Tsimshian during residence on the coast while working on fishing boats and in the salmon canneries.

In a later unpublished paper (Rigsby 1969), "Some Linguistic Insights into Recent Tsimshian Prehistory", I treated some of the phonological (viz. the dorsal consonantisms) and lexical dimensions of the historical relationship between Gitksan and Nisgha and of them with the Coast Tsimshian language. Some features of the Gitksan/Nisgha relationship are repeated here in the chapter on phonology and elsewhere. To repeat the major conclusions of that paper (see also Rigsby and Dunn 1968, as well as Sherzer and Bauman 1972:142-143), I presented evidence which showed that all three languages of the Tsimshian family had borrowed words from other neighbouring languages and that the ancestral home of the proto-language was situated on the coast and not in the interior area, as Boas (1916:872) had earlier suggested.

Since then, John Dunn (1976a, 1976b) has reported that there is a second coastal Tsimshian language that is still spoken by several families in Klemtu and Hartley Bay. He calls the language "Southern Tsimshian"; its native name is [sgʉʉxs] at Hartley Bay and [sgʉʉmx] at Metlakatla, Alaska. Southern Tsimshian appears to be as distant from Coast Tsimshian along several dimensions as it is from Gitksan and Nisgha, and it is phonologically conservative in some ways interesting for the reconstruction of Proto-Tsimshian. The existence of Southern Tsimshian supports my earlier hypothesis that Proto-Tsimshian was spoken on the coast south of the Skeena, because its location accords with Sapir's (1916) principle that the area of greatest diversity is the area of longest occupation.

Most recently, Marie-Lucie Tarpent (1980, 1983b) has expanded our knowledge of the structural development of the Tsimshian languages by applying the method of internal reconstruction to Nisgha plural formations. Plurality is a highly developed grammatical category in Gitksan, Nisgha, and Coast Tsimshian nominal and verbal morphology, and synchronically, each of the three languages displays a bewildering range of plural construction-types, ranging from simple initial $C_i\theta$-reduplicated forms through more opaque, often doubly marked (i.e. "pleonastic") reduplications, to suppletive sets. Tarpent provides reasonable analyses of the histories of the several construction types in Nisgha and importantly, she discerns three stages in the development of plural-marking in Nisgha. The details of the historical development of plural constructions in Gitksan and Coast Tsimshian differ from Nisgha, but Tarpent's results seem generalizable in broad outline to them. Tarpent (1983a) examines the Nisgha numerals and reconstructs some of their possible derivations.

Despite the great amount of descriptive linguistic work that has been done in Gitksan, Nisgha and Coast Tsimshian since 1966, the three languages remain inadequately and incompletely reported in the literature. Boas TC remains the major publication, and although it may be superseded in the future, it will remain a classic monument. One hopes that as new descriptive grammars (such as Dunn 1979 and this present one) of the four languages are written and published, we can turn more of our attention and energy towards unraveling the historical development of the Tsimshian language family and reconstructing its proto-language.

To conclude this section, the presently known classification of the four languages of the Tsimshian family may be represented thus:

Tsimshian Language Family

Interior Tsimshian

Coast Tsimshian / Southern Tsimshian / Nisgha / Gitksan (including Kitwancool)
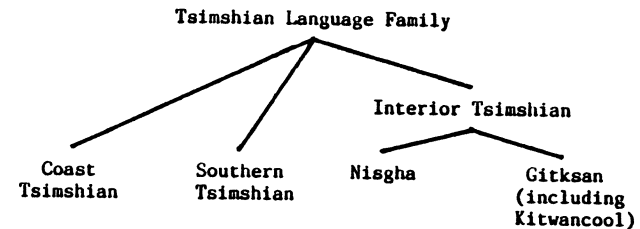
The Wider Relationships of the Tsimshian Language Family

Although Boas (1911a:46) spoke of the languages of the Pacific Northwest as forming a distinctive language area (what we would now call a Sprachbund) and included Tsimshian among them, Edward Sapir was the first scholar to focus and comment more fully upon the areal historical relationships of the Tsimshian languages to neighbouring languages and language families. Sapir (1916:458; see also Golla 1984:108 for Sapir's earlier comments on the same topic in an unpublished 1913 letter to A. L. Kroeber) noted that Tsimshian, Kwakiutl-Nootka, Chemakum and Salishan all share the features of numeral classifiers and distributive (or plural) reduplication. Sapir also observed that the Tsimshian-speaking people were culturally more similar to the Haida and Tlingit (see also Sapir 1920:269-270, 1921d) than to their southern neighbours, and he (1916:459) said:

...the morphological resemblances between Tsimshian and the languages south of it, when contrasted with the lack of correspondingly significant resemblances between Tsimshian and Na-dene [Athabaskan, Haida, and Tlingit], seems to be indicative of a much earlier contact of the Tsimshian with the Kwakiutl and the Salish than with the Haida and Tlingit.

It was also Sapir who first proposed that the Tsimshian language family was genetically related to the Penutian language stock, whose other member languages are found far to the south, mainly in the present states of Oregon and California. In December, 1915, Sapir wrote to Kroeber with his thoughts on expanding the Penutian grouping to include

a number of Oregon languages (Takelma; Coos, Siuslaw, and Alsea; and Chinookan) and the Tsimshianic languages:

> And now (don't faint!), I think that Tsimshian is the most northern outlying member of the stock. Again greatly specialized, but still exhibiting many startling features in common... Of Chinook and Tsimshian I am not as sure as of Lower Umpqua [Siuslaw], Coos, and Takelma, but I think my evidence will grow as I work on it. How to group these languages I do not yet know, of course... I doubt if Takelma, W. Oregon, Chinook, and Tsimshian form a northern unit as contrasted with your southern [Californian] one. (from Golla 1984:201-202).

By 1918, Sapir was sufficiently confident to write to Robert Lowie:

> Just at the moment I am carding some of my Penutian - Takelma - Coos - Siuslaw - Chinookan - <u>Tsimshian</u> correspondences. It is technical work, of course, but quite interesting, as many lines of historical research are opened up. <u>Yes, my boy, Tsimshian</u>. <u>Not a bit isolated</u>. Very specialized in development, but showing clear threads, in my humble and heterodox opinion, binding it to Oregonian "stocks". I have recently prepared a paper on Nass River terms of relationship, but am waiting to hear from Beynon - Barbeau's Tsimshian interpreter, for comparative Tsimshian data. (Boas' material does not seem completely satisfactory). ...

Three years later, Sapir (1921b, 1921c) published statements that included Tsimshian as a northern outlier of Penutian. It bears remarking that by this time, Sapir himself had done a fair bit of linguistic work on Nisgha and Coast Tsimshian with several men who had come to Ottawa in connection with land claim matters, he had obtained Coast Tsimshian kinterms from Beynon, he had discussed some Tsimshianic kinterms with Theresa Mayer (later, Durlach) and of course he had read and worked through Boas' published materials on the two languages.

In his famous 1929 classification (foreshadowed in Sapir 1921b) where he grouped all North American native languages and some Central American ones into one or another of six superstocks, Sapir included "Tsimshian" as one of six co-ordinate branches within the Penutian superstock. Sapir (1929[1949]:175) also characterized the Penutian languages structurally in this way:

> The <u>Penutian</u> languages are far less cumbersome in structure than [Eskimo-Aleut, Algonkin-Wakashan, and Nadene] but are more tightly knit, presenting many analogies to the Indo-European languages; make use of suffixes of formal, rather than concrete, significance; show many types of inner stem change; and possess true nominal cases, for the most part. Chinook seems to have developed a secondary "polysynthetic" form on the basis of a broken down form of Penutian; while Tsimshian and Maidu have probably been considerably influenced by contact with Mosan [Wakashan and Salishan] and with Shoshonean and Hokan respectively.

Beyond the references cited, Sapir published no detailed evidence for the relationship, but the force of his genius and brilliance was such that many scholars uncritically accepted the Penutian connection of the Tsimshian languages as definite and established.

In 1956, Dell Hymes prepared a paper, "The Relationship of Tsimshian and Chinookan", in which he undertook to reconstruct what evidence might have inspired Sapir's hypothesis of their relationship. He reviewed what was then known of the history of Sapir's proposal of the Tsimshian languages as belonging to Penutian, he listed a number of apparent Nisgha, Coast Tsimshian and Chinookan grammatical and lexical correspondences, and he noted some systematic sound correspondences. Hymes found that there was such evidence to suggest the relationship. In retrospect, one can say that Hymes undertook a difficult task, given the poor phonetic quality of the Nisgha and Coast Tsimshian materials he had available to work with, not to mention the lack of good modern descriptive analyses of the two languages then.

Recently, Michael Silverstein (1979) published an overview of Penutian research that presents a sober and perceptive appraisal of the situation at hand. Silverstein notes that the Tsimshianic languages diverge markedly in syntactic type from the Penutian archetype as defined by Sapir. They display "a tightly-knit phrase-level clisis as the productive morphosyntactic apparatus", and they encode case-relations at the surface level primarily through "strict constituent order" (Silverstein 1979:659, 669). This contrasts greatly with the structural type, say, of Yokuts, a quintessential Penutian language with nominal case-suffixes. Sapir considered the present Tsimshian structural type - what Rigsby (1975) termed "an analytic ergative syntax" - to be the product of contact with the Wakashan and Salishan languages, especially with Kwakiutl. However, it is precisely this same structural type which grammatical reconstruction indicates to be archaic within the Tsimshian family. And the sorts of morphosyntactic relationships that Silverstein was able to identify in an unpublished (1969) paper which may link the Tsimshian languages to the southern Penutian languages involve exactly this same phrasal syntax. Silverstein (1969) proposed that the /?an/ transitive subject relative clause proclitic and /nθ-/ alienable possession prefix (in Coast Tsimshian; it is also a fossilized kinterm prefix in all the Tsimshian languages) were the reflexes of an earlier single syntactic formative, and he compared its construction type with similar constructions which are reconstructable in Coos, Alsea, and Yokuts, but he did not reach a firm conclusion of their genetic relationship.

The inclusion of the Tsimshian language family within the great Penutian stock, then, remains unproven and problematic. The relationship cannot be established on the basis of a handful of resemblant lexical items as seen in:

> Coast Tsimshian - guu?pl <u>two</u> (of abstract objects: of round objects; gulapdaat <u>two</u> (of persons aboard any conveyance); gip<u>l</u>'on two (of fathoms; of measures); galbeeltk <u>two</u> (of canoes) - forms from Dunn (1978).

> Nisgha - gilp'il /kilp-?θl/ <u>two</u> (things; and abstract count); galp /kalp/ <u>testicles</u>; gilpwa /kilp-wa/ <u>two bundles of skins</u>; galbee'etkws /qε-lpe·?-tkʷ-s/ <u>two canoes</u>.

> Gitksan - gilbil /kilp-θl/ <u>two</u> (things; and abstract count); galp /kalp/ <u>testicles</u>.

11

12

These forms include a recurrent partial in /-1p-/ that has a shape
similar to the /1Vp-/ ~ /nVp/ root for <u>two</u> that is found in such
Southern Plateau languages as Nez Perce, Cayuse, Sahaptin, Molala and
Klamath (see Rigsby 1965:109-152). However, we cannot provide a
detailed genetic hypothesis that includes a series of motivated
historical transformations that can derive the synchronic grammatical
forms in the several languages from a common original grammatical
construction and thus establish their genetic relationship beyond doubt
(Tarpent 1983a:66-68 proposes etymologies for the Nisgha forms built on
the root in question). In fact, there is good reason to believe that
numerals and numeral systems diffuse easily among languages in such
interlingual social contexts as trade and gambling (Rigsby 1965:151).
Nonetheless, the resemblances above call out for some kind of historical
explanation; they are unlikely to be chance convergences of sound and
meaning. Silverstein's unpublished (1976) "Time Perspective in Northern
and Western Penutian" paper, among other matters, explores some of the
social organizational features of Pacific Northwest language communities
and speech communities and their relevance to the geographical
distribution of the Penutian languages outside California. He concludes
(p. 9) with:

> The real enigma, to my mind, is constituted by Tsimshian, for
> its position must imply movement, either by the ancestors of those
> who now speak it, or by the ancestors of those who spoke everything
> else in Penutian, or, worse still, by the ancestors of everyone in
> between. This problem takes us far beyond the temporal and
> linguistic bounds of Penutian itself, however.

I agree with Silverstein (1979:681) that if we are to make any
progress on the front of the wider range genetic relationship of the
Tsimshian language family, we need to do "careful comparative study of
lexical formations with derivational suffixes." At the same time,
however, we should also give greater priority to exploring the
dimensions of the areal historical relations of the Tsimshianic
languages to the neighbouring Kwakiutlan languages, particularly to
Heiltsuk. In fact, a systematic comparison of Tsimshianic and
Kwakiutlan grammatical constructions remains to be done; the parallels
that Sapir thought he could discern need to be made explicit and
appraised in the histories of the two language families. For a start, I
suggest that they include at least a Verb – Subject – Object basic
constituent ordering followed by peripheral, oblique constituents in
independent clauses. The grammatical relations of major constituents in
such clauses are indicated not only by their ordering, but also by
enclitics that precede their syntactic host, but are suffixed to the
preceding element. Both Tsimshianic and Kwakiutlan focus constituents
by moving them into sentence-initial position, but in the Tsimshianic
languages, predication and focusing are done by different formal
patterns. In Kwakiutlan, I think, predication and focusing are
conflated, so that predicates are always (usually) focused; my knowledge
of Kwakiutlan structure comes mainly from Levine's work on Kwakwala (see
Levine 1980, 1981).

In the Tsimshianic languages, there is a Subject – Verb – Object
ordering found in dependent (subordinate) clauses. This SVO ordering is
surely older than the VSO one, and the dependent order subject
pronominal clitics display striking resemblances to the first, second,
and third person pronominal elements found in other Penutian languages.

They are: /nə/ 1SG, /mə/ 2SG, /mə ... səm/ 2PL, and /t/ 3SG/PL.

In the meantime, the conservative position is to speak of the
Tsimshian language family as an isolate. Its genetic relationship to
other Penutian languages has not yet been demonstrated or established,
but for the record, I suspect that Sapir was correct and we will be able
to do that in coming years.

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