

Analysis of two Kaxwaan (Yuman) word lists from the early twentieth century

Introduction: The modern Piipaash people (a.k.a. Maricopa), who live along the Gila and Salt Rivers (Phoenix, AZ), comprise five historically distinct Yuman groups: the Piipaash proper, Xalychidom, Kavelychidom, Halyikwamai, and Kaxwaan. The Xalychidom and Kavelychidom, like the Piipaash (ISO: mrc), originally lived along the Colorado River and spoke languages of the River branch of the Yuman family (R), while the Halyikwamai and Kaxwaan lived further south at the Colorado-Gila Delta and spoke varieties of Delta-California Yuman (DC) (Kroeber 1943, Miller 2018). Starting with the Piipaash, the five groups gradually migrated eastward from their ancestral lands around the Colorado to the Gila and Salt between c.1500 and 1845: The Kaxwaan departed the Colorado in 1820 and settled among the Piipaash by 1840 (Harwell 1979; Spier 1933). Over time, the five groups assimilated culturally and linguistically, such that the modern community exhibits a more unified “Piipaash” identity (Harwell 1979; Harwell and Kelly 1983).

Little direct information about the languages spoken by the assimilated groups has been available to linguists (cf. Kroeber 1943), and little is known about the process by which they shifted to Piipaash (e.g. whether gradual language convergence was involved). We analyze two Kaxwaan word lists: (1) An unpublished 50-word list collected by Edward H. Davis in 1921 from a 65-year-old Kaxwaan woman born among the Piipaash; (2) A 220-word list collected by Alfred L. Kroeber in 1930 (and partly published in Kroeber 1943) from an old Kaxwaan woman born to Kaxwaan parents.¹ We show that these adults’ Kaxwaan speech remained distinct from Piipaash through the 1920s, such that the shift may have been more abrupt and/or occurred among younger generations.

Findings: Table 1 presents selected Kaxwaan words, along with counterparts from Cocopa (Crawford 1989), a closely related DC language (ISO: coc), and Piipaash (Langdon et al. 1991). Beyond two direction terms – Piipaash (Spier 1933) and Kaxwaan (Kroeber 1943) replaced the historic word for ‘west’ with that for ‘south’, and use the same word for ‘ocean’ and ‘south’ (cf. Cocopa *xak^wʔil^y* ‘ocean’) – and a few tribe names, we find no unequivocal evidence of borrowing from Piipaash. More often, Kaxwaan and Cocopa words derive from a common source (e.g. ‘one’, ‘person’). We find no evidence of sound diffusion among Piipaash and Kaxwaan (cf. Hinton 1979):

typical sound correspondences which hold between other DC and R languages persist in these lists, such as that between *w* in DC vs. *v* in R (e.g. ‘west’, ‘house’) and that between *y* in DC vs. *ǰ* in R (e.g. ‘eye’) (Miller 2018, Wares 1968).

Table 1. Selected Kaxwaan, Cocopa, and Piipaash words

	Kaxwaan (1)	Kaxwaan (2)	Cocopa	Piipaash
‘west’	cə wáhk-t	kuwá:k-it	(ma)wí:k	kvé
‘south’	xə sra íł	xaseʔíł	kwá:k	xa sʔíł
‘one’	šít	ešít(in)	šít	šent
‘person’	-----	me-capá:y-it	capáy	pi:pá:
‘house’	ə wá-t	Ewá-t	wá	vá
‘eye’	-----	i:yú-t	ʔiyú	i:ǰó

Implications: Although the scope of the data is limited, the similarities between Kaxwaan and Cocopa are consistent with their being dialects of the same DC language (e.g. Miller 2018). Further, analysis of the two lists show that Kaxwaan persisted as a linguistic identity distinct from Piipaash almost a century after their arrival on the Gila River. Our results illuminate the linguistic history of the Gila River and Salt River Piipaash communities, who continue to recognize their Kaxwaan ancestry (SRPMIC Cultural Resources Department n.d.), and suggest that any efforts to reconstruct Kaxwaan should look to the relatively well-documented Cocopa language.

¹ In respect of Yuman customs against naming the deceased (e.g. Spier 1933), we avoid using the informants’ names.

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