

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

Jonathan Geary
jonathangeary@email.arizona.edu
University of Arizona



1. Historical background

Today, the Piipaash people (also spelled “Pee Posh”, a.k.a. “Maricopa”) occupy two reservations along the Gila River and Salt River near Phoenix, Arizona.

The modern Piipaash comprise five historic tribal groups:

- (1) Piipaash proper
- (2) Xalychidom
- (3) Kavelychidom
- (4) Halyikwamai
- (5) **Kaxwaan** (also spelled “Kohuana”, “Koxwen”)

All five once lived further west, near the Colorado River.

The Piipaash, Xalychidom, and Kavelychidom lived along the Colorado River, while the Halyikwamai and Kaxwaan lived further south at the Colorado-Gila Delta.

All five originally spoke distinct (dialects of) Yuman languages (Figure 1; Kroeber 1943, Miller 2018).

Piipaash, Xalychidom, and Kavelychidom belong to the River branch of Yuman and may have once been dialects of the same language as Quechan (a.k.a. “Yuma”).

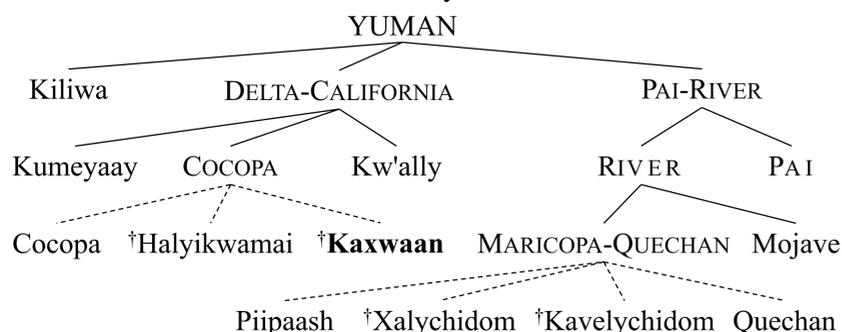
Halyikwamai and Kaxwaan belong to the Delta-California branch and may have been dialects of the same language as Cocopa (today spoken in Arizona and Mexico).

Conflicts with other tribes led all five to gradually abandon the Colorado and migrate eastward to settle along the Gila and Salt R. c.1500-1845 (Harwell 1979; Spier 1933).

The Kaxwaan departed in 1820 and settled by 1840.

The five groups **assimilated** culturally and **linguistically**, such that the modern communities exhibit a more unified “Piipaash” identity (Harwell 1979; Harwell and Kelly 1983).

Figure 1. Yuman family tree. Adapted from Miller (2018). Historic dialects are indicated by dashed lines.¹ † = dormant.



¹ Little information is available about Xalychidom and Kavelychidom beyond that they were like Piipaash (Kroeber 1943). Piipaash and Quechan were dialects of the same language but are today separate languages.

2. Research question and approach

(1) Piipaash continues to be spoken at Gila and Salt River, but little direct information about the languages spoken by the assimilated groups has been available to linguists.

(2) Moreover, little is known about how the members of the assimilated groups shifted to speaking Piipaash.

Was gradual language convergence involved, or did the Kaxwaan abruptly shift to Piipaash (across generations)?

We analyze two Kaxwaan word lists from the early 20th c.:

- (1) An unpublished 50-word list collected by Edward H. Davis in 1921 from a 65-year-old Piipaash-born Kaxwaan woman.
- (2) A 220-word list collected by Alfred L. Kroeber in 1930 (and partly published in Kroeber 1943) from an old Kaxwaan woman who was born during the Kaxwaan’s migration.

We compare Cocopa (Crawford 1989) and Piipaash (Langdon et al. 1991) to assess degree of borrowing/convergence.

Select Kaxwaan, Cocopa, and Piipaash forms are presented in Table 1 (original transcriptions are presented in quotes “”).

4. Other historical implications

Davis reported only three Kaxwaan individuals remained in 1921.

However, a 1915 census list published in Spier (1933) includes 39 individuals identified as Kaxwaan (including children), and seemingly only one of the three women who Davis would interview in 1921.

The Kaxwaan must have been more numerous than Davis reported.

Kroeber’s consultant confirmed date of migration c.1820-1840.

5. Conclusions

Kaxwaan persisted as a linguistic identity distinct from Piipaash nearly a century after arrival on the Gila River.

Similarities between Kaxwaan and Cocopa are consistent with their being dialects of the same language (Kroeber 1943; Miller 2018), though data is limited to (short) word lists.

Kaxwaan ancestry continues to be recognized at both Gila and Salt River (SRPMIC Cultural Resources Department n.d.). Potential revitalization efforts may look to Cocopa as a model.

3. Findings

Little unequivocal evidence of borrowing from Piipaash:

The names of several (formerly unknown) tribes are borrowed.

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^wʔiʔ* ‘ocean’).

No evidence of phonological diffusion (Hinton 1979); typical sound correspondences between Delta-California and River languages hold (Miller 2018, Wares 1968), including:

Delta-California *w* ~ River *v* (e.g. ‘west’, ‘house’)

Delta-California *y* ~ River *ɔ* (e.g. ‘eye’)

These adults’ Kaxwaan speech remained distinct from Piipaash (and like one another’s) through the 1920s.

Table 1. Selected Kaxwaan, Cocopa, and Piipaash words.

	Kaxwaan (1)	Kaxwaan (2)	Cocopa	Piipaash
‘west’	ca-wáhk-t “Ca.wahkt”	ku-wá:k-it “kuwá’kit”	(maʔ)wí:k	kvé
‘south’	xa saʔíʃ “Ha.sra ilsch” ²	xa seʔíʃ “xase’iL”	kwá:k	xa sʔíʃ
‘one’	šít “Shit”	ešít “eci’t(in)”	šít	šent
‘person’	-----	me-capá:y-it “metcapā’yit”	capáy	pi:pá:
‘house’	awá-t “A.-wat”	Ewá-t “swat”	wá	vá
‘eye’	-----	i:yú-t “tyu’t”	ʔiyú	i:ðó

² Davis, a non-linguist, appears to cleverly use the quadgraph “lsch” or “schl” to represent a lateral fricative /ʃ/.

Acknowledgements

The author thanks Skye Anderson, Luis Barragan, John Powell, and three anonymous reviewers for their support and expertise, as well as the organizers of the 2021 SSILA Winter Meeting.

Selected References

Crawford, James M. 1989. *Cocopa dictionary*. Berkeley, CA: University of California Press.
Davis, Edward H. 1921. *Notebook 23B: 1920 Mojave, Maricopa* (unpublished). Edward H. Davis Collection, MS 75-23B, San Diego History Center Document Collection, San Diego, CA.
Harwell, Henry O. 1979. *Maricopa origins: An ethnohistorical approach to a Riverine Yuman community*. PhD dissertation, Indiana University.
Harwell, Henry O., and Marsha C. S. Kelly. 1983. Maricopa. In *Handbook of North American Indians* 10, ed. Alfonso Ortiz, 71–85. Washington.
Hinton, Leanne. 1979. Irataba’s gift: A closer look at the *ʂ*->*s* soundshift in Mojave and Northern Pai. *Journal of California and Great Basin Anthropology* 1: 3–37.
Kroeber, Alfred L. 1930. *Maricopa/Kaxwaan/Yaqui/Mayo: Notebook (I) 1930* (unpublished). A. L. Kroeber papers, BANC FILM 2049, The Bancroft Library, University of California, Berkeley.
Kroeber, Alfred L. 1943. Classification of the Yuman languages. *University of California Publications in Linguistics* 1: 21–40.
Langdon, Margaret, et al. 1991. *Maricopa – English dictionary*. Prepared by Margaret Langdon and others. SRPMIC Department of Education.
Miller, Amy. 2018. Phonological developments in Delta-California Yuman. *International Journal of American Linguistics* 84: 383–433.
Salt River Pima-Maricopa Indian Community (SRPMIC) Cultural Resources Department. n.d. O’odham Piipaash Language Program. <https://www.srpmic-nsn.gov/government/culturalresources/oplp/>.
Spier, Leslie. 1933. *Yuman tribes of the Gila River*. New York, NY: Dover.
Wares, Alan Campbell. 1968. *A comparative study of Yuman consonantism*. The Hague: Mouton.