

Comprehension Difficulties
with the
Boas-Hunt **kwakwala** Texts

Peter Wilson

Contents

0.	Introduction	2
1.0.	Background	4
1.1.	Kwakiutl Tales - New Series	4
1.2.	The Religion of the Kwakiutl and Kwakiutl Texts - Second Series	4
1.3.	General Comments	5
1.4.	Notes on the Examples	5
2.0.	Data: Kwakiutl Tales - New Series	6
2.1.	Similarities	6
2.2.	Differences	7
3.0.	Data: The Religion of the Kwakiutl	8
3.1.	Similarities	9
3.2.	Differences	10
4.0.	Data: Kwakiutl Texts - Second Series	11
4.1.	Similarities	11
4.2.	Differences	12
5.0.	A Note on Dialect	13
6.0.	Discussion	14
Appendix 1:	Boas Orthography 1940+	15
Appendix 2:	Boas Orthography 1900-1940	16
References		17

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0. Introduction

During work on **kwakwala**, I often re-elicited material published earlier. The works I surveyed included material by Boas and Hunt and other early researchers and missionaries.¹ Among these early written recordings of **kwakwala**, only the works by Boas and Hunt present a consistent and accurate orthography and transcription of the language.²

Although much of Boas and Hunt's grammar and dictionary publications were able to be re-elicited, much of the textual work was not understood very well. This was puzzling, especially since the dictionary and grammar information came from the texts.

In 1985 I had the opportunity to work with James Henderson. We spent much of our time talking about the days when he was a boy and about the people that he had known. I took this opportunity to read to him some of the stories recorded by Boas and Hunt. I focused on the texts from "Kwakiutl Tales - New Series," (Boas 1935, 1943) "The Religion of the Kwakiutl Indians," (Boas 1930a, 1930b) and "Kwakiutl Texts - Second Series" (Boas and Hunt 1906). My goal was to attempt to re-elicite the textual material by having Mr. Henderson listen to the stories in **kwakwala** while providing him with the opportunity to comment, translate, and repeat samples of the material.

James Henderson had no difficulty understanding stories from "Kwakiutl Tales - New Series" (Boas 1935, 1943). On the other hand, he had some difficulty understanding stories from "The Religion of the Kwakiutl" (Boas 1930a, 1930b) and "Kwakiutl Texts - Second Series" (Boas and Hunt 1906).

¹ These included: Boas (1930a, 1930b, 1935, 1943, 1947, 1948), Boas and Hunt (1906), Hall (1882a, 1882b), Scouler (1841), Hale (1846), Schoolcraft (1853), Gibbs (1877), Tolmie and Dawson (1884), Dawson (1887), and various Bible and Hymn translations (e.g. Hall 1897, 1899).

² See Wilson 1982 for a detailed review of these works.

In this study, I set out to discover what differences exist between the three series of texts. I expected that comprehension would be affected by one or both of differences in language and differences in background knowledge. This hypothesis is based on suggestions made in Wilson (1982) and Berman (1991).

The results of this study demonstrate two points. First, all three series of stories are generally accurate in transcription, lexical items, morphology, and syntax. Among the three, "Kwakiutl Tales - New Series" (Boas 1935, 1943) is more accurate than the other two. This is consistent with the findings in Wilson (1982). Second, "Kwakiutl Tales - New Series" (Boas 1935, 1943) contains stories, characters, events, and places that were familiar to Mr. Henderson. The earlier two series of stories, on the other hand, present words, themes, stories, and background information with which Mr. Henderson was not as familiar (Boas 1906, 1930a, 1930b).

The differences between the later series (Boas 1935, 1943) and the earlier two series (Boas 1906, 1930a, 1930b) are probably not significant enough to account for the lower level of comprehension from the earlier works alone. Perhaps, as suggested in Berman (1991), differences in background knowledge may contribute to overall comprehension.

1.0 Background

The material discussed in this paper comes from two different periods in Boas' work (from Wilson 1982). "Kwakiutl Tales - New Series" comes from the post 1940 "phonemic" period. The English translation was published in 1935 (Boas 1935) and the ~~kwakwala~~ version was published in 1943 Boas (1943). The other two works, "Kwakiutl Texts - Second Series" Boas and Hunt (1906) and "The Religion of the Kwakiutl Indians" (Boas (1930a, 1930b) come from Boas' "middle" period. This middle period was "pre-phonemic" but generally accurate.³

1.1 Kwakiutl Tales - New Series

I chose "Kwakiutl Tales - New Series" (Boas 1935, 1943) for two reasons. First, it contains stories written by Hunt which were originally told by story tellers with whom Mr. Henderson was familiar. Second, my earlier research had shown that this text collection presented a consistent and accurate transcription of ~~kwakwala~~ (Wilson 1982). In addition, I anticipated that Mr. Henderson would be able to understand the texts because several stories were told by speakers familiar to Mr. Henderson.

"Kwakiutl Tales - New Series" was published in two volumes: English translation (Boas 1935) and Kwakiutl (Boas 1943). Appendix 1 presents a comparison between the Boas (1935, 1943) orthography and my own.

1.2 The Religion of the Kwakiutl and Kwakiutl Texts - Second Series

I choose "The Religion of the Kwakiutl" (Boas 1930a, 1930b) because it presented a description of events rather than specific tales / texts recorded from other speakers. Generally, this volume is a collection of informative stories written by George Hunt (see Berman 1991 for a discussion of the method of data collection and recording employed by Boas and Hunt).

"The Religion of the Kwakiutl" was published in two volumes: Kwakiutl (1930a) and English translations (1930b). Appendix

³ The term "phonemic" is used to describe Boas' later transcription. In later works, Boas began a process of eliminating symbols that are predictable. For example, he dispensed with /ʔ/, a variant of /ɛ/ in the environment of palato-velars. The pre-phonemic period from 1900-1940 was generally accurate but contained a large number of symbols that are predictable variants.

2.0 Kwakiutl Tales - New Series

As mentioned above, James Henderson appeared to have no difficulty understanding the **kʷakʷala** in "Kwakiutl Tales - New Series" (Boas 1935, 1943). During our sessions he made comments on the transcription, word formation, syntax, translations, and proper names. The most difficult aspect of the tales were with the mythical names in the stories. Occasionally, we had to consult the translation.

2.1. Similarities

The language in "Kwakiutl Tales: New Series" (Boas 1935, 1943) is accurate and not much different from the language of James Henderson. The lexical items, transcription, morphology, syntax, and dialect were re-elicited without difficulty. Examples are presented below:

Word Formation - Morphology

meleˀxlaq
K.T. B.H.211.69
to look behind

melixda
JH 05/03/85

Morphology

gˀaxˀasaqos
K.T. B.H.211.79
those you have come with

gaxˀasaqos
JH 05/03/85

Lexical

tseˀlwe
K.T. B.H.212.99
wild crabapples

celkˀ
JH 05/04/85

tseˀlsa
K.T. B.H.213.139
cranberries

fels
JH 05/04/85

Place Names

aˀwitˀbalis
K.T. B.H.210.36
Wells Point in the mouth of Wells Pass

ˀwitˀbalis
JH 05/01/85

ˀlile
K.T. B.H.210.38
Rand Island

ˀlile
JH 05/01/85

leqweˀma
KT B.H. 59.8
village name (B.H. tribe)

leqweˀma
JH 04/30/85

2 presents a comparison of the orthography used in Boas (1930a, 1930b) and my own.

Finally, I choose "Kwakiutl Texts - Second Series" (Boas 1906) because it is similar to "Kwakiutl Tales - New Series," (Boas 1935, 1943) only earlier in publication. This series, like the later series, is a collection of legends which George Hunt collected. As noted in Berman (1991), Hunt listened to the stories and then later wrote them down. Again, I read stories from the tribes with which James Henderson was familiar. Unfortunately, the names of the story tellers are not listed in this publication.

"Kwakiutl Text - Second Series" was one in a number of publications for the Jesup North Pacific Expedition. Both English translation and Kwakiutl are presented on each page in two columns. Appendix 2 presents the comparison between the orthography used in Boas (1906) and my own.

1.3 General Comments

In order to elicit the information, I read the stories in **kʷakʷala** to Mr. Henderson. I stopped after each sentence (or major idea) and we discussed the section. I took notes during our discussions. When passages were difficult we consulted the English translation of the text.

During our collaboration, Mr. Henderson not only provided insights into the texts but also anecdotes about the story tellers and the times. Generally speaking, he was able to comprehend many of the stories, recognize words, and suggest corrections to the transcriptions.

1.4 Notes on the Examples

In the examples presented below, the Boas material is presented in his orthography and Mr. Henderson's work is presented in my own. Since Mr. Henderson's comments were not always phrased in the same sentence as the original, the inflectional morphology is not always the same as the original. Abbreviations used in the examples are listed below:

K.T. Kwakiutl Tales - New Series (Boas 1935, 1943)
R.K. The Religion of the Kwakiutl (Boas 1930a, 1930b)
K.Txt.2 Kwakiutl Texts - Second Series (Boas 1906)
K.D. Kwakiutl Dictionary (Boas 1948)

Page and line numbers are listed 2.2, i.e. page 2, line 2.

Names of People

wā'xo'na'kwelas
KT B.H. 59.10
name

waxō'nak'welas
JH 04/30/85

xiā'k·iixōgwaxa
K.T. B.H.209.5

ʔelakillaʔuʔwa
JH 05/01/85

name, J.H. had an aunt with the same name.

2.3 Differences

The discrepancies between Boas' text and James Henderson review include differences in transcription, morphology, syntax, and translation.

Transcription Differences:

ē expect i

hō'menata
KT B.H. 59
all the time

hemonata
JH 04/30/85

Add final ʔ

qlāte'
KT B.H. 59
news

ʔatiʔ
JH 04/30/85

Translation Differences: Lexical Choice

James Henderson noted that the English translations did not always match the kwakwala. In the example below, he preferred a different lexical item than the one used in the story.

gō'egenax·lā'elxo
K.T. B.H. 113.22
Boas: little girls

ʔačidaʔamemoniʔ
JH 05/01/85
J.H. little girls

J.H. suggested "little girls" (from Boas' English translation) was best translated into kwakwala with the word based on ʔačadaʔem "girl" not with the word based on ʔona. The word ʔona is translated as "infant girl" (see 1948, page 313), and is also used as a familiar address name for a young girl (J.H.).

Translation Differences: Word Formation

In some examples, the word used in the story contained root-suffix combinations that Mr. Henderson translated differently. In the following example, the English version of the story describes "a mat in front of" some people. Mr. Henderson, on the other hand, interpreted the kwakwala as "to have a mat over the head."

Lepdza'cmolite's
K.T. B.H.212.107
to have a mat in front
to have mat over (J.H. translation)

ʔapamlit
JH 05/04/85
to have a mat on
floor in house

Syntactic Differences

Occasionally, James Henderson suggested alternative sentence structure. In the following example, he preferred a non-"passive" non-quotative alternate to the original.

qlw'elā'ʔ'elxo'elxo dzō'g'ayās
K.T. B.H. 113.13
Their digging sticks were hidden.

ʔwalatālis d'igayos
JH 05/01/85

J.H. prefers this sentence to the Boas text which uses the -suʔ ("passive") and -[aʔi (quotative) suffixes.

Lexical Difficulties

Some words in the stories were not recognized by Mr. Henderson. An example is presented below:

k·le'lkwa'ema'laxes k·lelā'ku
K.T. B.H. 113.19
They quarrelled about their digging sticks. J.H. was not sure about the meaning of the word **Kelakw**.

Kelk'wahalaʔis Kelakw
JH 05/01/85

3.0. Data: The Religion of the Kwakiutl

James Henderson had difficulty comprehending some of the information in "The Religion of the Kwakiutl." His translation of the kwakwala was sometimes different from the texts and indicated a difference in comprehension. Again, the most difficult aspect of the stories was with the mythical names and places in the stories. We needed to consult the translation far more frequently than with "Kwakiutl Tales - New Series" in order to decipher words and the general understanding of the story.

3.1. Similarities

The language in "The Religion of the Kwakiutl" is generally accurate and not much different from the language of James Henderson. Individual lexical items, transcription, morphology, and syntax patterns, were re-elicited without much difficulty. Examples are presented below:

Morphology

Lē'lexwāta	λilā'xwāta
R.K. B.H.61.33	JH 08/24/85
standing up, place of standing	

Morphology (reduplication)

eā'sē	?i'osi
R.K. B.H.62.19	JH 08/24/85
your fathers	

Morphology (transitive)

tsiō'tsietemdlesg'ada	šūšētemd
R.K. B.H.67.14	JH 09/03/85
to put black on your face (šuta "black" + -d "transitive")	

Place Names

alō'elēnoawē	?ašū'iruš'
R.K. B.H.64.13	JH 08/29/85
people from behind	

Names of People

nō'ng'āxtš'ye	nungeš'tawi
R.K. B.H.63.3	JH 08/29/85
Name: head wolf in story, from nuyem "knowledge"	

Names of Dances

hāmā'selat	ha'maselat
R.K. B.H.64.9	JH 08/29/85
hamača dance	

3.2. Differences

The discrepancies between Boas' text and James Henderson's review include differences in language and background knowledge. Although the language presented in this series of texts is slightly more different from Mr. Henderson's **k'wak'wala** than Boas (1935, 1943), it is, nonetheless, very similar.

Transcription (m should be n)

ēme'lmaqelākūē	mela
R.K. B.H.68.23	JH 09/06/85
to weave, to twist	

Transcription (q should be q'w)

qētā'lax	qitolaš	q'w'itolaš
R.K. B.H. 69.8	JH 09/13/85	
The book contains qitolaš "to listen to water" but it should be q'w'itolaš "to untie"		

Lexical

tsemō'tledax	camufedeš (not sure)
R.K. B.H.64.4	JH 08/29/85
J.H. did not recognize this word. Boas lists tse'mota' in K.D. as "to be silent. quiet" p. 198.	

Morphology (Reduplication)

nau'alakwasa	na'ē'nwalek'
R.K. B.H.62.31	JH 08/27/85
plural of nawalek' "supernatural power"	

Background Knowledge

An example of the difference in background knowledge between the text and Mr. Henderson is with a dance ritual known in **k'wak'wala** as /**šw'igwad'a**/. Boas translates /**šw'igwad'a**/ as "a member of the Sparrow Society." Mr. Henderson translates this as "the false part of the ritual where people used different names." This difference made comprehending the story difficult: the text used the word to describe a person whereas Mr. Henderson translated the word as the name of the ritual.

šwō'šwōsema'ya	šw'ig'wisamaš'a
R.K. B.H.62.25	JH 08/27/85
Boas translates this word as a proper name "Head Sparrows." J.H. translates this word as the false name part of the ritual.	

gʷəgʷədʒa **gʷiɣʷədʒa**
 K.D. F.B.328 JH 08/27/85
 Boas translates this word as a member of the Sparrow Society. J.H. translates this word as the false part of the ritual where people used different names.

In addition, Mr. Henderson was not able to confirm that /gʷiɣʷədʒa/ referred to sparrows. He was aware of the ritual and provided several /gʷiɣʷədʒa/ names in his family. Perhaps the form of the ritual described by George Hunt was different from the ritual described by James Henderson.

4.0. Kwakiutl Texts - New Series

The language used in Kwakiutl Texts - New Series is again generally accurate and not much different from the language of James Henderson. Individual lexical items, transcription, morphology, and syntax patterns, were re-elicited without much difficulty. Examples are presented below:

4.1. Similarities

Transcription

k·!ō'tā **ku'ti**
 K.Txt.2 9.29 JH 05/17/85
 Boas: Island in front of Denman. J.H. Tree Island off top end of Denman Island

aō'ms **?a?ums**
 K.Txt.2 10.8 JH 05/18/85
 someone beyond ordinary

Morphology

ne'x'wusta **no'x'westa**
 K.Txt.2 18.2 JH 05/23/85
 straight up river

Morphology (Reduplication)

lā'laxa'masōs **lala'xam**
 K.Txt.2 12.40 JH 05/18/85
 small basket

Lexical

gu'ldema **g'aldam**
 K.Txt.2 13.34 JH 05/18/85
 J.H. woodpecker (red breasted) "makes fire"

dō'da'nalō
 K.Txt.2 15.11
 possessions

ditahala
 JH 05/22/85

4.2 Differences

There were a number of differences in transcription between James Henderson and Boas and Hunt (1906). This series of texts is the least similar of the three. The greatest differences, however, came in the understanding of the cultural background behind the information.

Transcription (addition of *wə*)

ōx'qō'lagemō **?ixəwəgolaŋem**
 K.Txt.2 3.2 JH 05/14/85
 best looking (*nuyəm* name)

Transcription (*ɕy* should be *y*)

ɕy'lx'wuttlā **yəl'wəttola**
 K.Txt.2 9.41 JH 05/17/85
 dead animal over shoulder

Background Knowledge

The main differences in background knowledge occurred with proper names, regalia, and rituals. For example, the text uses proper names that Mr. Henderson felt were not correct.

liā'gasō /xə'gasi/ should be >>> **xəncaxsəm**
 K.Txt.2 15.1 JH 05/22/85
 name: Black Bear Woman.

ne'ngasō /nə'ngasi/ should be >>> **ninənŋes**
 K.Txt.2 15.1 JH 05/22/85
 name: Grisly Bear Woman.

It is interesting to note that at one point in the story the text uses the correct form of the word according to Mr. Henderson:

nō'nenŋasō **ninənŋes**
 K.Txt.2 19.17 JH 05/22/85
 name: Grisly Bear Woman. J.H. This is the correct form for the proper name.

Appendix 1: Boas orthography 1940+

Wilson	Boas			
a	a	ā	e	ē
i	i	ī	o	ō
u	ū	u		
e	ä			
o	ö			
ø	ε	χ		
Wilson	Boas	Wilson	Boas	
b	b	d	d	
p	p	t	t	
ʃ	pl	ʃ	ʃl	
m	m	n	n	
ñ	em	ñ	en	
dʒ	dz			
c	ts			
č	tsʰ			
s	s			
y	y			
ÿ	ey			
g	gʰ	gw	gw	gʷ
k	kʰ	kʷ	kʷ	kʷ
x	xʰ	xʷ	xʷ	xʷ
w	w			
ū	ew			
g	g	gw	gw	gʷ
q	q	qw	qw	qʷ
č	qʰ	čw	čw	čʷ
ʒ	z	ʒw	ʒw	ʒʷ
λ	l			
ʁ	L			
ʁ	Ll			
l	l			
l	el			
t	t			
h	h			
ʔ	ε			

Boas does not write word initial glottal stop /#ε.../. He also does not write glottal stop between two vowels /VV/. For example:

Wilson	Boas	
ʔeʔen	εen	eyebrows

Appendix 2: Boas Orthography 1900-1940

Wilson	Boas				
a	a	ā	e	ē	ë
i	i	ī	o	ō	ö
u	ū	u			
e	ä				
ø	ε	χ	ʃ	ū	Λ
Wilson	Boas		Wilson	Boas	
b	b		d	d	
p	p		t	t	
ʃ	pl		ʃ	ʃl	
m	m		n	n	
ñ	em		ñ	en	
dʒ	dz		g	gʰ	
c	ts		k	kʰ	
č	tsʰ		x	xʰ	
s	s				
y	y				
ÿ	ey				
g	gʷ	gʷ	gʷ	gʷ	
k	kʷ	kʷ	kʷ	kʷ	
x	xʷ	xʷ	xʷ	xʷ	
w	w				
ū	ew				
g	g	gʷ	gʷ	gʷ	
q	q	qw	qw	qʷ	
č	qʰ	čw	čw	čʷ	
ʒ	z	ʒw	ʒw	ʒʷ	
λ	l				
ʁ	L				
ʁ	Ll				
l	l				
l	el				
t	t				
h	h				
ʔ	ε				

The symbols / X g. ε r l / are used infrequently. Boas does not write glottal stop in word initial position nor between vowels. Both occurrences are predictable.

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A morphemically glossed Kwak'wala text from the Boas-Hunt corpus. This paper provides a morphemically glossed excerpt from a Kwak'wala text. It is intended as an instructional tool for linguists and others who are interested in accessing and analyzing the narratives in the Boas-Hunt corpus. Save to Library. Download. The author adduces parallels between three of the sea stories in the sugya and maritime tall tales preserved in other Near Eastern texts. He argues that the folkloric motifs present in the talmudic narratives under discussion represent shared cultural material, which the rabbinic authors and early audiences of the sugya would not have attributed to any specific non-Jewish tradition. Wilson, Peter - "Comprehension Difficulties with the Boas-Hunt KÉ·ak'É·ala Texts". Zenk, Henry - "A Basic Chinook Jargon Lexicon". ICSNL XXVII (1992). Rath, John C. - "Notes on Boas Hunt's North Wakashan Text Materials". Turner, Nancy J; Ignace, Marianne; Compton, Brian - "Secwepemc (Shuswap) Tree Names: Keys to the Past?" van Eijk, Jan - "Who is Sunulqaz: A Salish Quest".