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The Contribution of Mary R. Haas to the Study of Southeastern Languages

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The Contribution of Mary R. Haas to the Study of Southeastern Languages

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I am honored to have been asked to discuss Mary Haas's contributions to the study of the indigenous languages of the Southeastern United States for this volume, in which we celebrate Mary Haas's life while mourning her passing. Miss Haas's contributions to this area were vast, in terms both of her coverage of many languages from many different genetic groups and of the subject matter of her work, which ranged from lexical studies to text collections to synchronic grammar, from historical phonology to syntax, from anthropological linguistics to classification.

I first met Mary Haas, or at least saw her from a respectful distance, at the first Hokan Conference in 1970 at UCSD, when I was a first-year graduate student and Margaret Langdon's research assistant. Although at the time I had not yet worked on any of the many languages Miss Haas wrote about, I had read some of her work on linguistic prehistory as an undergraduate, so I understood something of her importance, and I realized that it was her influence that had helped to make Margaret so different from all the other professors in our department ~ so concerned at every level with the accurate recording and preservation of real language data, and with the proper analysis and presentation of it, traits that mark both women's work, which they have passed on to generations of their students.

I heard Miss Haas speak several times about Muskogean in the mid-seventies: the two papers I recall best were presented at the Conference on Mechanisms of Syntactic Change organized by Charles Li in Santa Barbara and at Larry Hyman's Stress Fest at USC. Although I had not then studied any Muskogean language myself, I was greatly impressed by these presentations. Here was a female professor presenting fascinating new historical and synchronic research on very complex data, holding the interest of audiences often composed of people thirty years or so younger than her -- what a role model!

The two papers just referred to are excellent examples of how Haas's contributions continued unabated throughout the whole of her long career. She began studying the Muskogean language Creek (or, as she often referred to it, Muskogee) in the 1930s, and it served as the cornerstone for much of her later research. Haas's Stress Fest paper was a detailed description of the complex tonal accent system of Creek. At the meeting, she presented the analysis she had developed after years of working with Creek data: the manuscript of her Creek dictionary reveals the evolution of this analysis and its orthographic representation, with superceded forms carefully corrected and updated. The paper occasioned considerable discussion in the audience, and the final published paper incorporating this is a highly sophisticated product.

The facts of Creek data were also important for the Syntactic Change paper. As one of the few scholars privileged to have had some exposure to all branches of Muskogean, Haas was able to show convincingly how the complex, multi-layered system of verb conjugation in the Koasati and Alabama languages was related to simpler systems in Creek (on the one hand) and Choctaw and Chickasaw (on the other). Once again, she related her own data to the theoretical concerns of interest to others at the conference, arguing that the various Muskogean inflectional paradigms (I can hear her saying "PAR-a-dim" right now) had evolved from an earlier system with unmarked main and inflected auxiliary verbs ~ a system reminiscent of that I had just discovered in my own dissertation research on the Yuman language Mojave, and consequently of great interest to me.

A few years after I heard these two papers, I coincidentally began my own study of Chickasaw (followed later by Choctaw and Creek-Seminole), and then I truly understood the depth and importance of Miss Haas's contribution to Muskogean studies. Really, Mary Haas is Muskogean: any bibliography of works on the language family must rely heavily on her work. Here's an example: I am involved in a joint project to assemble Muskogean cognate sets with representatives from as many languages of the family as possible. While we have found a large number of new sets by now, the first draft of this project mainly consisted of a collection I made of all the different Muskogean sets Haas had discussed in different works. This was a very large number of sets indeed. Remarkably, compared with most other historical phonologists who work on a relatively poorly described family, she considered entirely different cognate sets and reconstructions in almost everything she wrote, so when these are all put together in one place, they almost make up a book by themselves. (This is especially noteworthy when one looks at the length of typical papers by Miss Haas. For one whose writing was almost always exceptionally clear and readable, she had an amazing gift for being brief.)

The most important sets, of course, come from Haas's paper on the classification of the Muskogean languages, and the closely related papers on Proto-Muskogean *kw, the position of Apalachee, and the relationship of Natchez and Muskogean. Although I came to disagree with the classification she argued for (which in fact she later withdrew from slightly), I value the clarity of the argumentation and the data presented in these four papers almost above any of her other work. When I teach historical linguistics, I always use a Muskogean problem that invites students to propose Haas's reconstructions and classification, and they are always struck by its elegance.

As I mentioned, Haas worked extensively on Creek, which I always felt was her favorite Southeastern language, but she also did extensive fieldwork on other languages of the region, especially the Muskogean languages Koasati and Hitchiti and the isolates Natchez and Tunica, the last of which (topic of her own dissertation research) is the subject of her most extensive published descriptions, providing "a grammar, a dictionary, and a body of texts". Her published and unpublished writings do not stop with these languages, however: she also wrote on the Southeastern languages Biloxi, Cherokee, Chitimacha, Choctaw, Ofo, Tonkawa, Yuchi, and the Muskogean-based trade language Mobilian, in most cases citing at least some data from her own fieldwork. Karen Booker's linguistic bibliography of the Aboriginal Southeast lists fifty-six books and papers by Haas, most of them extremely important for any student of the linguistics of the region, and covering all its diverse genetic groups. They deal not only with single languages, but also with much larger comparative issues.

Haas's work on the Southeast provided material for one of her deepest interests, the search for ever larger and deeper genetic groupings of American Indian languages. In this, she clearly followed the lead of her teacher Edward Sapir (though with more specific data and argumentation!), proving to be very influential – surely contributing, for example, to the reshaping of Macro-Algonkian in the revised (and still widely accepted) classification presented by the Voegelins in the 1960s. These days we do not usually think of Algonkian as connected with the Southeast, but Haas persuaded many linguists that Algonkian was related to the Gulf languages, a loose grouping consisting of Atakapa, Chitimacha, Muskogean, Natchez, and Tunica that she supported convincingly in many writings. She also wrote on broad comparative topics in Siouan and Hokan-Coahuiltecan, again citing Southeastern data. In all this work, Haas revealed inclinations that now seem contrary to those recently expressed, for instance, by members of the SSILA committee evaluating the Routledge Atlas; I believe she might have agreed with my own judgment that anti-Greenberg reaction may be taking us too far back in the direction of Powell. But we cannot

know this, and perhaps her own current feelings would be different, if she were here to tell us.

I want to close by telling how warm and generous Miss Haas was, even with younger scholars she did not know at all well, like me. I used to send her copies of most of what I wrote on Muskogean, and she would acknowledge these with very sweet, supportive brief notes, sometimes signed "love, Mary". When I taught a field methods class on Creek-Seminole in the mid-eighties she allowed me to copy the dictionary manuscript she had given me a few years earlier (with its revealing handwritten annotations) for my students, and wrote out a careful description for me of where her fieldwork had been conducted and who the consultants referred to in the dictionary were. (I must say parenthetically that the only thing I really regret about Mary Haas's contribution to Southeastern studies is her decision not to publish this absolutely excellent dictionary, which was ahead of its time in so many ways, such as its innovative use of practical orthography. There will eventually be another dictionary to supplement the existing nineteenth-century missionary dictionary, but it is indeed sad that the first modern Creek dictionary cannot be Haas's.) She also generously gave permission for me to cite other unpublished materials, such as her Natchez texts and the wordlists for Natchez and Chitimacha prepared by her and Morris Swadesh.

Mary R. Haas had a long and wonderfully productive scholarly life, in which she made extremely important contributions to the study of the American Indian languages of the Southeast, which will continue to be influential as long as the names of these languages are known. We are all lucky to have been touched by her work. She will be missed.

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(in some cases rather obliquely; many others could have been added)

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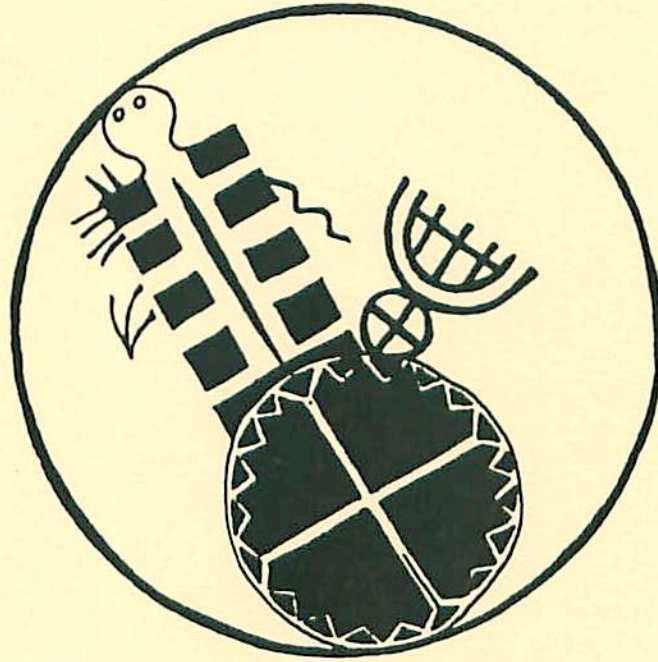
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REPORT 10

**SURVEY OF CALIFORNIA AND
OTHER INDIAN LANGUAGES**



**THE HOKAN, PENUTIAN &
J.P. HARRINGTON CONFERENCES
And
THE MARY R. HAAS
MEMORIAL**

**June 28-29, 1996
University of California at Berkeley**

Leanne Hinton, Editor

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cover design by Leanne Hinton (Santa Barbara Chumash rock painting)

This volume is dedicated to the memory of

MARY R. HAAS

Professor emeritus of Linguistics

at the University of California at Berkeley

INTRODUCTION

This volume of the Survey Reports is the Proceedings of the Hokan, Penutian and J.P. Harrington Conferences, held at the University of California at Berkeley on June 28-29, 1996. Part I includes five of the papers that were presented at that conference, and also a paper by George V. Grekoff, who was unable to attend the conference but arranged in advance to submit an article for inclusion in the Proceedings. During the conference, a memorial session was also held for Mary R. Haas, who died a month before the conference. Part II of this volume consists of the presentations that were made about her life and research.

We gratefully acknowledge grants from Joseph Cerny, Vice Chancellor for Research and Dean of the Graduate Division, and William Simmons, Dean of Social Sciences, that helped make this conference possible.

Leanne Hinton
Volume and Series Editor

THE HOKAN, PENUTIAN AND J.P. HARRINGTON CONFERENCES

and the

MARY R. HAAS MEMORIAL SESSION

June 28-29, 1996
University of California at Berkeley, Alumni House

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