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Proto-Uto-Aztecan **pi*
“younger sister” ->
“great-grandmother”¹

ALEXIS MANASTER RAMER

Detailed linguistic work, involving both internal and comparative reconstruction, traditionally has been an important source of information about the cultural history of nonliterate peoples. Such work, in turn, depends on descriptive materials obtained in the field, but, as native languages evolve or disappear, it becomes increasingly necessary to resort to philological methods more familiar from the study of literate cultures. As Ives Goddard reminds us,² we must then dust off older, often prestructuralist descriptions of American Indian languages, which have fallen into oblivion but which, in spite of all sorts of problems of interpretation, are sometimes the best because the oldest sources of information.

A case in point is the kinship terminology of the Uto-Aztecan language Tubatulabal, formerly (and perhaps still) spoken in Kern County, California. Along with much else, these words are simply missing from Charles F. Voegelin's brief vocabulary, which is the most recent published lexical work on the language.³ However, even though this work is full of errors both of omission and commission, since its appearance, no Uto-Aztecanist has, to my knowledge, looked for Tubatulabal vocabulary in older sources for this language, which go back to the beginning of the century.⁴

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Even forms contained in Voegelin's own earlier publications but omitted from his brief vocabulary have often been missed, presumably because everybody assumed that the latter was more complete than it was. Yet the Tubatulabal texts he edited are full of otherwise unattested lexical material,⁵ and a number of important vocabulary items are to be found only in his grammar.⁶

As it happens, Tubatulabal kinship terminology was part of what fell into this gap, and most of it has been ignored in recent work on the Uto-Aztecan languages.⁷ Here I would like to consider two Tubatulabal words for "great-grandrelative," which we find recorded in Voegelin's grammar as *cagaa-* "great-grandparent, great-grandchild,"⁸ and by Gifford as *saka* "great-grandparent" and *saka-bi-n* "(my) great-grandchild."⁹

Gifford's phonetic transcriptions are known to have been of poor quality; for example, he did not transcribe vowel lengths, had trouble distinguishing voiced and voiceless (or lax and tense) obstruents (such as *k* versus *g*, *p* versus *b*, etc.), confused fricatives like *s* and affricates like *c* (= *ts*), and so on. Hence, we must rely on Voegelin for the precise form of the word. Likewise, we accept Voegelin's statement that, while the diminutive suffix *-bi* may not be used for the older generation, it need not be used for the younger,¹⁰ although this is not a crucial point in the present context.

What is more important is that one of Gifford's Tubatulabal informants restricted the reference of *cagaa-* to males, giving what Gifford recorded as *ipi* for "great-grandmother" and *ipi-bi-n* for "(my) great-granddaughter."¹¹ These forms are not attested anywhere else in our Tubatulabal sources, but we can to some extent correct some of Gifford's minor inaccuracies here.

Thus, given what has just been said, we must assume that the diminutive suffix was not required for the "great-granddaughter" sense and that Gifford's transcription is phonetically inaccurate in the usual respects. Specifically, since many Tubatulabal kinship terms are of the form *VCVV* (with a voiceless consonant) or *VVCVV* (with a voiced consonant), with the same vowels on both sides of the consonant, I will take it that the word was really *ipii-* or *iibii-*. At present, there is no compelling evidence that would choose between these two possibilities.

The next step is to realize that Tubatulabal has no monosyllabic kinship terms. Moreover, the terms that have one of the forms just discussed, i.e., *VCVV* or *VVCVV* (with the same vowel throughout), are cognate with forms in other Uto-Aztecan languages that are monosyllabic and lack the first syllable. Thus, Tubatulabal

akaa- “father’s son, son’s child”¹² is related to Serrano *-ka’*, *-kak-* “paternal grandrelative” or its reciprocal, Cupeño *-qa’* “father’s parent,” etc.¹³ Likewise, Tubatulabal *aanaa-* “father”¹⁴ is cognate with Cupeño *-na* “father” and the like.¹⁵ Apparently, Uto-Aztecan monosyllabic kinship terms became disyllabic in Tubatulabal by the simple expedient of prefixing a copy of the final (and originally sole) vowel (a kind of reduplication that is widely used in this language for various other purposes as well).

Given these facts, we can assume that *ipii* (or *iibii*) comes from an earlier **pi*, **pii*, or **piC* “female great-grandrelative” (the C refers to a final consonant of unknown quality). There is no way to choose between these three alternatives at present, although we may assume that only one is correct.

This etymon is transparently relatable to the term for “great-grandrelative” in another Uto-Aztecan language, O’odham (the language that used to be known as Papago), spoken in southern Arizona. There are two terms involved: *wiikol* and *wiṣad*. In every O’odham dialect, one of these means “great-grandparent” and the other “great-grandchild,” but the dialects differ as to which is which.¹⁶ It seems obvious that *-kol* and *-ṣad* were originally separate morphemes and that the root was originally just **wii-*. This, in turn, given well-known sound laws, must also come from **pi*, **pii*, or **piC*. Again, there is no way to choose between these three forms.

Now, the primary division of the Uto-Aztecan language family is into Northern and Southern,¹⁷ and, *other things being equal*, it is logical to assume that any feature attested in both of these sub-families must belong to the reconstructed ancestral language of the family, Proto-Uto-Aztecan (PUA). As it happens, Tubatulabal is a Northern language, and O’odham a Southern one. Hence, the data we have seen from these two languages suffice to establish **pi* (etc.) as a PUA term for “great-grandrelative.”

We also find that some of the Takic languages (a subgroup of Northern Uto-Aztecan) have reflexes of this etymon, for example, Luiseño *-pii=wi* “great-grandrelative” (and similar forms in closely related Cupeño and Cahuilla).¹⁸ While the morphology here is obscure, so that we cannot be sure what hides behind the apparent suffix *-wi*, there is no doubt that the root here is, once again, **pi*, **pii*, or **piC*. However, the same root is also found with a seemingly very different meaning in the Takic languages, namely Luiseño *-pii=t* “younger sister” (and similar forms in closely related Serrano and Gabrielino). Again, we do not know enough to explain the final *-t* element, but the formal identity of the root

elements does not seem in doubt.

In order to accept that we are really dealing with the same etymon, however, we cannot merely point to formal identity; we must also be able to make sense of the semantic difference. Unexpected though the connection between “great-grandrelative” and “younger sibling” might be in modern western society, this semantic relationship is widely attested in the Uto-Aztec (and some non-Uto-Aztec languages) of California.

For example, this phenomenon is also found in at least two NUA languages belonging to the Numic branch that are spoken in California—Kawaiisu and Chemehuevi¹⁹—though not in very closely related Numic languages (such as Southern Paiute) spoken in Arizona and Utah.²⁰ A different etymon is involved in these languages, **cakka'i-*, but the semantics are the same. In fact, the basic Tubatulabal term for “great-grandrelative” cited above, namely *cagaa-*, is derived from this etymon, either via borrowing from Kawaiisu (as suggested by Gifford²¹ and as I now tend to believe) or by virtue of cognation with the Numic form (as I used to argue).²² In addition, the same phenomenon of identifying great-grandparents with younger siblings is also found in the non-Uto-Aztec languages of Mojave, Diegueño, and Maidu.²³

The crucial point here is that Tubatulabal, Chemehuevi, Kawaiisu, and Mojave were spoken over a geographically continuous area of southeastern California. Moreover, if we include the Takic languages (Luiseño and its congeners), as suggested above, then the main area of this semantic phenomenon is extended into near contiguity with the Diegueño outpost farther south. So far, this appears to be primarily an areal, Southern Californian, semantic phenomenon. (It would not apply to Maidu, spoken much further north.)

However, the data cited here also make it clear that it must at one point have affected the ancestral language of the O'odham people, who live in Arizona. This suggests that we may be dealing with a properly Uto-Aztec phenomenon, which the speakers of these languages may then have helped spread to other, unrelated, languages in California. For, as noted, anything shared by NUA and SUA languages, like the ambiguity of the root **pi* (etc.) between “great-grandrelative” and “younger sibling,” would likely be a feature of PUA.

The question now arises of explaining this ambiguity and establishing, if possible, which of the two meanings came first. As it happens, the situation before us is closely paralleled by a similar,

though unrelated, phenomenon attested in full within modern O’odham:²⁴

The same terms are used between those who are four generations apart as between those of the same generation, but the rank is inverted. My great-great-grandparents and their brothers, sisters, and cousins call me by the higher rank term *ni-sihs* [“my older sibling”], and I call any of them *ni-shehpj* or *ni-sikul* [both meaning “my younger sibling”]. The inversion of rank indicates the responsibility of the younger generation for the aged.

Thus, in modern O’odham it is great-great-grandparents that are identified with younger siblings, and the reason for this identification is, it would seem, apparent to the speakers. On the other hand, the PUA etymon under discussion (*pi) involves the terminological identification of younger siblings with great-grandparents. However, the logic is basically the same, and we may thus assume that originally this etymon referred just to younger siblings.

Moreover, it would seem that the earliest meaning must have been specifically “younger sister” (attested in Luiseño and some other Takic languages), which was first extended to “great-grandmother” (attested by Gifford’s Tubatulabal informant) and only later to “great-grandparent” (in Takic and O’odham). The specifically female reference is not only supported by the Takic and Tubatulabal data, but is also confirmed by Aztec (another SUA language) *pih-tli* “older sister,” which appears to come from the same etymon (with a semantic shift along a different dimension).

This is a particularly interesting conclusion, because the proto-meaning we thus arrive at (“younger sister”) is directly attested only in the geographically and genealogically restricted Takic group of languages, and because this means that the change in meaning from “great-grandmother” to “great-grandrelative” was an independent innovation in Takic and in O’odham. This is a good example of a feature shared by NUA and SUA languages which, *because other things were not equal*, cannot be postulated for the proto-language.

In any event, the further semantic extension, from “great-grandparent” to “great-grandchild” (usually with a diminutive suffix), must have come even later, once the underlying logic of equating great-grandparents with younger siblings was forgotten. And this, again, must have happened independently in sev-

eral languages. Beyond that, the history of this semantic phenomenon remains largely an open question, especially because many studies of the kinship systems of the area do not address it.²⁵

In conclusion, by looking into older sources on Tubatulabal, we were able to recover a number of kinship terms, to relate them to their Uto-Aztecan sources, and to contribute to the reconstruction of the original scope of the areal semantic phenomenon of equating great-grandrelatives with younger siblings.

NOTES

1. Sincere thanks are due to Wick Miller and to several anonymous referees, whose comments have made a huge difference to this small paper.

2. "Philological Approaches to the Study of North American Indian Languages: Documents and Documentation," in *Native Languages of the Americas*, ed. Thom A. Sebeok (New York: Plenum Press, 1976), 1:73–92.

3. Charles F. Voegelin, "Working Dictionary of Tübatulabal," *International Journal of American Linguistics* 24 (1958): 221–28.

4. Especially Alfred Kroeber, *Shoshonean Dialects of California*, University of California Publications in American Archaeology and Ethnology, vol. 4, no. 3 (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1907), 65–165; and Edward W. Gifford, *Tübatulabal and Kawaiisu Kinship Terms*, University of California Publications in American Archaeology and Ethnology, vol. 12, no. 6 (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1917), 219–48. There is also much useful material in Erminie W. Voegelin, *Tübatulabal Ethnography*, Anthropological Records, vol. 2, no. 1 (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1938), 1–90.

5. C. F. Voegelin, *Tübatulabal Texts*, University of California Publications in American Archaeology and Ethnology, vol. 34, no. 3 (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1935), 191–246.

6. C. F. Voegelin, *Tübatulabal Grammar*, University of California Publications in American Archaeology and Ethnology, vol. 34, no. 2 (Berkeley: University of California, 1935), 55–190.

7. Wick R. Miller, *Uto-Aztecan Cognate Sets*, University of California Publications in Linguistics, no. 48 (Berkeley and Los Angeles: University of California Press, 1967) cites some Tubatulabal kinship terms based on the unpublished field notes of Sydney Lamb and Hansjakob Seiler from the mid-fifties, but it is apparent that Lamb and Seiler largely attempted to relicit forms recorded by Voegelin.

8. C. F. Voegelin, *Tübatulabal Grammar*, 155.

9. Gifford, *Tübatulabal and Kawaiisu*, 223.

10. C. F. Voegelin, *Tübatulabal Grammar*, 154.

11. Gifford, *Tübatulabal and Kawaiisu*, 224.

12. C. F. Voegelin, *Tübatulabal Grammar*, 154; Gifford, *Tübatulabal and Kawaiisu*, 222.

13. Jane H. Hill and Rosinda Nolasquez, *Mulu'wetam: The First People* (Banning, CA: Malki Museum Press, 1973); Kenneth C. Hill, "A Serrano Dictio-

nary" (in preparation). Cf. Miller's (*Uto-Aztecan Cognate Sets*) cognate set #496 *ka "grandmother."

14. C. F. Voegelin, *Tübatulabal Grammar*, 155; Gifford, *Tübatulabal and Kawaiisu*, 221.

15. Hill and Nolasquez, *Mulu'wetam*. See also Miller's (*Uto-Aztecan Cognate Sets*) cognate set #483 *na "father."

16. Dean Saxton, Lucille Saxton, and Susie Enos, *Dictionary Papago/Pima—English, O'othham—Mil-gahn; Papago/Pima—English, O'othham—Mil-gahn*, 2d ed., revised and expanded, ed. R. L. Cherry (Tucson: University of Arizona Press, 1983).

17. The validity of NUA as a classificatory unit is confirmed by recent discoveries (Alexis Manaster Ramer, "A Northern Uto-Aztecan Sound Law: *-c- → *-y-," *International Journal of American Linguistics*, in press, 1992).

18. K. C. Hill, *Serrano Dictionary*; William Bright, *A Luiseño Dictionary*, University of California Publications in Linguistics, no. 51 (Berkeley and Los Angeles: University of California Press, 1968).

19. Edward W. Gifford, *Californian Kinship Terminologies*, University of California Publications in American Archaeology and Ethnology, vol. 18 (Berkeley and Los Angeles: University of California Press, 1922), 136–38.

20. Gifford, *Tübatulabal and Kawaiisu*, 245–46; Edward Sapir, *Southern Paiute Dictionary*, Proceedings of the American Academy of Arts and Sciences, vol. 65, no. 3 (Boston: American Academy of Arts and Sciences, 1931), 537–730.

21. Gifford, *Tübatulabal and Kawaiisu*, 241.

22. "Kern Laws," *International Journal of American Linguistics* 50 (1984):325–34; "Some Tubatulabal Kinship Etymologies," *California Linguistic Newsletter* 22:3 (1991): 8–9.

23. Gifford, *Californian Kinship Terminologies*, 136–38.

24. Saxton, Saxton, and Enos, *Dictionary Papago/Pima*, 125.

25. For example, A. Kimball Romney, "Kinship and Family," in *Social Anthropology*, ed. Manning Nash (vol. 6 of *Handbook of Middle American Indians*, ed. Robert Wauchope) (Austin: University of Texas Press, 1967), 207–37.