

A Siouan-Algonquian Wanderwort: the name of the bear

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1 Introduction

Contact between Algonquian and Siouan languages are well-attested. [Koontz \(1986\)](#) pointed out that the words for “bow” in many Siouan languages (Lakhota *itázipa*, Omaha *máde* etc) are independent borrowings from Algonquian *meʔtekwa “tree”, which means “bow” in some languages. [Carter et al. \(2006\)](#) and [Michaud et al. \(2012\)](#) likewise show that various etyma for “squash” (Lakhota *wagmú*, Chiwere *wa·dwá* etc) originate from Algonquian *e:mehkwani “ladle” (attested in the meaning “squash” in Menominee *ohkam-emeskwan* “hubbard squash”, [Bloomfield 1975](#): 175)¹

In these cases, borrowing took place from Algonquian to Siouan, and occurred independently in several branches of Siouan, i.e. these do not reflect borrowings into proto-Siouan, as the etyma in question do not follow the regular phonological correspondences.

The present paper will examine the etymology of the word “bear” in Siouan, and propose a possible Algonquian origin for this etymon.

2 The Siouan word for “bear”

Two distinct etyma for “bear” are attested throughout Siouan languages; they probably originally refer to different species, the black bear *Ursus americanus* and the Grizzly bear *Ursus arctos horribilis* though most languages only preserve one of the two roots.

¹Note that Menominee also has a form *emeskwan* “spoon”, which cannot come from *e:mehkwani by the regular sound laws ([Bloomfield 1946](#): 89).

First, a root “black bear” is attested in the following languages (data from [Carter et al. 2006](#)):

Table 1: The etymon for “black bear” in Siouan languages

Language	Form	Meaning
Crow	<i>buushí</i>	bear
Chiwere	<i>mújje</i>	black bear
Hochank	<i>húyč</i>	black bear
Biloxi	<i>oⁿtí, óⁿtí (*ɔti)</i> ,	bear
Tutelo	<i>mūnti (*mų•ti)</i> .	bear
Ofo	<i>uⁿthi, ūⁿthi (*ú•thi)</i>	bear

The correspondences between the languages is not regular, and [Carter et al. 2006](#) argue that this word could be diffused from Uto-Aztecan (citing for instance Cora *húuce?e* “bear”).

This etymon was replaced by a noun derived from “black” in the Dhegiha languages (Omaha *wasábe*, Osage *wasápe* “black bear”).

A second root, originally probably designating the grizzly bear, is quite widespread across Siouan languages, as it appears in Mandan, Mississippi valley Siouan – it is absent in Crow-Hidatsa and Ohio valley Siouan:

Table 2: The etymon for “Grizzly bear” in Siouan languages

Language	Form	Meaning
Mandan	<i>wqtó?</i>	bear
Lakhota	<i>mąthó</i>	bear
Chiwere	<i>mąthó</i>	grizzly
Hochank	<i>mąčó</i>	grizzly
Omaha	<i>mąčhó</i>	grizzly
Kansa	<i>mičhó</i>	polar bear
Osage	<i>mįchó</i>	grizzly
Quapaw	<i>mąthó, mąčhó</i>	grizzly

This etymon presents puzzling correspondences, as pointed out by [Rankin \(1994\)](#). Dakotan aspirated *-th-* regularly corresponds to preaspirated *ht-*, but rarely *th-* in Dhegiha languages.²

The normal correspondence Dakotan *h-* to Dhegiha *th-* is generally reconstructed as **rh* following [Taylor \(1976\)](#), to explain the relationship between Lakhota *hí* < **rhi* “arrive” and *glí* **k-rhi* “come back” (Omaha *thí*,

²The correspondence to palatals such *čh-* is explainable as a hypocoristic use of palatalization throughout Siouan.

gǝi). It can be illustrated by the following (non-exhaustive) list of cognates:³

Table 3: The correspondence of Dakotan *h-* to postaspirated *th-* in Dhegiha

Lakhota	Omaha	Meaning
<i>hí</i>	<i>thí</i>	arrive
<i>hḷ-ḥpáya</i> “fall”	<i>othí</i>	hit
<i>mahé</i>	<i>mąthe</i>	inside
<i>pehá</i>	<i>bethá</i> < * <i>pethá</i>	fold
<i>pehá</i>	<i>ppéthą</i> < * <i>hpéthą</i>	crane

Examples of Dakotan *th-* corresponding to Dhegiha postaspirates are also found, but are much rarer; only the following examples (including “bear”) are found:

Table 4: The correspondence of Dakotan *th-* to postaspirated in Dhegiha

Lakhota	Omaha	Meaning
<i>ithúkala</i>	<i>ičhóga</i>	mouse
<i>thathóka</i>	<i>ttačhóge</i>	antelope
<i>yathá</i>	<i>wađáthe</i> “food”	chew

However, none of these three etyma seem to constitute good evidence for the *th-* : *th-/čh-* correspondence, as explained by Carter et al. (2006).

The noun “antelope” is transparent in Lakhota, where it can be analysed as a compound meaning “enemy ruminant”; the CSD authors suggest a borrowing from Dakotan into Dhegiha.

The noun “mouse” and the verb “chew”, on the other hand, present correspondences that differ from that of “bear” when other languages than Dakotan and Dhegiha are taken into consideration. “Mouse” has an unexpected voiced stop in Chiwere *hḷdúje* and Hochank *wiǰukxéte*. “Chew” presents an irregular voiced *d-* in Biloxi *dadě* “chew”

Another apparent example of this correspondence would be Lakhota *othú* “wear pants” and Osage *óthą* “leggings”, but the Osage etymon is better compared with Lakota *ohá* “wear on the foot” (etymologically derived from the root “to stand”).

Rankin’s conclusion, in view of the irregularity of the correspondence between postaspirated dentals, is that the Siouan etymon for “grizzly bear” reflects a loanword from an unknown source.

³This correspondence, first implicitly proposed by Dorsey (1885), was rediscovered by the John Koontz and integrated in the Carter et al. (2006).

3 Algonquian

The etymon for “bear” in Algonquian is universally reconstructed as *maθkw-a, following the phonetic rules proposed by Bloomfield (1925) and Siebert (1941). One can additionally reconstruct a medial *-θkw- based on the two compounds *na:pe:θkw-a “male bear” and *wa:pa-θkw-a “white bear” pointed out by Siebert.

The three proto-etyma *maθkwa, *na:pe:θkwa and *wa:paθkwa present the following regular reflexes:

Table 5: The etymon for “bear” in Algonquian languages

Language	Form	Meaning
Ojibwe	<i>makwa, -g</i>	bear
Fox	<i>mahkwa</i>	bear
Cree	<i>maskwa</i>	bear
Massachusetts	<i>masq</i>	bear
Unami	<i>maxkw</i>	bear
Arapaho	<i>wox</i>	bear
Ojibwe	<i>naabek, -wag</i>	male bear
Penobscot	<i>nàpeskw</i>	male bear
Cree	<i>waapask</i>	white bear
Penobscot	<i>wapskw</i>	white bear
Arapaho	<i>nóókox</i>	white bear

The presence of a medial root *-θkw-, alongside the initial *maθkw-, constitutes strong evidence against the hypothesis that this etymon could have been borrowed from another language.

The phonetic nature of the phoneme which Bloomfield reconstructs as *θ is subject to some controversy, as it merges with *l in most languages, except Cree (where it merges with *t as t) and Arapaho (where it yields θ, merging with *č). Bloomfield himself mentions that it could have been either *[θ] or the lateral fricative *[ɬ]. Some Algonquianists remain neutral as to the exact reconstruction (Goddard 1979: 73) while others favour *ɬ (Picard 1984). Goddard (1994) however later provided additional support for a reconstruction *[θ].

4 Comparison

Rankin proposed that the rare correspondence of aspirated coronal in Dakotan to aspirated coronal in the other languages probably reflected borrowing from another language family. This correspondence should be recon-

structured differently from that of Dakotan *h-*: Dhegiha *th-* (*rh-); it cannot be a stop cluster such as *tk, as those are normally preserved as *tk* in Lakhota. The proto-form which we can postulate for proto-Siouan would be either *wəθó or *wətxó with a stop + velar fricative cluster.⁴ Note that proto-Siouan did not have a contrast between oral and nasal consonants: *wə was realised *[mã].

The Algonquian form *maθkwa “bear” is somewhat reminiscent of the Siouan etymon. If we opt for the reconstruction of *θ as *[θ] rather than *[t̪], we can superpose the two reconstructions:

m	a	θ	k	wa
w	ə	t	x	o

The main difference between the two proto-forms is that of the internal cluster, which is fricative + stop in Algonquian vs. stop + fricative in Siouan, but the places of articulation are similar. The other differences are quite trivial (*-wa vs. *o and *wə vs. *ma).

The Algonquian word is actually bimorphemic, as the *-a is the animate gender marker; the Siouan etymon on the other hand is not analysable, though we find in Lakhota according to [Ullrich \(2008\)](#) a form with infixes second person *ma-ní-thó* “you are a shark at it”, with this noun used as a stative verb. This is most probably a Dakotan innovation, due to analogy with verbs such as *máni*, *ma-wá-ni* “to walk”.

I suggest that the Siouan etymon was borrowed from either a lost Algonquian language (none of the known languages could yield the Siouan form) or a lost parent of Algonquian where *θk would correspond to *tx, or any cluster that could be heard as *tx when it was borrowed in Siouan.

The grizzly bear being a western animal,⁵ it may come as a surprise that the direction of borrowing took place from Algonquian (a family most of whose members are located in the East) to Siouan (most of whose surviving members are located in the Mid-West). However, this paradox is only apparent. The Urheimat of Algonquian probably lies in the West according to [Goddard \(1994\)](#) and the relationship of Siouan to Catawba and Yuchi ([Rankin 1998](#)) suggests an eastern origin for this family, with subsequent spread to the west by Mississippi Valley Siouan, Mandan and Crow/Hidatsa.

We find other cases of “bear” being a Wanderwort, spread across several unrelated language families, possibly a lexical replacement due to taboo avoidance. For instance, Chinese 熊 *gwum, Tibetan *dom* < *d-wam have been compared to Japanese *kuma* and Korean *kwom* “bear”.

⁴The post-aspirated dental is realised with uvular frication [tχ] in Lakhota (marginally contrastive with [tʰ]) and Osage.

⁵As pointed out to me by John Koontz.

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