

6 “LA GESTE D’ASDIWAL”: A STRUCTURAL STUDY OF MYTH IN THE LIGHT OF ORAL HISTORY AND LINGUISTICS

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Introduction

“The Story of Asdiwal” was the most elaborate text published by Franz Boas in Coast Tsimshian (Sm’algyax) with an English translation (Boas 1912: 70–145). In 1958, Claude Lévi-Strauss undertook a detailed analysis of this narrative, comparing it with another version of the story. Mostly relying on the English translation (Lévi-Strauss 1967) of the study, this analysis was controversially discussed during the heydays of structural anthropology,¹ with the result that “Perhaps no single paper in the study of oral literature has provoked such reaction.” (Adams 1981: 379) Although structuralism “is no longer a hot-button topic among scholars” (Anderson 2004: 107), the text is still considered an outstanding example for the structural study of myth, and as a side effect, the Asdiwal story itself has become widely known even beyond the field of cultural anthropology.

Although Lévi-Strauss’s study attracted great attention for many years, the reception concentrated mostly either on aspects of methodology or, particularly in (American) Northwest Coast anthropology, on cross-cousin marriage as a central issue in his argumentation. According to Mandelbaum (1987: 32), Lévi-Strauss’s concern was “to demonstrate the thought patterns” of myths that are manifested in oppositions which “represent dilemmas of human existence.” These oppositions are “repeated endlessly, not all in any one story but through all the sacred narratives within a culture.” (Mandelbaum 1987: 32) For Lévi-Strauss this is done unconsciously and structuralist methods can crack the code, a methodology that is neither concerned with “who communicates what specific messages to whom, under what circumstances, and to what effect” (Mandelbaum 1987: 32) nor relies on the content and plot of a narrative. This leads to two central methodological problems of the approach: on the one hand the arbitrariness of any selection and categorization of binary oppositions and on the other hand the determination of the underlying meaning of a narrative:

1 Just to mention some contributions that refer directly to the Asdiwal story: Douglas (1967), Ackerman (1973), Adams (1974), Oppitz (1975), and Thomas et al. (1976). Lévi-Strauss took up the discussion, repudiating most of the criticism (Lévi-Strauss 1973, 1983, 1984). For a more recent evaluation see Anderson (2004) in the volume “Coming to Shore.” In the same volume, several articles acknowledge the work of Lévi-Strauss as a source for Northwest Coast ethnology and discuss its influence (Mauzé et al., eds., 2004).

“No criteria are anywhere discussed for making this determination. Discussions of tale topics concern the way the tale handles supposedly focal problems, not how these are identified.” (Kronenfeld and Decker 1979: 523, 527)

Among the issues raised by Lévi-Strauss in his analysis are “areas of cultural tension, reconciling people to the contradictions of their society by exploring and attenuating oppositions.” (Anderson 2004: 108) The most prominent of these cultural tensions Lévi-Strauss centered on was “the cluster of matrilineal kinship and group membership among the Tsimshianic groups: [...] In this cluster Lévi-Strauss saw a contradiction between the pressures of kinship and residence patterns that was partially resolved through matrilineal cross-cousin marriage.” (Anderson 2004: 108) The question of cross-cousin marriage in Tsimshian society became the main topic in the discussion of the ethnographic validity of Lévi-Strauss’s claims while other aspects of Lévi-Strauss’s analysis have been mostly ignored.

Adams (1974) alone raised other important issues that had been disregarded by Lévi-Strauss,² insisting on the legal character of the story that leads to a different type of contradiction:

“The primary use of these myths as social charters which entitle their owners to be considered legitimate members of a timeless, perpetual society must be juxtaposed to the evidence that their owners are in fact newcomers. In this sense, Lévi-Strauss is right about myths being used to overcome and justify a contradiction, ... The justification is arranged by means of a concept of power, thought to come from supernaturals ...” (Adams 1974: 175)

Adams (1974: 173–174) also treated in some detail the meaning of the main protagonist’s name. The first element of *Asdiwaal*, the particle *asdi*, signifies either ‘improperly, awkwardly’ or ‘movement away from the fire from the center toward the doorway,’ and the verbal construction *asdiwaal* ‘have an accident, make a mistake.’ The linguistic dimension of the Asdiwal story was alluded to by Lévi-Strauss (1967), but only in an incidental manner. He commented on the name Asdiwal in a note (Lévi-Strauss 1967: 4, 43) and, in the conclusion at the end of his study, referred to Boas’s Tsimshian Grammar, briefly characterizing local particles: “a grammatical construction employing couplets of antithetical terms is present in the Tsimshian tongue as a very obvious model, and probably presents itself as such quite consciously to the speaker, [Note: Boas quotes 31 pairs of ‘local particles’ in oppositions ...]” (Lévi-Strauss 1967: 42, 46)

Except for such cursory references to the Tsimshianic languages, none of the contributors undertook notable efforts to evaluate the tale topics and binary oppositions chosen by Lévi-Strauss or to develop criteria for such selections referring directly

2 As one of the few authors who based his interpretation on a new, independent summary of the story, Oppitz (1975: 268–273) should also be mentioned here.

to the original Sm'algyax text. The present chapter seeks to initiate this kind of investigation and, by means of a well-known example, also exemplify the benefits of linguistic work on such narrative texts.

Adawx: The Question of Genre

The definition of myth is a matter of long-lasting, ongoing debate. Among the various criteria that have been discussed is the question of genre, which was addressed for the Asdiwal story by Alan Dundes:

“What about ... the story of Asdiwal (which he cautiously labelled ‘geste’)? This is not a myth either. If it were believed to be historically ‘true’ by the Tsimshian, then it would be a legend. ... In no way is the geste of Asdiwal an account of how the world or humankind came to be in their present form. It is not a myth by folkloristic standards.” (Dundes 1997: 45–46)

While folklorists like Dundes or Bascom (1965) consider myth as a genre of its own, different from legend or fairy tale / folktale, other researchers define myth as a characteristic of narrations not by necessity restricted to specific genres (Segal 2004: 4–6).

When Lévi-Strauss titled his article “La Geste d’Asdiwal,” he adapted the translation of “The Story of Asdiwal” used by Franz Boas to French. Instead of a more general equivalent of ‘story’ in French like ‘histoire,’ ‘conte,’ ‘narration’ or ‘récit,’ Lévi-Strauss chose the label for a specific genre of French Medieval heroic epic, the ‘chanson de geste.’³ But, without further reference to the genre question, the first sentence of the article starts with: “Cette étude d’un mythe indigène ...” (Lévi-Strauss 1958: 3) It seems as if the translation of genre between English and French is somehow problematic. This raises the question of the universality of the genres myth, legend and fairy tale or folktale: are they more or less universal or eurocentric concepts of folklorists because narrative genres should be better understood as mere culturally specific classifications? Therefore, it may be of some interest to look at what genre the Tsimshian *adawx* represents.

Boas stated that “The Tsimshian distinguish clearly between two types of stories—the myth (*ada’ox*) and the tale (*ma’tesk*). The latter is entirely historical in character, although from our point of view it may contain supernatural elements. The incidents narrated in the former are believed to have happened during the time when animals appeared in the form of human beings.” (Boas 1916: 565) Though labelled “myth” by Boas, the *adawx* should better be understood as a “true history,

3 The English translation of the article (Lévi-Strauss 1967) was titled “The Story of Asdiwal” as in Boas (1912).

true telling” (McDonald 2003: 153) in Tsimshian society that manifests historical and social consciousness negotiated within and between lineages (Roth 2008: 6). Laws and customs were also recorded and illustrated in *adawx* (McDonald 2003: 24). Miller (1998: 657) used the term “epic” and criticized the treatment of the type of narratives represented by the *adawx* as “myths”: “Unfortunately, popularly and dubiously regarded as ‘myths,’ these epics have often been slandered by the insensitive and slighted by scholars seeking to impose their own sense of detail and linear chronology on much more complex narratives.” Marsden likewise focused on the historical and legal character of the *adawx*: “Adawx are oral records of historical events of collective political, social, and economic significance, ...” (Marsden 2002: 102), but also touched on the integrative and complex character of the *adawx* that quite frequently is understood as a characteristic of myths:

“These *adawx*, therefore, have many levels of meaning. They describe specific events in the history of a house while also revealing their importance within the broader context of the geographic and political history of the Tsimshian. As well, they exemplify the inherent laws of Tsimshian society by which charters are established that define relationships among peoples and between people and the living power of the land.

The knowledge contained in these *adawx*, like the events they portray, moves between the worlds of spirit and matter, reflecting the pervasive worldview of Northwest Coast peoples that all creation is imbued with spirit. From this perspective, the *adawx* reflect the world itself, where human and spirit realms interpenetrate.” (Marsden 2002: 135)

Another aspect of *adawx* is the legitimacy of their telling. In contrast to other narratives, *adawx* as family histories belong to the regalia of a specific noble house. Each *adawx* was accompanied by songs and masks or crests that allude to it. The performance and/or exhibition of such sets of regalia was restricted to particular occasions and to a small number of prominent members of the noble house. And, although Henry Tate, the collector or, better still, author of the text, was a member of the *Gawalaa* house of the *Gispaxlo’ots* (eagle) clan,⁴ one may doubt if he ever was in the position to tell or record the story legitimately: “While Tate was doubtlessly in a position to hear many of the *adawx* and other traditions, he probably realized that, as a non-royal *lik’agyet*, he might not be capable of securing the permission from knowledgeable chiefs, matriarchs, and elders to record them for publication.” (Roth 2008: 173) And in the case of the *Asdiwal* story, the access seemed even to be not a matter of descent, but of adoption by which he became a member of the

4 According to Roth (2008: 173). The information on the status of Henry Tate supplied by Boas, Barbeau and Beynon is not fully congruous (Roth 2008: 172–173).

Gispwudwada (killerwhale) clan (Boas 1916: 500) to whose regalia the Asdiwal story seems to belong.⁵

But legitimacy was just one of the problems Tate had to solve, as he had also to respect the guidelines of Boas for collecting and writing down Sm'alg̃yax texts. Another important issue concerns the shifts due to the transmission of narratives that were orally performed to the written medium (see Kasten 2017: 20, *this volume*). Such transmissions cannot fully cope with either the elaborate style of formal public speaking or the transient social agreements the narratives are intended to negotiate. The Asdiwal story, as with the other texts collected by Tate, must be understood as an attempt to reconcile the multiple challenges of an intercultural genesis process. And this process affected the narrations in various respects,⁶ as, for example, when Tate inserted some ethnographic information on winter famines or on the bird *hats'anaas* into the Asdiwal story (Boas 1912: 70; 72).

To close the discussion of genre, it should be noted that Lévi-Strauss himself raised the issue of genre in a later lecture (Lévi-Strauss 1983: 221–237). In this article he analyzed a Kwakiutl (Kwakw̃ak̃a'wakw) story that shows substantial resemblances to the Asdiwal story. A central argument in his comparison of both texts was that the Kwakiutl narrative is a family history (“histoire de famille”) and, therefore, differs in function from the Tsimshian myth. As a family history it is situated between the speculative thinking of myth and political realism. Lévi-Strauss admitted its specific character as the family history⁷ of one of the Kwakiutl noble houses, focusing on the legitimation and the prestige of this particular house (Lévi-Strauss

5 Only the 1902 version explicitly attributed the Asdiwal story to the Gispwudwada (Boas 1902: 221, 225–229). It may also be noted that Asdiwal (alias Potlatch-Giver in that part of the story) used carved killerwhales, the main crest of the Gispwudwada, to defeat his brother-in-laws (Boas 1912: 136–141). And, though not mentioned in the narrative itself, the royal house of the Ginaxangiik, the family of Potlatch-Giver's wife, belongs to the Gispwudwada.

6 The list of possible deviations includes, among others, omissions: “there have always been comments that she left out part of the legend. ... By not telling all of the legend on tape, she still owned or controlled the adawx.” (Mulder 1996: 158) Another issue is the use of story titles as given by Boas (1912). The first author who raised the topic was Barbeau (1917) in his review of Boas's Tsimshian Mythology, observing that “The demarcation between historic-like traditions or myths belonging exclusively to clans and families and those that form part of the general stocks is not clearly drawn here.” (Barbeau 1917: 553) and that “Tate, moreover, relates these stories as if he were speaking to a stranger. For instance, he says (p. 389): ‘... In olden times, people cleared their land with stone axes ...’ Such details on culture perspectives do not enter into the undisturbed Indian narratives.” (Barbeau 1917: 562) The collaboration of Tate and Boas was analyzed in some detail by Maud (1993), but quite polemically, and, what is worse, he only consulted the English translations of the texts. But this is not the place to go into detail on this; instead, see Dürr (1992, 1996).

7 Unfortunately, the text (Boas 1921: 1249–1255) is one of the few texts in Boas's immense Kwakw̃'ala corpus only accessible via its English translation. According to Berman (1991: 121–128), in the Kwakw̃'ala language stories owned by a noble house are called *nuyam̃il*, a subgenre of the *nuyam̃* ‘myth, history.’

1983: 219). Although he touched on a clue that might have been important for the understanding of the Tsimshian stories as well, he did not revise his earlier interpretations, but rather contrasted these with the Kwakiutl version.

What's the Story about: Potlatch Feasts, Titles and Names

In this section, a topic of the Asdiwal story will be chosen that was not touched on by Lévi-Strauss. In the light of the function of *adawx*, one might expect that activities which lead to prestige and advancement would play an important role in the plot of the stories. And indeed, this aspect is omnipresent in the story of Asdiwal, although it was totally ignored by Lévi-Strauss (1967) in the summary as well as in the analysis.⁸

Due to his descent from a noble family, his success as a hunter and his marriages with daughters of chiefs, Asdiwal became famous and was promoted to chief himself. The cultural framework for this rise is the potlatch feast in which status was negotiated and confirmed in Tsimshian society. And the most obvious indications for advancement are noble titles and prestigious names.

Feasts (Potlatches)

The narrative, therefore, includes a series of three successive potlatches as pivotal incidents. The wording of each of these short text passages is quite similar. In each passage or in the adjacent text the locality (except for the first potlatch) and the social rank of the protagonists are clarified.

The first potlatch took place after the death of the old “chieftainess” (*sigidmna'ax*). Her daughter at that time was married to a supernatural being called *Hats'anaas*, who together had a son. The title “princess” (*lguwaalksm hana'ax*) identifies her as the legitimate heir of the chieftainess. She inaugurated a name-giving potlatch to announce the name of her son “Asdiwal,” chosen by his father:⁹

8 It can also serve as a good example for the highly selective and subjective, and consequently biased character, of Lévi-Strauss's summary and analysis. Some of the omissions might become comprehensible presuming that Lévi-Strauss relied for his summary mostly on Boas's extensive comparative notes on the individual episodes (Boas 1916: 792–825).

9 In this article, the transcription of Sm'algyax tries to follow, as far as possible, the conventions in Anderson et al. (eds. 2013), Dunn (1979), Mulder (1996) and Stebbins (2003). Names of places, clans, etc. are given in the form most common in recent literature. In quotations from Boas (1911, 1916) the orthography remains unchanged. For a discussion on the problems of standardizing Sm'algyax orthography see Stebbins (2003).

Barred *l* stands for the voiceless correspondence of *l*, underlined *k* and *g* for voiceless and voiced uvular stops. Underlined *a* represents the shwa sound, *ü* an unrounded high back

- 1 *Ada wil dzak-sga 'wiileeks-tga*
 and then die-CON great-DEM
*'niigana 'wiileeks-m yaawk-sga*¹⁰ *łguwaalks-m hana'ax-ga* [...]

 therefore great-CON give.potlatch-CON princess-CON woman-DEM
Ada-t wil aytg-iswa na-waa łguułg-tga
 and-she then call.by.name-CON POSS-name child-her
Asdiwaal nahla ky'ilam-s na-gwat adm wadi-yaagwa
 <name> PAST give-CON POSS-father so.that like-hold
 “Then the old (woman) died. Therefore the princess gave a great potlatch, [...]

 Then she called the name of her son. Asdi-wā'l was what the father gave him

 to be his name.” (Boas 1912: 80, line 33–82, line 4; 81–83)

In the following sentences, Asdiwal is characterized as a great hunter of the woods, whose fame was known by all people and animals. In the same context, Asdiwal is also called a “prince” (*łguwaalks*) for the first time. The place of the potlatch is not mentioned, but it seems still to be the provisional camp where the family lived because, immediately after the potlatch, his mother returned to her relatives in Kitselas with Asdiwal.

The second name-giving feast was also held by his mother, when Asdiwal, although still considered dead, came back to Kitselas with his first wife, the daughter of the Sun Chief. The chiefly character of Asdiwal's new name is explicitly mentioned and, from here on, the hero of the story is no longer called “Asdiwal,” but “Potlatch-Giver” (*Waxayeewk* or *Waxayaawk*):

- 2 *Ada wil gyik hatsiksm yaawk-dit*
 and then again again give.potlatch-she
Ada-t wil aytg-a waa-m sm'oogyit-dit Waxayeewk
 and-she then call.by.name-CON name-CON chief-DEM Potlatch.Giver

vowel. Though not written here, *shwa* may also be present in some consonant clusters resulting from suffixation of the connective *-m* or the third person *-t*. The glossing follows Mulder (1996), although in a simplified manner owed to the purpose of this article. Abbreviations used: CAUS = causative, CON = connective, DEM = demonstrative, EMPH = emphasis, FUT = future tense, NEG = negation, PAST = past tense, PL = plural, and PREP = preposition.

Connectives help to identify the syntactic function within a sentence. They are only indicated on verbs, nouns, and adjectival forms, but not on particles, prepositions or pronouns. Pronominal elements have been glossed with the most suitable English correspondence to ease the understanding. For example, third person *-t* is translated as ‘he,’ ‘him,’ ‘his,’ ‘she,’ ‘her,’ ‘they,’ ‘them,’ or ‘their’ respectively, without glossing the demonstratives sometimes present.

The elucidations of lexical morphemes are quoted or sometimes adapted from Anderson et al. (eds. 2013: sub voce). The glosses present only rough approximations to the rich meanings of the morphemes, especially in the case of particles.

- 10 Boas (1912: 258) *yā'k*, Anderson et al. (eds. 2013: sub voce) *yaawk*, but Dunn (1979: sub voce) has *yaawkw*.

A wil dm waal-t gisga dm huk-yaawk-tga
 and then FUT be-he PREP FUT always-give.potlatch-he

“Therefore she gave a potlatch again, and she named him with a chief’s name, Potlatch-Giver (Waxayē’k), for he was to be one to give potlatches;” (Boas 1912: 110, line 2–5; 111)

The third and final name-giving feast mentioned in the narrative took place when Potlatch-Giver, leaving behind the Skeena River and his family, went to Ginadoiks. Once again, from here to the end, the hero of the story is referred to consistently by his new name “Stone-Slinger” (*Dahukdzan*):

3 Ada k’a gyik wil ’wiileeks-m yaawk-tga
 and for.a.while again then great-CON give.potlatch-he
 Ada gyik hatsiksm-t aytg-a gyik waa-m sm’oogyit-it
 and again again-he call.by.name-CON again name-CON chief-DEM
 Dahukdzant-k¹¹ su-waa-tga
 <name>-DEM new-name-his

“There he made again a great potlatch. Then he took again a chief’s name. Stone-Slinger (Da-huk-dza’n) was his new name.” (Boas 1912: 142, line 8–11; 143)

Titles

Most protagonists are referred to either by family relations or by social rank. The narration pays minute attention to the status of the protagonists. Asdiwal’s mother is introduced referring to her mother’s chiefly rank (*sigidmna’ax*). She shifts from “noble-woman” (*Iguyaaksm hana’ax*) to “princess” (*Iguwaalksm hana’ax*) when her mother, the chieftainess, consented to the marriage to Hats’anas. Asdiwal, after being named for the first time in a potlatch, is labelled “prince,” i.e. heir of a chief. Only his father Hats’anas lacks any designation as a nobleman or as a supernatural being. He is referred to either by his name or as “young handsome man.”

Both wives are introduced as daughters of an important chief (*sm’oogyit*), the Sun Chief and later the chief of the Ginaxangiik. While his first wife is referred to as “princess” from the beginning, his second wife starts as a “noble-woman” and advances to “princess” only when her father, the chief, consented to the marriage with Asdiwal. In the narrative his mother and his second wife change from “noble-woman” to “princess” without explicit explanation. The relevance of marriage for the title is inconclusive here because both Asdiwal’s mother and his first wife had been married before.

11 Unclear, *huk*- ‘one who always does something’ (Anderson et al., eds. 2013: sub voce)

When Asdiwal stays with the Sea-Lion-People and cures them from an epidemic, the interaction focuses on the chief of that people termed “chief” (*sm’oogyit*) or “master of the sea-lions” (Boas 1912: 133) (*miyaan t’iibn*). He is the only non-relative of some importance mentioned in the story.

The attention to the titles of the protagonists, thus, is characteristic for passages that cope with the establishing or confirmation of higher status by noble marriage or potlatch feasts. It can also be found in some encounters that have the potential to lead to higher status like the first meetings with his future wives or with the chief of the Sea-Lion-People. This brings about a high concentration of the explicit use of titles in the substantial passages of the narrative while in most other contexts kinship terms are preferred when identifying the protagonists.

Names

Even more important than titles are chiefly names. The concept of names is quite specific in Tsimshian society. As a Tsimshian depicted it: “People are nothing. They’re not important at all. It’s the names that are really real.” (quoted in Roth 2008: 30). Miller wrote: “Tsimshian say that people are given to the names rather than the reverse became [sic!¹²] the names are immortal and each can convey benefits to its ‘holder,’ who treats it with respect ...” (Miller 1998: 670) In this respect, “Tsimshians ... are embedded in cycles of transmigrating names: bodies in a lineage shift from name to name, ... so that social advancement and changes in status are inseparable from becoming the new person reified in the new name.” (Roth 2008: 4)

Therefore, names seemed to be so loaded with meaning and power that explicit reference by name is restricted to two persons only in the Asdiwal story: to the main protagonist Asdiwal (= Potlatch-Giver = Stone-Slinger) and to his father Hats’anas.¹³

Hats’anas, the name of a bird similar to a robin, is a pun on *hats’anaas* ‘good luck’ (Boas 1912: 72, line 29–32; 73). As mentioned before, the name Asdiwal puns on the verb *asdiwaal* ‘making mistakes.’¹⁴ Names like Asdiwal which indicate bad characteristics had been common at least in Gitksan culture to honor the bearer’s overcoming of that bad characteristic (Adams 1974: 174).

Like titles, names are used as landmarks for social advancement. Every time a new name was approved in a name-giving feast, the main protagonist is referred

12 Should be: because.

13 I exclude two more names mentioned in direct speech only when the master of the sea-lions sent messengers to borrow canoes from “Self-Stomach”/“All-Stomach” (Boas 1912: 132, line 18) and “Self-like-Sea-Lion” (Boas 1912: 138, line 24).

14 A related name *Asiwaalgit* is used to denominate a specific crest (*dzepk*) depicting a large supernatural bird in possession of the Kitsumkalum Ganhada house Xpilaxha (McDonald 2003: 85).

by this new, chiefly name in the story. Thus, he is first called “Asdiwal” (Boas 1912: 82–110) and later two names that were explicitly labelled as chiefly names in the text (see examples 2 and 3 above): “Potlatch-Giver” (*Waxayeewk* or *Waxayaawk*; Boas 1912: 110–142) and “Stone-Slinger” (*Dahukdzan*; Boas 1912: 142–144).

Locative Particles in the Story of Asdiwal

While all observations treated up to this point could have also been detected by a careful reading of Boas’s translation of the Asdiwal story, the following section will focus on the role and use of specific spatial orientation systems that are deeply inscribed in Sm’algyax and in the languages of the North Pacific Rim in general.¹⁵

Sm’algyax locative particles

The Tsimshianic languages possess an elaborated system of particles for specifying the locational aspects of objects or actions. This set of locative particles is by far the largest subgroup of particles in the Sm’algyax language. About sixty morphemes either refer to place or position of objects or actions or they indicate motion of objects or actions in relation to place or position (Dunn 1979: 41–45, Boas 1911: 300–312). Semantically, locative particles cover a wide range of meanings within the domain of spatial reference—these include rather abstract concepts as well as concrete ones. Some particles like *bax* ‘ascending’ vs. *yaga* ‘descending’¹⁶ form pairs of opposites. Movement particles are mostly used adverbially preceding the verbal predicate, e.g.

- 4 *Ada wil bax-yaa-t a lax-sga’niis-t*
 And then up-walk-he PREP on-mountain-DEM
 “and he [Stone-Slinger] went up the mountain.” (Boas 1912: 142, line 24; 143)

In addition, the orientation system of Sm’algyax comprises a number of specific particles for geographical and even for in-house movements (Dunn 1979: 43–45, Boas 1911: 300–312, Fortescue 2011a: 33–38), including:

15 Such orientation systems are found in most languages of the Pacific Northwest Coast and seem to be an areal characteristic of the North Pacific Rim (Fortescue 2011a, 2011b).
 16 There is also a second pair *man* ‘ascending (without surface contact)’ vs. *tkyi* ‘descending (without surface contact)’; distinguished from *bax* ‘ascending (with surface contact)’ and *yaga* ‘descending (with surface contact)’ by the semantic dimension of surface contact (Dunn 1979: 44–45).

1. geographic, coast-oriented
dzagm 'towards the shore (from the water)'
uks 'towards the sea'
2. geographic, river-oriented
k'ala 'upriver'
gyisi 'downriver'
3. domestic, settlement-oriented
na 'out of the woods behind the houses'
4. domestic, in-house¹⁷
t'm 'from rear to middle of the house'
asdi 'from the middle to the front of the house'
lagawk 'from the side of the house to the fire'

Although only few of the geographical particles, like *k'ala* 'upriver' vs. *gyisi* 'downriver,' can be categorized semantically as true opposites, a number of them verge on a sort of culturally oppositional understanding.

The movement particles *bax* 'up' and *yaga* 'down'

The particle *bax* 'up' and its opposite *yaga* 'down' occur frequently (18 and 24 times, respectively) throughout the text. Apparently they are used to describe the movements of the protagonists, in particular that of the main protagonist Asdiwal/Potlatch-Giver. For instance, when Asdiwal moves up into the mountains for hunting:

- 5 *Ada wil bax-yaa-t gisga sga'niis-tga*
 And then up-walk-he PREP mountain-DEM
 "and [Asdiwal] went up the mountain." (Boas 1912: 88, line 29; 89)

He went to the mountains, because his father-in-law desired mountain-goat meat:

- 6 *daat, meł-a hasag-ayu da dm-t bax-goo-da łams-u*
 dear(female) say-CON want-I PREP FUT-he up-go.somewhere-CON son.in.law-my
mati hu-waal-da da gyilhawli,
 mountain.goat PL-be-CON PREP in.the.woods
awil n-k'oomtg-a sami-m mati dil yeey-a mati
 because I-wish-CON meat-CON mountain.goat and fat-CON mountain.goat
 "My dear, say that I wish my son-in-law to go up for the mountain-goats there

17 In relation to this specific set of particles, it should be mentioned that, with the exception of hunting, during winter most activities took place inside the houses, including potlatches.

in the woods, because I desire mountain-goat meat and mountain-goat tallow.”
(Boas 1912: 88, line 20–22; 89)

His wife had warned him before about going to the mountain, so that the *bax* movement to the mountains is repeated four times in this short passage until Asdiwal finally decided to go up into the mountains for hunting. And on the next page *bax* is once more used when the heavenly throng wanted to see “who had gone up” (Boas 1912: 90, line 9; 91) (*bax* + *dawl* ‘leave, depart’).

The next concentration of *bax* can be found when Potlatch-Giver was invited by his brothers-in-law to go mountain-goat hunting. They left together:

- 7 *ada wil bax-waalxs-tga*
and then up-walk.PL-they
“They [i.e. Potlatch-Giver and his brothers-in-law] went up;” (Boas 1912: 116,
line 21; 117)

Potlatch-Giver succeeded in this contest. Therefore, in the next episode, the brothers-in-law wanted to go hunting in the sea while Potlatch-Giver still preferred to hunt in the mountains, once again moving *bax*:

- 8 *ada aldi wila bax-yaa-s Waxayaawk-ga lax-sga'niis-tga*
and EMPH then up-walk-CON <name>-DEM on-mountain-DEM
asga naa-ktga
PREP snowshoes-his
“Then Potlatch-Giver, on his part, went up the mountain on his snowshoes.”
(Boas 1912: 118, line 25–26; 119)
- 9 *ada gyik wil bax-yaa-s Waxayaawk gisga txal-hawli-tga*
and again then up-walk-CON <name> PREP touching-woods-DEM
ada gyik t'apxaad-a sa-ol-dit.
and again two.flat.objects-CON CAUS-hunt.bear-he
“Then Potlatch-Giver went up again into the woods, and he killed two bears.”
(Boas 1912: 122, line 6–7; 123)

It turned out that once again Potlatch-Giver was more successful, bringing back bears from both of his hunting trips. Later, when he joined his brothers-in-law hunting in the sea, they left him alone in a critical situation. After his rescue, he once again went into the mountainous inland:

- 10 *ada wila bax-yaa-tga asga gylhawli-ga*
and then up-walk-he PREP in.the.woods-DEM
“Then he [Potlatch-Giver] went inland.” (Boas 1912: 134, line 29; 135)

Later his wife also came inland (*bax + goo* ‘go somewhere’) (Boas 1912: 136, line 12) and both went further inland (*bax + waalxs* ‘walk,’ the suppletive plural of *yaa*) (Boas 1912: 136, line 18) to reach a lake.

One would expect that the particle *'yaga* ‘down,’ in contrast, refers to the act of coming back to the village and to the family from a hunting trip. But such incidents are not mentioned. One of the few occurrences of *'yaga* associated with a returning to a village can be found when Asdiwal, after courting the chief’s daughter, went to Ginaxangiik:

- 11 *da-t wila 'yaga-stuul-sga hana'ax-ga*
 and-he then down-accompany-CON woman-DEM
 “he [Asdiwal] accompanied the woman down (to the village)” (Boas 1912: 116, line 4–5; 117)

In the second example, Potlatch-Giver, after having killed his elder brothers-in-law, returned to stay with the last remaining, youngest brother-in-law:

- 12 *ni'nii da wil 'yaga-yaa-s Waxayaawk*
 that and then down-walk-CON <name>
 “Then Potlatch-Giver went down ...” (Boas 1912: 140, line 34–142, line 1; 141–143)

The following two examples demonstrate the use of *bax* ‘up’ and *'yaga* ‘down’ as a stylistic bracket for episodes. The first example connects the starting point of Asdiwal’s relation with the Sun Chief’s daughter to the first return to his new wife from a hunting trip, while the second example frames Potlatch-Giver’s creation of supernatural killer-whales:

- 13 *ada wil bax-yaa-t gisga sga'niis-tga*
 and then up-walk-he PREP mountain-DEM
ada wil sm-baa-s Asdiwaal-ga
 and then very-run-CON <name>-DEM
hoygyigad-a wil gyipaayg-a ts'u'uts'-it
 be.like-CON that fly-CON bird-DEM
 “and [Asdiwal] went up the mountain. Verily, Asdi-wā'l ran like a bird flying.” (Boas 1912: 88, line 29–30; 89)
Ada wil 'yaga-baa-s Asdiwaal gisga nagoox-tga
 and then down-run-CON <name> PREP before-CON
wadi-wil gyipaayg-a ts'u'uts'-it
 like-that fly-CON bird-DEM
 “Then Asdi-wā'l ran down as before, like a bird flying.” (Boas 1912: 94, line 12; 95)

- 14 *ada gyik wil 'yaga-dog-a n-sa'naaxld-it* [...]

and again then down-take.PL-CON which-make.killer.whale-DEM

“Then he took down again the killer-whales [...]” (Boas 1912: 138, line 18; 139)

da wila 'yaga-yaa-s Waxayaawk-ga

and then down-walk-CON <name>-DEM

ada uks-huutg-it gisga n-dzoog-sga aks-ga a xswat'axg-dit

and to.sea-call-he PREP POSS-edge-CON water-DEM PREP whistle-he-DEM

ada wil dzagm-hap-da 'naaxl-a awaa-tga

and then ashore-go.in.group-CON killer.whale-CON near-DEM

ada wila-t wulagm-bax-dox-tga

and then-he out.of.water-up-take-them

“After a while, Potlatch-Giver went down, stood near the water on the shore of the lake, and whistled. Then the killer-whales came ashore to him, and he took them up ashore.” (Boas 1912: 138, line 25–29; 139)

The last example can also serve to demonstrate that the use of *'yaga* is not restricted to motion of the protagonists, but includes in addition verb constructions like *'yaga-gaa* ‘take down.’ In the first part of the story, Asdiwal’s mother repeatedly brought back edible animals. At first, the supernatural Hats’an_as supplied her with small animals (Boas 1912: 74, line 5–15), but when greater animals showed up—consecutively a large porcupine, a beaver, and a mountain goat—this is expressed three times by the same *'yaga-gaa* ‘take down’ (Boas 1912: 74, line 20–76, line 2).

Concentrations of *'yaga* correlate with important incidents in the story, sometimes combining both aspects of motion and food placement. This can be seen in the sentences adjacent to Hats’an_as marriage; here, the last sentence emphasizes the role of Hats’an_as as the provider of the family:

- 15 *Da wila-t 'yaga-stuul-tga hana'ax-ga sup'as-m 'yuuta-ga*

and then-he down-accompany-CON woman-CON young-CON man-DEM

Ada wil-t naks-gisga lguwaalks-m hana'ax-ga

and then-he marry-CON princess-CON woman-DEM

dat wila-t 'yaga-dox-tga sup'as-m 'yuuta-ga na-yets'isk-set

and then-he down-take.PL-them young-CON man-DEM POSS-land.animal-DEM

“and the young man accompanied the women down. Then he married the princess, and the young man took down the animals.” (Boas 1912: 78, line 29–32; 79)

When Asdiwal/Potlatch-Giver took over the role of the provider of the family, verbal expressions including *'yaga* are used repeatedly when he brings back venison to his family, e.g.:

- 16 *Ada-t k'a-'yaga-t'al-ditga gu smgal-yikyey-m semi-t*
 and-he for.a.while-down-put-them who very-fat-CON bear-DEM
aam k'a-'yaga-ts'nl-doo-ditga gana 'yaga-xhuup'ltg-itga
 good for.a.while-down-leave.behind-put.down-them therefore down-until.night-he
 “Then he [Potlatch-Giver] carried them [bears] down, those which were fat
 bears; and he left some behind. Therefore he carried them down until night ...”
 (Boas 1912: 118, line 33–120, line 2; 119–121)

Once, Potlatch-Giver requested something of his wife:

- 17 *ndo'o ma 'yaga-goo-t wineey-a*
 go.ahead you down-go.somewhere-CON food-DEM
 “Go down for food.” (Boas 1912: 136, line 20; 137)

His wife left down (*'yaga-dawl*) for food, returning with much food (Boas 1912: 136, line 21–22; 137). In total, more than ten occurrences of different verbal expressions with *'yaga* refer directly to providing food.

A final concentration of *'yaga* ‘down’ can be found when Potlatch-Giver created killer-whales with his supernatural powers to defeat his brother-in-laws. This new usage starts immediately after the sentence quoted above, which still refers to providing food:

- 18 *Ada-t wil 'yaga-dox-t gisga ts'm-t'aa-ga*
 And-he then down-take.PL-them PREP in-lake-DEM
 “Then he took them [the killer-whales] down into the lake.” (Boas 1912: 136,
 line 29–30; 137)
- 14 *ada gyik wil 'yaga-dog-a n-sa'naaxld-it [...]*
 and again then down-take.PL-CON which-make.killer.whale-DEM
da wila 'yaga-yaa-s Waxayaawk-ga
 and then down-walk-CON <name>-DEM
 “Then he took down again the killer-whales [...] After a while, Potlatch-Giver
 went down,” (Boas 1912: 138, line 18–26; 139)

The particle *'yaga* is also interspersed to indicate motions or activities of minor protagonists, as in the case of the brothers-in-law who “took down their canoes” (Boas 1912: 138, line 29) (*'yaga-* + *txoo* ‘take a canoe to water’) which also helps to augment the concentration of the particle in specific passages.

In summary, the use of the pair of opposite particles *bax* and *'yaga* correlates with hunting. Game is attained in the mountains (*bax*) and, when the hunt was successful, the distribution (*'yaga*) of venison becomes an instrument of prosperity and fame.

Particles describing geographical movement

As mentioned above (: 130f.), particles indicating geographical movements group along several dimensions. For reasons of descriptive economy, river-oriented locative particles will be discussed first, followed by settlement-oriented ones and, at last, coast-oriented particles.

At the beginning of the narrative, the young noble-woman, who later became Asdiwal's mother, and her mother, a chieftainess, lived in different villages along the Skeena River described by the nouns *gyigyaani* 'place up the river' and *gye'ets* 'place down the river.' One of the respective directional particles is only used once, when the noble-woman says:¹⁸

- 19 *Dzila gyisi-yaa-i*
 when downriver-walk-I
 "when I shall go down the river" (Boas 1912: 70, line 17; 71)

When Asdiwal followed a bear to reach the Sun Chief, the particles *gyisi* 'downriver' and *na* 'out of the woods in rear of the houses' are quite prominent. The bear went down the river (*gyisi-yaa*), ran down the river (*gyisi-baa*) three times, but also came out of the woods (*na-baa*) twice (Boas 1912: 82, line 12–84, line 1). Later, Potlatch-Giver left the village of his mother after her death downriver (*gyisi*):

- 20 *Ada wil sta-gyisi-yaa-s Waxayaawk a gyisi-Ksiyaan-ga*
 and then steadily-downriver-walk-CON <name> PREP downriver-<name>-DEM
 "Then Potlatch-Giver continued to go down Skeena River." (Boas 1912: 114, line 17; 115)

There are no other occurrences of river-oriented particles that seem to be of relevance for the plot of the story.¹⁹

From the subset of settlement-oriented locative particles, only *na* 'out of the woods behind of the houses' is used in the text. It indicates several returns of Asdiwal/Potlatch-Giver from mountain-goat hunting, the first time when he returns to his first wife:

- 21 *Ada la na-baa-t gisga awaa naks-tga*
 and PAST out.of.woods-run-he PREP near wife-his
 "(Asdi-wā'l) went to his wife." (Boas 1912: 94, line 15; 95)

18 The context of this sentence reads: "I remember (think) when I meet my mother when I go down the river, ... then I shall eat food ..." (Boas 1912: 71).

19 The only occurrences of *k'ala*- 'upriver' refer to the people of *k'ala-Ksiyaan* "upriver Skeena" (Boas 1912: 80, line 14) and to Potlatch-Giver's brothers-in-law (Boas 1912: 120, line 28).

The particle *na* can be found next when Potlatch-Giver meets his future second wife for the first time:

- 22 *ada wila na-baa-t gisga k'üül-da*
 and then out.of.woods-run-he PREP one.object-CON
wil-dzox-sga galts'ab-a Ts'msyen-t
 where-live-CON village-CON Tsimshian.people-DEM
a wil-dzog-a Gyinaxangyiig-it
 PREP where-live-CON <name>-DEM
ada la dm na-baa-dit
 and near.FUT out.of.woods-run-he
da txal'waay-da k'üül-da lguyaaks-m hana'ax
 and meet-CON one.object-CON noble.person-CON woman
gisga txä-stuup'l-sga hu-walp-ga
 PREP place-rear.of.house-CON PL-house-DEM

“He [Potlatch-Giver] came out at a camp, a town of the Tsimshian, G'inaxangi'get. When he came out of the woods, he met a noble-woman behind the houses.” (Boas 1912: 114, line 18–20; 115)

The third and last occurrence takes place when Potlatch-Giver returned from a hunting trip to mountains while his brothers-in-law had come home empty-handed from their hunting trip to the sea:

- 23 *ada-t sa-na-baa-t gisga na-wil-dzox-tga*
 and-he suddenly-out.of.woods-run-CON PREP POSS-where-live-their
 “He [Potlatch-Giver] came of the woods at their camp.” (Boas 1912: 120, line 3; 121)

This particle, therefore, is not used often, but at important junctions of the narrative. Its use can also explain the asymmetry mentioned above (: 131ff.) between *bax* ‘up’ and *'yaga* ‘down’ with reference to hunting in the mountains, because the departure for the trip with *bax* is paralleled by *na* instead of *'yaga* ‘down.’

As might be expected, the coast-oriented locative particles *uks* ‘towards the sea’ and *dzagm* ‘towards the shore’ occur quite frequently in the passages narrating the hunting trips to the sea of Potlatch-Giver and of his brothers-in-law.

The particle *uks* ‘towards the sea’ is used several times to describe the direction of some of the minor participants in the story. Potlatch-Giver is only associated with *uks* ‘towards the sea’ in the context of sea-lion hunting (Boas 1912: 122, line 21; 132, line 8; 138, line 27–140, line 23):²⁰

20 There is also a 2x2 repetitive pattern when Asdiwal is first advised to summon the winds and later follows the advice (Boas 1912: 134, line 5–26). In the case of the East wind, the particle *uks* is used twice: “*Am-uks-gwaatk.*’ (East wind,) drive it seaward.” (Boas 1912: 134, line 13, 26; 135)

- 24 *Ada wagayt-uks-moxg-s Waxayaawk asga lguk'alaan-tgitga*
 and far-to.sea-go.aboard-CON <name> PREP brother.in.law-his
 “Then Potlatch-Giver went out to sea aboard (the canoe) of his little brothers-in-law” (Boas 1912: 122, line 21; 123)

The particle *dzagm* ‘towards the shore’ often describes the activities of Potlatch-Giver’s brothers-in-law (Boas 1912: 126, line 1–18; 132, line 8; 138, line 27–140, line 23). The repeated use of *dzagm* also includes requests when Asdiwal bids his brothers-in-law to go ashore:²¹

- 25 *Ndo'o, dzagm-ga-dawł-sm la aam wil 'li-t'aa-yut*
 go.ahead ashore-PL-leave-you.PL PAST good where on-sit-I
 “Go ashore and let me stay here!” (Boas 1912: 126, line 7; 127)
naat, ndo'o dzagm-dawł-nt
 dear(male) go.ahead ashore-leave-you
 “My dear, do go ashore!” (Boas 1912: 126, line 14–15; 127)

Due to Potlatch-Giver’s own request, his brothers-in-law leave him alone in a critical situation on a rock in the sea from which his father rescues him. Later in the story, they are killed by Potlatch-Giver by means of supernatural killer-whales—and in this episode *dzagm* shows up again frequently. The use of *yaga* ‘down’ in the same context was mentioned above in section 4.2.

Particles describing in-house movement

As set out before (: 126ff.), the Sm’algyax text is predominantly concerned with noble status and social advancement. This concern is manifested by repeated stereotypical references to potlatch feasts and to the confirmation of chiefly names, but also includes marriage. The first meetings with his future wives occur behind the house,²² thus shifting the location from the hunter’s domain, the uninhabited wilderness, to the space of social interaction and life, the village and the houses. Marriages create new alliances between noble families, thus ensuring status and regulating the access to new resources and noble regalia. In this respect they must be considered hotspots of status manipulation. While the first encounters with his future wives take place outside the house, the stage for family life is set inside the house of the chiefs. It

21 In the first sentence Potlatch-Giver addressed his brothers-in-law, in the second only the youngest brother-in-law who left him unwillingly: “*Ada sm-hagwil-dzagm-dawł-ga*—He left him, slowly going towards the shore.” (Boas 1912: 126, line 18–19; 127)

22 In the first case (Boas 1911: 86, line 21; 87), the locative particle *gyil* ‘behind’ is used, in the second (Boas 1911: 114, line 20; 115) *na-* ‘from out of the woods behind the house.’

may therefore be of interest to close the discussion with the set of domestic locative particles, and particularly with *t'm* 'from rear to middle of the house' which implies (pro)motion to the most privileged place in the rear of a noble house.

The first occurrence of *t'm* relates to the Sun Chief's acceptance of Asdiwal as his daughter's husband. While Asdiwal was sitting down at the place of the guests on the other side of the fire, the Sun Chief asked his daughter to sit near Asdiwal:

26 *lguulg-i suuna t'm-yaa-n*

child-my better rear.of.house-walk-you

ada t'aa-n a awaa wil t'aa-ditga lguwaalks-aga gwa'a
and sit-you PREP near where sit-CON prince-DEM this

ada dm-t naksg-n
and FUT-he marry-you

ada wil t'm-yaa-sga lguwaalks-m hana'ax-ga
and then rear.of.house-walk-CON princess-CON woman-DEM

ada wil-t sil-t'aa-t gisga sup'as-m 'yuuta-ga
and then-she together-sit-CON PREP young-CON man-DEM

“My child, you may come towards the fire and sit down where this prince is sitting. He shall marry you.’ Then the princess went towards the fire and sat down with the young man.” (Boas 1912: 86, line 29–33; 87)

The next occurrence marks the culmination point of the test motive. Asdiwal has already proven a successful hunter in several tests, when his father-in-law initiated a final test: sitting on hot stones in the chief's house. Asdiwal's wife refused her father's request to order Asdiwal to the dangerous seat. He asked his daughter twice, finally asking Asdiwal himself to go near the fire:

27 *daat, gun-t'm-yaa naks-n, la lamk-a loop [...]*

dear(female) CAUS-rear.of.house-walk husband-your PAST hot-CON stone

“My dear, order your husband to go to the fire, the stones are hot.’ [...]”

(Boas 1912: 102, line 20–27; 103)

ada gyik hatsiksm haw-sga sm'oogyit
and again again speak-CON chief

asga-t t'm-huutg-isga lams-tga
PREP-he rear.of.house-call-CON son.in.law-his

“Then the chief spoke again and called his son-in-law to the fire.”

(Boas 1912: 102, line 31–104, line 1; 103–105)

In the third and final occurrence, the Sun Chief, finally, allocated Asdiwal the prestigious seat in the rear of the house in admittance of Asdiwal's superior power. The Sun Chief said to his entourage:

- 28 *T'm-yaa-n* *lams-utga*
 rear.of.house-walk-CAUS son.in.law-my
Ada ma dm t'aa-n-t gisga stuup'l-a
 and you FUT sit-CAUS-him PREP rear.of.house-DEM
Ada wil t'm-yaa-s Asdiwaal-ga
 and then rear.of.house-walk-CON <name>-DEM
Ada t'aa-t gisga stuup'l-ga dił naks-tga
 And sit-he DEM rear.of.house-DEM and wife-his

“My son-in-law shall go to the fire. Make him sit in the rear of the house.’

Then Asdi-wā'1 went to the fire and sat down with his wife in the rear of the house.” (Boas 1912: 106, line 17–20; 107)

In the sentence immediately following, the chief admits that Potlatch-Giver had “really greater supernatural power” than he himself, and the text continues: “Now he liked his son-in-law much, and he respected him.” (Boas 1912: 106, line 20–24; 107)

The message to the audience of these highly repetitive sections of the story is that Asdiwal has proven powerful enough to withstand the dangers of a chiefly position. The fire and hot stones and Asdiwal’s position relative to the fire can be considered symbolic for the perils of such a position.

There is another passage in the text that refers to the placement of Potlatch-Giver in the house. Although *t'm* is not present because no motion was involved, the sentence describes the preparations of the Sea-Lion-People for the invitation of Potlatch-Giver. They indicate his status as a specially honored chiefly guest who sits on mats in the most privileged place in the house:

- 29 *Ada-t wil baal-a sgan-tga*
 and-they then spread-CON mat-DEM
adm-t t'aa-d-it a nastoo walp-t a dzoga-lag-it
 so.that-they sit-CAUS-him PREP side house-DEM PREP edge-fire-DEM

“Then they spread out mats for him to sit down on one side of the house close to the fire.” (Boas 1912: 128, line 30–31; 129)

There are also three occurrences of *lagawk* ‘from the side of the house to the fire.’ The first and the last seem obviously to refer to some sort of magical / ritual practice expressed by the verb *lagawk-huutk* ‘call, summon towards the fire.’ The first request leads to the resurrection of a slave by the chief’s daughter stepping over the bones (Boas 1912: 98–101). The latter describes a sacrifice of Potlatch-Giver’s wife:

- 30 *ada wila-t lagawk-huutg-itga sm'oogyit-ga naks Asdiwaal-ga*
 and then-he to.fire-call-CON chief-DEM wife <name>-DEM
 “Then the chief called towards the fire the wife of Asdi-wā'1,” (Boas 1912: 98, line 31; 99–101)

- 31 *ada al la sga'nag-a lagawk-huutg-a wineey-t dil yee-t* [...]

and EMPH NEG long.time-CON to.fire-call-CON food-her and fat-her

adm wila da'axlg-da naks-da dzabdab-dit

so.that then be.able-CON husband-her make.PL-he

“and (his wife) did not stop for a long time putting food and fat [...] into the fire

as a sacrifice, that her husband might succeed;” (Boas 1912: 138, line 13–17; 139)

In the second occurrence, cited above in 31, the text repeats the chief’s request, shifting from *t'm* and the daughter’s perspective (“your husband” *naks-n*) to *lagawk* and the chief’s perspective (“my son-in-law” *lams-u*). One may speculate that *lagawk* alludes to the magical / supernatural purpose of the chief’s order:

- 32 *daat, gun-t'm-yaa naks-n, la lamk-a loop* [...]

dear(female) CAUS-rear.of.house-walk husband-your PAST hot-CON stone

gun-lagawk-yaa lams-ut wa lamk-a loop-t

CAUS-to.fire-walk son-in-law-my when hot-CON stone-DEM

“My dear, order your husband to go to the fire, the stones are hot.’ [...]

‘Order my son-in-law to go to the fire while the stones are hot.’”

(Boas 1912: 102, line 20–27; 103)

All passages showing *t'm* are concerned with the placement of Asdiwal in a chief’s house.²³ Starting from the position as a guest, Asdiwal/Potlatch-Giver achieves a chiefly seat in the respective houses which is repeatedly expressed by the particle *t'm*. The use of *t'm* most frequently correlates with the first marriage when the main protagonist still bore the name Asdiwal. It seems therefore obvious that the frequent use of the particle *t'm* has been triggered by implicit association with its opposite *asdi* that can be used for motion in the front part of the house. The only occurrence of the particle *asdi*, however, is in a non-locative meaning when his first wife advises Asidwal

- 33 *ma asdiwaan-gn adzi da waa-n*

you make.a.mistake-possibly if then do-you

“You will make a mistake if you do.” (Boas 1912: 88, line 24; 89)

The punning with the particle *asdi*—either in the name Asdiwal or in the verb *asdi-waal* ‘to make a mistake’—, can consequently not be considered as an explicit binary opposition.

23 There is one more occurrence that does not fit into this line of argumentation, when the Chief of the Sea-Lion people said: “*t'm-gaa na-lip-xsoo-yut*”—‘Take my own canoe to the fire.’” (Boas 1912: 132, line 29)

Implications for an interpretation based on locative particles

Lévi-Strauss acknowledged the relevance of locative particles in the Tsimshianic languages (Lévi-Strauss 1967: 42, 46) and identified geographical movement as part of a scheme of binary oppositions in the story (Lévi-Strauss 1967: 17–20). But the findings originating from the text itself, based on the locative particles, do not fit many aspects of Lévi-Strauss's analysis. Of course, this cannot be understood as a refutation of his analysis, because he explicitly denied the relevance of the content and the plot of a narrative for his kind of more general analyses (Lévi-Strauss 1955: 85–86).

The obvious main concern of the text is social advancement that can be achieved by successful hunting and by marrying women of supernatural or royal ancestry. Although several locative particles would be well-suited for this purpose, no explicit binary oppositions seem to be at work via these particles. Nevertheless, some particles help to orchestrate central issues of the plot of the story. Furthermore, it seems plausible that the repetitive and clustered use of selected particles was the intentional choice of the author / narrator as, in comparison with the other texts in Boas's 1912 collection, locative particles of the geographic and house-oriented subtype are almost twice as frequent in the story of Asdiwal.

The opposite particles *bax* 'up' and *'yaga* 'down' both serve to highlight hunting in the mountains, the former used when Asdiwal/Potlatch-Giver leaves for a hunting trip, the latter when he distributes the resulting venison. The opposites *uks* 'seaward' and *dzagm* 'ashore' help to illustrate the conflict between Potlatch-Giver (*uks*) and his brothers-in-law (*dzagm*).

In the social domain, the particle *'yaga* 'down' serves as a marker for the distribution of venison. The particle *na* 'from the woods to the rear of the houses' characterizes the return of the successful hunter from the wilderness to the social domain, but also his appeal as a potential spouse. The in-house locative particle *t'm* 'from rear to middle of the house' indicates the achievement of chiefly status, and, in the episode of Asdiwal's test by hot stones, also the dangers of that status. The particle *asdi*, although used sometimes as some sort of opposite of *t'm*, does not occur in this locative function in the text, but only once in *asdiwaal* 'making a mistake.' This punning with the name Asdiwal can well be understood as a reference to the overcoming of the characteristics of *asdi* by establishing a *t'm*-like position in the rear part of the house, the place for the highest members of a noble family.

While most locative particles seem inconspicuous, more investigation is needed to achieve a fair understanding of the text, the more so as spatial configurations are also expressed by some nouns as, e.g., *stuup'l* 'rear of house' or *gyigyaani* 'upriver location; the interior' or by the various verbs of motion. Moreover, spatial metaphors most probably are not the exclusive source for culture-specific narrative symbolism.

Conclusions

Using the well-known Asdiwal story, I have tried to demonstrate the usefulness of studies of narratives that rely on a linguistic analysis of the text in the source language. If one approaches texts in such a way, the analysis will focus on the peculiarities of the respective linguaculture and on the specific situation of elicitation as well as on the author or narrator. A careful look at the structure, wording and grammar of the original text reveals narrative mechanisms which may be overlooked in the translation. It also minimizes the risk of biased summaries and interpretations. All operations can be uncovered via direct grammatical representations of the intentions of the author or narrator in a way that leaves little room for arbitrariness. As a linguist I trust in the original Sm'alg̃ax wording and, therefore, based my selection for interpretation from this source. Therefore, I appraise the social role of the *adawx* as the key to the interpretation and consider locative particles like *t'm* and others as intentional indicators for the focal points of the Asdiwal story.

Of course, the present study offers a quite literal type of partial interpretation. It is not intended to cast doubt upon the relevance of universalistic myth analyses or upon the decisive impulse to this field that originated from Lévi-Strauss. Not only are binary oppositions an important aspect of narrative structure, but it would also be unwise to ignore that there are many stories within a story and, of course, from a universalist mythographer's point of view behind or beyond all stories. And the story of Asdiwal is far from having being told to its end. Therefore, nothing could be more adequate than closing this article with the modesty formulated by Anderson, taking up the punning on the name Asdiwal: "It is ironic that the name of the hero in the text that has so captivated our discipline puns on 'making a mistake,' because we have certainly made a lot of mistakes in trying to understand it." (Anderson 2004: 120)

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