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5 OWLS, SASQUATCH AND TSUN' DYE: UNCOVERING INDIGENOUS ENGLISHES THROUGH ORAL STORYTELLING

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Introduction

As part of a large scale process of language contact and change, one that has been underway in North America since the 15th century, many Aboriginal people[1] in Canada have come to speak English, either mono- or bilingually. This has resulted in a plethora of mostly unstudied varieties, or dialects[2], which I refer to here as First Nations English. These are "shaped by the cultural patterns of communication, by phenomena associated by languages in contact, and by the linguistic features of Indigenous languages" (Ball and Berndhardt 2008: 573). Research into these varieties, their features, origins and setting in society has only barely begun in Canada, partially due to the lack of access and overall difficulty of conducting research in First Nations communities. This difficulty is the result of several circumstances. One major problem is that the dialects are focused on reserves, which are often in remote and isolated areas. Aboriginal peoples have responded to the intrusion of colonialism and the ever-advancing Northern frontier by retreating further and further away (Brody 1981), and many reserves are even now located away from major population centres and suffer from a lack of infrastructure that makes travel to and from them difficult. Furthermore, the status of the history of research on First Nations communities and cultures, as well as the cultural gap between First Nations peoples and the researchers, who typically come from an Anglo-European cultural background, have compounded the difficulty. The history of work in anthropology and linguistics with First Nations in Canada is often fraught with dangers and pitfalls created by a background of colonialist and racist attitudes. Many researchers, even those who were genuinely working for the benefit of their informants, still fell prey to the condescending attitudes of their time.

The history of anthropology and linguistics in this context is one of unfortunate and blatant intrusiveness into other people's lives. Although not every anthropologist and linguist who has worked with First Nations (or other communities) has done

1 Aboriginal is a term encompassing Inuit, First Nations and Métis groups in Canada. First Nations in itself refers to many culturally and linguistically distinct bands, each with their own history.

2 I will use both terms interchangeably here. Some researchers prefer the term "variety", feeling that "dialect" still carries negative connotation. However, I feel that it is important to recognize the validity of the term, along with the validity of the linguistic groupings it refers to.

so solely for personal benefit, research in First Nations communities has very often suffered from the taint of Eurocentrism, as researchers often adopted a position of superior intellectual privilege (Zinga et al. 2009) and worked from the assumption of European culture as the default system (Sterzuk 2011). The fundamental problem was the conducting of research *on*, rather than *with* Aboriginal communities (Zinga et al. 2009). Many Aboriginal communities remain skeptical of researchers and their claims of mutual benefit.

A schism exists between the cultural perceptions of First Nations members and those researchers who have been raised and trained in the norms of Anglo-European cultural standards. The latter values objectivity, empirical evidence and the success of the individual. Although there are, of course, variations from nation to nation and beyond, an overall attitude of industrial production, the desire for progress and finding value in material items, and personal ownership can be seen. While First Nations cultures in Canada are by no means monolithic, and vary considerably across North America, there is overall a series of vital differences between First Nations and white settler cultures. Many First Nations cultures value self reliance, but also see a person as an intrinsic member of the group, and often reach decisions by group consensus (Brody 1981). Indigenous worldviews are increasingly recognized as legitimate knowledge systems by academic institutions (Battiste and Henderson 2009). This growing recognition extends to First Nations epistemology and cultural networks, including oral history.

Authenticity in Fieldwork

I conducted six weeks of fieldwork in Northern British Columbia, studying the history and use of Witsuwit'en English, one of many varieties of FNEs in Canada. The Witsuwit'en[3] have lived in the region now called the Bulkley Valley for over 5 500 years (Morin 2011). Their traditional territories straddle two intangible borders. The first is the linguistic border between Dene-Athabaskan languages spoken across the Prairies and a plethora of languages in Western and coastal British Columbia (Morin 2011). The second is the cultural boundary that also helps distinguish the Aboriginal groups on coastal B.C. and the Prairies. The Witsuwit'en originally migrated into the region and adopted many customs from the nearby Gitxsan people. This included survival methods, as well as the northwest coast feast system and many corresponding linguistic items (Hargus 2007). The Witsuwit'en adopted the clan and feast system of the Gitxsan and altered it to suit to their needs (Morin 2011). Just under 3000 Witsuwit'en Band members live throughout the Bulkley Valley, and Moricetown is the largest of

3 The English orthography of this word varies from source to source. I follow the orthography of Sharon Hargus, who has studied Witsuwit'en grammar and phonology extensively and is the leading researcher on the topic.

the six reserves, with around 2000 registered Band members.[4] Less than 140 fluent Witsuwit'en speakers are left in these communities, with under a hundred people having some understanding or are learning (First Peoples' Heritage Language and Culture Council 2016). No children have been able to learn their ancestral language. The entire community has shifted to English over the last three generations.

When preparing for my field work within Moricetown in 2014, I was struck by the contrast between the typical setup of sociolinguistic fieldwork (see below) and the modes of cultural interaction described in publications concerning Aboriginal culture and communication in Canada. The standard format of a Labovian style sociolinguistic interview is very problematic when it comes to working in First Nations communities and is not only likely to be inappropriate, but even detrimental to the interview process and results. A second consideration of mine, one that is more widely problematic in sociolinguistics, was the issue of *authenticity*. The goal of any linguistic interview is to record speech acts that can be considered "real" and "authentic", and can therefore be used for linguistic analysis and to assess various hypotheses about the speaker and the speech community. The veracity of our publications relies heavily on the idea that linguists and their methods can access something that can be considered authentic, real speech. And yet it is acknowledged that truly uncensored, honest speech is not always obtainable, especially when one conducts one's research in an ethical manner (Bucholtz 2003). This leads to the observer's paradox (Labov 1972), an inherent problem created when the researcher needs to be present to observe authentic speech, but through their presence, informants become aware of being observed and alter their speech in both subtle and dramatic ways. So what is meant by the term "authentic", and how can we create situations where informants can give us material that may be considered authentic?

The concept of authenticity "underwrites nearly every aspect of sociolinguistics" (Bucholtz 2003: 398). The idea of *real language* and language use remains a central concept and stands in contrast to the idealism of Chomskyan linguistics (Bucholtz 2003). Sociolinguistics can only claim empirical validity when the research is based on data collected in "authentic contexts by authentic speakers" (Bucholtz 2003). For some researchers, the concept of authenticity is a "conceptual error" that should be set aside, a "pseudo-concept" and even unattainable or illusionary (Coupland 2014). Anthropology has also had its share of struggles over authenticity. Although a single chapter is far too short to deal with the concept in its entirety, there are some things that can be discussed briefly. Certainly, we should avoid ideas of finding one's true self or true data amongst unconquered natives (Theodossopoulos 2013). Western anthropology has already made the mistake of connecting the authentic to the exotic and the

4 More information about the Witsuwit'en can be found on the community's webpage, The Office of the Wet'suwet'en. For information on their history and culture, I rely on their own text book, Niwhts'ide'ni Hibi'it'en: The Ways of Our Ancestors Witsuwit'en History & Culture Throughout the Millennia.

Other (Theodossopoulos 2013). This has a doubly negative effect of de-authenticating Western society and any community that has been influenced by it, further devaluing any people whose culture has been forcibly eliminated or altered by colonialism. By this definition, only cultures uncontaminated by modernity can be authentic (Theodossopoulos 2013). Salvage linguistics carries with it the unfortunate viewpoint that as speakers move away from their ancestral languages or lifestyles, they are shifting away from an authentic past (Bucholtz 2003), and somehow losing authenticity and veracity in the process. Salvage linguistics was concerned with recording as much language as possible from dying languages, a belated reaction to the attempted assimilation of Aboriginal peoples into colonial society (Sterzuk 2011; Villagas 2009), and an attempt to preserve knowledge in the wake of attacks on Indigenous realms of knowledge and traditions (Villagas 2009). Much of this anthropological work was also carried out during or after massive epidemics that severely reduced First Nations populations, when it was assumed First Nations people had no future beyond assimilation and extinction. Material was collected for preservation and study, rather than transmission to the next generation. A culture whose bubble has been popped by Western European contact can never be the same, and salvage anthropologists can only hope to pick up a few remaining pieces for preservation. From this viewpoint, authenticity is equated with purity, isolation and stagnation. A culture's value can only be found in its past life, and the anthropologist's task is to search for the genuine article amidst the junk heap of the modern world. Modern anthropology and linguistics must learn to discard these concepts and begin working with First Nations people in the context of the present and future possibilities.

When we shift paradigms and begin to view authenticity as something that people can claim (Eckert 2014) and perform in order to claim, rather than a state of possession of qualities that define an enduring category (Eckert 2014), we can recognize authenticity as plastic and malleable. Authenticity is not a natural given quality; it is a means by which communities shape their identities in an active fashion (Coulmas 2014). Authenticity is something enacted daily in speech acts performed in social settings. Under this new paradigm, research methodology needs to be altered to include First Nations participants as research partners, and in ways that "respect the communities' culture and goals" (Ball and Berndhardt 2008: 582). Decolonizing research means giving up the title of "expert" and recognizing that "important knowledge and perspectives are held by the people whose behaviour the university-based researcher wishes to understand" (ibid.). The comfort and security of the participant should also be taken into account. We must take "the well-being of the people participating in the research" (ibid.) to heart. The interviewer must be involved in the process, not removed. The idea that "face-to-face contacts need to be made to enable trusting relationships and reciprocal learning about language, culture, knowledge systems, and practices" (Ball and Berndhardt 2008) flies against the concepts of Western scholarly practice, but it is nonetheless necessary for research in linguistics and anthropology

to move forward. We should consider the applications of research results, and how we turn can aid the community who has helped us. Data should be shared in a way that is relevant and understandable to the community. In addition to possible indirect or altruistic outcomes, the research results should offer direct benefits to the participants (ibid.). It is no longer enough to research for the mere sake of research. It is also important to identify First Nations community members' perspectives on their English dialect (ibid.).

Storywork and Fieldwork

The primary focus of my interviews was to record oral responses from participants and to give them as much choice as possible in deciding what to tell me. It was emphasized that there were no right or wrong answers, but that participants were free to tell any stories they knew, or give opinions on current events. The authentic narrative thus encompasses the lives of the present, not only the distant and mythological past. Speakers, regardless of their fluency in Witsuwit'en, were given an opportunity to tell me about their lives. Indeed, in regards to investigating Witsuwit'en English, fluency in the ancestral language is no longer the sole index of authenticity. Rather than falling into salvage linguistics and conducting interviews that attempt to save history, reconstructing a time before European contact (Bucholtz 2003), my interviews attempted to acknowledge the legitimacy of both the past and the present.

Many of the assumptions Anglo-Europeans make about speaker interaction ring false in situations dominated by speakers with First Nations backgrounds. The structure of Labovian interviews, with their reading lists and text samples, may be inappropriate for First Nations people. The initial emphasis on reading from a word list may cause difficulty, as many First Nations speakers, especially the elderly, are not literate, or have had very negative experiences in the Canadian school system (Leap 1993). Not only do First Nations Peoples speak a distinct variety of English with unique phonological and syntactic properties, they also have different expectations of social situations and of how a group of speakers will interact with and respond to each other (Leap 1993). One of the primary differences is that First Nations cultures are primarily oral, not literary, cultures. While the medium of print and the ability to read are highly valued in Anglo-American cultures (Coulmas 2014), First Nations cultures remain oriented on the transmission of culture via storytelling and face-to-face communication. The supremacy of the oral word in First Nations communities should not be underestimated, along with accompanying value on face-to-face communication. While written languages can help demarcate boundaries of nationalism (Coulmas 2014), oral languages without written standards remain fluid and dynamic.

Atleo describes how Elders do storywork at the level of principle so that people could imagine themselves in and through the story (Atloe and Fitznor 2010). Story-

work—the combination of the story, the storyteller and the listener (Friesen 2009), is also referenced in helping to integrate Indigenous knowledge into Anglo-European education curriculums. Oral story-telling may also be a source of knowledge to scientists. In fact, during the time I was doing my fieldwork in British Columbia, a Parks Canada expedition located the wreck of the HMS Erebus, one of the two ships that attempted to find the Northwest Passage under the leadership of Sir John Franklin. Inuit oral history was instrumental in locating the Erebus (News 2014). Indigenous knowledge has survived colonialism and is increasingly being valued by both Aboriginal people and researchers who are coming from the starting point of an Anglo-European knowledge system (Battiste and Henderson 2009). Iwama's paper on Two-Eyed Seeing notes how researchers reproduce the orality of Elders' narratives, and discusses the usage of puppets in oral story telling to transmit legends and initiate healing in Mik'maq legends (Iwana et al. 2009). Oral histories have played an important role in the healing process for individuals and communities who have suffered through residential schools (Atloe and Fitznor 2010). It has been noted, for instance, that Cree authors' writings often favour the realization of their oral dialect over the rules of written Standard Canadian (Gingell 2010).

While heritage languages and language contact are often considered to be the primary influence on First Nations Englishes (Ball and Berndhardt 2008; Leap 1993), the emphasis on oral information over written sources may also have implications for morpho-syntax. In a study conducted by Ball and Berndhardt on First Nations English speakers, one participant reported that First Nations children in her community would often string together phrases without the use of conjunctions as expected in standard English, and instead used "gestures and vocal emphasis to highlight new information" (Ball and Berndhardt 2008). Storytelling may also be nonlinear and not follow the conventions of Western story-telling (Leap 1993). In Ute storytelling, for example, a nonlinear, non-chronological style of topic development is used, and connections are implied, but not explicit, requiring the listener to make the mental connections themselves (Leap 1993). For the Dene in Alaska, "the best telling of a story is the briefest" (Ball and Berndhardt 2008: 582) and this storytelling works on the assumption of shared community knowledge (Ball and Berndhardt 2008). Many cultures emphasize not the accuracy or detail of the information relayed in the story, but the way that the story is told (Leap 1993).

Witsuwit'en Oral History

Stories are essential to Witsuwit'en culture. *Cin k'ikh*, the Witsuwit'en oral history, "reflects our view that the world is as one, with no divisions between the spirit, animal and human worlds" (Morin 2011). *Cin k'ikh* not only perform the function of transmitting traditions and morals, they are integral to Witsuwit'en society, and were

previously acted out at feasts. Masks and costumes were used to make *cin k'ikh* come alive before the community. They were an integral part of the *balhats*, the great feasts where individuals took chief names and acted out the stories pertaining to clan crests, or *niwhnitsiy* (Morin 2011). Story telling is still an important part of preparing to take a chief name and serves as a method of indirect instruction to transmit norms of social behavior and explain the system of reciprocity that is so integral to the societies that use the feast system.

Many stories also reference specific locations in the region, and help to directly tie the people to the unchanging land of the *yin tah*, or territories (Morin 2011). Many of these stories also embody Traditional Ecological Knowledge. Other *cin k'ikh* demonstrate the value of community responsibility, generosity, and the importance of acknowledging the sacrifice of animal lives for human benefit. *C'idede* are teaching stories that focus on the relationships between animals and people and the importance of following through with respect and traditions to prevent disasters (Morin 2011). For instance, the story of the "The Orphan Boy Who Became A Culture Hero" (Jenness 1934) demonstrates the importance of these stories, when a young boy learns the secret of a noblewoman who hunts porcupines, and is successful because he has absorbed knowledge from his grandmother: "She taught him by means of folktales all the ancient lore: to be honest, to observe what was permitted and what was prohibited, and to train himself in all necessary pursuits."

The Stories

The interview began with me explaining my research project and obtaining oral consent to continue. I then asked a series of questions about the region and the town, and linguistic awareness ("Do you think people in Moricetown speak differently than people in Smithers?") as a warm up, which sometimes led to further comments. After this first part, my role shifted to that of a listener. Using the framework of storywork, my strategy was to take the role of the learner: "Tell me a story about your people". Acknowledging my status as an outsider and a learner put me in a more suitable position to ask questions about Witsuwit'en customs. It also gave the participants the opportunity to speak for as long as they wanted, on any topic they wanted. They were not obligated to provide right/wrong answers. By taking this viewpoint, I was able to record long, unbroken sections of spoken text, detailing cultural events such as feasts, ghost stories and spirit sightings. These stories offer relatively unbroken narratives of events held to be true, occurring at various times in the past, concerning individuals, both living and dead. The following stories not only contain important cultural information; they demonstrate the features of Witsuwit'en English in use. Although some individuals did reduce the "opacity" of their dialect for my benefit, and admitted as much, during my fieldwork I was able to attend several community events, and the

dialect I heard spoken around me is adequately reflected in the recorded data. It was more difficult to decide how to transcribe select portions of the recordings. A great deal of paralinguistic information, such as gestures, was lost in the recording process, as I was only making audio, not visual recordings. In the end, it may prove impossible to create transcriptions that convey the authenticity of the interview, so removed are they from the reality of their performance as acts of authenticity.

The dialogue has been transcribed verbatim, without any editing for "correctness" a set forth in any written standard for of English. Discourse markers such as *um* and *uh* have been included, along with pauses, indicated by commas. Conventional orthography is maintained, with deleted consonants being marked in curved brackets and substituted phonemes shown in in straight brackets, to maintain textual coherency, while additional phonetic transcriptions will be supplied in text as they are discussed. Shifts in clause structure are marked with commas, and clauses that change topic are separated with a full stop for ease of reading. The choice of where to create full stops is dependent on the pauses in the interviews and whether or not they are continuing from a previous topic. As the transcriber, I try to strike a balance between ease of reading and relaying how the story was told, including real-time amendments from the speaker. Finally, names have been changed to protect the identity of the informants. All the participants below are female, Cora and Laura are Elders.

The following texts describe, like many First Nations stories, interactions between human and animals. First there an encounter with a family of sasquatches, then a talking owl, then *tsun' dye*, or otter spirits, and finally the story of a woman who became a frog. Only the last story involving the frog takes place in the time beyond living memory.

> **Sally:** He took, he like(d) being the father of Moricetown. When he buried somebody he said that in short, he said when he buried somebody they go up there and they notice(d) the bodies were missing, the one that they just buried up in the graveyard there, know what they were missing so what he did, and figured the only way they could find out who was doing it was they buried him, made it so that he could breathe and everything in the box, he took some, like bread crumbs or whatever, but a trail to make sure he could find his way back, sure enough they said that thing dug him out and started draggin(g) him up the mountain here. They said there's a cave up here. Father said he notice(d) that he was being drag by something in the bushes so he'd leave little bread crumbs so if he got away he would know which way to come back so when he got there he notice(d) that there was a family of them, woman little one.

> **Cora:** No no, it's a(n) Indian doctor and then he heard that and then a same area then a owl come to him and uh talk to him in Witsuwit'en. /D/ee owl jump up on the tree but our tradition says you cannot answer back the owl. A Fort Saint James lady told me the same thing, its their tradition too. You

can't talk back to the owl and keep talking, the owl will keep going going going and if you stop the owl beat you, you gonna die, that's why you don't answer the owl no matter where you are. That's what they told us when we were kids. I thought it was fun, we were copying the owl here after that they tol(d) us not to do that answer it back, um, that owl jump(ed) on the tree and dad was under the tree, he was spending the night there fire going col(d) and uh de owl tol(d) him (Witsuwit'en) pass(ed) away back home and then the owl said you got one martin in your trap ahead and dad said sure enough in the morning he was heading out on the trail, (h)ees first trap had martin in it an um dad had to stop this owl from talking, he said to him (speaks in Witsuwit'en) fly away or I'll shoot you. That's in Witsuwit'en that that owl he listen(ed) he flew away cause dad didn't wanna talk back anymore and it did fly away. This is true story of the owl speaking Witsuwit'en to dad telling him someone died back home, and when he got home it was true, the owl was messenger delivered the news to dad while he's out in the bush.

Anna: Well they used to talk about tsun'dyes how they can turn into humans or they can turn into anything what they wanna be, an(d) I remember that as a kid there was me my sister, my brother an(d) a couple of our cousins. We used to run across the bridge over there by the canyon an(d) we used to go down to this house where they'd uh always give us snacks and candies an it was Molly's place that's when she used to be with that Arnold guy. She used to lived (d)own there an I remember as a kid we were makin(g) it home too late, it was dark we got stuck in the middle of the bridge an(d) there's four tsun' dyes. We were all huddled together an(d) I was the oldest one there so I was tryna protect them an(d) they wouldn't let us off the bridge and that was the scariest time, after that we quit going across to the to that house after that. It it was like ol(d) people standing one each corner and /d/ey, /d/ey looked scary to, no no they blocked us on the bridge on the middle of the bridge. No they're jus(t) standing there looking at us and we're all too scared to move. We stood there for like uh maybe an hour or two hours and then we just all huddle(d) together an we're all cryin(g) an(d) finally I looked up an(d) I said they're gone they're gone let's go round so we started running we started running.

Laura: They told me lotta stories, now that I'm getting older I'm forget-tin(g). There was a story long time ago I guess you gotta all. Ever tell you did anybody tell you that there were the a young girl turn(ed) into a frog an(d) it happen(ed) right in Moricetown eh? Girl disappeared and year uh the grand-daughter she turn(ed) into a frog, a, yeah and they turn(ed) into frog and they use to live in smokehouse. They kick(ed) kicked that frog out, that frog keep coming back they didn't know it was their daughter that vanished turn into frog hmm gee I forgot the rest mhm and /d/ere's another thing that you can-

> not uh when you alone in the bush you never think of your anybody like a boyfriend that uh what they call it, how do you say tsun' dye in Engli/s/, otter otter that can turn into into anything like could be like your boyfriend standing there that's why they gotta ha/b/e a whip, they always see one down the canyon, yeah sounds like a uh yeah one time uh me and mum were in the bush trapping settin(g) trap and /d/en we heard like a lady cryin(g) somewhere, I said how could somebody got los(t) here and um said that might be the uh otter that turns into tryin(g) to make you go towards them I think.

Analysis

In the above transcriptions, the variation in syntax and morphology that distinguishes Witsuwit'en English from other more standardized English varieties can clearly be seen. In these passages, we can observe how the features of Witsuwit'en English play out systemically. The phonology of this English variety allows more variation than standard Canadian English. Consonant clusters are reduced in coda sequences. In the case of Paula's story, we see the deletion of [d] in consonant clusters [ld]. In all texts, we find that the velar nasal [ŋ], especially, is changed into alveolar nasal [n]. The last is a feature frequently found in non-standard English varieties (Kortmann and Lunkenheimer 2013) and in casual speech world-wide consonant cluster reduction was noted by Leap to be present in every variety of Native American and Canadian English he studied (1993). In Laura's interview, voiced fricatives become plosives, as in [deɪ] for *they*, the [v] in *have*, while the voiceless fricative [ŋ] becomes the voiceless sibilant [s]. Both the onset and the coda consonant in the syllable may be affected. Some of this may be the result of native Witsuwit'en phonology; for instance, the voiced and voiced and unvoiced interdental fricative are not in the phonological system, but [d] and [t] are (Hargus 2007).

In all stories, the verbal phrase is subject to a great deal of alteration. Past tense verbs frequently lose the morphological ending *-ed* and become simple present. Perfective *be* and *have* are deleted and past preterite verb forms may be replaced by their present tense forms. In fact, the whole structure of the verb clause could be described as flexible, allowing for the variation on the clause structure, if the coherency of the story remains intact. Since it was established at the outset of the interviews that these events occurred in the past, the story-teller is free to use present tense interchangeably throughout the story. These passages also show another pattern of deletion often found in First Nations Englishes. Genee and Stiger also report uninflected main verb and participles in their review of Blackfoot English, as well as omission of "to be" (2010). Main nouns and pronouns may be deleted. Both the definite and indefinite article can be subject to deletion, and speakers may not repair this "break" in structure before moving ahead in the story. Although this is, to a degree, a characteristic of spo-

ken speech, work on varieties of Native American Englishes has shown that pronoun deletion is systemic and often related to functions in the Ancestral language grammar (Penfield-Jasper 1977; Leap 1993). The same feature has been observed in Blackfoot English (Genee and Stigter 2010) and is surmised to be the result of unneeded parts of speech are being deleted for the sake of economy. In Witsuwit'en, the personal pronoun is used only for focus and emphasis since first and second person subjects, objects and possessors are obligatory marked on verbs and nouns (Hargus 2007). The result here seems to be the deletion of unnecessary personal pronouns in English.

Conclusion

In the thirty hours of recorded interviews, there exists more information than a single chapter can discuss, but the reader can see from these short transcriptions how much information is available, for the researcher who is willing to take a deeper look at these stories and the idea of authenticity. The focus on storywork allowed me to record long sections of uninterrupted speech. Participants could tell whatever stories they were comfortable with, and to take their time with a natural story structure. The topics ranged from stories about people's lives and their personal histories, how they had come to speak English, the dramatic range of changes they had witnessed in their community, along with descriptions of how their parents and grandparents had lived, supernatural stories both old and new, and current news and concerns in the community. There was no pressure to be "correct" and follow a linear Anglo-European style narrative. I recorded many stories about peoples lives and personal experiences, stories often emphasized as being true. The story-tellers themselves claimed authenticity, along with cultural ownership of these passages. If I am told a "true" story, then I as the researcher should accept that the way it was told to me was also authentic. This is regardless of the externally motivated changes on their culture that people have experienced. It makes no difference whether the story was told in English or Witsuwit'en. These speakers are not inauthentic if they tell me a story in English, and indeed, this concept is integral to my study of English varieties. If the speaker expresses themselves and their personal experiences as authentic, and the story is offered to me as an authentic experience, then I as the researcher should work to mediate that authenticity and transmit a sense of that into my analysis.

Linguistics and anthropologists often work with oral texts, which are intangible forms of knowledge and culture. That very intangibility means that they cannot be judged and weighed as one would a Ming vase, or a Haida cedar mask. They cannot be passed from story teller to story-teller unchanged. They are always, in a sense, imbued in a specific context of speaker and listener. Stories cannot exist without the situation of *storytelling*. Salvage linguistics, which recorded the stories without an expectation of further transmission within the community, assumed the stories would be trans-

mitted via recording or transcription, captured and forever replayed, unchanging in form. We should remember as researchers that this is not truly the way oral storytelling works. It is meant to be flexible and adaptive, just as the storytellers and their cultures are. Researchers must themselves learn to adapt to and accept this instability.

We can see how themes of transformation are at play in these tales. Animals like the *tsun' dye* take on human shape, while a girl takes the shape of a frog. But we can also observe the shift in the interaction between man and nature. We see how animals can speak with and even have terrible power over humans. In the story in which the French priest, Father Morice, appears, nature is tricked, driven back and killed. A human has played tricks on nature, and not simply won the game, but also killed the animals. So what can we as researchers take away from these observations? Perhaps it can be said that here, English is also being transformed and played with, moving back and forth between two worlds. Will we as researchers be willing to accept that and play the transformation game? Are we willing to accept that the "other" can have power over us? Or do we hide and lay trails to trap authenticity, to grasp and hold it, and make it concrete? Perhaps such metaphors become too easily tangled, for there are many interpretations of a story. But we should realize authenticity is not a seal of approval to be placed on objects we deem worthy. Authenticity is a process, created and shared by a people in common as they respond to a changing world. It is something that can be shared between speaker and listener, and can transform as needed. To be sure, accepting this process means accepting a constant state of tension in our research methodology, and the realization that we can never be too sure of our power and control over the interview process. But in this tension, there lies the possibility for real connections and real change.

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