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Northern Sierra Miwok Dictionary

by Catherine A. Callaghan

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INTRODUCTION

Northern Sierra Miwok is a California Indian language formerly spoken in the foothills and mountains of the Mokelumne and Calaveras river drainages,¹ in an area including much of what is now Amador County. The language is remembered by a small number of people, some of whom still speak it among themselves. It is closely related to Central and Southern Sierra Miwok, spoken on the western slopes of the Sierra Nevada Mountains south of the Northern Sierra Miwok speech area. Sierra Miwok is in turn related to Plains Miwok, once the language of an area extending from Ione to the western banks of the Sacramento River, and Saclan, a dialect of Bay Miwok. Bay Miwok, now extinct, was spoken by Indians living around Mt. Diablo.² All these languages are more distantly related to Coast Miwok, formerly the language of the Marin peninsula north to Bodega Bay, and Lake Miwok, once spoken in a small triangle south of Clear Lake. These relationships can be summarized as follows:

- I. Eastern Miwok
 - A. Sierra Miwok
 - 1. Northern Sierra Miwok
 - 2. Central Sierra Miwok
 - 3. Southern Sierra Miwok
 - B. Plains Miwok
 - C. Saclan (Bay Miwok Dialect)

II. Western Miwok

- A. Coast Miwok (probably a single language with various dialects)
 - 1. Bodega Miwok
 - 2. Marin Miwok
- B. Lake Miwok

The Miwok family is in turn related to the Costanoan family of languages, once spoken from San Francisco south to Big Sur. Any wider affiliations are speculative at the present time.

Culture and History. The Northern Sierra Miwok were almost entirely a hunting and gathering people. Acorns comprised the starch staple. They were harvested in the fall and stored in granaries for year-round consumption. Other nuts included the buckeye, laurel (pepperwood), hazelnut, and pine nuts from the gray pine and the sugar pine. The Indians also gathered seeds from various grasses, including introduced wild oats. They ate several species of roots, commonly called Indian potatoes. They also ate wild clover, berries, and mushrooms. Only tobacco was sometimes cultivated.

Deer, grizzly bears, and black bears were hunted with the bow and arrow. Rabbits were also an important source of meat and skins. They were chased into a net and clubbed to death. Quail, pigeons, and other birds were taken with traps and snares. Ducks and other waterfowl were captured with nets. Other sources of food were trout, grasshoppers, yellowjacket larvae, freshwater clams, and land snails. Fish and meat were often dried and stored in large twined storage baskets.

Basketry reached a high level of artistry among the Northern Sierra Miwok, involving both twining and coiling techniques. They wove twined seed-beaters for knocking seeds from grass stalks into twined conical burden baskets. Twined rackets were used in a ball game. Infants were carried on the back in cradle baskets. Milkweed and hemp fibers were

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rolled into string, which was twined or braided into tump-
lines for carrying baskets.

Acorn meal was cooked in watertight coiled baskets by
means of stone boiling. Mallard feathers, woodpecker
feathers, and quail plumes were woven into coiled gift bas-
kets, which could be further adorned with abalone pendants.

The commonest dwelling was a conical bark-slab house,
containing a cooking hearth and an earth oven. The floor
was covered with pine needles, and deerskins were used for
bedding. Other structures in a typical settlement included
a sweathouse for the curing of disease and purification
before a deer hunt, a small conical hut used by pubescent
girls, a grinding house built over a bedrock mortar, and
covered acorn granaries.

The primary political unit was the sovereign tribelet,
consisting of several permanently occupied settlements plus
seasonal campsites and the surrounding territory. The chief
resided at the capital settlement, which was also the site
of a semi-subterranean earth lodge. This structure was 40-
50 feet in diameter and about 4 feet deep. Four center
poles supported a conical roof, consisting of brush, pine
needles, and a final covering of earth. There was a central
smokehole and a small side door. The earth lodge was the
center of most ritual and social activities.

The chief acted as advisor to his people, arbitrator of
disputes, and manager of natural resources. His approval
was necessary for public ceremonies. The chieftainship
passed from father to son or, in the absence of a son, to a
daughter.

Social structure was based on two exogamous moieties,
Land and Water. Lineage affiliation was extremely important.
Some settlements consisted of agnatically related men and
their wives and children.

Trade networks featured east-west movement. The Sierra Miwok imported salt and obsidian from the Great Basin and haliotis shells from Costanoan territory. Baskets were also frequently exchanged.

The spirit doctor cured by locating the source of disease and removing it by sucking. Herb doctors administered medicinal plants. Deer shamans could locate deer and foretell the success of a hunt. Weather shamans had power over wind and rain. Sacred literature featured the exploits of Coyote, Condor, and Prairie Falcon.

The Northern Sierra Miwok may have numbered 2,000 at the time of contact with the Spaniards in the 18th century. For a period of time the Sierras became a refuge for Indians fleeing the missions and other settlers. This state of affairs ended abruptly with the discovery of gold at Coloma, north of Northern Sierra Miwok territory. Some Eastern Miwok Indians worked at the gold mines, but relations between Indians and miners were often hostile. Records indicate that at least 200 Miwok Indians were killed by miners between 1847 and 1860.

Confiscation of Indian lands became policy when California joined the United States. Those treaties negotiated with Eastern Miwok tribes were never ratified by the U.S. Senate. The Indians became increasingly dependent on seasonal employment. By the beginning of the 20th century, most Eastern Miwok survivors were living on scattered rancherias and the edges of Sierran towns.

Bibliographical Sources. The journalist Stephen Powers traveled among the Indians of Northern California during the summers of 1871 and 1872, and he published the results of his research in book form in 1877.³ His section on the Eastern Miwok included ethnographic information, myths, place names, and numerals. In 1908, S. A. Barrett published extensive vocabularies of Plains Miwok and the three Sierra Miwok languages, as well as Lake Miwok and Coast Miwok.⁴

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A. L. Kroeber published a sketch of Northern Sierra Miwok in 1911, supplemented by notes on Central Sierra, Southern Sierra, Plains, and Coast Miwok.⁵ L. S. Freeland gathered extensive material on the aforementioned languages (excluding Coast Miwok) during the 1920's and 30's. Her Language of the Sierra Miwok was a grammar based primarily on the western dialect of Central Sierra Miwok, but it included numerous paradigms, sentences, and morphological information on the eastern dialect of the same language, the West Point dialect of Northern Sierra Miwok, and Southern Sierra Miwok.⁶ Both Kroeber and Freeland noted some of the sound correspondences linking the Miwok languages.

Extensive field work on individual California Indian languages was made possible in the 1950's by the Survey of California Indian Languages under the direction of Mary R. Haas at Berkeley. This interest resulted in a Central Sierra Miwok dictionary with texts (based on the Freeland material),⁷ a Southern Sierra Miwok grammar with texts and dictionary,⁸ a Lake Miwok dictionary and grammar,⁹ and a Bodega Miwok dictionary.¹⁰ The Survey also funded the initial research for a Plains Miwok dictionary¹¹ and the present volume, which is the sixth dictionary of a Miwok language to be published. The author has also compiled a Marin Miwok dictionary from published and unpublished sources.¹²

The three Sierra Miwok languages are about as close as Swedish, Danish, and Norwegian. Plains Miwok is more divergent, and Lake Miwok is as different from the Sierra Miwok languages as English is from German. This state of affairs makes reconstruction possible at four levels: Proto Sierra Miwok, Proto Eastern Miwok, Proto Western Miwok, and Proto Miwok. An extensive corpus of lexical and morphological items has already been reconstructed.¹³

Kinship between the Miwok and Costanoan families is not obvious on inspection, although R. G. Latham suggested it as early as 1856.¹⁴ In 1910, Kroeber assembled sets of

resemblant forms between the two families and noted certain sound correspondences, although he concluded that genetic relationship was far from certain.¹⁵ Early scholars were hampered by a paucity of data, particularly on Costanoan languages. This gap was partially filled when J. P. Harrington's field notes on three Costanoan languages (Mutsun, Rumsen, and Chocheño) became available. Marc Okrand completed an excellent Mutsun grammar in 1977, based on a portion of the Harrington material,¹⁶ and Catherine Schambach reconstructed an extensive corpus of Proto Costanoan.¹⁷

As shallow reconstruction continues, it becomes increasingly possible to compare Proto Miwok with Proto Costanoan, while at the same time sifting through the materials on the daughter languages to glean those items that have survived in only one language in each family. In 1971, I presented the principal sound correspondences justifying the subdivisions within Miwok, and linking the Miwok family to the Costanoan family.¹⁸ I have further substantiated Miwok-Costanoan (Utian) as a deep genetic unit by reconstructing Proto Utian lexical items (largely unpublished), derivational morphology, and independent pronouns.¹⁹

The question of deeper affiliations is an old one. In 1919, A. L. Kroeber and R. B. Dixon argued that Miwok-Costanoan (which they called "Utian," after words for "two" in the two families), was in turn related to the Maidun, Wintun, and Yokuts families of California.²⁰ Before we can determine if any part of the Penutian hypothesis is valid, we must have a data base that is substantial enough to trace the network of loan words through California languages, as well as to identify potential cognates. It is hoped that this volume will contribute to such a goal.

The material for this dictionary was gathered during field trips to Ione, California, from 1956 to the present, under the auspices of the Survey of California Indian

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Languages, Department of Linguistics, University of California at Berkeley; the American Philosophical Society; the American Association of University Women; the National Science Foundation; and Ohio State University.

The naturalist C. Hart Merriam collected an extensive corpus of plant and animal terms in the West Point dialect of Northern Sierra Miwok during the early part of this century.²¹ I have included his species identifications (and occasionally his Northern Sierra Miwok transcriptions) when I think they are helpful. I have made no attempt to update his transcriptions or identifications, which are followed by "CHM."

Respondents. My respondents were Elena ("Nellie") McCauley (now deceased), a native speaker of the Camanche dialect of Northern Sierra Miwok (spoken near Ione); Birdie Burris and her mother, Queenie Miller, both of whom spoke the Fiddletown dialect south of Nisenan territory; and Nicolas Villa, Sr., a native speaker of the Ione dialect of Northern Sierra Miwok.

Elena McCauley was born in Camanche in 1881. Her mother died in childbirth, and she was raised by her grandmother, who spoke Camanche. (Camanche is not to be confused with Comanche.) At age 15, she went to Pleasanton, where she learned Plains Miwok as a second language. To make matters more complex, her husband, Aza McCauley, was a native speaker of the Jackson Valley dialect of Plains Miwok, and he also spoke some Northern Sierra Miwok.²² Mrs. McCauley sometimes confused the two languages.

Queenie Miller's family was from Fiddletown, and both she and Birdie Burris were native speakers of the Fiddletown dialect of Northern Sierra Miwok. Mrs. Burris often conversed with her mother in Northern Sierra Miwok until Mrs. Miller's death in 1975. Mrs. Burris's father, Henry Miller, understood the El Dorado dialect of Nisenan but he

did not speak any Indian language. Consequently, Mrs. Burris grew up bilingual in English and Northern Sierra Miwok.

In the course of my field work with Mrs. Burris, I checked much of the material I had elicited from Mrs. McCauley, and I also obtained much new information. Words and examples believed to be peculiar to the Camanche dialect are followed by (C), and those thought to be peculiar to the Fiddletown dialect of Northern Sierra Miwok are followed by (F). In a very few instances, Birdie Burris's speech (BB) differed from that of her mother (QM), even though both women spoke Fiddletown. Words not recognized by Mrs. Burris are followed by (d.k. BB), meaning "Birdie Burris doesn't know (recognize) this item." Occasionally, the semantic range of an item will be clarified by reference to Barrett and Gifford (B and G).²³

I also worked with Nicolas Villa, Sr., during the fall of 1985. He is a native speaker of the Ione dialect of Northern Sierra Miwok. His grandmother and greatgrandmother grew up near the Ione Castle. His mother, Lucy Fred, was born in Clements. Items believed to be peculiar to the Ione dialect are followed by (I). A word followed by (C, I) would occur in Camanche and Ione, but not in Fiddletown. In a few cases, Mrs. Burris knew a Northern Sierra Miwok word peculiar to the West Point dialect (W).

Dictionary Structure. Respondents' descriptions often follow definitions, and the example phrases and sentences were chosen to illustrate the syntactic patterns and semantic range of the entries and subentries. When necessary, definitions are followed by literal translations in single quotation marks. The entries are alphabetized as nearly as possible according to the order of the Latin alphabet. The order of symbols is as follows: a, b, c, d, e, ə, f, h, i, j, k, l, m, n, ŋ, o, p, r, s, ʃ, t, ʈ, u, w, y, ʔ, ʰ, C, H, V, Y, Ø. Small letters represent phonemes and capital letters represent morphophonemes. Their values are described

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in the Grammatical Synopsis section and compared with English in the Arrangement of Alphabet and Phonetic Key below.

Where possible, related words are included as subentries under the same main entry, with cross-references at their expected alphabetical positions. For example, the reader looking up the meaning of kolehny- 'to catch cold' will be referred to kol'e- 'to cough', where it appears as a sub-entry. If the main entry is monomorphemic, subentries can usually be derived through partial loss, suffixation, reduplication, quantitative ablaut, metathesis, or a combination of these processes.

The English-Northern Sierra Miwok portion of the dictionary should be used as an index to the Northern Sierra Miwok-English section, where a much fuller definition of each item is presented.

The "Grammatical Synopsis" and the morphological analysis in dictionary entries owe much to Broadbent's "The Southern Sierra Miwok Language" and even more to Freeland's "Language of the Sierra Miwok."²⁴ I recommend the latter to those readers wishing to know more about Northern Sierra Miwok grammar. It is full of example sentences and historical insights.

Acknowledgments. I wish to thank the many assistants who helped in sorting and filing my Northern Sierra Miwok data, especially Marcia Hurlow Stump, who helped type the first draft of this dictionary, and S. H. Tsang, who did considerable work on the second draft. I wish to thank the Community United Methodist Church of Brentwood, California for providing me with office space while I was preparing the final draft. I am deeply grateful to Elena McCauley, Nicolas Villa, Sr., Queenie Miller, and Birdie Burris, whose kindness and patience made this book possible.

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NOTES TO INTRODUCTION

1. The geographic, ethnographic, and historical information in this introduction has been summarized mainly from Richard Levy, "Eastern Miwok," Handbook of North American Indians, Volume 8: California (Robert F. Heizer, Volume Editor), Smithsonian Institution, Washington, D.C. (1978).

2. M. S. Beeler, "Saclan," International Journal of American Linguistics 21.201-209 (1955); "Saclan Once More," *ibid.*, 25.67-68 (1959). Saclan was probably spoken in the Walnut Creek-Lafayette area.

For evidence that the region between Stockton and Mt. Diablo was also Miwok-speaking, see James A. Bennyhoff, "Ethnogeography of the Plains Miwok," Center for Archaeological Research at Davis, publication no. 5 (Davis, Calif., 1977).

3. Stephen Powers, "Tribes of California," Contributions to North America Ethnology, vol. 3, Department of the Interior, U.S. Geographical and Geological Survey of the Rocky Mountain Region (under J. W. Powell), Washington: Government Printing Office (1877). Reprinted by the University of California Press, Berkeley and Los Angeles (1976).

4. S. A. Barrett, "The Geography and Dialects of the Miwok Indians," University of California Publications in American Archaeology and Ethnology 6.333-368 (1908).

5. A. L. Kroeber, "Miwok," in "The Languages of the Coast of California North of San Francisco," University of California Publications in American Archaeology and Ethnology 9.278-319 (1911).

6. L. S. Freeland, "Language of the Sierra Miwok," Indiana University Publications in Anthropology and Linguistics, Memoir no. 6 of the International Journal of American Linguistics (Bloomington, 1951).

7. L. S. Freeland and Sylvia M. Broadbent, "Central Sierra Miwok Dictionary with Texts," University of California Publications in Linguistics, vol. 23 (Berkeley and Los Angeles, 1960).

8. Sylvia M. Broadbent, "The Southern Sierra Miwok Language," University of California Publications in Linguistics, vol. 38 (Berkeley and Los Angeles, 1964).

9. Catherine A. Callaghan, "Lake Miwok Dictionary," University of California Publications in Linguistics, vol. 39 (Berkeley and Los Angeles, 1965); "A Grammar of the Lake Miwok Language," Ph. D. dissertation, University of California at Berkeley (1963), 274 pages.

10. Catherine A. Callaghan, "Bodega Miwok Dictionary," University of California Publications in Linguistics, vol. 60 (Berkeley and Los Angeles, 1970).

11. Catherine A. Callaghan, "Plains Miwok Dictionary," University of California Publications in Linguistics, vol. 105 (Berkeley and Los Angeles, 1984).

12. Catherine A. Callaghan and Zinny S. Bond, "Marin Miwok Dictionary," unpublished manuscript, 216 pages.

13. The first attempts to reconstruct Proto Miwok items appeared in Sylvia M. Broadbent and Catherine A. Callaghan, "Comparative Miwok: A Preliminary Survey," International Journal of American Linguistics 26.301-316 (1960). Subsequent relevant articles include Catherine A. Callaghan, "Proto Miwok Phonology," General Linguistics 12.1-31 (1971);

"Increase in Morphological Complexity," Proceedings of the 11th International Congress of Linguists 1.383-388 (1972); "Proto Miwok Kinship System," Proceedings of the Third Annual Meeting of the Berkeley Linguistic Society, p. 132-143 (1977); and "An 'Indo-European' Type Paradigm in Proto Eastern Miwok," American Indian and Indo-European Studies: Papers in Honor of Madison S. Beeler, p. 31-41 (Mouton, The Hague, 1980).

The last article is significant in that it shows how a set of declarative endings, superficially similar to common Indo-European secondary endings, developed in Eastern Miwok. This development underscores the necessity of shallow comparisons in advance of deep comparative work, in order to detect spurious cognates.

14. R. G. Latham, "On the Languages of Northern, Western, and Central America," Transactions of the Philological Society, p. 57-115 (London, 1856).

15. A. L. Kroeber, "The Chumash and Costanoan Languages," University of California Publications in American Archaeology and Ethnology 9.237-271 (1910).

16. Marc Okrand, "Mutsun Grammar," Ph. D. dissertation, University of California at Berkeley (1977), 350 pages.

17. Catherine Schambach, "A Preliminary Reconstruction of Proto-Costanoan," unpublished paper (1977), 30 pages.

18. Catherine A. Callaghan, "Proto Miwok Phonology," General Linguistics 12.1-31 (1971).

19. Catherine A. Callaghan, "Proto Utian Derivational Noun Morphology," Occasional Papers on Linguistics 10.71-77, Department of Linguistics, Southern Illinois University at Carbondale (1982); "Proto Utian Derivational Verb Morphology," *ibid.*, 11.23-31 (1983); "Proto Utian Independent Pronouns," *ibid.*, 13.12-24 (1986).

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20. Roland B. Dixon and A. L. Kroeber, "Linguistic Families of California," University of California Publications in American Archaeology and Ethnology 16.47-118 (1919).

21. C. Hart Merriam, "Indian Names for Plants and Animals among California and Other Western North American Tribes (assembled and annotated by Robert F. Heizer), Ballena Press Publications in Archaeology, Ethnology and History, no. 14 (Socorro, New Mexico, 1979).

22. Most or all of the Plains Miwok Indians were relocated at the San Jose Mission during the early part of the 19th century. Many returned to Plains Miwok territory after the secularization of the missions in 1834, but we cannot know which aboriginal dialects were represented by later speakers. Also, Indians from several areas moved to Camanche.

23. S. A. Barrett and E. W. Gifford, "Miwok Material Culture," Bulletin of Milwaukee Public Museum, vol. 2, no. 4 (Milwaukee, 1933). Republished by the Yosemite Natural History Association, Inc., Yosemite National Park, California.

24. Sylvia M. Broadbent, op. cit. (1964) and L. S. Freeland, op. cit. (1951).