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Sex Differences in Quechan Narration

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QUECHAN¹ storytelling is not yet a lost art, but it is well on the way to becoming one. The decline is comparatively recent. Even people in their 30's, as well as those older than that, remember with pleasure being put to sleep by tales told by their elders, and when a storyteller is now available who will narrate such tales, there are always eager listeners to hear him. At the present time, however, the number of narrators who are confident of their ability to tell the stories is small indeed.

Traditionally, stories were told always at night—never in the daytime²—in an atmosphere of intimacy and affection. Narrator F-5³ recalls as a very young child being held in the arms of her maternal grandfather while he put her to sleep by telling stories. A male consultant in his late 50's recalls that after work in the fields everybody gathered around the campfire to be amused by Coyote stories told by his maternal grandfather. The typical recollection is of an elderly narrator admonishing the children that they must stay awake to the end of the tale and signify their wakefulness by saying "Hah" at appropriate points. From time to time the narrator would punctuate his tale by asking "Are you listening?" This, of course, was a transparent device to determine that all had fallen asleep, and the recollection usually ends with the comment, "I always fell asleep before the end of the story, so I don't know how to tell it."

The existence of family traditions in storytelling is a factor contributing to variation

between narrators. Especially in the case of mythic material—all the more if the myth contains esoteric elements which require validation through dreams—families take pride in their exclusive knowledge and tend to guard it rather jealously. Intermarriage—in the old days with friendly neighboring tribes, the Mohave and the Kamyá, or occasionally with a Cocopa captive—has undoubtedly also contributed to variation, to a degree that cannot be accurately determined. Songs and song cycles have been freely borrowed among all the River and coastal Yuman tribes. A further factor for variation is simply that some narrators have more interest, knowledge, and skill as raconteurs than others. An unexpected factor in stories collected by me is that the narrator is free to tailor the story to his audience. In my particular case this has on the one hand led to suppression of certain details thought to be considered ribald by white people, on the other hand to the interjection of explanatory asides which would not be needed by a Quechan audience.

There are at least two common, well-recognized stylistic features that distinguish female narrative style (and probably female speech in general) from male. One is the use of an intercalated *-n-/-na-* in both noun and verb stems, with diminutive and/or childlike effect. Thus F-1 used the phrase *canayeri: kanwic ?anxwe?* for 'some kind of little red bird or other' where a man would have said *?acayer ka:wic ?axwe?*. Another typical female device is the use of a non-variable second element

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ku:ʔe:y/kwaʔe:y in compound-type verb phrases⁴, to which it supplies the meaning 'pitiably' and is most conveniently translated 'poor thing'; thus, female narrators are much more likely than men to use forms like *si:va ku:ʔe:yk* 'there the poor fellow sat,' where men are more likely to say simply *si:vak* 'there he sat.'

Apart from these surface stylistic differences, this paper addresses differences in substantive content of male/female narration of the same or similar episodes, whether these occur in the same plot context or not. These content differences are not necessarily recognized by the Quechan as attributable to the male vs. the female touch. In view of the numerous factors for variation, the analysis is in some degree speculative, and the further conclusions drawn may not correspond to Quechan perceptions.

I have chosen two examples. One is the episode of a boy hero's (or heroes') encounter with the man-eating ogre *kwayu:*. The other is the story of Oriole's ascent to the sky, safe return, and attempted escape from Coyote. Main elements of the *Kwayu:* episode are the boy hero's character, his meeting with and capture by *Kwayu:*, his killing of *Kwayu:*, his safe return home and reunion with his kin. Main elements of the Oriole story are his being lured by Coyote's trick up to the sky, his sojourn in a house of ice, his decision to return to his original home and wives, his revenge on Coyote and his flight with his wives, and Coyote's successful pursuit of them. There are three versions of the *Kwayu:* episode, by narrators M-1, F-1 and F-2. There are two versions of Oriole, by narrators C and F-3, and a third briefer version by F-1 to which only occasional reference will be made.

The boy heroes in the *Kwayu:* episode are clearly bold and adventurous characters and endowed with shamanistic powers. In F-2's version they are twins. Their parents having been eaten by *Kwayu:*, they are left in the care

of their father's mother. When they decide to find and kill *Kwayu:*, the old woman tries to dissuade them:

"You wouldn't be able to manage it. He's a powerful person, you wouldn't manage to kill him."

"We'll do it, we'll see."

"You couldn't get to him where he stays in the sky, you might die."

They didn't pay attention; "We'll go and see," they said, and they decided on this and went.⁵

F-1's hero is a baby in the cradle. His father having been killed and his mother taken captive in an enemy raid, he is left in the care of his father's mother. The old woman puts him in a cradle and makes a miniature bow and arrow for him. She warns him not to stray, for there are evil creatures about who will harm him. The boy, however, climbs out of the cradle and goes wandering. He is captured by monsters three times but succeeds in overcoming them and comes home to boast to his grandmother:

"Somehow I've been killing the evil creatures, as you call them," he said.

"What a crazy-wild thing you are," she said, and she, poor thing, scolded him.

On the fourth expedition he encounters *Kwayu:*.

Narrator M-1 makes much less of the boy's bereavement and treats his boldness as a matter of course. The boy was born after his mother was abandoned by his father. He grew up quickly, and his mother made him a bow and sent him out to hunt rabbits. On his second hunt he encounters *Kwayu:*.

In the F-2 version the twins, after overcoming obstacles along the road, seek out *Kwayu:* at his home in the sky.

That *Kwayu:*, as he lay there, he was blind, he didn't see things there. The boys, after arriving, were circling around the house and looking at it, and they were bothering him. This hand of his—he was

blind and was doing like this [gesture] with his hand all the time, and he wanted to catch and gather them in while doing so, but it didn't happen—they were dying of laughter as they circled. This went on until somehow there he gathered them in, both of them. There they were, gathered in, gathered in, and, well, his wife is there, that one—well, an old lady—"Old lady! See if you can do something so that I'll eat," he said.

The F-1 version locates Kwayu: close to water and gives the boy hero a more aggressive posture:

They call him Kwayu:, he's indeed a big person He was sitting in a spring of some kind, and as the boy went along he looked down into it He stood there and said "Go away!" or something. He held the bow and with it he stood there shooting, they say. No sooner did he shoot than he [Kwayu:] got him, they say.

The M-1 version rationalizes the association with water in greater detail and credits the boy with a brashness that is hard to beat:

There's something called Kwayu:, he comes down from the sky, catches people and kills them. He was sitting in a pool there—he is not small, that person.

This fellow was sitting there with his testicles spread out, and, "Move aside! I am one who comes here to wash his hands," the boy said; "I'll shoot you. Now, go away!" He [Kwayu:] sat there in silence until he [the boy] shot—the testicles—he shot.

He shot. It didn't go in. It's very tough, it's very hard. It went thud! slide! and fell straight down, the arrow. When it fell, he did it again, aimed, shot. It went wild, and he [Kwayu:] got up, took the boy and went flying away with him, and took him into the sky.

All versions agree that Kwayu: wanted the hero(es) cooked, that the hero(es) by the exercise of magical power prevented the fire from

heating the pots and caused sharp rocks (F-2 says knives) to be placed in the mush, so that when Kwayu: gulped it down his throat ruptured and he fell dead.

At this point, in F-2's version, the twins sang a song to the bones of Kwayu:'s previous victims, which were lying there in quantities. The song appears to mean⁶ "The legs, the arms, the joints, dead and gone, dead and gone." Thereupon the bones joined in the song. The F-1 version has it that when Kwayu: fell down dead, the people that had been hung up by him to dry like jerky and the bones that were lying around all got up and danced for joy. M-1's version again is more graphic and has a different emphasis:

He [Kwayu:] took it and put it into his mouth—lots of people, an awful lot—he took the pot and "Gosh, I can feel the hot stuff crashing and banging as it goes down my throat here. Gosh, it's marvellously strong," he said

When he had done it four times, the round [rocks] were stacked up here . . . and with this last one, as he swallowed them, it ruptured his throat.

It ruptured, and he died, and there where he was, he thrashed about, thrashed about, and that thrashing of his caused a wind, and everything danced, like this.

Finally there is the reunion with the grandmother or mother at home, after a magic descent in which the hero transforms himself, finally into an arrow or a pestle, and lands behind the house. F-2's version stresses the grandmother's misery and worry during the twins' absence:

Coyote was there, the one called Coyote, how bad he is! . . . He's the one who was supposed to guard the old woman. They saw that he was bad . . . and, "Gosh," they said and stood there weeping and looking, and they entered. Then this one—the Coyote lay there pretending to be sick.

They saw that he was wondering how he should behave.

"Well, we killed him and got back."

"I thought you had met your end somewhere and were no more, and I've been weeping," the old woman said.

The version does not specify Coyote's mistreatment of the grandmother. It ends somewhat abruptly, with the implication that the twins do not punish Coyote.

The F-1 version is briefer, mentioning only that the boy tells his grandmother he has killed the person she mentioned. Soon he grows up and hunts deer so that the old woman has plenty to eat. The M-1 version again is more detailed and emphasizes the revenge aspect:

Standing [behind the house] he saw, the house was full of people, lots of dancers.

"Ah! they're really ruining my house, the people. I'd like to kill them somehow," he said.

They are birds, and he was watching, thinking what he will do. He called up and brought that strong wind, and suddenly it covers everything, it's dusty, it's thick And so, finally he was looking towards there, until the house was filled with lots of dead people.

When his mother saw him where he was standing there, she came to him and embraced him "Ah, good! I'm so happy. I'm happy that you're here, because I was really being made miserable by them. So I was, but finally they're all gone, you've finished them."

The boy then repairs the house. The errant husband and father also returns. All are reconciled and live happily.

The Oriole story has a more complex plot line than the Kwayu: story.⁷ Oriole, who lives happily with his two beautiful wives, befriends Coyote. Coyote covets the wives, procures a small colored bird, and persuades Oriole to try to shoot it. As Oriole's shots miss, the target bird rises higher until, in pursuing it, Oriole finds himself in a land above the sky. He dis-

covers a house made of ice inhabited by two stars (in F-3 only one star) and two girls (their daughters, perhaps also stars)⁸. The girls sleep on either side of him to keep him from sliding about on the ice. Oriole introduces his hosts to deer meat, corn and other crops, all food previously unknown to them.

Oriole, however, decides to return to earth. At this point the stories differ in regard to his reasons for wishing to leave.

In C's version, the decision results from his disgust at the constant bickering of the girls. When he tells one girl that his crops have ripened, the other becomes angry because he failed to tell her also. Finally,

The women became angry. When he went again, behind him they were fighting. "That's what you're always doing. You know I forbid it. You know that we're eating good things here," [the fathers said].

When he came home, they told him. "I don't consider them any wives of mine. I keep thinking of my former wives. I'm going to go over there [to my fields] again," [Oriole said].

He went. Nighthawk Buzzard, they met each other.

"How is it that you're here?" [said Buzzard].

"I don't understand myself or what's happened to me."

"I've been watching you, I'll send you back."

F-3 (also F-1) describes Oriole as consistently homesick but makes no reference to quarreling girls. Every morning, in her version, Oriole goes to his fields, lies face down and weeps while trying to think of a way to go home. Finally one day,

. . . after a while when he was as usual crying, there was something there, and he was lying under it and crying After a while something saw him there, a buzzard that was up above soaring in circles. After a while, "Well, this person that I see lying here, I've been thinking that after a while if

he dies I'll notice that he rots, but I see that it isn't so where he lies," he said.

He came down and was about to settle on [Oriole's] head, but stopped. "Well, you person that's lying here, I'm watching you and thinking that when you die I'll notice you rotting, but I find that it isn't so. That's why I came here," he said; "Whatever happened to you that caused you to come here?"

"Ah me! I'll explain myself for you to hear. I was getting along fine in the place where I lived. I had children there. I had two wives. I was there until a person came and did something, he said that he was showing me something. No sooner did I look around than I was about to stand here where I am now. That's why I'm here not knowing which way to go to get back. That's what I'm unhappy about," he said.

With the buzzard's help, Oriole descends through the four levels of the heavens and lands at the back of his house. He is warned that he must wait four days without moving before entering the house. If he stirs, he will find himself back up in the sky.

In C's version, although Oriole sees that his wives' once beautiful bodies are no longer so, their once long glossy hair is matted and reaches only to their necks, and that their skirts are worn out, he does not stir. F-3's version is more dramatic:

At sundown Coyote came home, with ugly things. He went away to hunt, he went away—he had water beetles—he had dead fish—he had dead snakes—he hunted for water snakes, and he gathered crickets and brought them and told the women, "Come on! Eat!" They didn't eat it. They fed it to the children, but they didn't want it.

He became angry and took a stick and was beating them, that Coyote. "Eat! Eat!" he said as he chased them. As he was beating the children, they were running around the house, back and forth, crying. While this one [Oriole] lay face down behind the house, they were circling very

near, circling very near. He heard them where he lay. "Okay, here I go! He'll hear what I have to say," he said and up he rose. It upset him and up he rose, they say, and immediately he stood back up in the sky.

Oriole again lay crying in the same place. Buzzard, however, refused to help again, but Spider let Oriole down to earth with a web string. This time he succeeded in controlling himself for the required four days.

F-1 also refers to children but omits the return to the sky. C makes no mention of children or of a return to the sky but goes directly to the confrontation with Coyote.

On the fourth day at sunrise he'll arrive. When they saw him they wept, "You can see that we are in misery here."

"All right. What does he feed you?"

They ate water snakes, frogs. Although it was bad.

When Coyote went [hunting] again, he brought something, a water snake. "Come out and cook again!"

"Gather them and throw them away!" They gathered them and threw them behind the house.

[To Coyote] "Go get wood!" [and] he went away. They stayed behind and created a shadow [of Coyote]. When they made it, its actions were like his.

"How could I kill him? Let me kill Coyote. His water will be salty and bitter. Everything he eats will be bitter."

In F-3's version Coyote is absent when Oriole enters the house. First Oriole helps his wives abort the fetuses they have conceived by Coyote (no mention of this in C), and then, as in C, the family takes flight through a tunnel dug in the floor. All versions describe, with differences in detail, the obstacles they leave behind in the tunnel to prevent Coyote from overtaking them: scorpions, snakes, thickets of thorn, deep trenches, clashing rocks, etc. Finally they cross a wide stretch of ocean and reach land on the other side.

All versions emphasize Coyote's stubborn persistence in pushing through all obstacles until finally after a long swim he arrives on the other side of the ocean and finds Oriole. The accounts of the reunion differ significantly. The female versions end in reconciliation. F-1 describes Coyote as starved to the point where his insides are hollow, so that when he breathes, the wind passes through and comes out his rear end, whistling. Oriole allows him to have some poor stuff to eat. F-3 relates that the Orioles put some deer gut on the fire so that its odor will guide Coyote to them. Coyote arrives, emaciated and with sunken eyes, and they feed him scraps.

"Well, from now on you can behave yourself and stay as one among us."

They took care of him and said, "We'll be here [together] doing things."

"Yes, I'll do it." And so, he stayed there, they say.

In C's version the reconciliation is far from complete:

He [Coyote] went along swimming. In four days he crossed over [the ocean]. He went running along there. When he came to the sand hill, he went climbing up it and stood on top. He looked over the land until he saw them where they were. He went climbing down. No sooner did they eat deer again than there he stood.

He was there, and nobody said anything. It's all gone. It's ended.⁹

At the time of translation I commented that this seemed an odd way for a story to end. The narrator was pleased at the comment and stated that he had intentionally ended it in this way so as to provoke a question. He then explained that the moral of the story was that there are some people, like Coyote, who are so obstinate that one cannot deal with them. The end of the story brings out Oriole's despair and acceptance of the sad fact that he could never rid himself of this nuisance. The story has a title—*i:wa: tu:ev*, literally 'tamped heart' but

signifying 'obstinate, determined'—which applies to Coyote.¹⁰

The Quechan, nowadays as well as a generation or two ago, state that stories are told with the specific intent of educating the young concerning both good and bad behavior. In the past, narrators stood ready, but often only when asked, to explicate the meaning of stories in ways that were not always self-evident. Nowadays, when I have asked narrators to make such comments, the replies have not been so explicit. Some have commented to the effect that the story shows the young that there are people who behave in certain ways, good or bad, but that one doesn't lecture the young concerning the meaning of the story. It is rather for the listener to reflect on the story and search out its meaning for himself. It is as if by exposing the listener to the total aspect of the human comedy one defines for him models or behavioral types, leaving it to him to choose his way in accordance with his natural gifts. In practice, old people employ advice, admonition, scolding and sarcasm, but (although interpersonal violence among peers is not at all rare) parents would be ashamed to resort to corporal punishment or physical restraint of children. The educational function of narrative, then, is performed in the context of known norms of behavior.

In a few respects stories appear to refer to older social conditions which either no longer obtain or which persist only in modified form. Especially in female narration the paternal grandmother is specified as the nurturant female guardian of children. It may be that in the period when the primary social group was a relatively isolated patrilineal-patrilocal lineage, and when the time of younger women was occupied with foraging and food preparation, the care of children did in fact become a major responsibility of the father's mother. The grandparent-grandchild relationship remains a particularly warm one, no longer confined to the paternal line, and fond mothers and fathers

are not lacking—probably never were. The modern analogue of the missing mother appears to be the working woman, whose children are cared for during the day by any available grandparent.

Perhaps concomitant with this change is a surprising decline in awareness of clan and sub-clan affiliation, the lineage having given way to the nuclear family as the primary unit. A generation or two ago all consultants would readily supply not only their own sub-clan affiliation but that of practically any other member of the tribe. Nowadays many individuals have to resort to deducing their affiliation by recalling the clan or sub-clan names by which their sisters, mothers, and aunts used to be addressed. The actual degree of kinship with others is still carefully kept track of, though English speakers tend to use English kinship terms in place of the much more descriptive Quechan terminology.

The stories—e.g., C's version of Oriole—represent jealousy as a typically female manifestation, connected especially to quarrels over the affections of a man. The female narratives in particular represent women as submissive to and intimidated by men, although far from reluctant to make their own opinions known. How far this corresponds to reality, past or present, I do not know. Some have said that in the old days the breakup of a marriage occurred normally by a husband's abandonment of his wife but practically never by the reverse. It appears that this situation has at present become equalized. Furthermore, women now take an active and effective role in tribal administration and politics, although they are still susceptible to criticism if they appear too self-assertive.

A specific point of interest is the Ogre's silence in reaction to the boy hero's challenge in the M-I version of Kwayu:. The term used—*nak aʔi:m*—has a wide range of meaning. In the imperative form it may simply mean "Shut up!" In other uses it may mean "disregard,

ignore, keep a dignified silence in the face of provocation." Some consultants, relating incidents in which they were offended, relate that "I didn't say anything," implying, however, that they probably retained a suppressed grudge. In one instance, a female informant who felt that she had been mistreated by a neighbor, relates that she consulted her paternal uncle. His advice was: "Be silent. Something [retribution] will happen to him."¹¹ This pattern, then, remains very much alive.

The male and female stories reflect different attitudes toward the male as family head. One notes, for example, that the female versions of Oriole refer to his children—F-3 tells of his springing to their defense against Coyote, even at cost to himself—while C makes no mention of children. F-3 commented that Oriole is a good person even though he was unwise in allowing Coyote to mislead him. In general female narrators tend to represent the male as provider and protector of the family. Male narrators tend rather to represent him as footloose and fancy-free. The women's Oriole misses his wives and children. One wonders if C's Oriole would have been so anxious to go home if the star girls had been more solicitous mates.

Similarly the women's narratives reflect a feminine attitude toward the nurturing of children. The old women try to dissuade, but do not restrain, their boy charges from adventures that are known to be dangerous. Even when F-1's baby boy hero returns from his successful bout with Kwayu:, his grandmother scolds him for his excessive audacity, although one supposes that she was secretly proud of his prowess.

I cannot affirm that in practice the woman's attitude toward boy children is as represented in the stories, though I have some tentative evidence that it is. The stories reflect very little about older men's attitudes toward the socialization of boys. Accounts I have

obtained of actual practice show that men consistently emphasize physical strength and endurance, holding up the image of the warrior as an ideal. In times long past, there was an initiation ceremony for adolescent boys centering on nose-piercing, accompanied by forced fasting, endurance tests, and more or less formal instruction on the masculine virtues. The practice was abandoned approximately one century ago, but the underlying attitudes persist.

In the end all stories indicate shamanistic power ("wizardry" would come closer to the connotations of the term *su:ma:*) as the ultimate resort in coping with tight situations. The whole subject of shamanistic power needs further investigation. It can be said, however, that power comes to a man unsolicited but not undeserved. A boy must react responsibly to the dreams that visit him at a very early age even though he will not exercise his powers until he is middle-aged. It takes strength of character to acquire power; from those who do not have the strength, the opportunity is taken away.

In this respect again the stories reflect an earlier culture now almost wholly defunct. The future of storytelling also is predictably gloomy. I cannot here discuss in detail the various factors that have rendered the telling of stories, as well as the ancestral culture they mirror, moribund. I can note, however, that the final blow was administered by commercial television, that Ogre that feeds on the flesh of its creators and the spirit of its audience. The process of cultural disintegration appears to have accelerated during the past two decades, coincident with the period of TV ascendancy. It is the TV set, with its own characteristic symbology and value system, which now is the constant companion of the idle hours of young and old alike.¹²



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NOTES

1. The Quechan tribe, commonly called the Yuma in the anthropological literature, formerly occupied a territory on both sides of the Colorado River in the vicinity of Yuma, Arizona.
2. It is said that if one tells stories in the daytime, Coyote will come and scratch one's buttocks.
3. Because many older Quechan object to the publication of their names, I here identify narrators as F if female, M if male, plus a number, if their narratives were recorded in 1976-79. I identify one male narrator, whose story was recorded in 1935, as C.
4. These are phrases in which the first verb stem carries prefixes, including person markers, but no suffixes, while the second verb stem carries no prefixes (i.e., is not marked for person) but supplies tense-modal suffixes to the whole phrase. Thus, *si:vak* (*si:-* demonstrative \emptyset - 3p *ava* be located sitting *-k* present-past), but in the compound the tense-modal suffix *-k* is moved to the second stem *ku:ʔe:y*.
5. For purposes of this paper I am using a free style of translation and a somewhat modified orthography. For essential help in translation I am indebted to Joe Miguel, Jr., Ignatius Cachora, Mina Hills, Tessie Escalante, and Millie Romero. The narrators quoted are: M-1, age 85±, monolingual; F-1, age 90±, partial bilingual; F-2, 70±, bilingual; F-3, 70±, substantially monolingual; and C, 70± in 1935, monolingual.
6. The words of the song are in Mohave.
7. Excerpts are quoted from the F-3 and C versions. The F-1 version is cited only incidentally.

8. The stars *xarado* and *şakwalyʔuk* stand overhead in the winter sky and symbolize frosty weather. There is a pair of stars called *xwaʔa:v kwanyu:v* 'jealous fighters' who are regarded as female, but it is not certain that the daughters can be equated with them.

9. This is a standard formula indicating the end of a story.

10. F-3, however, stated that *i:wa: tu:ev* is the title of a different story, which she then narrated.

11. The Quechan wording is *nak kaʔi:m* 'Be silent'. *u:vam ava:mxa* '[Something] will arrive there where he is.'

12. In all fairness, however, one can hardly censure a medium which has successfully corrupted the rest of American culture for not sparing the Indian.

