

Re-assessing the source language of a purported Kaxwaan (Yuman) word list

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Introduction: The Kaxwaan are one of five historically distinct Yuman tribes that once lived along the Colorado River and now comprise the modern Piipaash people (a.k.a. Maricopa), who live along the Gila and Salt Rivers in central Arizona (Spier 1933). Historically, the Kaxwaan lived at the Colorado River Delta, but departed in 1820 and settled among the Piipaash in central Arizona by 1840 (Harwell 1979, Spier 1933). Over time, the Piipaash, Kaxwaan, and three further Colorado River tribes intermarried and assimilated culturally and linguistically, such that now the community exhibits a more unified “Piipaash” identity (Harwell 1979, Harwell and Kelly 1983).

Kaxwaan, a now-dormant dialect of the same language as Cocopa, which belongs to the Delta-California branch of the Yuman language family (Geary 2021, Kroeber 1943), is attested as having been spoken into the 1930s. Linguistically, Kaxwaan is known only through two wordlists obtained by Davis in 1921 (analyzed in Geary 2021) and Kroeber in 1930 (Kroeber 1943). In 1963, James Crawford collected a wordlist from JY,¹ who was born near Gila River in 1892 and whom he identified then as a speaker of Piipaash (River Yuman). Subsequently, however, Crawford (1966:3–4, 1983:567) identified JY as a Kaxwaan speaker, writing that “[n]o significant difference is apparent between Cocopa and [Kaxwaan] in either my list or Kroeber’s” (1966:4); more recent sources have repeated this claim (Laylander 1997:9, Golla 2011:120). Here, we compare this wordlist with Piipaash, Kaxwaan, and Cocopa forms, revealing that JY’s speech exhibits linguistic features that identify it as Piipaash and not Kaxwaan, consistent with Crawford’s original claim.

Findings: Table 1 presents selected words from Crawford (1963), along with the Piipaash (Langdon et al. 1991), Kaxwaan (Kroeber 1930), and Cocopa equivalents (Crawford 1989). JY’s speech exhibits distinctive **phonological** characteristics that are consistent with its being Piipaash: For example, typical of River, JY uses /v/ and /ð/ where non-River languages use /w/ (cf. ‘two’, ‘rock’) and /y/ (cf. ‘eye’, ‘doctor’), respectively. Likewise, JY uses Piipaash /č/ and /kʲ/ where Kaxwaan-Cocopa use /s/ (cf. ‘fish’) and /k/ (cf. ‘seven’), respectively (Wares 1968:70). **Lexical** evidence, including the use of River names for ‘coyote’ and ‘bow’, likewise identifies JY’s speech as Piipaash. Finally, **morpho-syntactic** evidence, namely the occurrence of realis -k/-m suffixes in individually elicited verbs (cf. ‘seven’, ‘yellow’) and in sentences (1–2), which is a feature of Piipaash and not Kaxwaan-Cocopa, is also consistent with JY’s being a speaker of Piipaash:

- (1) ʔipá:-s ma-yu:-k
man-SUJ 3/2-see-REAL
‘The man sees you.’
- (2) nʲá: marí:k ʔ-má:-m
I bean 1-eat-REAL
‘I eat beans.’

¹ Following Yuman customs against naming the deceased (e.g. Spier 1933), we avoid using the consultant’s name.

Table 1. Selected words from speaker JY (Crawford 1963), along with Piipaash, Kaxwaan, and Cocopa equivalents

	JY	Piipaash	Kaxwaan	Cocopa
‘two’	xavík	xvík	xowák	xwák
‘rock’	(?)əví:	(?)ví:	^u wít	wí:
‘eye’	ʔiðó	i:ðó	īyút	ʔiyú
‘doctor’	k ^w ɪsɪ:ðé ⁽ⁱ⁾	k ^w siðé	<u>kwuciyāt</u>	ʂk ^w i:yá:
‘fish’	ʔičí:	čí:	siʔíL	siʔíʕ
‘(be) seven’	paxk ^y é:-k	pxk ^y é:-k	peXkát	pxká:
‘coyote’	xatəlwí	xatl ^y wé	xatpát	xtpá
‘bow’	ʔu:ʔí:s	ʔu:ʔí:š	itcím:t	ʔi:cím
‘(be) yellow’	k ^w és(əm)	k ^w és-m	aqwáce	q ^w ás

Discussion: Our findings show that Crawford (1963) recorded this wordlist from a speaker of Piipaash rather than Kaxwaan, consistent with his original report. While JY may have been “the last [Kaxwaan]” in terms of her socio-cultural affiliation (Laylander 1997:9), it is unclear why Crawford (1966) subsequently identified her as a speaker of Kaxwaan, especially given his familiarity with the Piipaash and Cocopa languages. Instead, knowledge of the Kaxwaan dialect remains restricted to the two wordlists that were collected in the early twentieth century.

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