

DISCUSSION AND CORRESPONDENCE

SMOKING AND TOBACCO AMONG THE NORTHERN DÉNÉS

I HAVE followed with the keenest interest the details of the match between the two able wrestlers, Professors Wiener and Dixon, anent the origin of tobacco, and, for a reason of which a word shall be said in due time, the exhaustive paper of the latter on "Words for Tobacco" has especially appealed to me. Of course, I am not competent to judge of the merits or demerits of either thesis, and can only express the conviction of one who has not specialized on the subject that the first of the two contestants has indeed a hard proposition on hand if he really wants to convert people to his way of thinking. A priori, and without an adequate examination, it seems a desperate task to prove the non-American origin of the soothing weed. If I presume to venture just a few lines on that question, the blame must be laid at the doors of Prof. Dixon's treatment of the Déné equivalents for the word "tobacco" and the use of what some may consider that adjunct to modern civilization.

Before I offer any comment thereon, the circumstance of my being a native of France, who has been guilty of some books in the language of his fatherland, will perhaps excuse me for daring to confirm the appositeness of Dixon's strictures on the rendering of a few French terms by his opponent. French *prunes* is plums in English, and English prunes becomes *pruneaux* in French. Prof. Wiener seems to me somewhat disingenuous when he contends that "if necessary, the word *sèches* is added to distinguish the second from the first";¹ wherefrom one would gather that, in his estimation, the case with the French *prunes* is the same as that of the *raisins* of that language. Yet there is no similarity between the two; the French having but one word (*raisins*) to express the English "grapes" and "raisins," have to add a qualificative (*secs*) to differentiate the ones from the others, whilst, in the case of dried plums, they have a special term (*pruneaux*), which they constantly use to the exclusion of any periphrasis.

As to the translation at the bottom of p. 95, it goes without saying that Dixon is quite right. Wiener's assimilation of *épicerie* to "spices" might likewise be open to criticism, because the former is much more comprehensive than the latter, whose real synonym is *épices*.

¹ *American Anthropologist*, vol. 23, no. 1, p. 88.

But what I am chiefly concerned with is Prof. Dixon's nomenclature of Déné terms for the idea of "tobacco" and his deductions as to what they imply. In the first place, let it be distinctly understood that smoking was absolutely unknown to all the Carriers previous to 1792-93, when Alexander Mackenzie passed, almost unperceived, through the territory of the Southern division of their tribe, and the 26th of July, 1806, when representatives of our race, Simon Fraser and companions, first had any intercourse with the bulk of the Upper Carriers farther North. I have already described, on the authority of quasi eye-witnesses, the utter amazement of those people when they first beheld the operation of smoking.

On landing, Fraser's men, to impress the natives with a proper idea of their wonderful resources, fired a volley with their guns, whereupon the whole crowd of Carriers fell prostrate to the ground. To allay their fears and make friends, tobacco was offered them, which, on being tasted, was found too bitter and thrown away. Then, to show its use, the crew lighted their pipes and, at the sight of the smoke issuing from their mouths, the people began to whisper that they must come from the land of the ghosts, since they were still full of the fire wherewith they had been cremated.¹

Were additional proof that smoking and tobacco were originally unknown to the Carrier tribe of the great Déné family necessary, I would submit that, (1) when I first came in contact with those Indians, almost forty years ago, there still lived among them a fairly large number of individuals whose parents were fully grown up when they saw Fraser and his men land on the shores of Lake Stuart; (2) I was personally acquainted with an aborigine who had been born quite a few years before the advent of the whites, though he happened to be elsewhere on the day of their landing at *Tsaoice*, or the mouth of the Beaver River; and (3) the language of the Carriers decidedly bears them up in their contention.

To this very day, they have no word for pipe other than that for stone. With them *st'sé* primarily meant "my stone"; but, in common parlance, it has come to stand for "my pipe," because the first pipes they made were of that material.² Should they wish to be more explicit, they will say *se-æte'ka-tš'é*, "my tobacco stone," but in no case have they any term especially descriptive, or even simply denotive, of that particular object which we call a pipe.

As to the verb to smoke, they have formed a synonym by hitting upon the most expressive kind of onomatopoeia possible. Let any one

¹ *Primitive Tribes and Pioneer Traders*, p. 62, of third edition.

² See specimens of these in my "Notes . . . on the Western Dénés," pp. 36-38.

light a pipe, and his tongue and lips will produce a succession of sharp sucking sounds, which cannot be better rendered than by the monosyllable *tæt* pronounced with a lingual explosion (*'tæt*). This the Carriers verbified by prefixing the pronominal elements *æs-*, *in-*, *æ-*, etc. (*æs'tæt*, I smoke; *in'tæt*, thou smokest; *æ'tæt*, he smokes, etc.), words which have, morphologically, no reference to escaping smoke, but connote the noise produced by the lips of the smoker.

There now remains the Carrier word for tobacco, *æte'ka*—not *teka* as Prof. Dixon has it, and still less *tsabara*, as he also gives it, probably on Petitot's authority. Initial *æ-* of the first term is so essential that it does not disappear with the prefixing of a possessive pronoun, as is usual with most words commencing with that letter. Instead, therefore, of saying *ste'ka*, we will have *se-æte'ka* when we speak of "my tobacco." On the other hand, *æteka* (without the click on the *k*) means "powder horn."

As to *tsabara*, it is a compound with a perfectly Déné complexion, which, however, corresponds to no idea akin to that of tobacco. The reader will grasp its true signification when we analyze it for him: *tsa*, beaver; *ba*, contour, profile; *ra*, hair.

But what of *æte'ka*? Where did that vocable originate, and how did the Carriers of one hundred and fifteen years ago happen to hit upon it in order to designate the new product introduced among them? These are questions which have long puzzled me, and to which I am sorry to say I have not yet found any answer. What I wrote in that connection thirty years ago is just as much to the point today as it was then, and will, for that reason, bear reproduction here.

The word *æte'ka* "must be either a borrowed word or a word formed by agglutination, as the name of the horse (*yezih-li*, 'elk-dog,' or domestic elk). Now I have studied that word in the vocabularies of over twenty tribes, all contiguous, mediately or immediately, without being able to discover anything like an homonymous equivalent. On the other hand, the two parts of which it is composed, *æte-* and *-'ka*, are genuine Carrier particles which, taken separately, are not without meaning, but to which no rational signification can be ascribed when joined together. Yet the names of all new objects in the Déné languages are either borrowed from foreign dialects, or more generally formed by compounding, that is by the juxtaposition of two or more names of objects already known. Thus, in Tsilkoh'tin the name of tobacco is *tsælyu*¹ which

¹ And not *tsulu*, as Prof. Dixon now has it, p. 27. The Chilcotins say for "I smoke" *tséllécyu*, which seems to correspond to "I make soot medicine," though medicine for bodily ailments is with them *tatapæn*. Yet, within the same class of concepts, they have *nina-Kwoen*, a totally different root, for "eye medicine or water."

means 'smoke [or rather soot] medicine.' Altogether the Carrier (and Tšékéhne) word designating that imported plant has the appearance of an old root of the second category, which is to me inexplicable."¹

Furthermore, the all-important glottal explosion on the last syllable of *æte'ka* absolutely bars the possibility of any analogy between it and the Tlingit *-gan* tentatively suggested by Prof. Dixon. Will not someone propose a better guess?

I have divided the Carrier substantives into four different classes,² which shall be minutely described and conscientiously studied when my Lexicological Grammar, now almost ready for the press, is out. In a former essay³ I also showed how the relative priority of a concept, the approximate sociological age of an object with regard to a tribe, could pretty accurately be surmised by the category to which belongs the word which expresses it. The fourth, which is that of the verbal nouns, is almost exclusively made up of words which are expressive of things, implements, or contrivances of a fairly modern introduction, quite often due to the Caucasian invasion of the Northern wilds. We have already seen by contemporaneous testimony that tobacco and smoking are a comparatively recent importation among the Carriers of the far Northwest. If we are to trust the natural inferences suggested by philology, the chances are that tobacco will prove adventitious amongst the other Northern Dénés as well, even if we take as a gauge the native terms therefor adduced by Prof. Dixon.

Thus, to mention those which have the appearance of being genuine, Loucheux *tse'ted*, Dog-Rib, *tsede'ti*, Hare *tsee'turi* and Chippewayan *t'sæl'tui* are all so many verbal nouns which correspond to "that which one sucks in."⁴ Moreover, I do not recollect having ever heard the act of smoking, let alone the notion of real tobacco, mentioned once in any of the many Déné legends that have been narrated to me, or which I have read in the works of reputable authors.

As to the *na-* element in the Southern Déné words for tobacco, Prof. Dixon attaches to it, I fear, too great importance when he calls it a stem, and possibly misestimates its true import when he suggests that its presence there "might be taken as evidence that the separation of this

¹ Note §, p. 37 of my "Notes . . . on the Western Dénés."

² "The Déné Languages," pp. 181-182, *ap. Trans. Canadian Institute*, vol. 1.

³ "Notes . . . on the Western Dénés," pp. 32-34, *ap. Trans. Can. Inst.*, vol. 1v.

⁴ Dixon gives *tseen'tu* for the Montagnais and *ts'Ell'ui* for the Chippewayan. May I ask what is the difference between the two tribes? (The *tt* of Petitot and other missionaries in the Far North corresponds to my exploded '*t*'; hence my transcription of Dixon's Déné terms.)

Southern group took place before the use of tobacco was known." ¹ To me that monosyllable would predicate a different, though somewhat analogous, inference, namely that the use of tobacco is older in the South than in the North, and here are my grounds for that opinion.

In their original build, the Déné languages are precise and logical to a nicety. Whenever they render any of those acts which normally consist of many parts or reiterated movements, they generally incorporate in, or prefix to, the words therefor the particle *na-*, which denotes iteration. For instance, the act of sharpening, or grinding, an edge cannot be properly accomplished by a single motion of the hand or application of the stone or file. That motion must, on the contrary, be repeated quite a number of times, or, if you will, a cutting tool has normally to be sharpened from time to time. Hence the verb to express that action in Carrier is *na-s'kas*, which, though meaning morphologically "I sharpen over again," has come to designate the simple act of sharpening. In like manner, you require a number of movements of the arm and hands to wring clothes; the Carrier expression for this will therefore be *na-skræz*, a word which, iterative in its material make up, is none the less simply positive in signification.

In another order of ideas, it is but natural here below to feel cold at times; such an experience is, as a rule, of more or less frequent occurrence. So, to denote that state, you will have recourse to the iterative particle, and say *na-sæstli*, in the same way as you will employ the verb *na-nisthi* when you refer to that common act of sleeping which occurs at least every night.

All of these verbs can be used without the iterative prefix; but then, instead of calling to mind an ordinarily oft-repeated action or state, they will imply that this happens either for the first time, or in such a singular, uncommon, or striking manner that it is singled out for non-iterative expression; in a word, that it must be regarded as unusual. Thus *æs'kas* and *æsræz* ² mean respectively: I sharpen and I wring for the first time; while *sæstli* is perfectly good Carrier for "I undergo an accidental, unexpected, or violent attack of cold," "I take cold," and *nisthi* is the equivalent of "I am sleeping out of my regular hours," "I fell asleep."

Now what is said of iterative *na-* coupled with verbs naturally applies with equal force to the same particle joined to nouns. But to me that is precisely the element which enters into the composition of Navaho and

¹ P. 28.

² The *k* in *na-skræz* is called out by the *n* of *na-*.

Apache *na-'to* and Jicarilla *na-'todi*, which I take to mean literally "that which is over again sucked in." In fact, I feel all the surer of the accuracy of my analysis as I see that the same Navahoes who say *na-ac'to* for "I smoke" reduce the verb to *ec'to* when they intend to point to the act of beginning to smoke.¹

From which I infer that the language connected therewith has, with time, come to conform to the above-mentioned requirements of the Déné grammar, when it is a question of naturally repeated actions, or such as are reckoned of every-day routine, a condition which has not yet been attained in the North, where no related idiom uses the iterative prefix in connection with smoking or tobacco.² In other words, the Dénés of the south have had a longer experience with the soothing weed than those of the north.

I said above that I never heard of smoking or tobacco or saw any mention of them, in any of the legends which I was told by the Indians or read in books. To make this doubly sure, I have just scanned over the late Fr. Petitot's *Traditions indiennes du Canada Nord-Ouest*, a collection of excellently rendered myths which bears me up in my contention. After having given the main body of the Eastern Déné legends without a single reference thereto, the compiler presents us with an account of the advent of the first white people on Great Slave Lake. His informant is none other than the famous half-breed patriarch François Beaulieu, who was an old man at the time of the coming of the pioneer missionaries in the northern valleys.³ The narrator enumerates the gifts bestowed, on that occasion, on the Indian chief by the leader of the newcomers; then he mentions tobacco, whereupon he puts the following words in the mouth of the latter:

"Ah! you naturally don't know it. It is called *tabac*.⁴ Having said so, he gave to every one a pipe and some tobacco, and taught them how to smoke. But as soon as they had smoked: 'Ah! how bad it is!,' they said.

¹ Cf. the Franciscan Fathers' *Vocabulary of the Navaho Language*, *sub voce* to Smoke.

² Dixon gives *tseakh* for the former, a word which well illustrates the helplessness of the scholar who is at the mercy of untrained travellers or writers for his linguistic material. The Nah'ane term for "tobacco" is *t'siK*, and the same aborigines say *Kaa-déstséh* for "I smoke"—no iterative particle in either word.

³ They never spoke of him but as of "old Beaulieu." In fact, he was about 76 years of age when Father (afterwards Archbishop) Taché first met him in 1842.

⁴ Though English-speaking, the first whites in the far north had to use French in their intercourse with the half-breeds and Indians, there being as yet no English half-breeds in the country.

They all set upon spitting, grimacing and whining, and it happened that some even vomitted." ¹

From all of which are we to conclude that tobacco is not a native product of America? By no means. Not any more, at least, than we can say the same of maize or the potato, because neither of these was known to the prehistoric Northern Dénés. It was never claimed that Nicotian tobacco originated even within what is now called British America.

A. G. MORICE, O.M.I.

SAINTE-BONIFACE, MAN.

¹ Translated from the literal version of Fr. Petitot, pp. 411-12.