

Some Observations of Rumsen Ohlone Grammar

David V. Kaufman
University of Kansas

1. Introduction

This paper presents a brief preliminary analysis of some elements of Rumsen Ohlone (ISO 639-3:css) grammar, as these elements occur in a Rumsen narrative titled, “Coyote, His Wife, and Makkeweks.” This narrative was published for the first time in the original Rumsen along with English translation in my essay titled, “Rumsen Ohlone Folklore: Two Tales” in the *Journal of Folklore Research* (Kaufman 2008), but without the morphological glosses and grammatical notation that this paper includes. So far, little has been published on Rumsen, and what has been published primarily focuses on phonetic and phonological issues. Few grammatical elements have so far been analyzed, although Callaghan (2003) described the Proto-Utian and Rumsen case systems. Thus, this brief preliminary grammatical overview should be helpful to Rumsens interested in re-learning and preserving their heritage language, linguists, and anyone else interested in Rumsen and the other Costanoan languages of California.

Rumsen is a member of the Costanoan, or Ohlonean¹, language family. Recognized as a distinct language family by the linguist Albert Gatschet in 1877, the Costanoan languages are considered part of the broad Penutian family, which also includes Miwok. Rumsen, now dormant, was one of eight distinct but related Costanoan languages spoken in north-central California in the region of the San Francisco and Monterey Bay areas. Rumsen was spoken in the Monterey-Carmel region down the coast to Big Sur in the south and Soledad in the east. The last known native speaker of Rumsen, Isabelle Meadows, died in 1939. The modern descendants of Rumsen and other Ohlone groups still inhabit the San Francisco and Monterey Bay areas, as their ancestors have for thousands of years, but they still struggle for federal recognition.

Harrington spent several years collaborating with Meadows² to collect data on the Rumsen language and culture. Thanks to their collaboration, much of what we now know about the Rumsen language and culture is what was preserved in Harrington’s voluminous unpublished notes, most of which have been put on microfiche, which is the source of the data in this paper. As yet, no dictionary or grammar has been published on Rumsen.

The only grammars so far published on any Costanoan language are on Rumsen’s closest linguistic relative, Mutsun, also dormant, once spoken in the area of San Juan Bautista northeast of Monterey. These are the *Grammar of the Mutsun Language, Spoken at the Mission of San Juan Bautista, Alta California* by the Spanish missionary Felipe Arroyo de la Cuesta in the nineteenth century, and the *Grammar of Mutsun* published in

¹ The Ohlones themselves prefer the term Ohlonean to Costanoan, since this latter term is from the Spanish word *costano* ‘people of the coast’ and was bestowed upon them by invading Spanish colonists. However, since the term most accepted by linguists is Costanoan, I employ this term here.

² Harrington’s other consultants included Tom Torres, Tomasa and Flugenio Cantua, Trinidad Ranjel, Laura and Alfonso Ramírez, María Onesimo Ramírez, Claudia Corona, and Julia Díaz. Earlier among Kroeber’s consultants were María Viviana Soto, Jacinta González, and Tom Torres.

1977, a dissertation by Marc Okrand, the linguist who later invented the Klingon language spoken in Star Trek.

In this paper, I first discuss Rumsen orthography, pronunciation and stress patterns. Then I present the narrative in the original Rumsen, first as uninterrupted narrative, then with a line-by-line morphological gloss, then with the English translation. I then present a brief linear analysis of some aspects of Rumsen grammar as they occur in the narrative.

2. Orthography and pronunciation

While no standard orthography currently exists for Rumsen, I have developed an orthography that I believe best represents the sounds once spoken in the language. The orthography I use is as follows: a, č, e, h, i, k, l, m, n, o, p, r, s, ʂ, š, t, ʈ, u, w, x, y, and ' . While most of the letters and sounds are easily recognizable to an English speaker, a few symbols should be clarified: the symbol č represents the *ch* in English *church*. The ʂ represents a retroflex *s*, pronounced with the tongue curled backward in the mouth. The symbol š represents the *sh* of English *ship*. The ʈ represents a retroflex *t*, the tongue curled backward as in the case of ʂ. The symbol *x* represents a guttural sound similar to the *ch* of German *Bach*. The symbol ' represents a glottal stop, articulated with the vocal cords, the sound produced at the beginning and middle of the English *uh-oh*.

Rumsen, along with other Costanoan languages, has both long and short vowels as well as long and short consonants. I have written both long vowels and consonants doubled. Vowel length, and perhaps consonant length, is phonemic, e.g., *ku*, 'irrealis' vs. *kuu*, 'negative' and *xop*, 'ascend' vs. *xoop*, 'redwood'.

3. Stress

Rumsen stress appears to fall predominantly on the first syllable of a word as in Mutsun (Okrand 1977). In regards to Mutsun, Okrand states that "the best evidence for word-initial stress comes from non-native vocabulary. If a loanword from Spanish has stress on a syllable other than that which is stressed in Spanish, the shift must be due to Mutsun stress patterns" (ibid.: 98). The same also seems to hold true for Rumsen, which also has Spanish loan words with the stress shifted to first syllable: *púyyito* 'chicken' from *pollito*; *káwwayo* 'horse' from *caballo*; and *kásteyano* 'Spanish' from *castellano* (Harrington 1981), the original Spanish words being stressed on the penultimate syllable.

4. Narrative

The following narrative involves three characters: Coyote, the trickster figure common in the American west (as opposed to, for instance, the rabbit in the Plains and Southeast), his wife, and a sea creature called Makkeweks. Coyote and his wife take a trip to the ocean. Coyote tells his wife about the coastal animals that are her "uncles" (relatives), but he does not tell her about Makkeweks. When Makkeweks makes his appearance, she dies of fright. Then Coyote revives her with a shamanic³ ritual.

³ I use the term "shamanic" with the knowledge that this term is a point of contention among some anthropologists, because the term "shaman" is a Tungus word that technically only refers to their own

Maččan, Wa Xawwan 'inn Makkewekş
Coyote, His Wife, and Makkeweks

Neyyink ku wattin kawtak Maččan. Neyyink ku waş kayy wa xawwan: “Kuu ku me koypon.” Neyyinkmur Makkewekş ku waş koypomp. Neyyink ku waş Maččan koypomp. Neyyinkmur ku waş Makkewekş koypomp maysantopin. Neyyinkmur 'innay ša lačyankw Maččan xawwan. Neyyinkmur lakkuy wa koyponin. Maččanink waş kayy: “tomminş me 'etten, xakkaw, 'immey me 'ettenakay 'išku kuu koypon”; kuumur waş monšemiki Makkewekş waamur 'etten. Tanmur lakkuy, neeyku waş liiw Maččan, neeyku waş wattiş 'ewwey, xuyyamur kuu tonn waş şakkes 'aţţap Makkewekş ša lačyankw. Neyyink ku 'ummap Maččan, neeyinkmur naterimp xuya şottow, xuya şaanay xuya şottow 'išku mussen neeyikku mussey. Neyyink ku xaal Maččan wa 'oxšenin, neeyink ku čunnuy, neeyink ku čitt. Neyyink ku pussep(iki) wa xawwan neeyink ku kappes 'aţţap xallu. Rotteymur wa čunn Maččan, tanmur čitt.
(Harrington 1981:reel 690510-071, p. 40–42)

1. neey-ink ku watt-in kaw-tak maččan
then-? IRR come-PAST beach-LOC coyote
then Coyote went to the beach
2. neey-ink ku wa-ş kayy wa xawwan
then-? IRR 3-ACC say 3POSS wife
then Coyote said to his wife
3. kuu ku me koypon
NEG IRR 2 be.afraid
“Don't be afraid”
4. neey-ink-mur Makkewekş ku wa-ş koypo(n)-mp
then-?-? IRR 3-ACC be.afraid-CAUS
then Makkeweks scared her
5. neey-ink ku wa-ş maččan koypo(n)-mp
then-? IRR 3-ACC coyote be.afraid-CAUS
then [Makkeweks] caused her to be afraid
6. neey-ink-mur ku wa-ş Makkewekş koypo(n)-mp maysantop-in
then-?-? IRR 3-ACC be.afraid-CAUS rise.up-SUB
Makkeweks scared her when he rose up
7. neey-ink-mur 'innay ša lačyankw maččan xawwan
then-?-? fall DEF woman coyote wife
then Coyote's wife fell down

spiritual practices in Siberia. But, lacking any better overall substitute, the term has been adopted to refer generally to the spiritual practices of other groups, and I use this term here in that way.

8. neey-ink-mur lakkuy wa koypon-in
 then-?-? die 3 be.afraid-SUB
 she died from fright
9. maččan wa-ş kayy: tomminş me 'etten, xakkaw, 'immey me 'etten-akay
 coyote 3-ACC say sea.lion 2POSS uncle mussel all 2POSS uncle-PL
 Coyote told her: "The sea lion and the mussel are all your uncles, so don't be afraid"
10. 'išku kuu koypon
 in.order.to NEG be.afraid
 so she would not be afraid
11. kuu-mur wa-ş monsem-iki Makkewekş wa-mur 'etten
 NEG-? 3-ACC advise-PAST 3POSS-? uncle
 he did not tell her that Makkeweks was her uncle
12. tan-mur lakkuy, neey ku wa-ş liiw maččan, neey ku wa-ş watt-iş
 when-? die then IRR 3-ACC carry coyote then IRR 3-ACC come-?
 when she died, then Coyote put her on his back and carried her, coming
13. 'ewwey xuyya-mur kuu tonn wa-ş sakkes 'aţţap Makkewekş şa lačyankw
 far down-? NEG find 3-ACC look.at again? DEF woman
 farther away, over where the woman wouldn't see Makkeweks again
14. neey-ink ku 'ummap maččan, neey-ink-mur nateri(n)-mp
 then-? IRR light.fire? coyote then-?-? set.down?-CAUS
 then Coyote lit a fire, and next he laid her down
15. xuya şottow, xuya şaanay xuya şottow 'išku mussen neey-ink ku mussey
 down fire down side down fire in.order.to get.warm then-? IRR get.warm
 laid her down by the side of the fire to get warm. She got warm.
16. neey-ink ku xaal maččan wa 'oxšen-in
 then-? IRR jump coyote 3 do.magic-SUB
 then Coyote jumped, doing a shamanic ritual
17. neey-ink ku čunnuy, neey-ink ku čitt
 then-? IRR sing then-? IRR dance
 then he sang, then he danced
18. neey-ink ku pussep-(iki) wa xawwan neey-ink ku kappes 'aţţap xallu
 then-? IRR revive-(PAST) 3POSS wife then-? IRR three time jump
 his wife came back to life, then Coyote jumped three times
19. rottey mur wa čunn maččan tan-mur čitt
 be ? 3POSS song coyote when-? dance
 there was his song when he danced

Then Coyote went to the beach. Then Coyote said to his wife: “Don’t be afraid.” Then Makkeweks scared her. Makkeweks scared her when he rose up from the water. Then the Coyote’s wife fell down and she died from fright. Coyote had told her: “The sea lion and the mussel are all your uncles, so don’t be afraid.” But he did not tell her that Makkeweks was her uncle. When she died, then Coyote put her on his back and carried her farther away, over there where the woman wouldn’t see Makkeweks again. Then Coyote lit a fire, and next he laid her down there by the fire, there close to the fire so she would get warm; and then she got warm. Then Coyote jumped while performing a shamanic ritual, then he sang, then he danced. His wife came back to life, then Coyote jumped three times, and he had his song when he was dancing.

5. A brief preliminary analysis of Rumsen grammar

The following is a brief analysis of Rumsen grammar arranged by the line numbers in which the grammatical elements appear in the narrative.

Line 1

- *ku* appears as a type of irrealis particle. In this narrative, we see its use mainly in the past tense, although, in Harrington’s microfiche notes, there appear many occurrences of *ku* in the future tense as well, thus apparently meaning something like “not in the present moment.” (It appears that, in many Rumsen sentences, tense is not overtly marked.) However, it seems reasonable to assume that, in storytelling, events occur in the past tense, and *ku*, as an irrealis marker, often seems to take the place of a true past tense marker. The particle *ku* also seems to occur in imperative clauses and perhaps other clauses where the outcome is uncertain (see Line 3 note). I believe this irrealis *ku* also appears in *išku* ‘in order to’ (see Lines 10 and 15).
- *-in* is one of the past tense suffixes, *-n* being its Mutsun counterpart (Okrand 1977: 98), not to be confused with subordinative *-in* (see Lines 6, 8, 16).
- *-ta* and *-tak* are locative suffixes, the first occurring when the noun to which it is attached ends in a consonant, the second when it ends in a vowel or diphthong (*-aw* is considered a diphthong): *Karmen-ta*, in Carmel; *kaw-tak*, at/on the beach.

Line 2

Unlike many other Native American languages, Costanoan “lacks incorporation and has independent functionally substantival pronouns” (Kroeber 1904: 71). Note that nominal and possessive pronouns are identical. The following are the Rumsen pronominal forms (based on Harrington 1981 and Kroeber 1904):

Nominative (subject)			Accusative (object)
1	<i>ka</i>	I, my	<i>kas</i>
2	<i>me</i>	you, your	<i>mes</i>
3	<i>wa</i>	he/she/it his/hers/its	<i>was</i>
1	<i>mak</i>	we, our	<i>makkewes</i>
2	<i>makam</i>	you, your	<i>mamas</i>
3	<i>'uti</i>	they, their (dual?)	<i>'utsen</i>

- Mutsun retained an accusative (objective) suffix (*-e*, *-ne*, and *-se*) on nouns. However, “no trace of it has been found on the noun” (Kroeber 1904) in Rumsen except on pronominal forms (those appearing with *-s* above). However, more data will have to be examined to verify the accuracy of this.

Line 3

- The irrealis form *ku* is used here in an imperative clause, indicating a form of request, “don’t be afraid,” perhaps with some modicum of uncertainty about the addressee’s fulfilling the request. (See Line 1 note.)

Line 4

- *-mur* may be a marker of focality. This idea warrants further analysis, however, so I have simply glossed *-mur* with an uncertain ? until more data is examined.

Line 6

- *-mp* is a causative suffix (Shipley 1980: 239). I have left the *n* in parentheses to show assimilation of [n] > [m] / __[p].
- Harrington mentions that *-in* is a subordinative suffix, indicating its occurrence in conjunction with another action, as occurs here: she (Coyote’s wife) becomes afraid as Makkeweks rises out of the water.

Line 9

- *-kay* and *-akay* are plural suffixes, the former used with nouns ending in a vowel or diphthong, the latter with those ending in a consonant: *etten-akay*, uncles; *isu-kay*, hands.

Line 11

- *-iki* is another past tense suffix. (See Line 1 note for *-in*.)

Line 15

- *-en* is an inchoative suffix (Shipley 1980: 240), in this case meaning ‘get to warming.’

Line 18

- This is as it appears in Harrington’s notes, indicating that the *-iki* past tense suffix may be subject to speaker preference or is optional in storytelling. (See Lines 1 and 11 notes.)

The Rumsen language is only in the beginning stages of analysis. While this has been an attempt to elucidate certain aspects of Rumsen grammar, much more needs to be done. I hope that, as more texts and other data are reviewed, more of the grammar will be analyzed. I also hope that a dictionary and grammar of the language will eventually be published.

Abbreviations

-	morpheme boundary
1	1 st person
2	2 nd person

3	3 rd person
ACC	accusative
DEF	definite (article)
IRR	irrealis
LOC	locative
NEG	negative
PL	plural
POSS	possessive
REFL	reflexive
SUB	subordinative

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Author contact information

David V. Kaufman: dvklinguist2003@yahoo.com