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The Linguistic Classification of Powhatan

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THE LINGUISTIC CLASSIFICATION OF POWHATAN

Years ago Gerard (AA, n.s., 6: 313 *et seq.*) tried to prove that Powhatan was a Cree dialect. This led to a controversy with Tooker, the main result of which was to show the incompetence of both. I therefore take up the subject once more and present it in the *AMERICAN ANTHROPOLOGIST* rather than in a linguistic journal because American ethnologists and archaeologists are both interested in the historical implications. Our sources are the vocabularies of Smith and Strachey. It can easily be shown that the vocabularies are independent; though elsewhere Smith frequently cribbed from Strachey or Strachey from Smith. It should be borne in mind that these vocabularies are very badly recorded and some words do not mean (as shown by the testimony of Algonquian languages in general) what they are stated to mean; and obvious misprints occur. Furthermore, so many words occur in many Algonquian languages and show nothing which is diagnostic of linguistic affiliations, that there is only a small residuum with which to operate. I am glad to say that small as this residuum is, it is decisive. Gerard was on the right track. The Cree affiliations of Powhatan are obvious in view of the words: attemous, dog; woskan, bone; meskott, the leg; negeisp, I am full; muskan, the forehead; meskew, the nose; hamkone, laddle; huspissaan, leap (this last only partially). Confirmatory are: outacan, dish (misprint for ouracan); neir, I; quire, thou. But Powhatan cannot be considered a Cree dialect in the sense, for example, that Moose Factory, etc. are. This is shown positively by the words: nows, a father (really, my father); kowse, father (really, thy father); vhpocan, tobacco pipe; nus, three. Pointing towards this same conclusion are: tapacoh, night; mekouse, nails of fingers and toes. It all depends upon how accurately these words are recorded. The same applies to: mehkewh, bill, beak; meihtucs, tree. If musquaspenne really means red potato (which the context favors) and is well-recorded, we have positive proof that Powhatan has very close Cree affiliations, but that it can not be classified as a mere Cree dialect. If the word is well-recorded and means bear potato (*cf.* Fox) we have only proof of the close Cree affiliations. If hauquequins, a little stone pot, is well-recorded, we have proof that Powhatan can not be classified as a mere Cree dialect, and it would indicate that where s is recorded before a stop consonant probably x or ' is correct: and would be additional proof that Powhatan is not a mere Cree dialect. The word vsqwaseins, girl, is favorable to close affiliations with Cree, but is not decisive. If Anbomesk, a village of the Powhatan confederacy (reference misplaced), means "white beaver" and is properly recorded, close Cree affiliations are confirmed. A few other words are favorable to Cree affiliations; but differences in vocabulary show Powhatan is not a mere dialect.

Summing up, we may say that Powhatan clearly belongs with the Cree group of Central Algonquian languages, that it is closer to Cree than to any other member of that group, but that it can not be classified as a mere Cree dialect. A prehistoric migration is thereby shown.

TRUMAN MICHELSON