

A Short Survey of the Na-Dené Isolate Haida

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1 Introduction

Haida is spoken by some 300 people on the Queen Charlotte Islands [lit.ref. 5], off the west coast of Canada, and on the mainland in the Alaskan panhandle and adjacent Canada. Recent research has uncovered enough evidence to assign Haida as a single language to the Na-Dené phylum, next to Tlingit and the Athabaskan languages. The relationship, however, is not discernable to the layman and is disputed by other researchers; the morphology differs completely and only an extensive analysis of the vocabulary shows a correlation. Haida and the other Na-Dené languages may have separated somewhere between 7000 and 5000 B.C., roughly when the split between Indo-European and Finno-Ugric occurred. *ha'ida* means 'people' in Haida.

This survey derives from four sources, mentioned below. De la Grassière [lit.ref. 1] and Swanton [lit.ref. 4] describe Skidegate Haida (South-west Queen Charlotte), Enrico [lit.ref. 2] covers Masset¹ Haida (North Queen Charlotte) and Edwards [lit.ref. 3] uses Hydeburg Haida (mainland). This is no real problem since these dialects differ only slightly more than British and American English, but it does explain some inconsistencies in the examples. An attempt has been made to adapt the text from De la Grassière for old-fashioned spelling.

2 General structure

The structure of Haida is more or less comparable to that of English, the main exception being that Haida is generally post-fix and English is generally pre-fix:

a kuugiina isis laa = the book the-thing good = the good book;

dii tlenga = me towards = towards me.

A word-to-word translation from Haida to English that takes this transformation in word order into account is generally understandable.

The Haida language is fairly untypical for the region (the North-West of the American continent). Its phonetics and grammar are much simpler than those of the surrounding American languages.

3 Phonetical features

Rather than distinguishing between voiced and voiceless, as most European languages do, Haida distinguishes between (lightly) voiced and (lightly) glottalized. That is, *b*, *d*, *dɫ*, *g* and *G* are pronounced slightly voiced, and *p*, *t*, *tɫ*, *k* and *q* are pronounced with a slight glottal stop following them; since the latter process is automatic it is not indicated in the spelling. Words that seem to start with a vowel, actually start with a glottal stop, as in the German word *der Arzt*, which is pronounced *der'aartst* rather than *deraartst*. Likewise, *ɫ* and *w* at the beginning of a syllable are preceded by a glottal stop. Neither of these effects are shown in the spelling.

In addition to the normal *p*, *t*, *k* and their voiced counterparts, Haida has a *tɫ* which resembles a *t* spoken with the sides of the tongue rather than with the tip, and a *q*, which resembles a *k* pronounced further backwards in the throat. The slightly voiced, non-glottalized version of the *tɫ* is written *dɫ*, that of the *q* is written *G*. The letter *x* is pronounced as the *ch* in the Scottish word *loch*, the letter *ɫ* as the *ll* in Welsh *Llangollen*. The apostrophe ' is used for the glottal stop.

¹Masset is pronounced *Massey*.

There are only three vowels: a, i and u, both short and long (aa, ii and uu). The actual sound depends somewhat on the surrounding consonants; in particular, the short a often sounds like the u in the English word *but*, and the i and u after gutturals often sound like e and o.

Haida easily absorbs foreign words, but bends them completely to fit Haida phonetics: galiips = *grapes*, labliit = *minister* (from French *le prêtre*), inIng = *English*.

4 Nouns

Nouns can carry articles, like in English: nang iiInga = *a man*, anang iiInga = *the man*; different articles are used for objects, places, etc. Nouns have plurals, often ending in -gang or -lang: chas = *sister*, chaslang = *sisters*. Nouns are not marked for case. There are numerous words for kinship relations, with terms differing according to the speaker: ha'ng = *father (son speaking)*, haat = *father (daughter speaking)*.

5 Adjectives

Adjectives follow the noun and often end in -a: laa = *good*, daGanga = *bad*; a comparative is made by putting iidang after the adjective: daGanga iidang = *worse*; a superlative by putting sitl liigang after it: daGanga sitl liigang = *worst*. In a plural noun-adjective construct, it is the adjective that gets the plural ending: a kuugiina isis laa-gang = *the book the-thing good-s = the good books*.

6 Verbs

The verb is not conjugated for person, except that it has a special form for 'restricted absent group', generally formed by inserting -wa- before the last ending.

Iaa quyaadang	- I love	talang quyaadang	- we love
daa quyaadang	- you love	dalang quyaadang	- you (all) love
laa quyaadang	- he/she loves	Ia quyaadang	- they love
u quyaadang	- it loves	laa quyaadawang	- they love (small group)

Just like English, Haida has lots of tenses and modes, but in good Haida fashion, the word(s) indicating them follow the verb rather than precede them as in English. A few examples follow:

Iaa quyaadang	- I love
Iaa quyaadagangang	- I am loving
Iaa quyaadaguun	- I loved (as you know)
Iaa quyaadaayaan	- I loved (I'm telling you)
Iaa quyaadagiigiini	- I was loving
Iaa quyaadaasang	- I shall love
Iaa quyaada'ngkasang	- I am about to love
Iaa quyaadadjang	- I must love
Iaa quyaadiee laagang	- I would love
Iaa quyaadahalgang	- I cause somebody to love
Iaa quyaadahangang	- I can love
Iaa quyaad'us?	- do I love?
Iaa quyaadas	- that I love
quyaadas	- loving, lover
quyaadiee	- to love

and pages and pages more ...

Some forms differ depending on whether they describe something already known to the listener or something new: Iaa quyaadaguun = *I loved (old information)*, Iaa quyaadaayaan = *I loved (new information)*. It is interesting to see that the progressive forms Iaa quyaadagangang = *I am loving* and Iaa quyaadagiigiini = *I was loving* are formed by reduplicating the ending.

The participle quyaadas = *loving, lover* is also used in subordinate clauses: Iaa quyaadas = *that I love*. It can be combined with such conjunctions as dlu = *if*, to form conditional sentences:

Iaa quyaadas dlu - *I loving if = if I love*.

The participle can also be used as a noun: nang quyaadas = *a lover*.

The passive form differs structurally from the English one:

dii quyaadiagang - me is loved = I am loved

and the same construction is used for most predicatively used adjectives:

dii iskatsgang - me is skinny = I am skinny

We can see the above conjugations in action in the following (normal) Haida sentence:

gam il xyaal-gii-gang-ang-waa-saa-hang-gang

which means *They (a small group) probably won't be dancing all the time.* The break-up is as follows:

gam - not
il - they
xyaal- - dance
-gii- - verb (do)
-gang- - habitually (all the time)
-ang- - not
-waa- - small group
-saa- - future (will)
-hang- - can (probably)
-gang - verb marker

The meaning of the Haida verb is generally more specific than that of the corresponding English verb:

sisgang - to carry water
duugang - to carry wood
unchigangang - to carry a parcel

...

Most of these verbs can be decomposed partly into smaller units; for example, **unchigangang** contains **un-** = *on the back* and **-chii-**, which is a classifier (see below under Numerals) for bags, parcels, etc. Also, meanings are often combined:

iskatsgang - to be skinny
iskamdjuugang - to be skinny and big
iikiidjuugang - to be fat and big
and pages and pages more ...

Again, these are composed of components as **-yuu-** = *big*.

Action performed by a group is often described by a different word than that performed by a single person:

qaagang - to walk alone
istalgang - to walk together
huutlang - to drink alone
niilgang - to drink in company

Unlike many languages, Haida has a word for 'to have', **daa-**: **nii ɬ daagang** = *house I have*. It also has a full-fledged word for 'to be'; its root is **is-** (!) and, like in English, it is irregular: **ɬaa ichang** = *I am*; **ɬaa ijang** = *I was*; **laa isadjang** = *he must be*.

7 Pronouns

Unlike the nouns, the pronouns are distinguished for cases, like in English. There are four cases, as shown in Figure 1. In addition, there is word for *it*: **u**. There are two forms for the nominative singular; the second form is used when it is not the first word in the sentence. Note that the words **talang** = *we* and **dalang** = *you* contain the plural ending **-lang**.

The genitive is used as a possessive pronoun: **dii kuugiina** = *of-me book* = *my book*; otherwise possession is indicated using the postposition **gia**: **John gia kuugiina** = *John's book*. The word **gia** actually means 'property', so the form **John gia kuugiina** means 'a book that is the property of John' (allowing for the difference in word order between Haida and English), which makes sense.

In line with the other Na-Dené languages, the object pronoun precedes the subject pronoun except the word for *it*:

Singular:			
nominative	ɬaa/ɬ - I	daa/dang - you	laa/il - he/she
genitive	dii - of me	dang - of you	il - of him/her
dative	dii'aa - to me	dahaa - to you	lahaa - to him/her
accusative	dii - me	daha - you	laa - him/her
Plural:			
nominative	talang - we	dalang - you all	ɬa - they
genitive	iitl - of us	dalang - of you all	ɬa - of them
dative	itlaa - to us	dalanga - to you all	ɬa'aa - to them
accusative	iitl - us	dalang - you all	laa - them

Figure 1: Forms of the pronouns

laa ɬ quyaadang	- him/her I love = I love him/her
laa il quyaadang	- him/her he/she loves = he/she loves him/her
ɬaa u taagang	- I it eat = I eat it

8 Syntax

Normal word order is object-subject-verb:

stliku ɬ tiguun	- an-otter I killed = I killed an otter
huu koogiina dii aw dii'aa istaguun	- this book my mother to-me has-given

but if the subject is to receive emphasis, the order may be subject-object-verb:

ɬaa stliku tiguun	- I an-otter killed = I killed an otter
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Using the focuser uu, one can add even more emphasis, both to the subject and to the object:

ɬaa uu stliku tiguun	- I and-nobody-else an-otter killed = it was I who killed an otter
stliku uu ɬ tiguun	- an-otter and-nothing-else I killed = I killed an otter (and not a beaver)

These and related phenomena are analysed in depth by Edwards.

Negation is indicated by **gam** before the form to be negated and the particle **-'ang-** in the verb, in a construction comparable to the French *ne ... pas*:

gam ɬ quyaad-'ang-ang	- not I love-not-present = I do not love
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Likewise, questions are formed with the word **gu** and possibly the ending **'us**:

dii-ga gu adaaɬ dang tlaad-ɬangaa?	- me-to [question] tomorrow you help-would? = Could you help me tomorrow?
ɬaa quyaad'us?	- do I love?

Subordinate clauses are marked by **-s** on the verb:

Bill ɬGanggulaa-s ɬ qing-gan	= <i>Bill is-working-that I see-past = I saw that Bill was working.</i>
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An example of a conditional clause is

sabliik dii sdaɬaa-s dluu, ɬaa gwadang-saan	= <i>bread me want-that if, I get-shall</i> = <i>When I want some bread I'll get it myself.</i>
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This is Mainland (Alaskan) Haida, and we see that the future ending is **-saan** rather than **-sang**; this is an example of the dialect differences.

Just an interesting sentence:

tlaan waajii xagw-ii-gwii an-nan-ang; sgunaa-gang	= <i>no-more that halibut-the-on head-rub-present; stink-present</i> = <i>Stop rubbing your head on that halibut; it stinks.</i>
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(supposedly said to the cat.) This sentence features another very specific verb: **an-nan-ang** = *to rub one's head*, which contains the particle **-nan-** = *rub*.

9 Numerals

1	sGwansing	6	ɬGaniɬ
2	stung	7	chigwan
3	ɬGuunɬ	8	stansanga
4	stansing	9	tlaa'ɬ sGwansing-Gu (= ten without one)
5	tliiɬ	10	tlaa'ɬ
20	lagwat / tlaalii stung	11	tlaa'ɬ wuk sGwansing
30	tlaalii ɬGuunɬ	12	tlaa'ɬ wuk stung

The numbers are related in pairs:

2	stung	4	stansing
3	ɬGuunɬ	6	ɬGaniɬ
4	stansing	8	stansanga
5	tliiɬ	10	tlaa'ɬ

Objects are counted using classifiers, as in most East-Asian and American languages; this is comparable to the use of *four heads of cattle* rather than *four cattle* in English. For round objects the classifier *ki* is used, for example:

watch-gii ki stung = 'watch'-the round-object two = two watches.

This again shows how easily the language incorporates foreign words.

10 References

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4. John R. Swanton, *Haida*, Handbook of American Indian Languages, BAE Bulletin 40, Part 1, Franz Boas, Reprint Anthropological Publications, Oosterhout, N.B., the Netherlands, 1969, © 1911, pp. 205-282,.
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