

SKETCH OF THE KWAKIUTL LANGUAGE¹

By FRANZ BOAS

In the course of a series of investigations undertaken for the Jesup North Pacific Expedition, I collected extensive material on the language of the Kwakiutl Indians, who inhabit northeastern Vancouver island and the adjacent coast of British Columbia. A treatise on the grammar of this language, by Rev. Alfred J. Hall, was published in 1889;² but the author has not succeeded in elucidating its structural peculiarities. I published a brief sketch of the grammar in the Reports of the Committee on the Northwestern Tribes of Canada, appointed by the British Association for the Advancement of Science.³ While the data given in these sketches are in the main correct, the fundamental traits of the language have hitherto remained unknown.

The phonetic system of the Kwakiutl is very rich. It abounds particularly in sounds of the k series and of the l series. The system of consonants includes velars, palatals, anterior palatals, alveolars, and labials. The palatal series (English k) seems to occur only in combination with u articulations. In most of these groups we find a sonans, surd, fortis, and spirans. The sonans is harder than the corresponding English sound. The surd is pronounced with a full breath, while the fortis is a surd with increased stress and suddenness of articulation. The sonans is so strong that it is very easily mistaken for a surd. Besides the groups mentioned before, we have a series of lateral linguals or l sounds; the laryngeal catch; h; y; and w.

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² A Grammar of the Kwagiutl Language, *Trans. Royal Society of Canada*, 1888, II, pp. 57-105.

³ *Report of the Sixtieth Meeting of the B. A. S.*, 1890, pp. 655-668; also 1896, pp. 585, 586.