

Modern myths of meaning of “Yuchi” in Yuchean

David K. Hackett

It is with a cautious humility that I raise the question of the century old, quasi-established meaning of the term “Yuchi.” Modern consensus has it that this term by which the Tsoyaha people are widely known and sometimes spelled “Euchee,” comes from the Uchean *Yu Tci* -- meaning “seated at a distance” or “faraway.” This origin theory was posited by Frank Speck in 1909. While it is true that the various words for distant (yonder, far, & faraway) often begin with the phoneme *yu*, so do some other terms with quite desperate meanings. An analysis of all the words with this phoneme was undertaken in an attempt to resurrect the root meaning of it.

Several major ideas begin with the phoneme *Yu*, and many more carry it as a subordinate modifier - morpheme. These include besides “distance:” “house/home,” “squareground,” “ill/sick,” “fly,” “high/up,” “myth/story,” “pipe,” “lie/fool,” “strange/weird,” “tie on,” “exchange” & “long ago.” It is not readily clear that these things share any common concept. It is clear that the meaning of the morpheme *Yu* is subtle, and a bit obscure. However, I might posit that they all have a measured significance wherein the key idea is “import or significance” as in great, large or special. *Yu* would then be a root idea, like *Go/co* meaning man or *S’a* meaning earth, but herein *Yu* would flag the largeness or significance. This can be seen in the word *stago* (far) and *yustago* (very far). It remains clear from the diverse use of the morpheme *Yu* that it cannot in all likelihood be readily interpreted as “far,” anymore than “up” or “home” or even “sick.”

Yuchi words for “far” include *yukho*, *hege’fa*, *hegehe’a* (Lit: place-end), *stago*, *yustago*, *yuhe’a* (yonder - Lit: house-end), *yuxke* (yonder). In Yuchean the word *chi* is one form of the verb “to sit.” A cursory understanding of the language could easily cause one to surmise that *Yu-chi* might refer to “sitting far off.” However a more thorough knowledge of the broad spectrum of the usage of the morpheme *Yu*, ought to give pause here. After all we have *yuba* (high, mountain) *yuda* (pipe), *yuhe/yuti* (house/home), *yude* (fly), *yu’de* (story), *yu’a’e* (squareground), *yukwane* (tie on), *yuhu’lene* (exchange), and *yuxe* (sick) -- all of which that have nothing to do with far-ness. When you add that the Yuchi elders insist that it is not *Yu-chi*, but *Yudji*, and that early records also often record it as “Ugee,” and “Hughee,” this opens up greater doubt still as to the Speck theory of origin for the word “Yuchi.” While several Yuchi speakers gave Speck tacit approval of this theory, Frank Speck did not have access to the most knowledgeable of Yuchi Elders. In light of this argument, Speck’s theory must be viewed with great skepticism, and so far as it has been widely embraced - it should be viewed as mythology.

While it is still possible that the word is not Yuchean in origin at all, its wide use by the Yuchi, the Cherokee (*Yutsi*), Muskogean (*Yutcu’lke*), as well as scholars suggests that it might just be a self-appellation. Yuchi elders insist that it is composed of the morphemes *Yu*, *dji*, & *ha* and Chief Sam Brown, jr. insisted that the meaning was earth-sky people. Certainly the Yuchean words for “high/up” and “fly” could support such a claim, but both *dji* or *chi* are hard to cast as references to the earth, and “sky” has a word: *hob’o*.

Based in the knowledge of the elders, I would argue that *Yudji* was originally a title. *Dji* like *yu* has several uses, but not as diverse. It is part of the verbs “be” and “go” as well as a past tense indicator. Since I do not believe it is a tense indicator here, I would argue that the interpretation should be something on the order of *Yu* (significant) *dji* (being) *ha* people, or “people that are significant or important” and that it was originally used as a title. This preserves the sense that Chief Brown was conveying, as well as the most likely interpretations of the individual morphemes (*ha* is well understood to be used as a plural suffix for “people.”). It is also consistent with the emerging view that the Yuchi played a significant role in the commerce and administration of the protohistoric culture in the Southeast.

There is much less question about the use of *Tsoyaha*. *Tso* (Sun or sacred) *ya* (fire) *ha* (people) is often used with Yuchi or alone as the self-appellation of our people. It is broadly interpreted as “Children of the Sun,” as we are taught that our original ancestors came down from the Sun, bringing our culture, and becoming priests to the peoples of the Southeast.

We may never know the explicit etymology of the name, “Yuchi,” but a better understanding of the Yuchi language can only give us a better understanding of the people and the culture. It is quite clear that the Yuchean language and the culture are intimately interwoven and evolved together -- unraveling one will reveal the other.



Additional support for *Yu* being a morpheme denoting significance or noteworthiness -- & perhaps greatness.

Yuso -- Polecat, skunk, wherein *so* means stink, and ***yuso*** means “significant stink.”

Yuti -- Fool, wherein *tixa* means liar or to lie, and ***yuti*** means a significant liar.

Yuxa -- happy, merry, well, wherein *xa* means future, ball game, and ***xa’a*** means sunshine (big future).

Yuxu -- to shake (rattle), wherein *xuxu* means cricket or cicada from their sound.

It should be noted how much the turtleshell rattles sound like the cicadas during dancing.

Yudowu -- town, wherein *dowu* means authority, appoint, permission, therefore a town is “significant authority.”

Already noted: ***Yuba (yupa)*** -- high or mountain, wherein *ba* means climb, so ***yuba*** means a “significant climb.”

Yuda -- pipe, wherein *da* means fire or to light, so ***yuda*** would be a “significant fire.”

Also note that the clan call is ***yudaha*** (pipe-people).

Also of note: the derivations of house and squareground: ***Yuhe*** -- house or home, ***yuhe’a*** or ***yue’a*** (big house), and squareground -- ***S’a sa he*** or ***yu ahe (yu’a’e)***. (*he* -- head, therefore ***yuhe*** is “significant head??”)

Yuhepe -- Boat, as in “house-drinks”

also strange -- ***yuhe’a*** (bighouse??) or ***yuhe!’e***

Yugo!ta -- grow (“go upward”)

Yuxe -- sick, wherein *xe* means dead or die.

Yufala -- Way or path of significance & ***Yuxt’a*** --- road, trail

Yuhulene -- Exchange, trade

A further search of words wherein the prefix morpheme ***Yu*** is used to underscore that the meaning is to call further attention to the import of the succeeding morpheme. These additional terms further confirm the use of ***Yu*** as a morpheme to flag a significance or noteworthiness. One can easily use the term “great” as a substitute for ***Yu*** and see the general idea of the morpheme’s use. It should be further noted, as well, that these words all have a high level of significance to the Yuchi and their culture.

The Spirit is Willing, and the Culture is Confirming

The real import to the Spiritual Yuchean Lexicon is while many of these words have meaning and use in other languages — it is a secondary or derived usage, whereas they have primary usage in Yuchean, i.e. they are borrowed from the Yuchean into the other languages. This can be established by the structure of the unique Yuchi language. First it is morpheme agglomerative (more so than German), that is the words are made up of elements (morphemes) that have specific meanings themselves — therefore one can more easily trace the origins of any word as it arises in, or from the Yuchi. Second, Yuchean is a language isolate, which means it is not closely related to any other known language. It also is a very pristine isolate, which raises large questions of how the Yuchi lived intimately (particularly with the Koasati) and engaged in exchange without incorporating neighboring language words into the Yuchean. This is because the Yuchi were exceedingly protective of their language, more so than even the French are of theirs. However, the opposite is not true. When we look at the other neighboring languages, we find that they have borrowed quite a number of words from the Yuchean.

A classic example is the word for translator/interpreter: *Yatiki*. This word, and words derived from it, are widely used throughout the neighboring languages -- very likely because the Yuchi were long involved in commerce and trade. In these other languages there is no etymological trace of its evolution, but it clearly is made up of Yuchean morphemes. In Yuchean it is a dimorphic term made up of the morphemes for “fire” (“wood-yellow”) and “hand” (“receiver”). Similar morphemes give rise to the term for “poleboy” (*Yadjiki*) as well. So one can most often establish a known origin for a word in Yuchean. The other words in the Spiritual Lexicon are also dimorphemes and polymorphemes leading to the conclusion that they are original words from the Yuchean. This does not argue against some terms having multiple origins and being used because they have dual meaningfulness — but it does accumulate a very strong argument that the Yuchi language and the Green Corn/moundbuilding priesthood coevolved in time. This strongly supports oral traditions among the Yuchi elders that state the said same.

The import of the Spiritual Yuchean Lexicon also is that these words are as important as words like “land” and “water” (often used by linguists) for finding cross language connections. *Iniha* is a dimorpheme in Yuchi with the meaning of “true ceremony” and “people.” It is used by many Southeastern peoples as a term for priests or religious leaders. It was a term used by the Algonquin (Lenape and Shawnee) for their priests, and the Yuchi were very close to these people, as they were with the Koasati -- often living among them all. So it is not just that these words have meaning in Yuchi, but that they have their roots of origin in Yuchean. So while *Kutani* means priest in several languages, its traceable roots are to be found in the Yuchean where it is a dimorpheme meaning “to make brothers.” While *Shawano* is associated with the Shawnee, its traceable roots are in the Yuchean as a dimorpheme as Chief Sam Brown, Jr. taught us.

Based in this brief analysis of these several key words, one comes to a strong conclusion that the Yuchi were key players in the Moundbuilding/Green Corn Rites, and that the evidence indicates a coevolution of these Rites with the Yuchean language based on its structure and the words' subsequent spread to neighboring languages. Further etymological analysis will demonstrate that the Yuchi were instrumental in founding this pan-Southeastern culture, as traders and priests in order to maintain peace among the peoples -- as the elders have long maintained. It should also be noted that the culture was far more influential and significant in its range across Eastern North America as to be deemed more than just the original tribal confederacy (predating the Iroquois League and the Creek Confederacy), but understood as the First United States of this Land. For far too long the dimensions and quality of the Moundbuilding culture has been minimized, and portrayed as only a loose affiliation of warring tribes. I believe the evidence supports a new view, uncolored by the dominant cultural jingoism, marginalization and minimization that has been so long told of this culture.

Oral traditions may be suspect, but the confirming power encoded in the Yuchean language is a history unto itself, waiting to be unraveled. I have talked to spiritual leaders from a number of tribes who have been taught by their elders that they Tsoyaha Yuchi were indeed the *Isopogogee*, Children of the Sun.

Spiritual Yuchi Lexicon

The Priests:

- Iniha** (Algonquin usage) --- *Iniha* carries the meaning of “people of the true ceremony” in Yuchi.
- Micco** (Muskogean) --- *Nekho* means “to open up belief” in Yuchean.
- Yoholo** (Muskogean) -- *Yuhochine* means “medicine song” in Yuchean. Yoholo means singer in Creek.
- AniKutani** (Cherokee) -- *Khutane* means “to make brothers” in Yuchean. Ani means people in Cherokee.
Khotane in Yuchean is a small portal/keyhole, the ogee. 
- Shawaeno** (various) -- *Shawaeno* means “snake/eagle/moon spirit” in Yuchean and refers to priests in general.
- Ispogogee** (various) -- *Ispogogee* means dark-horned giant in Yuchean and is a general reference to the original priests.
- Choyaha** (Yuchi) --- *Tsoyaha* (Sun-fire people)
- Yatiti** (Yuchi) --- Fire cross 
- Yati** (Yuchi) --- Fire
- Yatiki** (Yuchi) --- Translator/Interpreter (Literally: Fire Receiver)
- Yustafawaeno** (Yuchi) -- upper spirit
- Coweta** (white town name) -- Co weta means Hawk-man in Yuchean, a princible symbol and priest.
ha'goweta means “to fast” in Yuchean.
- Echota** (white town name) --- *E tsho ta* means “sacred tobacco fire” in Yuchean.
- Canasauga** (white town name) -- *Caeno Sauga* means eagle-bear.
- Tsopathla** (Chief in Yuchi) --- *Tso pa thla* means “great sacred or Sun chief” literally.
- Gohanasha** (Yuchi) --- *Go Ha Ne Xa* means “ancestors” -- people that have passed.
- Gohantone** (Yuchi) -- The deity -- Breathmaster (Lit: person controls breath)
- Yuda** (Yuchi) -- *Yuda* means pipe. *Yudaha* (pipepeople) is the clan call.
- EE** (Yuchi) --- *ii* means tobacco/ blood.
- Chodasha** (Yuchi) -- *Tsodasha* -- an herb: Life Everlasting or rabbit tobacco (*Polycephallium* sp.)
Lit: “Sacred fire quick”.
- Choshata** (Yuchi) --- *Tsoxata* -- an herb: Praire willow (*Salix humilis*).
- Fadae** (Yuchi) -- *Fadae* -- an herb: Button Snakeroot (*Eryngium yuccifolium*).
- Dae** (Yuchi) -- *Dae* -- an herb/tree: Red Cedar (*Juniperus virginiana*).
- Choso** (Yuchi) --- *Tsoso* -- an herb: Horsemint (Bergamot) (*Monarda fistulosa*).
- Josene** (Yuchi) ---- *Tsosene* -- an herb: Spicebush (*Lindera benzoin*).
- Chochubyoto** (Yuchi) --- *Tsochubyoto* -- an herb Jimsee root or Jimsom weed (*Datura stramonium*).
- Chocho** (Yuchi) --- *Tsocho* -- corn --- *tsothohitsa* (Greencorn).
- Eyapenetsee** (Yuchi) -- *ii ya pe net sii* (Greencorn Ceremony) tobacco/blood, orate, smoke/drink.
- Yashayawa** (Yuchi) -- *yaxayaewa* means arbor (seating structure on the squareground).
- SaeSaehe** (Yuchi) -- Squareground
- Ya tci ki** (Yuchi) -- Poleboy (translator -- tree receiver -- tree be/go hand) **Yaxdjiki** see **Yudjiha**
- Yasee** (Yuchi) --- *yasi* device: switch used by poleboy (lit: tree-pieces)
- Khyagoha laka** (Yuchi) -- Crane feather
- YaDiDa** (Yuchi) --- device: Drum
- Tha pa ne** (Yuchi) -- device: Rattle
- Get i ne** (Yuchi) -- device: Scratcher
- Yas aege si sine** (Yuchi) -- device: Walkingstick or staff.
- Sot'adax'i chata'a** (Yuchi) --- Great Lizard (Dinosaur) a threat

Yuclean as a Tool of Understanding Indigenous Southeastern Culture

The Yuchi language has a number of unusual and interesting features that should interest many besides linguists. First, Yuclean is a language isolate, which means it is unrelated to other known Indian languages. In the case of Yuclean this lack of evolution from or with other languages is rather profound and absolute. A few have suggested very distant Siouian influences, but these remain sketchy and unconvincing to most. Further the language has remained isolated from the many neighboring languages despite very intimate contact with these peoples for many centuries. Most isolates form because the speakers are physically isolated, and evidence does point at the Yuchi spending some time island-hopping the Caribbean. But they have spent much time in intimate contact with other languages as well. This is rather unique among languages, and can only be explained by the staunch Yuchi pride and traditionalism, which has kept the language very pristine. The Yuchi have been more protective of their language than the French are of theirs, actively eschewing foreign words for many centuries. This has left the Yuclean language nearly devoid of any borrowed words or structure.

Because the Yuchi neither taught outsiders to speak Yuclean, nor permitted non-Yuchi words to be incorporated into the Yuclean, it remains among the most pristine languages, and has not change appreciably for many centuries. The opposite is not true, as a number of important terms have been borrowed out of the Yuclean, demonstrating that the Yuchi were at the very heart of the protohistoric culture in the Southeast region in both trade and religious focii.

Second, Yuclean is an agglomerative language (like German) wherein words are assembled by stringing morphemes of meaning together. Thus a word like “dinosaur” is composed of the morphemes for “lizard” (*sot’a*), “mouth” (*dax’i*), “red” (*chata*), “big” (*a*). This makes etymology of words straight forward because in addition to the meaning, the origins of the word are fairly easily traced by these morphemes as well. It also makes the language very adaptive to creating new words such as car (*k’as’athecaha* -- “thing, run, fast”), “radio” (*t’ostanewedine* -- “box, talking”) and “telephone” (*se te’wedine* -- “wire, iron, on, talking”), eliminating the need to borrow such words into the language. These morphemes might have several orderings within a word, but often start with the most important “noun.” These often become rather noteworthy prefix/suffix morphemes across the language as in the following list. It is this feature that makes it so useful for tracking word genealogies among languages.

Categorical Element Designation by Morphemes

Certain syllabic prefix/suffix terms (Morphemes) are used to set a stage for the word, i.e. a prefix of *S’a* denotes that the term refers to something pertaining to the earth or land. *Go (Co)* refers to something pertaining to humans or the human condition. *Tso* refers to something dedicated to the sun or sacred. A suffix of *ha* denotes a plural inanimate or group of people. Others morphemes include:

Morpheme	Meaning
<i>S’a</i>	earth
<i>Go (Co)</i>	humans/ human condition (Yuchi inclusive only)
<i>titi</i>	stone or metal
<i>Tso</i>	Sun or sacred
<i>Ya (-x,s)</i>	tree/wood
<i>Ya or Da/ Ba</i>	fire
<i>Yu</i>	noteworthiness/ significance
<i>--Waneo</i>	spirit / dream / shadow
<i>Ha</i>	tribe / clan -- groups of people & Plural inanimate
<i>Fa</i>	directional
<i>Da</i>	wind
<i>Tse</i>	water
<i>Ha!</i>	breath
<i>K’</i>	thing or action
<i>Xu</i>	fish
<i>Wak</i>	interrogative as well as suffix: -le
<i>--‘a</i>	big
<i>--s’i</i>	small
<i>-ne or -ke</i>	place (here)