

Document title: YB-2741A=8  
Manuscript title: <de ka ga . ka ka nwi ka de .> (“Skunk and Grizzly Bear”)  
Manuscript date: 1911-1938  
Manuscript location: National Anthropological Archives, Truman Michelson ms. #2741A.8  
Written by: Young Bear  
Written for: Truman Michelson  
Transcribed by: Lucy Thomason  
Edited by: Lucy Thomason  
Translated by: Lucy Thomason  
Help with translation provided to Ives Goddard by: Adeline Wanatee (1994)

Abbreviations: YB = Young Bear. LT = Lucy Thomason.

The original manuscript of this text is in the Smithsonian Institution’s National Anthropological Archives. It consists of 2 pages of Meskwaki syllabary (“papepipo”). It was written by Young Bear sometime between the years of 1910 and 1938. There is no contemporary translation.

As of late 2011, the time of this writing, the Smithsonian Institution’s National Anthropological Archives is housed in Suitland, Maryland, a suburb of Washington, D.C. Consult the website <http://www.nmnh.si.edu/naa/> for information about how to arrange a visit to the National Anthropological Archives.

There are phonemically eight vowels in Meskwaki: i, iː, e, eː, a, aː, o, oː.

There are phonemically eleven consonants in Meskwaki: p, t, č, k, s, š, h, m, n, w, y.

There are phonemically 29 consonant clusters in Meskwaki: hp, ht, hč, hk, šk, hm, hn, hw, hy, pw, tw, kw, sw, šw, mw, nw, py, ty, čy, ky, šy, my, ny, hpw, htw, hkw, šk, hpy, hky.

Meskwaki papepipo is adapted to be wonderfully easy to write. It is much harder to read. Papepipo omits vowel length, the consonant “h”, and nearly all punctuation. This means that spoken Meskwaki has eight distinct vowels, but papepipo writes only four vowels; spoken Meskwaki has eleven distinct consonants, but papepipo writes only ten consonants; spoken Meskwaki has 29 distinct consonant clusters, but papepipo writes only 16 consonant clusters. As a result, there is a great deal of educated guesswork involved in transcribing papepipo into fully phonemicized words, phrases, and sentences. The edited and translated text of “Skunk and Grizzly Bear” should be taken provisionally and read critically: there may be mistakes or infelicities in YB’s original papepipo, in LT’s reading of the papepipo, in LT’s choices regarding phonemicization, word breaks, and sentence breaks, and in LT’s choices regarding Meskwaki-to-English translation. Translation in particular is at the best of times an imperfect art, and in interpreting Meskwaki stories into English there is a constant struggle between the wish to give a painfully literal translation of each word and the wish to try to translate the (imagined) intended poetic and rhetorical effect of the Meskwaki language on Meskwaki ears into a similar poetic and rhetorical effect of English on English ears.

The Meskwaki of YB’s manuscript is now archaic, which makes it even more challenging to read than modern papepipo.

Some notes about fundamental features of the Meskwaki language which translate poorly into English: Meskwaki, like other members of the Algonquian language family, has animate versus inanimate gender where English has masculine versus feminine versus inanimate gender. Meskwaki distinguishes between a “proximate” (nearest/most interesting/most important/most sympathetic) third person and various “obviative” (more peripheral/less interesting/less important/less sympathetic) third persons. In Meskwaki it is obligatory to indicate the source of one’s information (direct evidence? indirect evidence? supposition? common knowledge? hearsay?) whereas in English this is optional. Complex, multi-faceted, multipartite verb stems predominate in Meskwaki to an extent unknown in English. (Cf. Edward Sapir’s famous observation that “single Algonkin words are like tiny imagist poems.”)

In the following text, the numbers in the left margin reflect the manuscript pages. Capital letters followed by a parenthesis mark the lines proposed by LT. A space between Meskwaki words reflects a word divider in the manuscript. Underscore ( ) marks a word boundary where there was no word divider in the manuscript. Pipe (|) marks a place where the end of a word is not marked by a word divider in the manuscript but does coincide with the edge of the page in the manuscript. Double pipe (||) marks the end of a page. Plain hyphen (-) marks a preverb boundary marked by a word divider in the manuscript. Underscored hyphen ( ) marks a preverb boundary not marked by a word divider in the manuscript. Square brackets ( [ ] ) enclose comments on the text and translation, including indications of where YB's manuscript differs from LT's redaction.

These editions and translations are works in progress and minor changes can be expected in the future.

- 1 A) šeka·kwa ka·ka·nwikaše·[wa]. [written as title; še·wa: <še.>]  
 A) Skunk and Grizzly Bear.
- B) kapo·twe e·h=ne·wa·či ka·ka·nwikaše·wa šeka·kwani,  
 B) At some point a grizzly bear saw a skunk,
- C) e·h=ne·woti·wa·či. [wo: <o>]  
 C) they saw each other.
- D) “hawo,”| e·h=iti·wa·či. [wo: <o|>]  
 D) “Hello,” they greeted each other.
- E) e·h=wa·pawa·pama·či e·h=kaka·nwikaše·niči.  
 E) (Skunk) stared at (Grizzly Bear)'s long claws.
- F) “kaši=ča·h=mana ketena·hpenana·wa keškaša,” e·h=ina·či. [keškaša: <ša.> written over erased syllable, in YB's hand]  
 F) “How did you get your claw to be like that?” he asked him.
- G) “ne·nešiwe·wa=ča·h,” e·h=ikoči.  
 G) “It's killed enemies time and time again,” (Grizzly Bear) told (Skunk).
- H) “mehteno·h=meko ki·na\_ išite·he·yane,  
 H) “If you want to, only,
- I) i·n=a·mihtah nesehki.” [nesehki: <.nesa|či.>]  
 I) it could kill you.”
- J) “nahi',\_ni·h=nesekwa,” e·h=ina·či.|  
 J) “All right, it can kill me,” (Skunk) told (Grizzly Bear).
- K) “hawo,” e·h=ikoči.  
 K) “All right,” (Grizzly Bear) told (Skunk).
- L) i·nah=e·h=tanehkwe·šiki.  
 L) (Skunk) lay down with his head there.
- M) “meškaše,\_ni·h=nepe,”\_e·h=ina·či.  
 M) “Claw, I want to die!” he told it.

N) e·h=pa·wi\_kaški\_nesekoči.|

N) But it couldn't kill him.

O) "či·wana·či='hi=ni·hka, ni·na=mata=mana nemeškwa·ha ne·nešiwe·wa," e·h=ineči  
ka·ka·nwikaše·wa.

O) "Phooey! In my case, I kill enemies time and time again with my anus," Grizzly Bear was told.

P) e·h=a·nweše·či ka·ka·nwikaše·wa.

P) The meaning was lost on Grizzly Bear.

Q) "o', ni·h=nesekwa," e·h=iči.

Q) "Well, it can kill me," he said.

R) i·nahi\_e·h=taneše·šiki.

R) (Grizzly Bear) lay down with his ear there.

S) "meškwa,\_ni·h=nepe,"|| e·h=ina·či.

S) "Anus, I want to die!" he told it.

[2] A) e·h=pemoči| ka·ka·nwikaše·wa.

A) And Grizzly Bear was shot.

B) "wi·h=nepeno=ni·hka,"\_e·h=ineči.

B) "Want to die, drat you!" was said to him.

C) i·ni\_e·šawiwa·či mi·škawesičiki,

C) That was what the two powerful beings did,

D) e·h=neseti·wa·či.|| [neseti: <ne> written quite oddly]

D) when one killed the other.