INTRODUCTION

At least fifty named Indian groups are known to have lived in the area south of the Mason–Dixon line and north of the Creek and the other Muskogean tribes. The exact number and the specific names vary from one source to another, but all agree that there were many different tribes in Maryland, Virginia and the Carolinas during the colonial period. Most also agree that these fifty or more tribes all spoke languages that can be assigned to just three language families: Algonquian, Iroquoian, and Siouan.

In the case of a few favoured groups there is little room for debate. It is certain that the Powhatan spoke an Algonquian language, that the Tuscarora and Cherokee are Iroquoians, and that the Catawba speak a Siouan language.

In other cases the linguistic material cannot be positively linked to one particular political group. There are several vocabularies of an Algonquian language that are labelled Nanticoke, but Ives Goddard (1978:73) has pointed out that Murray collected his “Nanticoke” vocabulary at the Choptank village on the Eastern Shore, and Heckewelder’s vocabularies were collected from refugees living in Ontario. Should the language be called Nanticoke, Choptank, or something else? And if it is Nanticoke, did the Choptank speak the same language, a different dialect, a different Algonquian language, or some completely unrelated language?

The basic problem, of course, is the lack of reliable linguistic data from most of this region. But there are additional complications. It is known that some Indians were bilingual or multilingual (cf. Rhodes 1982), so a member of one tribe might supply words from some other’s language, and there were “trade languages” which incorporated words from several distinct languages, such as the mixed Algonquian and Siouan jargon recorded by John Fontaine at Fort Christanna (Alexander 1971, Goddard 1972). When all that survives is a few badly-recorded
words — or worse, just a few proper names — it may not even be possible to identify the linguistic family; and even if the language can be identified, it may not be the language actually spoken by the group from whom the words were obtained.

Another complication is the frequent misuse of the words *Algonquian*, *Iroquoian* and *Siouan* in non-linguistic contexts. Although the Algonquian Conference has now been meeting for nearly three decades, it seems that no one has previously offered a precise definition of its subject matter. The term *Algonquian* is strictly a linguistic one: the Algonquians are, by definition, all those people who speak (or are descended from those who used to speak) one of the languages of the Algonquian family, no matter where they live or what kind of culture they have. Similarly *Iroquoian* refers to those who speak languages of the Iroquoian family, and the Siouans are those who speak a Siouan language. *Algonquian*, *Iroquoian* and *Siouan* are not ethnic, racial, political or geographical terms: there is no single “Algonquian culture”, no special variety of *Homo sapiens* that might be labelled “the Algonquian race”, no all-inclusive Algonquian or Iroquoian confederacies, nor — despite a century’s archaeological usage — anything that could properly be called “Algonquian” or “Iroquoian” pottery.

In the Northeast and on the Plains this point is reasonably well understood — the names of linguistic families are seldom applied in completely inappropriate contexts, though on a smaller scale some still speak about “Cree culture” as a single entity distinct from, say, “Ojibwa culture”, and some archaeologists are still reporting finds of prehistoric “Cree” pottery and “Assiniboine” pottery. But no one calls the Sarcee “Algonquian” (or more specifically “Blackfoot”) just because their culture is similar to that of the Siksika and they were part of the Blackfoot political confederacy.

In the South, however, the old terminological problems persist, partly from inertia and partly because so little new information has appeared in recent decades to provoke new assessments of the data.

It is evident that cataloguers of North American tribes have always hated to leave any blanks. In his compendious study of *The Indians of the southeastern United States* (1946), John R. Swanton attempted to identify every one of the 173 groups mentioned in historical sources,
though even he had to admit defeat on occasion. If a tribe is known to have existed, classifiers have tried to assign a linguistic label, even if there are no relevant data. Thus groups have been labelled “Iroquoian” (that is, speakers of an Iroquoian language) on the grounds that they were politically allied with a known Iroquoian tribe, or because they seem to share cultural traits with the Iroquois Confederacy, and others have been labelled “Algonquian” because their tribal name looks like it might be an Algonquian word. One writer even argued for a linguistic relationship because the tribes concerned never fought each other (Miller 1957:183; cf. Binford 1959:33). By such standards the Welsh are a Germanic tribe rather than a group of Celtic speakers: they are politically allied with the English and share much the same culture, and the name Welsh comes from Old English.

LINGUISTIC EVIDENCE

A few of the non-Algonquian languages survived into the twentieth century and been described by modern linguists. There are therefore no arguments about whether Tuscarora and Cherokee belong to the Iroquoian family, or Catawba to Siouan, and when linguists debate the precise affiliation of Catawba to Dakota, Winnebago and the other Siouan languages, they have an abundance of data to call upon. In other words, there is general acceptance of the fact that Catawba is related to Dakota, and only the details of exactly how it is related are open to discussion.

All the other languages are extinct, but for a handful of them the records are adequate to answer questions about affiliation, if not about the details of phonology and syntax that many linguists prefer to discuss. More than twenty years ago Ives Goddard (1974) drew attention to a short religious text in Conoy or Piscataway (that regrettaably has never been published), and for more than a century there have been rumours of a much longer Conoy manuscript somewhere in Italy. The language is definitely Algonquian, and distinct from all the others known. The Nanticoke vocabularies collected by Murray and Heckewelder have already been mentioned; Nanticoke too is definitely Algonquian, but the vocabularies seem to contain a mixture of at least two distinct dialects or languages (Pentland 1979:288, 299–301). It is impossible to determine whether all Nanticoke spoke a mixed language, or whether the data were
collected from various informants, including refugees from other Algonquian tribes in the Delmarva Peninsula.

Powhatan is well enough attested in William Strachey's 1612 vocabulary (Strachey 1953), but Frank Siebert (1975:295–6) suggested that it might contain words from more than one dialect, and I have shown (Pentland 1991) that the locative suffix was not uniform throughout the Powhatan confederacy, some areas having -nk (< Proto-Algonquian *-nki) but others -nt. The Roanoke colonists recorded a number of Algonquian words, but it is not clear whether they are all from a single language, nor just where that language was spoken; John Lawson's Pamlico vocabulary (1709) appears to be the same language, but it is too short to permit a certain identification. It is possible — perhaps even likely — that the Roanoke, Secotan, Pamlico, Chawanoke and Weapemeoc all spoke the same Algonquian language, but there is no proof (cf. Hoffman 1967: 35–36). However, John Smith (1612:10 = 1986, 1:150) reported that Chawanoke was different enough from Powhatan that interpreters were necessary.

Among the non-Algonquian languages, there is a vocabulary of Nottoway collected by John Wood in 1820 which gives more than 250 words of the language, more than enough to prove that Nottoway is a Northern Iroquoian language most closely related to Tuscarora (Lounsbury 1978:335, Rudes 1981a:44–45). The 80-word vocabulary of Minqua (Susquehannock) published by John Campanius (1696:157–160) provided sufficient material for Marianne Mithun (1981) to identify it as a separate Northern Iroquoian language, similar to those of the Five Nations.

However, even when vocabularies exist there may be dispute (by non-linguists, at least). In 1957 the Smithsonian Institution published a lengthy monograph by Carl F. Miller which claimed that there were no Siouan speakers east of the Mississippi, and that the Occaneechi, Saponi and Tutelo are not Siouan but "rather of a primitive Algonquian stock" (Miller 1957:206). William Sturtevant (1958) pointed out that Miller had rejected the perfectly sound linguistic evidence put forward by Horatio Hale (1883) to prove that Tutelo is a Siouan language, and had ignored the existence of Catawba and Woccon as well as the Biloxi and Ofo languages further south. Biloxi, Ofo and Tutelo are very obviously Siouan. Woccon is attested only in a short vocabulary recorded by John
Lawson (1709), but has long been recognized as a close relative of Catawba (Powell 1891:112); however, Woccon and Catawba are quite distant from the other Siouan languages, apparently forming a separate branch of the family (Carter 1980:180–1).

According to John Fontaine (1972:91) the Indians at Fort Christanna in 1716 were Saponi; the vocabulary he recorded, a mixture of Siouan and Algonquian words, may be a jargon which grew out of interaction between Siouan Saponi and Algonquian Powhatan people, but it is also possible that the Saponi spoke an unrelated language and merely used the jargon as a lingua franca to communicate with outsiders. In 1870 Horatio Hale was told that Tutelo and Saponi could understand each other’s speech, but this statement was made after both languages had gone out of use. Alexander (1971:305) notes that there were actually five tribes — Saponi, Occaneechi, Stuckanox (Stenkenocks), Meipontski and Tutelo — at Fort Christanna; the Siouan component of the trade jargon could have come from any of them.

In 1705 Robert Beverley (1947:191) reported that there was a “general Language”, said to be Occaneechi, used as a lingua franca. Beverley’s remark that the general language is “like what Lahontan calls the Algonkine” is ambiguous: he may have meant that Occaneechi is an Algonquian language, or simply that it was used as a lingua franca in the same way as Ojibwa. Since there is no known vocabulary of Occaneechi, its affiliation cannot be determined.

According to John Smith (1612:9 = 1986, 1:150), the Accomac and Acohanock on the Eastern Shore of Virginia spoke the Powhatan language. The Assateague of Kickotank on the Atlantic coast of the Delmarva Peninsula were also probably Algonquian, but the basis for this identification is slimmer than the Smithsonian Handbook lets on. In 1650, Col. Henry Norwood, later treasurer of Virginia, was shipwrecked in Assateague territory, and recorded a few Algonquian words in his journal (Norwood 1844). However, since he was led to safety by an English trader and his Accomac servant, who served as interpreter, it is possible that the words in Norwood’s narrative are in the servant’s Accomac dialect of Powhatan, rather than a specimen of the Assateague language.
The Moneton have been classified as Siouan, but again the identification is open to dispute. There is clear evidence of a Siouan presence in the area: in 1674 Gabriel Archer reported

"Now ye king [of the Tomahitans] must goe to give ye monetons a visit which were his frends, mony signifing water and ton great in theire language." [Davis 1990:40]

Moneton (presumably *mani ta*) is certainly ‘big water’ in some Siouan language, but unfortunately Archer’s phrasing does not make it clear whether “their language” refers to the Moneton themselves or to his Tomahitan hosts. One or the other was Siouan, but not necessarily both (Swanton 1943:57–58; cf. Bauxar 1957:384–9).

Even when a vocabulary was recorded the identification may remain doubtful. The Nansemond, who lived on a tributary of the James River south of the Powhatan, eventually joined the Iroquoian Nottoway (Binford 1967:189). James Mooney (1907:146) obtained six Nansemond words, but only *(nîkâtwîn)* ‘one’ is easily identified as Algonquian (Goddard 1978:74). It is possible that the word for ‘one’ is an Algonquian loan in an unrelated Nansemond language; on the other hand, it is just as likely that the other five words — *(nâkâtwîn)* ‘two’, *(toiśfâw)* ‘four’, etc. — were borrowed from another language by an Algonquian-speaking Nansemond people, or that they were just less well remembered by Mooney’s 83-year-old informant.1 Although we have linguistic data, we are still unable to allocate Nansemond to a particular language family.

QUASI-LINGUISTIC EVIDENCE

There are also a number of reports which merely mention languages that are the same or different, without specifying their affiliations. In *A map of Virginia*, Captain John Smith listed ten nations that could communicate only through interpreters and thus spoke ten distinct languages:

> Amongst those people are thus many severall nations of sundry languages, that environ Powhatans Territories. The Chawonokes, the Mangoags, the Monacans, the Mannahokes, the Massawomekes, the Powhatans, the Sasquesahanocks, the Atquanachukes, the Tockwoghes,

1Mooney (1907:146) noted that he was “so feeble, mentally and physically, that he could not be questioned with any satisfaction.”
and the Kuscarawaoke's. All those not any one understandeth another but by Interpreters. [Smith 1612:10 = 1986, 1:150]

Some of the languages named by Smith are known from other sources. Kuscarawaoke has been identified as one of the Nanticoke towns (Feest 1978a:241, 250), and is therefore probably Algonquian. The Sasquesahanock (Susquehannock), and no doubt also the Mangoag (Mingoess), spoke Iroquoian languages; and the Powhatan language is of course well known.

We can only speculate about the other six. The Chawanoke of North Carolina may have spoken an Algonquian language — Feest (1978b:271) optimistically says they and the Weapemeoc "may be considered as certainly belonging to this family" — but it is not known whether they were the same as Pamlico or something quite different. The Tockwogh of Maryland may have spoken a dialect similar to Nanticoke, as Smith seems to say elsewhere (1612:9 = 1986, 1:150), or an entirely distinct language. Atquanachuke is perhaps Iroquoian, while Monacan, Manannahoke and Massawomeke are generally assumed to have been Siouan languages. However, there isn't the slightest bit of evidence to support these identifications, except that it is known there were Iroquoians and Siouans in Virginia.

One of the more frustrating statements of this type comes from John Lawson, who in 1709 wrote:

I once met with a young Indian Woman, that had been brought from beyond the Mountains, and was sold a Slave into Virginia. She spoke the same Language, as the Coranine [Coree] Indians, that dwell near Cape-Look-out, allowing for some few Words, which were different, yet no otherwise, than that they might understand one another very well. [Lawson 1967:174]

Lawson apparently knew the Coree well — it was a quarrel with the Coree chief which led to his death two years later — but "beyond the Mountains" is a very large area in which many different languages were spoken. The most important tribe directly across the mountains from Cape Lookout was the Cherokee, who speak the only known Southern Iroquoian language. But there were also the Yuchi, whose language is not demonstrably related to any other (Crawford 1979:340–6), the

2 However, Hoffman (1964) equates the Massawomeke with the Erie and Black Minqua, who were Iroquoian.
Muskogeans Chickasaw and Koasati, the Algonquian Shawnee, and probably some Siouan speakers. Lawson's comparison has been cited as evidence that Coree is Iroquoian (Boyce 1978:282), and that it is Algonquian (Miller 1957:124). It is actually evidence only that Coree is fairly closely related to at least one other language (and therefore not an isolate), but the other language could be Yuchi or a member of any one of the four large families we are trying to sort out.

The least dependable evidence of this type is a traveller's statement that a particular tribe "told" him something, when the information may actually have been conveyed by means of an interpreter, or by sign language. In 1607 Gabriel Archer specifically stated that the newly-arrived Jamestown colonists held a "conference by signes" when they wanted to know what lay further up the James River, and an Indian "tolde" them about various islands, two kingdoms beyond the falls, and the mountains; he also "promised to procure" them corn if they would wait for him to return (Barbour 1969:82-83). Although Archer mentions the name of the mountains — "Quirank as he named them" — none of the colonists could have learned much of the Powhatan language in the short time since their arrival. The place name was probably extracted from an otherwise unintelligible discourse accompanying the signs.

In later years a few of the colonists, like Captain John Smith, learned a pidgin form of Powhatan, and perhaps other languages as well, and some of the local Indians learned enough English to communicate with the rest. Thereafter when a narrative implies that the English spoke directly to an inland tribe, it is seldom certain whether the language was pidgin Powhatan (which served as a lingua franca over a wide area), or whether the colonist actually communicated by means of an interpreter, or even a chain of interpreters. An unelaborated claim that an explorer understood the local speech is not evidence that the tribe spoke Powhatan, or even another Algonquian language.

NAMES AS EVIDENCE

Many tribal names can be identified as Algonquian words, but this does not prove that the people so named spoke an Algonquian language, as some have assumed. In 1943 Maurice Mook announced the discovery of a new Algonquian tribe in North Carolina "from the evidence of
location and the fact that Moratoc is an Algonkian-sounding word”, and in this he was supported by Frank Speck and John Swanton. Moratoc or Moratuc does indeed appear to be an Algonquian place name — though I would translate it as ‘strange river’ (deriving from Proto-Algonquian *myal- ‘strange, quasi’ + *?-tekʷ- ‘river’) rather than ‘nice river’ (as Speck suggested, presumably from Proto-Algonquian *melw- ‘good’) — but it shows only that the Roanoke colonists got their information from Algonquian speakers, a fact already known. Bernard Hoffman (1967: 36–37) suggests that the Moratuc may actually have been Tuscarora speakers. Mook forgot that the name by which the group became known is irrelevant in determining the language its members spoke: some Algonquian groups, such as the Cree, Ojibwa and Menomini, do have Algonquian names, but the name Montagnais is French, Blackfoot is English, Conoy is Iroquoian, and Arapaho and Cheyenne are Siouan. Only when there is unambiguous evidence that the recorded name is the group’s own, and that it has a certain meaning in their own language, can it be used to determine the group’s linguistic affiliation.

Mook is not the only one who forgot the basic principle that group names are more often than not given by outsiders. Neuseoc, the name of the people who lived at the mouth of the Neuse River, is no doubt an Algonquian word meaning ‘Neuse River people’; the names Weapemeoc and Mannahoke/Manahoac probably have the same suffix; and Chawanoke may be the same word as Shawnee (meaning ‘the southerners’), but in a different language. A specialist in Iroquoian or Siouan languages could probably suggest etymologies for some of the other names (and in a few cases, for some names which can also be interpreted as Algonquian). But before the name of a group can be accepted as evidence, it must be shown that it is their own name, and that it is a meaningful word — not just a name — in their language, as when we are told that the Onondaga call themselves onqtáʔke:kàʔ ‘people of [the town] on the hill’ (Goddard in Blau, Campisi and Tooker 1978:499).

Some attempts at identification have been even less sophisticated. John Swanton supported Maurice Mook’s identification of Moratuc as Algonquian on the grounds that “Most of the names in this region ending in -k... probably belonged to Algonquian people” (Mook 1943:637). Swanton himself pointed out that Mangoak (which probably means
'Iroquoian') is an exception, and did not explain how one could decide which occurrences were acceptable and which were not valid evidence. Swanton also identified the Duharhe or Duhare, a people mentioned by Peter Martyr as living near the coast of South Carolina in the 1520s, as Siouan speakers: "The ending of the word Duhare, and various other terms, shows that we are dealing with tribes of the Catawba division of the Siouan stock" (Swanton 1940:333).

OTHER CRITERIA

A non-linguistic criterion often used to determine linguistic identifications is that of political affiliation. The Smithsonian Handbook includes the Meherrin among the Iroquoian tribes of Virginia primarily because of "their political association with the Nottoway and Tuscarora" (Boyce 1978:282). This line of reasoning gives incorrect results too often to inspire any confidence in it: the Athapaskan-speaking Sarcee were allied with the Blackfoot, while the Nanticoke and other Algonquians were eventually incorporated into the Iroquois Confederacy. And of course there are many examples in the Old World of political unions between peoples speaking different languages, of which Switzerland is but the most famous. In the case of the Meherrin, Marianne Mithun (1979:139-140) and Blair Rudes (1981b) affirm that the names of their towns are Iroquoian; however, only if it can be demonstrated that they were their own names will the Iroquoian affiliation of Meherrin be proven.

Perhaps the most weakly supported identification is Swanton's suggestion that the Chicora, another South Carolina group mentioned by Peter Martyr, became either the Shakori or the Sugeree of North Carolina, "for there is evidence of the movement of a number of South Carolina tribes toward the northeast some time after 1567" (Swanton 1940:333-4; cf. Swanton 1936:372). He apparently reasoned that although Chicora does not resemble the name of any later group in the same district, it is similar enough to names in a neighbouring state to justify the assumption that they migrated north. Even if his identification were to prove correct, it would not be particularly helpful, since the linguistic affiliation of the Shakori and Sugeree is unknown. Swanton (1946, table 1) identified both as Siouan-speaking groups, but all that is really known is that the Shakori were associated with the Eno in the 17th century and later with the
Tuscarora (Hodge 1907–10, 2:521; Boyce 1978:283), and the Sugeree eventually joined the Catawba (Hodge 1907–10, 2:647).

CONCLUSION

As a general principle, we have no business calling any of the southern tribes “Algonquian”, “Iroquoian” or “Siouan” unless we have a vocabulary of their language or a trustworthy report that their language was similar to a known language.

The only tribes in our area which certainly spoke Algonquian languages are the Nanticoke, the Conoy (or Piscataway), the Powhatan, Pamlico, and the people of Roanoke. Other tribes which probably spoke Algonquian languages are the Pocomoke, Assateague, and Secotan. The relationship of Nansemond is doubtful.

The Susquehannock, Nottoway, Tuscarora and Cherokee spoke Iroquoian languages; the Meherrin were probably also Iroquoian. The only certain Siouan languages are Tutelo, Catawba and Woccon, but probably the Saponi and Moneton were also Siouan.

All the other groups — more than thirty of them — are of unknown linguistic affiliation. Some of these tribes no doubt did speak an Algonquian, Iroquoian or Siouan language; but these three linguistic groups were relatively recent arrivals in the South, and there were certainly other peoples here before them. It would not be at all surprising if some of the languages east of the mountains were survivals from an earlier period — languages like Yuchi further west, which are not demonstrably related to any of the large families.

Four centuries after the first Europeans arrived in this area, new documents are still turning up in various archives, and many of the sources previously known are being reviewed by a new generation of scholars. Although this paper has been devoted to deleting names from the list of identified languages, perhaps it will be possible to restore some of them in the future, with (of course) linguistic data to support the linguistic classification.
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