

The Ralph Pepper tapes: Overview of a lesser-known Kansa language audio resource

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Abstract: Rankin’s analysis of Kansa grammar relies heavily upon his 1970s-era recordings of consultant Maude Rowe. Still, he recorded approximately 200 additional minutes of Kansa fieldwork with consultant Ralph Pepper after Rowe’s death. It is unknown if Rankin ever transcribed these later recordings, and the tapes themselves were never professionally migrated to digital media along with Rankin’s other Kansa materials. As such, the Ralph Pepper tapes remain among the least accessible of the available Kansa language materials. While work with the Ralph Pepper tapes remains ongoing, an overview of the initial findings is presented here. In spite of their comparative brevity, these recordings may shed new light on Kansa phonology (e.g., vowel length), lexicon (e.g., word choice), and discourse features (e.g., evidentials).

Keywords: Kansa, Rankin, fieldwork, transcription

1. Introduction

This article is concerned with a collection of Kansa language resources undergoing its first systematic analysis. Owing to the paucity of extant Kansa materials, newly discovered items of any length have the potential to significantly impact what is known of the language. In this case, the materials are anything but new; they have been known and freely available for nearly four decades now. However, they have somehow managed to avoid close scrutiny throughout this time.

1.1. Language background

Kansa, also known as Kanza or Kaw, is a member of the Dhegiha branch of Mississippi Valley Siouan languages. It belongs specifically to the Kansa-Osage subdivision, but is also closely related to Omaha-Ponca, and Quapaw (Parks & Rankin 2001:109). There have been no L1 speakers of Kansa since approximately 1980, but the Kaw Nation has maintained active and fruitful language revitalization efforts for about two decades despite the lack of speakers through reliance upon documentary materials. The two most important of these sources include Dorsey’s 1880s-era Bureau of Ethnology materials collected shortly after the Kaw tribe’s forced removal from Kansas to a reservation in Indian Territory (present-day Kay County, Oklahoma) and Rankin’s 1970s-era fieldwork with some of the last living L1 speakers of Kansa in and around this same

area (McBride & Cumberland 2010:A21). Other available Kansa language materials are smaller in comparison and include work from Morehouse, Stubbs, Morgan, Turner, Bourassa, and La Flesche (Cumberland & Rankin 2012:i) as well as Gatschet, Hewitt, Michelson, and Spencer.

1.2. Rankin's work on Kansa

Rankin's Kansa materials, which are of particular interest here, consist of approximately 64 hours of audio recordings with three different full-blood Kaw speaker consultants of advanced age, including two males and one female. They were, in chronological order, Walter Kekahbah, Maude Rowe, and Ralph Pepper. Present-day knowledge of Kansa relies heavily upon Rankin's work with Rowe owing to the fact that his two male consultants suffered from grave hearing loss at the time. This reliance can be seen in the fact that Rankin recorded dozens of hours of salvage interviews with Rowe compared to approximately 200 minutes with Pepper and just around 30 minutes with Kekahbah. It is important to note here that Rankin managed to transcribe and analyze most of these recordings (McBride 2009:34), but not all. Careful consideration of Rankin's Kansa timeline reveals some materials that have managed to fall through the cracks for nearly 40 years

1.2.1. Kansa fieldwork: 1970s

From mid-1973 to mid-1979, Rankin collected Kansa language fieldwork materials in Kay, Osage, and Tulsa Counties in Oklahoma. Audio recordings of this fieldwork exist for his three primary consultants, as can be seen in Table 1.

Table 1: Rankin's recorded fieldwork with Kansa consultants

Consultant	Location	Date	App. length
Walter Kekahbah	Newkirk, OK	1973	0.5 hours
Maude Rowe	Shidler and Pawhuska, OK	1973-1977	60 hours
Ralph Pepper	Tulsa and rural Kay County, OK	1978-1979	3.5 hours

Note that, among the Pepper materials, there is also a field recording of moments from a 1979 Kaw powwow. It is of interest here primarily insofar as it contains a lengthy speech and prayer from Pepper, the latter of which is entirely in Kansa; the remainder of this recording is music. Pepper, the latter of which is entirely in Kansa; the remainder of this recording is music.

Table 1 clearly demonstrates that Rankin's field recordings skew dramatically in favor of Rowe. The primary reason for this is that the hearing loss of his two male consultants made for trying and time-consuming elicitation sessions, a fact that Rankin reflected on in an interview with Cumberland shortly before the former's death:

...[T]o record with Mr. Pepper, I had to basically write out my questions ahead of time so he could read them because he had trouble hearing my voice. He could always understand his daughter very easily but when I would try to talk to him, he had problems hearing, so he would respond to written questions and translate material... *I did some recording with Mr. Pepper, although his hearing loss made it difficult.* (Cumberland 2016:121-122, emphasis mine)

Rankin made use of two media to document his Kansa fieldwork: audiotape and paper. He consistently used an inconvenient reel-to-reel audiotape recorder throughout his work with all three of his consultants. He was not as consistent with his paper-based methodology. About halfway through his work with Rowe, he apparently made an important change. He had originally begun his Kansa fieldwork with a series of notebooks for the purpose of guiding his elicitations and taking notes on the day of recording and transcribing the Kansa afterward. On a mid-1970s research trip to the National Anthropological Archives, however, he had obtained photocopies of the original Dorsey lexical slip files. From this point on, he abandoned the use of notebooks and began eliciting directly from these photocopies. He also transcribed sessions on them, but took minimal notes. This change is reflected in the names he gave his recordings of Kekahbah and Rowe, the former of which are brief enough to have been included at the beginning of a single tape that also features Rowe at the end. Rankin labeled his first 21 recordings as “Kansa” and his last 34 as “Dictionary.” He labeled his five recordings with Pepper simply as “Ralph Pepper.”

After sessions with his consultants, Rankin generally attempted to produce close transcriptions of the collected material. However, his professional commitments often conspired against this; he told Cumberland as much:

Well, the first thing you need to do, of course, is transcribe all those tapes. Most of my recordings were on old tape recorders, reel-to-reel tape machines, so that had to be written down, and I got through most of it. *I may still have a little bit that still needs to be written down, even after all these years* because, you know, you get busy doing other things. I had a teaching position nine months out of the year and it’s almost impossible to do a lot of tape transcription during that period. Things just get in the way... (Cumberland 2016:125, emphasis mine)

Rankin managed to produce close transcriptions for his “Kansa” recordings on the notebooks he used at the time. He did the same for his “Dictionary” recordings on his Dorsey slip photocopies.

Rankin’s own health concerns at the time, the death of Rowe, and the difficulties in working with the hard-of-hearing male speakers put an end to his Kansa fieldwork in about 1980 (Cumberland 2016:122). Pepper and Kekahbah died shortly thereafter. Rankin was still left with an ample supply of analytical work that could be done on the language using his own materials and those of Dorsey and others, but he no longer had access to L1 consultants from that point on.

1.2.2. Kansa analysis: 1980s

Rankin shifted his focus toward analysis of Kansa during this period. He managed to compile a Kansa grammar sketch (Rankin 1989), a series of lexical files that he would update from time to time (e.g., Rankin 2008), and various comparative Siouan materials making use of his own Kansa data and the findings of others, which he reanalyzed in light of his deepening understanding of the language. Sadly, however, he fell out of touch with his Kaw tribal contacts during this period.

1.2.3. Return to Kansa: 1990s-2010s

At some point during the 1990s, Rankin had a surprise visit from a small delegation of Kaw tribal members who had come to his office at the University of Kansas to discuss his language materials.

This meeting renewed his connection to the tribe and also spurred the eventual establishment of the Kaw Nation's language revitalization efforts. One of the first acts was to hire an audio production company in Kansas to convert "at least fifty *hours*" of Rankin's reel-to-reel field recordings with Kekahbah and Rowe to CD (Cumberland 2016:126-127), *emphasis hers*). For some reason, however, the Pepper tapes were not included in this conversion.

Rankin maintained a close relationship with the tribe after the establishment in the late 1990s of the Kaw Nation's Language Department, for which he served as Language Consultant. He met with department staff at least quarterly from this point until his death in 2014 and participated in a number of language revitalization projects. At some point during this time, he managed to convert his Pepper reel-to-reel tapes to audiocassette format; the language department staff converted these to a digital format at a later date in-office. In 2006, he also oversaw the conversion of his "Kansa" recordings-era field notebooks to MS Word format. This was a team effort involving Rankin, Quintero, Cumberland, and myself. In 2008, he also allowed the duplication of his collection of Dorsey slip file photocopies corresponding to his "Dictionary" recordings. Unfortunately, these resulted in poor quality duplicates, including some slips that are unreadable. Even now, these remain mostly unanalyzed. Still, no field notes from Rankin's Pepper sessions were converted at this time.

1.3. Purpose

There is a lack of high quality audio for the Pepper tapes owing to the fact that they were not professionally digitized along with the others. Additionally, there are no known transcriptions of Rankin's time with Pepper; they were certainly not retyped with the others and any possible slip file notes may be unreadable given the poor quality of the available duplicates. As such, the Ralph Pepper tapes remain among the least accessible of available Kansa language materials. Nevertheless, while comparatively brief, they are potentially significant.

The purpose of this report is two-fold. In the short term, it is hoped that the overview provided herein will assist the Kaw Nation's current Kansa language revitalization efforts. Given that the Pepper materials have not heretofore been seriously described, this report may provide the Language Department a detailed snapshot of these materials. In the long term, it is hoped that the Pepper materials may lead to a fuller description of Kansa, particularly as a bridge between the older, Dorsey materials and the better-known Rankin materials. Keep in mind that Dorsey's consultants were all 19th century males, and Rankin's primary consultant was a 20th century female. Pepper, then—especially when taken with along with Kekahbah—could help to clarify the differences between Dorsey's data and Rankin's data.

2. Ralph Pepper tapes

2.1. Catalog

The Ralph Pepper tapes primarily consist of four cassettes of Kansa language elicitation, which were conducted at Pepper's home in Tulsa in December of 1978. These four tapes account for about 200 total minutes of salvage interviews yielding approximately 700 Kansa responses, including both words and sentences. Additionally, as was mentioned above, there is one cassette

of mixed recordings from the bleachers at a powwow in rural Kay County, possibly recorded in May of 1979. In roughly the middle of this tape, there are approximately two minutes of Pepper offering a speech in English followed by about an equal amount of time of Pepper praying in Kansa.

2.2. Methods

It is important to note here that work on the Ralph Pepper tapes has been an ongoing project for more than a decade. While serving as Kaw Nation Language Director in 2005, I digitized the cassettes that Rankin provided the tribe but conducted no further investigation into their contents. Research leading to my presentation at the 2017 Siouan and Caddoan Languages Conference (McBride 2017) renewed my interest in the analysis of the Pepper tapes. I began transcribing the audio the following spring. I suspect that a full analysis of the audio and transcriptions will take much time, but I hope to integrate my analysis into the available Kansa materials in the coming years.

3. Analysis and discussion

The findings are tentative at this beginning stage of the analytical process and serve mostly to confirm what is already known of Kansa. Still, there are some interesting early highlights, particularly in terms of phonology (e.g., vowel length), lexicon (e.g., word choice), and discourse features (e.g., evidentials).

3.1. Phonology

Before presenting how Pepper contributes to the larger understanding of Kansa phonology, it is worth noting that the proper documentation of vowel length is a constant source of consternation in Siouan scholarship (cf. Rankin 2005:465). The reasons for this are manifold, but it is largely a result of the fact that scholars have often tended to rely upon the work of early researchers, such as Dorsey, who failed to record vowel length at all or did so inconsistently. It may also be due to the fact that what nowadays can be shown via instrumentation to be long vowels are not absolutely long, but only relatively so. That is to say, a long vowel in one word in one context may actually be shorter than a short vowel in another word in another context so long as the short vowels in the former word and context are also proportionately shorter. The short vowel to long vowel ratio also appears to differ from context to context and from speaker to speaker. For example, for Kansa, Herd (2006:4) demonstrated that Maude Rowe's short vowel to long vowel ratio averaged approximately 1:1.5 for primarily stressed non-verbs. McBride (2017:13-15), on the other hand, demonstrated that, in contexts that include secondarily stressed words and verbs, Maude Rowe's short vowel to long vowel ratio averaged 1:1.16 while Walter Kekahbah's ratio averaged 1:1.23. Careful analysis of fluent speaker recordings can serve to set the record straight, but frequently has not done so owing to the reticence on the part of modern researchers to disregard material that does not take vowel length into account. This has the unintended effect of over-emphasizing individual speaker differences. For instance, Rankin's recent (2008) Kansa lexicon frequently lists Dorsey's ambiguously short vowel forms and his own consultants' consistently long vowel forms

side-by-side; he occasionally includes codes to demonstrate that Maude Rowe (noted as ‘MR’) used the long vowel, as in (1).

- (1) *gojǐ, gooǐ* (MR) ‘far off, remote, long way off’

Such entries imply that Rowe may be an outlier as opposed to a contributor to the central tendency. Given the paucity of available data, it must be admitted that that may well be the case. Yet, the fact remains that the Dorsey consultant data is the less reliable in this particular phonological matter and so should not be considered normative by default.

Unfortunately, Pepper’s elicitation responses frequently muddy the water rather than clarifying it. Pepper often lengthens forms that Rowe did not generally lengthen, as can be seen in Table 2.

Table 2: Pepper and Rowe vowel length comparisons

Example	Pepper	Rowe	Gloss
(2)	<i>waasábe</i>	<i>wasábe</i>	‘black bear’
(3)	<i>móqhi</i>	<i>máqhi</i>	‘knife’
(4)	<i>žáq</i>	<i>žá</i>	‘tree’

It is important to note, however, that these findings are impressionistic as opposed to instrumental. It is also unclear as to when he may be exaggerating certain sounds in order to be more easily understandable to Rankin. However, there are multiple instances of the lengthening patterns demonstrated in (2)-(4).

In addition to the lengthening of vowels, Pepper occasionally deletes syllable-final vowels leaving closed syllables. This is a violation of the general rule that syllabic codas in Kansa occur only in extremely restricted environments, i.e., some homorganic nasal codas between nasal vowel nuclei and stop onsets and some ambisyllabic geminate stops occurring word-medially (Herd 2006:2-3). Examples of Pepper’s closed-syllables can be seen in (5) and (6).

- (5) *šq* *gáxb* *éeyao*
 šq Ø-Ø-gáxe=abe e=ao
 by.and.by 3P-3A-make=NCONT DEM=DECL
 ‘he made it by and by’
- (6) *áayaha* *ttakkóječh*¹
 áa-Ø-yahá-a ttakkóje čhe
 LOC-3P-wear-IMP shoulder DET
 ‘put something on your shoulders’

There are no examples of Kekahbah or Rowe omitting vowels in this manner, and Dorsey’s consultants only do so in obvious loanwords, such as in (7).

- (7) *kháonzil bló* ‘Council Grove’

¹Pepper uses *ttakkóje* or some variant thereof (i.e., *ttákoje* or *ttaakkóje*) throughout the tapes for both ‘shoulder’ and ‘hip.’ While unattested elsewhere in Kansa, this term bears a passing resemblance to *táhü okkúche*, ‘neck joint,’ which is semantically similar to ‘shoulder.’ At one point, Rankin even suggests ‘joint’ as a translation.

3.2. Lexicon

Pepper's word choices are occasionally unexpected or even unique. For instance, he frequently provides hyponyms or meronyms despite known Kansa alternatives, as in (8)-(11).

- (8) a. *nqǎǰé* 'heart'
 b. used for 'heart,' 'stomach,' 'breast,' and 'chest'
- (9) a. *sákkóǰe* 'melon'
 b. used for 'melon' and 'squash,' but not 'gourd'
- (10) a. *ttakkóǰe* 'shoulder'
 b. used for both 'shoulder' and 'hip'
- (11) a. *waǰǰíga* 'bird'
 b. used for 'bird,' 'crow,' 'pigeon,' 'buzzard,' and 'bat,' but not 'owl'

While one cannot say so definitively, it is important to note that such examples are likely to be the result of attrition; owing to his hearing loss and the dearth of possible interlocutors, Pepper had not conversed in Kansa for some time prior to the recordings and may have forgotten numerous lexical items.

Pepper makes use of a larger set of subject markers than is found elsewhere in Kansa. For example, he frequent uses *góakhá*, perhaps a contraction of *gaa* (distal demonstrative) plus *akhá* (present, resting subject marker). This form appears neither in Dorsey's Kansa materials nor in Rankin's data for Kekahbah or Rowe. Examples can be seen in (12)-(13).

- (12) *wakʔó góakhá mǒǒšǰíge ǒǒhóbeo*
wakʔó gaa-akhá mǒǒšǰíge ǒǒ-Ø-Ø-hó=abe=ao
 woman DEM-3A.SBJ rabbit PREV-3P-3A-COOK=NCONT=DECL
 'that woman cooked rabbit'
- (13) *níkkašǰíga góakhá wakkáǰdagi akháu*
níkkašǰíga gaa-akhá wakkáǰdagi akhá=ao
 person DEM-3A.SBJ doctor 3A.CONT=DECL
 'that man is a doctor'

In a long and somewhat problematic sentence, he also makes use of what may be *akhé* as the subject marker and corresponding continuative auxiliary in a potentially oblique clause (this depends on how one brackets the construction). Note that Eschenberg (2005:31-33) describes the use of what she terms "nominative absolute" *akhé* in Omaha, where it appears to operate somewhat like a contraction of the subject marker *akhá* and the demonstrative *e*, but this is found nowhere else in the available Kansa materials.

- (14) *níkkašǰíghá waasábeakhe hiiyákhé níüǰüǰekhéǰi níkkašǰíghá*
níkkašǰíga akhá wasábe akhá-e Ø-hiyá akhá-e níǰüǰe khe=ǰi níkkašǰíga akhá
 person 3A.SBJ black.bear 3A.SBJ-DEM 3A-SWIM 3A.CONT-DEM river DET=LOC person 3A.SBJ
íiyabadáwasábeakhá níkkašǰíghá waasábekhá
ii-Ø-Ø-ye=abe=adá wasábe akhá níkkašǰíga akhá wasábe akhá
 LOC-3P-3A-see=NCONT=and black.bear 3A.SBJ person 3A.SBJ black.bear 3A.SBJ

<i>iiyabéohá</i>	<i>wasábeakhá</i>	<i>házaheu</i>
ii-Ø-Ø-ye=abe=ohá	wasábe akhá	Ø-háze=abe=ao
LOC-3P-3A-see=NCONT=when black.bear 3A.SBJ 3A-flee=NCONT=DECL		
‘the man, the man saw the bear swimming in the river, and, the bear, when the man saw the bear, the bear ran away’		

3.3. Discourse

As happens elsewhere in Dhegiha, Kansa makes use of evidential declarative markers that may be classified as gendered speech. However, Rankin noted that their use among the last Kansa speakers had become restricted to certain conditions:

This is a feature of the language that has been nearly lost over the past 100 years. Most of my Kansa field work between 1973 and 1978 was with Mrs. Maude Rowe, a woman in her early 70s, and *she used the female speech marker only under certain circumstances. The particle took the form of -e and was used only (a) if the main verb was in the first person, that is if she were talking about herself and her own experiences, and (b) if Mrs. Rowe felt personally involved in what she was saying. -e never appeared if I was eliciting verb lists or paradigms or reeliciting Dorsey’s 1880s material sentence by sentence. If she was recounting something that she had done personally, however, she always used the female speech marker. (Rankin 1989:307, emphasis mine)*

Examples of the Kansa female evidential can be difficult to spot because a great many verbs, verbal suffixes, and verbal enclitics already end in *-e*, the shape of the expected female evidential. Nevertheless, a quick survey of Rankin’s ‘Kansa’ data shows that the female evidential *-e* appears about 25 times in nearly 3,500 utterances from Rowe, or less than 1% of her responses.

Pepper’s evidential use is both more diverse and more frequent than Rowe’s data suggest. His markers seem to take some form of both the male evidential par excellence *-ao* and the somewhat more expanded male speech form *-eyao*, ‘indeed,’ which consists of the demonstrative *e* together with *-ao*. However, in very many cases, instances of Pepper’s evidential use appear to have been reduced, yielding such forms as *-əyau*, *-yao*, *-yau*, *-yəu*, *-yə*, *-e*, *-a*, *-o*, *-u*, *-ə*, etc. At this point, it is not clear if these forms represent phonological variations on one or two male evidentials or a much more vast and specialized set of context-dependent evidentials. At any rate, they appear approximately 50 times in just over 700 utterances, or more than 7% of Pepper’s total responses. Pepper also uses these evidential forms in all persons—not just the first person—as can be seen in (15)-(17).

(15) *šji bl̥iyáu*
 šj̥ w-yí=ao
 fat 1A-be=DECL
 ‘I’m fat’

(16) *yiiški hnáhnjao*
 yi=ški Ø-y-ya-hní=ao
 2A=also 3P-2A-INS-swallow=DECL
 ‘you swallowed it, too’

- (17) *šįmižigakhá waayóbea*
 šįmižiga akhá wa-Ø-yó=abe=ao
 girl 3A.SBJ PREV-3A-sing=NCONT=DECL
 ‘the little girl sang’

Note, however, that pointing out the difference between Rowe’s less than 1% evidential use and Pepper’s more than 7% evidential use is not the same as claiming that Rowe’s evidentials are rare; Zipf’s Law would not bear this out. Rather, I am merely stating that Pepper appears at least seven times more likely to make use of gendered evidentials.

4. Conclusion

Again, it should be stated that the findings here are only preliminary highlights that are by necessity only tentative at this point. Much additional analysis is needed. In particular, Pepper’s lengthy Kansa prayer in the powwow recording may provide a great deal of insight. This prayer is, in fact, the only example of connected, presumably extemporaneous Kansa male speech from the 20th century. However, the powwow recording offers the lowest quality of all the available Kansa audio given that it was obtained via an open-air loudspeaker. It also features many overlapping sounds and voices, including possible back-channeling from other Dhegiha language speakers in the audience. Still, the Pepper tapes when taken as a whole do seem to have the potential to expand our understanding of Kansa language—if only in raising more questions.

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