Etymology of Tuscarora

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Anyone who has corresponded with Frank T. Siebert, Jr. knows the sense of anticipation that accompanies opening one of his letters. They are often lengthy treatises, a veritable stream of consciousness of ideas, ranging from personal reminiscences, pet peeves, and the local weather conditions to well-thought-out and insightful analyses of ethnographic and linguistic problems that Frank has not yet gotten around to putting in print. Just one example of his insights is offered here in tribute to Frank.

The particular example I have chosen concerns the anomalous relationship between the name of the Tuscarora Nation used by the Tuscaroras themselves and those used in the related Northern Iroquoian languages, the more distantly related Chero-
kee language, the Algonquian languages in the East, and in English. The Tuscarora today call themselves the skaru*re?. The names for the Tuscarora in other languages may be divided by form into three groups: 1

Cherokee and modern Mohawk

- Cherokee aniskalá-li
- Mohawk tehatiskaró-ras

European languages

- English Tuscarora

Iroquoian and Algonquian languages

- Cayuga taskáowe?
- Mohawk akothaskaró-re?
- Oneida taskaló-le
- Onondaga taskáiyé?
- Seneca táske-owe?
- Wyandot taskáho
- Munsee táskalo-w
- Shawnee taskalónu

The Cherokee and modern Mohawk words are plural verbs meaning “they are Tuscaroras.” Once the plural pronominal prefixes (Cherokee ani-, Mohawk -hati-) and other inflectional markers are removed, the remaining verb stems (Cherokee -skala-1-, Mohawk -skaror-) appear to be direct borrowings from Tuscarora skaru*re?. While the borrowing of the Tuscarora self-designation would also account for the latter part of the names in the other languages listed above, no one has ever succeeded in finding a source for the initial syllable, Tu- in English, tha- in Mohawk, and ta- in all the rest of these words. There is no obvious explanation for the initial syllable within the Tuscarora language nor, apparently, in any of the other languages cited.

In a long-hand, eight-page letter addressed to me, Frank makes the following observations with respect to the etymology of the English name:

- The Catawba form is taskarú-deą [t̪askarú-de] (Catawba tas ‘salt’, root karu- ‘dry, evaporate’, and final -deą ‘eater, devourer’.) Catawba -deą is
found in wide- 'buffalo, cow', also used for just 'bison' and 'domestic cattle'; and isiwi-de- 'cannibal; Northern Iroquois, Seneca, Mohawk, etc.' (isi- 'raw, flesh', -wi- 'body, main part', -de- 'eater').

Now, there is much evidence that the natives of coastal N[orth] Car[olina], including the Tuscarora, dried sea water to make salt, and also traded salt to inland tribes (Lederer, Yeardy, etc.) so the term is suitable. Furthermore the Tuscarora were surrounded on at least two sides (west and south) by Catawban or Carolina Siouan speakers (Eno, Shakori, and Woccon), the Eno and Woccon at least being allied to the Tuscarora (Lawson 1709 lists the Eno as an actual Tuscarora settlement). The Eno later joined the Catawba Nation (see Adair), and the Woccon fought with the Tuscarora in the Tuscarora War, suffering terrible casualties, and many of the survivors were sold into slavery, being destroyed as a group. Also, William Byrd II in his writings uses the term Tuskarode for the Tuscarora. To me all this added up to the English adoption of the term for the Tuscarora from surrounding Carolina Siouan dialects (Woccon, Eno, Shakori, etc.). This is certainly sensible to me, and apparently reasonable.

The account given on page 524 of the new Handbook Vol. 15 ... does not strike me as being very relevant. Most of the terms given seem to be borrowings. The Catawba term is not discussed, although given by Byrd and I think also by Speck in one of his writings. "Hemp Gatherers" so far as I know does not fit Tuscarora early culture, but "salt making" does.

I am open-minded, however; I would like to hear your counter-argument.
FRANK T. SIEBERT, JR.

As I told Frank then, his explanation accounts nicely for the English word and I have no counter-argument. As for the names in the other Northern Iroquoian languages and neighboring Algonquian languages, I suspect they were borrowed either from the English or from the Catawba.

NOTES


6Landy, *Tuscarora Among the Iroquois*.

7Wright, *Prose Works; Frank Speck, Catawba Texts* (New York: Columbia University, 1934).