

**MAIDU, AN
ILLUSTRATIVE
SKETCH, PP. 681-734**

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Maidu, an Illustrative Sketch, pp. 681-734 by Roland B. Dixon

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ROLAND B. DIXON

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AN ILLUSTRATIVE SKETCH

BY

ROLAND B. DIXON

EXTRACT FROM HANDBOOK OF AMERICAN INDIAN
LANGUAGES (BULLETIN 40), PART 1, OF BUREAU OF
AMERICAN ETHNOLOGY (BOAS)

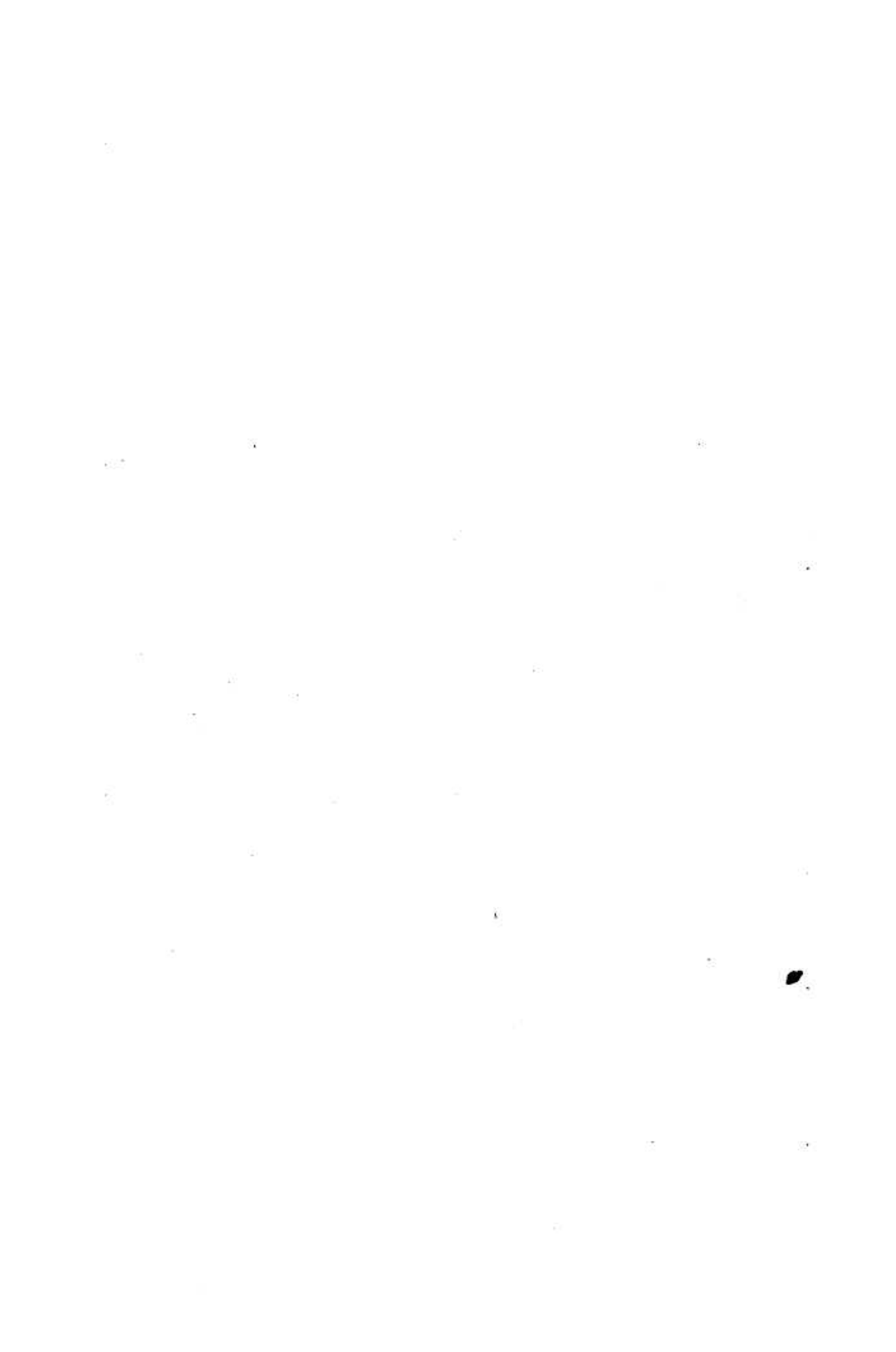


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MAIDU

By ROLAND B. DIXON

§ 1. DISTRIBUTION AND DIALECTS

The Maidu (or Pujunan) stock comprises the various dialects of the language spoken by a body of Indians in northeastern California. The region occupied by these Indians is a continuous single area, lying partly in the Sacramento valley and partly in the Sierra Nevada mountains. It may be roughly described as extending from the Cosumnes river in the south to a line drawn from Chico, through Lassen's Butte, to Susanville in the north, and from the Sacramento river eastward to the eastern base of the Sierra. The neighboring languages are, on the north the Achomawi-Atsugewi (Shastan) and Yana, on the west the Wintun (Copehan), on the south the Miwok (Moquelumnan), and on the east the Washo and Paiute (Shoshonean). Of these the Wintun and Shoshonean show the clearest morphological resemblances to the Maidu.

The Maidu language is spoken in three dialects, differing from one another more morphologically than lexically or phonetically, although differences of this sort, of course, occur. In general these morphological differences are in the direction of the morphological type of the languages of the other stocks with which the Maidu are in contact; the northwestern dialect most resembling the Wintun; the northeastern, the Achomawi-Atsugewi; and the southern, the Miwok. The northwestern dialect is spoken in that part of the Sacramento valley occupied by the stock, which lies north of the Yuba river, and also in the foothills adjoining, up to an elevation of about three thousand feet. It shows some minor variations within itself in the way of subdialects, these differences being as a rule, however, very slight. The northeastern dialect is spoken in the region of the high, flat-floored mountain valleys extending from Big Meadows in

the north to Sierra valley in the south. It has fewer variants than the other two dialects. This dialect is the one whose grammar is here given. The southern dialect comprises a number of slightly varying subdialects occupying the remainder of the area covered by the stock. In most respects this southern dialect is closer to the northwestern than to the northeastern.

With the exception of a few general statements in an article on the languages of California,¹ no account of the grammar of the Maidu has ever been given. Its grammar is, however, of interest, in that it may be taken as to some extent typical of a considerable group of central Californian languages, which in many important particulars are quite different from the majority of American Indian languages.

PHONETICS (§§ 2-4)

§ 2. System of Sounds

The phonetic system of the Maidu is only moderately extensive. It possesses but one series of *k*-sounds, of which only the *k* is frequent, and is lacking in velars and lateral (*l*) sounds. The consonant system includes palatals, alveolars, dento-alveolars, labials, and laterals. The sonants and surds are as a rule not very clearly differentiated, and it is sometimes difficult to determine in a given case which is intended. Surds are more common than sonants in the pairs *g-k* and *d-t*, *g* in particular being quite uncommon. Although in most groups of consonants there is a sonant, surd, and fortis, yet the fortis is often by no means strongly marked, and is difficult to separate from the surd. The glottal catch is but little used. A peculiar feature of the Maidu is the existence of two weak inspirational sonant stops *ʙ* and *ɗ*. The exact method of formation of these sounds is not clear. However, it is certain that inspiration proceeds no further than the soft palate; the peculiar quality of the sound being produced by a "smack" formed by a slight vacuum in the mouth. The *ʙ* and *ɗ* occur only as a rule before *ə*, and the difference between them and the ordinary *b* and *d* is, in the case of some speakers and in some words, very slight; in other words, or in the same words by other and generally older speakers, the difference is strongly marked. The consonant system of the Maidu may be shown in tabular form as follows:

¹ Roland B. Dixon and Alfred L. Kroeber, The Native Languages of California, in *American Anthropologist*, n. s., v, 1-26.