

# Free controversy- the language family of yurok language argumentative essay examp...

[Linguistics](#), [Language](#)



## **Introduction**

The Yurok language is a language spoken in North California. Many debates have come up during the recent years concerning the Yurok language. Yurok is much related to the Wiyot as compared to the Ritwan languages. It is important to note that Yurok is a relative although not a close one to the Algonquian languages. Additionally, the Yurok language comprises of complex verbs, and their word order is free (Native-Languages, 2015). The name ' Yurok' means downriver as the tribe used to reside along River Klamath in California. The number of Yurok speakers has been decreasing over the years, as there were thousands of people spoke the language in the 19th century. However, statistics today show that about 3500 Yuroks in North California, as some people have merged with the Wiyot people. Most of those who speak the language today are the elderly and the programs that work to revitalize languages. It is important to note that most of those people who spoke Yurok in North California still do exist but speak English. There are several programs underway working to revive the language, which is slowly disappearing (Yuroktribe, 2015).

The origin of the language is not yet clear, as there are very many explanations and classifications. The arguments continue until today, with many seeking answers as to which language family the Yurok language belongs. Many facts show that the Yurok language belongs to the Algic family. The Algic family has two groups that we will look into later on. Understanding why the Yurok language is classified under the Algic language family is important in this paper.

There are things considered in classifying languages. Therefore, there is

always a reason an individual language belongs to a particular family. In this case, understanding how the classification of the Yurok language was done will be vital. Some people speak Indigenous languages today while some of the languages are non-existent. The Yurok language still exists, with very few people recognizing and speaking it. One clear thing is that the Yurok language will continue to exist, and more people will speak it in the future.

#### Literature review

As earlier stated, the Yurok language is believed to belong to the Algic family. The Algic family is also known as the Algonquian and comprise of several indigenous languages on the northern side of America. The Algonquian family is among the largest language families in America. The Algic languages consist of approximately 30 languages, with Yurok having fewer speakers as many now speak English. There are two Algic languages; Wiyot and Yurok. However, these two languages have at times been combined into one subgroup known as the 'Ritwan'. Combining these two languages into a subgroup has resulted in a genetic tree with two branches, which are the Ritwan and the Algonquian. However, many specialists do not favor this type of grouping, as the two languages are not very much similar to each other as compared to how each of them is to the Algonquian (Goddard, 20110).

A Linguist called Edward Sapir first established the relationship between the Wiyot and Yurok. Additionally, he was the first person to come up and use the name 'Algic'. The Proto-Algonquian is the ancestral language of all the Algonquian languages, and people spoke it approximately 3000 years ago. On the other hand, the Algonquin is an indigenous language in Canada. Many

people confuse the Algonquin and the Algonquian. Algonquian means a branch of the Algonquian language family. Today, the Algonquian includes 27 languages spoken in a very wide region (Native-Languages, 2015).

The Algonquian language family has 14 languages currently. The languages have two subfamilies namely Algonquian and Ritwan. Algonquian subfamily comprises three groups: Plain, Central and Eastern Algonquian. Many of the languages are in danger today with only a few of the languages having speakers. Researchers have shown that ten of the languages are extinct, with many of the remaining languages heading towards being extinct. What makes the remaining languages face the threat of being extinct is because most of the speakers are old people who do not teach children how to speak the languages. Yurok language is not an exemption to this, as it also faces the threat of being extinct several years to come. The sound system of the Algonquian languages has some similarities and differences. The languages did not have a writing system before having contact with the European missionaries. After the contact, the Europeans began devising ways of writing the languages especially for the purposes of translating the Bible. Currently, all the extinct as well as the spoken languages have a writing system. The Yurok language still exists, but the Wiyot language is extinct (Garret, 2014).

The ancestors of the Yurok language are unknown until today. There are several theories about the origin of the language, but no one knows who the exact ancestors of the people were from the beginning. As earlier stated, the language has very few speakers currently. The California Gold Rush was the primary reason for the decline of the Yurok language. During that time, there

were very many new settlers in the region. The natives were forced to adopt new ways of living and change their language to English, which played a great role in the decline of the language. The last and only remaining native speaker of the Yurok language died in 2013, but there are efforts to revive the language to increase the number of people speaking it. The arrival of the white settlers also brought different diseases to the area, which killed many of the indigenous speaking people (Native-languages, 2015). The initiative doing this is underway and is likely to record success as time passes.

### Discussion

The Yurok language is among the languages that are being revived in America. There are several programs put forward for the purposes of bringing back the language. The programs are also aimed at increasing the number of speakers, as there are only a few existing first speakers of the language. One big issue present in the controversy about the Yurok language is too which language family it belongs. While some people say that it belongs to other families in Australia, there is much evidence that the language belongs to the Algonquian language family. Many books relate the language to the Algonquian family, which makes it clearer that it might be true. Most of the Algonquian languages are present in the Rocky Mountains in Canada. On the other hand, the Yurok and Wiyot are in North California. Henry Rowe was the first Linguist to propose the name Algonquian. However, that term was not retained, and the people Henry called Algonquian were later on included in the Algonquian language. On the other hand, Sapir proposed that the two languages were related to the Algonquian languages. Sapir's proposal is very important in linguistics history due to two reasons. First, what Sapir said

proved to be very true. Secondly, his proposal demonstrated the relationship between linguistics.

The dispute had a long history, which after understanding it we will be able to know the truth. In 1913, Sapir proposed the relationship between the Yurok and Wiyot with the Algonquian using poor data. Michelson attacked the proposal in 1914, and the two debated for long but never concluded on anything. Sapir did not include some important things in his proposal.

According to Pentland (2006), these include;

**He did not mention the restriction that indefinite prefixes had on definite nouns.**

Despite giving some examples, Sapir did not know that T is inserted between prefixes and vowels in Wiyot language similar to Algonquian.

**Sapir did not mention that both in Yurok and Algonquian, dependent nouns do not include an indefinite prefix.**

He did not mention those personal prefixes are attached to verbs both in Ritwan and Algonquian.

Sapir also fails to mention that possession verbs are derived from the third person nouns both in Yurok and Algonquian languages.

These are just but a few of the things that Sapir failed to mention in his 1913 proposal. Most things that cause the beginning of the relationship between these languages are how they speak. These include nouns, verbs, and pronouns among other grammatical issues. How these languages use the grammar is different, with some having several similarities in how they use them. Saying that the relationship between the Algonquian and the Ritwan

had not been demonstrated by 1913 by Sapir is, therefore, true. The evidence that he presented were weak and most could not be used (Pentland, 2006).

The genetic relation between the two languages: Yurok and Wiyot have also been under controversy. These controversies are mostly of where these two languages belong. During early classification, one of the controversies that came up was referred to as the Ritwan Controversy. It is because the two languages were included in a group called Ritwan (Gutenberg, 2015).

There are also some classifiers in both the Wiyot and Yurok languages. The system used to classify is very elaborate. The Yurok counting system is much more elaborate than in Wiyot because Yurok numeral are present in written literature more than those in Wiyot. Additionally, both the languages have a generic category used for objects that are not classified. In Yurok, the classification of human beings and animals takes place separately, which is the opposite case in Wiyot. Yurok has classes for animacy, but the Wiyot do not have. These are just but one of the differences that these two languages have.

The classification system used by Algonquian and Yurok languages are cognate. Very many similarities exist between the two languages. Classifiers, on the other hand, occur on various occasions, e. g. in numerals and verbs among others. The difference between the Algonquian, in this case, concentrating on Yurok and the Algonquian is due to how they elaborate numerals as well as how many classifiers they have (Yuroktribe, 2015).

The Yurok language as earlier stated is classified under the language family known as the Algonquian. The Algonquian comprise of several languages all spoken in the

North America. Most of the languages are nonexistent currently with the remaining few having very few people speaking them. It is hard to conclude how the classification of the Yurok language took place. Classification of languages takes places depending on several factors, and understanding the factors that made the Yurok language end up in the Algic family is vital. As we have seen earlier, the pronunciation of the languages is among the factors put into consideration. The Yurok speakers have some pronunciations similar to those of the Wiyot and Algonquian languages (Bower, 2015). The word structure of the Yurok language is much similar to other Algic languages. Verbs in the language are complex. The sentences use proverbs, which is the case for the other Algic languages (Hoopa, 2015). The history of the language dates back to the 17th century. However, the biggest blow to the people who spoke the language was in the 19th century (Proulx 2010). One can consider the language lucky, as there are people who speak it today, no matter how few they are. With the Algic language family having many languages, the Yurok and Wiyot are different from the others. The difference between them is what made the Yurok and Wiyot be classified separately. Most languages in Algic belong to Algonquian. Only three languages belong to the Ritwan, Yurok being one of them. Contrary to what many people say, it is evident that the Yurok language has a family. Every point directs to the fact that Yurok is in the Algic language family (Robins, 2008). Conclusion

Most indigenous languages are extinct currently. Most of these languages that have become extinct were spoken during the 17th-19th Century. Not much had been done to make sure that those languages continue to exist.



However, the case is different with the Yurok language. Some people still speak the language today in America, and efforts are underway to make sure that the Yurok language continues to exist like the other indigenous languages. Despite the existence of the Yurok language, many argue that the language does not belong to any family. Others argue that the language belongs to several families. However, it is evident from the text that the Yurok language does not belong to any other family but the Algonquian language family. There are some several reasons why the language is under the Algonquian family.

There is much concern directed to the language. Some universities are offering to teach the language as part of the school curriculum. Additionally, several programs work hard to ensure that the language remains in existence are in operation. Only a few people speak the language currently, with the majority of the speakers being old people as most of the initial speakers are dead. The Yurok language is in many aspects similar to the Wiyot language and other languages in the Algonquian family. Although Yurok does not much relate to the Algonquian language, they have some similarities, as they are both in the Algonquian family. The basis of classification is mostly according to the pronunciations and the use of words, which makes Yurok, fit in the Algonquian family.

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