



February 21, 2025 – International Mother Language Day

Puyallup Tribal language consultant publishes first comprehensive analysis of the many Native names for Mount Rainier - ʔuhuyəx^w ti dʔix^w pipa ʔə tiit qa sdadaʔ ʔə tiit sk^watač, ʔuxalad ti ʔəswəli

‘An Analysis of the Names for Mount Rainier’ appears in Living Languages Journal and answers questions community members have posed for many years

PUYALLUP RESERVATION, Tacoma, Washington—The Puyallup Tribal Council and Puyallup Tribal Language Program celebrate the publication of a historic paper that for the first time gives a comprehensive linguistic analysis of the many Native names for Mount Rainier.

The paper, titled “An Analysis of the Names for Mount Rainier,” was published today in the Living Languages Journal. It was authored by Zalmai ʔəswəli Zahir, Ph.D., who works as a Lushootseed Language Consultant for the Tribe. Among the findings, the non-exhaustive research reveals that there are 20 different names for the mountain that are used by seven different Tribal languages surrounding the mountain, and 18 of the 20 names are Salishan in origin.

The Tribe contracted with Dr. Zahir to write the analysis to answer the longstanding community questions, “What is the original Native name for Mt. Rainier and what does it mean?”

The City of Tacoma was named after the Lushootseed word for the name of the mountain, *taq^wuʔmaʔ*. *Tahoma* is a name given as an alternative to “Rainier” and is commonly used in the region. Examples include Mount Tahoma High School and the Tribe’s own Tahoma Market convenience stores. This name descends from the Yakama language name, *taxúma*, which is a borrowed variation of the Salishan name *taq^wuʔmaʔ* that has several other variations.

In the paper, Dr. Zahir presents the grammar and historical evolution for these 20 different names. He also discusses the metaphorical meanings attached to these names, reflecting the First People’s traditional narratives and world views of the mountain.

The mountain’s current name only goes back to the late 1700s when British Capt. George Vancouver sailed into what is now Puget Sound and named already-named sites—including “Puget Sound”—in his own language. “Mount Rainier” was named for Peter Rainier, a British admiral and friend of Vancouver’s who fought against the colonies in the American Revolutionary War and never saw the mountain named for him. As discussed in the paper, it is not known how old the Native names for Mount Rainier are. However, the fact that most of the meanings of the names can only be understood by analyzing Proto-

Salish grammar implies that these names come from a time when Salishan languages were more like Proto-Salish.

“cayəxʷ ʔəsqʷič ti qa sdadaʔ ʔə tiit skʷatač txʷəl ti ʔacaciłtalbixʷ ʔə ti bəkʷ swatxʷixʷtxʷəd gʷati ʔəshəliʔ ti sdaʔ ʔə təqʷuʔmaʔ. ʔəshəliʔ ti ʃaxaʔ skʷatač. ʃʷuhigʷalikʷ čəł ʔə tsi kayəʔčəł təqubət. ckʷaqid ʔəsłaxdxʷ čəł ʃʷuʔəłtxʷ tiit ʔiisədčəłs. tiit pipa gʷəl ʃʷukʷaxʷatəb čəł ʔə kʷi gʷəsłaxdxʷ tulʷčadəs kʷi səxʷuhəliʔtubčəł. *‘The many names of the Mountain’* is incredibly valuable to all the people of the land because our Mountain’s name is alive. Our sacred Mountain is alive. We continuously honor our Grandmother Mountain. We will always remember that she continually feeds our people. This paper helps remind us of where our continuous life comes from,” Puyallup Language Program Director Amber Hayward said.

“We are proud of our Tribe’s language revitalization efforts and the work of our amazing Language Program,” said the Puyallup Tribal Council, the Tribe’s governing body. “This paper is historic in itself and also helps us move forward.”

Living Languages is a journal dedicated to language revitalization and sustainability topics. It is published by University of Massachusetts Amherst Libraries. His paper can be read online at <https://openpublishing.library.umass.edu/livinglanguages/> or on the Puyallup Tribe’s Language Program’s website, PuyallupTribalLanguage.org.

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About the Puyallup Tribal Language Program

The Puyallup Tribal Language Program’s mission is to revitalize the Twulshootseed language in the Puyallup Tribal community. They do this through being kind, helpful and sharing as they produce speakers of their ancestral language while focusing on language “use” not “teaching.” This includes implementing various forms of communication including: conversational speech, language use in the home, language transmission to children, and public speaking. For more information, please visit <https://www.puyalluptriballanguage.org/>.

About the Puyallup Tribe of Indians

The Puyallup People have lived along the shores of what is now called Puget Sound since time immemorial. The Puyallup Tribe of Indians is a sovereign nation of more than 6,000 members and one of the largest employers in Pierce County. It serves its members and community with generosity and is committed to building a sustainable way of life for future generations. [Learn more about the Puyallup Tribe.](#)

About the Puyallup Tribal Council

The Puyallup Tribal Council is the elected governing body of the Puyallup Tribe of Indians. The council consists of Chairman Bill Sterud, Vice Chairwoman Sylvia Miller, and Councilmembers Annette Bryan, James Rideout, Anna Bean, Monica Miller and Fred Dillon. [Learn more about the Puyallup Tribal Council.](#)

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News media resources:

Photos, video interviews and other assets are available for news media use at:
<https://share.puyalluptribe-nsn.gov/nextcloud/index.php/s/QaEz4yeDk8cXGGK>

The paper can be read online at Living Languages (search by title or author):

<https://openpublishing.library.umass.edu/livinglanguages/>