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Some Choctaw Sentence Structures

Stephen M. Swartz

Introduction

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Choctaw is an American Indian language of the Muskogean family. Presently there are approximately 10,000 speakers located primarily in the Texas-Oklahoma area. Two dialects are spoken: the Oklahoma dialect and the Mississippi dialect. The data for this paper was gathered during the spring semester in 1974 at the Dallas Summer Institute of Linguistics from three native speakers of the Oklahoma dialect of Choctaw ranging in age from forty to fifty years.

Choctaw phonology consists of a system of fifteen consonants \( p, t, \), \( c, k, b, f, s, s', h, m, n, w, l, y \) and three vowels \( i, a, o \). Having had only twelve weeks of exposure to Choctaw, I submit this paper, both the phonology and the grammar, as purely tentative in nature. To simplify matters I chose to delete the marking of stress as this does not seem to be grammatically or lexically significant.

Being somewhat familiar with Longacre's case grammar approach to clause analysis, (Longacre, 1974), I felt it would be helpful to apply his sentence level techniques to the study of Choctaw. Longacre presents a binary, eight-part framework within which he groups all the various types of sentence combinations. Due to the time limitations it would have been too bold an undertaking to apply all eight parts of his framework; i.e., the deep structures conjoining, alternation, temporal, implication, paraphrase, illustration, deixis, and attribution. I chose rather to concentrate on the first four deep structures which find their counterparts in formal logic. Basically, conjoining and alternation are non-sequential deep structures while temporal and implication are sequential.

One further note is needed. All the sentences presented below are
shown as they were elicited and are thus subject to the pitfalls inherent in using strictly elicited data. However I believe the majority of these sentences represent normal Choctaw sentence patterns, and where this is not the case I have indicated.

**BODY**

1. **Conjoining**
   1. **Coupling**
      1. hatak mat skololi mǐcā miya
         man- the-short - and - fat
         'The man is short and fat.'

      2. hatak at tancik hokčik ma akma imahoyo ato hoponi
         man -the-corn- plants-? - and -his-wife-? - cook
         'The man plants corn, and his wife is the cook.'

      3. alanakani ato wakta imacokma akma alatik ato nanaconli
         boy - ? - hunt-he-likes-and -girl - ? - sew
         'The boy likes to hunt, and the girl likes to sew.'

      4. nasoba ofi oiyoholi ma ofi at nasoba inbalili
         wolf -dog- chase -when-dog-the-wolf-from-run
         'When the wolf chases the dog, the dog runs from the wolf.'

      5. ohoyo osi imanopolik ma inhaponakalo
         woman-son- talks -when-he-listens
         'When the woman speaks to her son, he listens.'

      6. hatak aěiha ohoyo mǐcā ala moma kāt ċata
         man -group-woman-and-children-all-? - Choctaw
         'The men, women, and children all speak Choctaw.'

      7. hatak at tanci tobi botatoba hokči
         man -the-corn-wheat-beans -plants
         'The man plants corn, wheat, and beans.'

The conjoining-coupling group which Longacre describes as deep structure and relations manifests itself in three distinct surface structures in the above set of sentences. The conjunction mǐcā acts to connect items in a series as seen in sentences 1.1.1., 1.1.6., and 1.1.7. It is non-obligatory in nature, but when it is used, it appears between the final two words in the series.

Sentences 1.1.2 and 1.1.3 illustrate the use of akma as a sentence level conjunction. This conjunction is used in coupling sentences with no reciprocity between the two clauses.

The third surface type is seen in sentences 1.1.4 and 1.1.5 in those instances where there is deep structure reciprocity. Whereas in English the conjunction and could be used between the clauses,
Choctaw requires the use of *ma* which may be translated 'when.'

1. **Conjoining**
   2. **Contrast**
      1. nani apakat amačokma anakfit ato nani ikayopəcə
         fish—eat—I-like—my-brother—?—fish—hates
         'I like to eat fish, but my brother hates to eat fish.'
      2. pinčoka himona ačokma ahnili amahoyō ato ikayopəcə
         our-house—new—good—love—I—my-wife—?—hates
         'I love our new home, but my wife hates it.'
      3. alanakani at hōsī pīsa hikiyo alatik ato pīnsa
         boy—the-bird-sees—not—girl—?—sees
         'The boy cannot see the bird, but the girl can.'
      4. anakfit ato holisko timanopoli kat imacokma kiyo amba
         my-brother—?—book—read—?—he—likes—not—but
         antik ato imačokma
         my-sister—?—she—likes
      5. čata anopoli kat anpona amba naholo anopa non anpona kiyo
         Choctaw—know—I—?—read—but—English—know—?—read—not
         'I know how to read Choctaw, but I don’t know how to read
         English.'
      6. hatak mat nittak okmano koča atoksali ninak ano anoka
         man—the—day—during—outdoors—work—night—during—
         atoksali
         indoors—work
         'The man works outdoors during the day and indoors at night.'
      7. ofi moma kat illi losa makillahōs okčaya
         dog—all—?—die—black—only one—live
         'All the dogs died but the black one.'
      8. ofi moma kat ikillo tok emba lakna makillahōs illi tok
         dog—all—?—not—die—past—but—brown—only one—die—past
         'None of the dogs died except the brown one.'
      9. momat yopit iskoli tok anakalahaš akiyo tok
         all—swim—go—past—me—myself—not—past
         'Everyone except me went swimming.'

Section 1.2 presents sentences belonging to the conjoining—contrast grouping. Longacre describes these as deep structure but relations. The conjunction *amba* as found in sentences 1.2.4 and 1.2.8 is the equivalent of the English antithetical *but*; however, in most cases of deep structure contrast *amba* is deleted.

In sentences 1.2.1–1.2.4 as well as in sentences 1.1.3 and 1.1.4 *ato* is used because there are two participants involved in the contrast.
Normally *ato* appears after the second participant although sometimes after both. Sentences 1.2.7-1.2.9, which are examples of exception with a universal set, encode not as antithetical sentences but rather as simple coordinate sentences with the conjunction *akma* deleted.

1. **Conjoining**
   3. **Comparison**
      1. `amofit ći to kat čimofit insurgents
         *my-dog-big-?your-dog-comparative*
         'My dog is bigger than your dog.'
      2. `amofit ći to kat čimi talawe
         *my-dog-big-?your-same as*
         'My dog is the same size as your dog.'
      3. `amofit osi kat čimi insurgents
         *my-dog-small?-your-comparative*
         'My dog is smaller than your dog.'
      4. `ofit akon aćokma ahhili kat katos ma insurgents
         *dog-?like-?I-?-cat-?-comparative*
         'I like dogs more than I like cats.'

Choctaw utilizes a single surface structure to encode the various types of deep structure comparison. The formula for the Choctaw comparative sentence is:

**FIRST BASE OF COMPARISON+ADJECTIVAL OR VERBAL NOTION TO BE COMPARED+SECOND BASE OF COMPARISON+COMPARATIVE**

Choctaw uses but two comparatives: *insahali* 'comparative degree' and *talawe* 'same as.' Thus in example 1.3.1, *amofit* 'my dog' is the first base, *ći to* 'big' is the comparable idea, *cimofit* 'your dog' is the second base, and *insahali* indicates that the first base has more of the quality of bigness than the second base; i.e., 'My dog is bigger than your dog.'

2. **Alternation**
   1. With only two possible alternatives
      1. `hatak mat balili hon čomba nowa hon
         *man-the-run-cont.-or-walk-cont.*
         'The man is running or walking.'
      2. `nana9poa mat illi kiyok mat okčayo
         *animal-the-die-or-alive*
         'The animal is either dead or alive.'
   2. With more than two alternatives
      1. `nakan kiyok mat ohoyo mat kiyok mat alanakani mat čokfi abači
         *man-or-woman-the-or-boy-the-rabbit-shoot*
         'Either the man, the woman, or the boy will shoot the rabbit.'
2. **nowak kiyok mat balili ikmanana hoș tamaha ilia či**
   walk - or - run - into -cont.-town-go - future
   'We will either walk or run into town.'

3. **nakani mat ilia či himmaka kiyok mat onakma kiyok mat**
   man -the- die-future-today- or tomorrow- or
   miskakma
day after tomorrow
   'The man will die today, tomorrow, or the day after tomorrow.'

Section 2.1 and 2.2 presents sentences of the type alternation with only two alternatives and alternation with more than two alternatives. These are deep structure or relations as described by Longacre. The morpheme comba as it is used in 2.1.1 has a limited use in Choctaw. It means or, but is used only in questions. The conjunction kiyok mat, which perhaps is merely the combination of the words kiyok 'not' and mat 'when', carries the meaning of or and is a close equivalent of the English or. However, kiyok mat operates exclusively on the phrase level to connect verbs, nouns, or adjectives.

3. **Temporal**
   1. **Overlap**
      1. **hatak mat talo honwa hoș anya tok**
         man -the-sing- ? -cont.-walk-past
         'As/while the man walked, he sang.'

      2. **nakani mat tali pinlat anya tok**
         masculine-the-rock-throw-walk-past
         'While the man was walking, he threw a rock.'

      3. **nakani mat tali pinhinlas !_nya tok**
         masculine-the-rock-throw-cont.-walk-past
         'While the man was walking, he kept on throwing rocks.'

      4. **ohoyo anopolis banilitakoș hotiño ko tok**
         woman- talk -sitting - cough-past
         'As the woman was talking, she coughed.' Literally, 'As the woman was sitting talking, she coughed.'

      5. **nakani anyatakoș nanattata kaliča antitola naha tok**
         man -walk-cont.-something-hung-up-almost-fall-past
         'As the man was walking, he stumbled.' Literally, 'The man was walking, something hung up (caught) his foot, he almost fell.'

      6. **čoka pilayaș anyali mat ofi mat waha tok**
         house-toward-walk-I-when-dog-the-bark-past
         'As I walked toward the house, the dog barked.'
7. ohoyo mat alanakani mat iso fonkanli nakanki mat hotioko 
   woman-the -boy - the-hit while - man- the-cough 
   tok 
   past 
   'Just as the woman hit the boy, the man coughed.'

2. Succession
   1. nakani mat akanya na nittak toklohos anoti balahinla 
      man - the-walk - ?- day - two -and then- run-cont. 
      nittak čafa tok 
      day - one-past 
      'The man walked for two days, and then he ran for one day.'

   2. ohoyo mat lowak otiča balinkasi banili na onatana tok 
      woman-the-fire-build-beside - sit -? -all night-past 
      'The woman built a fire, then sat beside it for one night.'

   3. nakani mat imahoyo illi na nakani mat lakbanahol anta 
      man -the -his-wife-die-? -man -the- alone - cont.

   4. nakani mat inčoka anoka anta na nittak toklo onahos kaniya 
      man -the-his-house-in-lives?-? - day - two -was there-leave 
      tok 
      past 
      'The man stayed in the house two days, then he left.'

   5. hatak at iskifa pitisiča pitpilat kosa okpani 
      man -the-axe - grab - hit -door- break 
      'The man grabbed the axe, hit the door (with it), and broke 
      it.'

   6. alanakani mat alatik ma oka ima na iško tok 
      boy -the- girl -when-water?-drink-past 
      'The boy gave water to the girl, and she drank it.'

Section 3.1 contains examples of the Choctaw merged sentence used 
 to encode temporal overlap. Deep structure temporal overlap involves 
 simultaneous events which are expressed in any one sentence. The focused 
 action is presented in the second clause which usually contains only the 
 verb plus the past tense marker tok. Thus in examples 3.1.1-3.1.3 the 
 focus is on the fact that the man is walking. The auxiliary verb (non­
 focused) is found in the first clause in the sentence, and this clause 
 appears in full form. In these merged sentences there are no inter­
 clausal connectors.

Most languages encode temporal overlap and temporal succession in 
 different ways, and Choctaw proves to be no exception as can be seen 
 from the data in section 3.2. In every sentence except 3.2.5, which is 
 different in form from the others in that it contains three verbs, the 
 interclausal connector na is present. Meaning something on the order of
then, na occurs in a variety of places within the sentence, whether it be in the first clause, the second clause, or between clauses. However, it always follows the verb. Thus with the addition of na after the verb in either clause, the deep structure changes from overlap to succession.

4. Implication
   1. Conditionality
      1. Hypotheticality
         1. lowak at masolik ma pila hinla
            fire-the-goes out-when-we-die-future
            'If the fire goes out, we will die.'
         2. takon mat ispa mat tabika hinla
            apple-the-you-eat-when-you-sicken-future
            'If you eat those apples, you will get sick.'
         3. hoisi at kocak mat labisa taha ci
            bird-the-outside-when warm-become-future
            'If the sun comes out, it will become warm.'
      2. Universal quantifier
         1. isla ciik ma cihi monala ci
            you-come-when-wait-I-future
            'Whenever you come, I'll be waiting.'
         2. kanaho icafi co tok ma yosoba tok
            who -we-send -past-when-lost-past
            'Whomever we sent got lost.'
      3. Contingency
         1. ohoyo pat akafi taha ma toksala cinka imisali
            woman-that.well-become-when-work-future-allow-I
            'After she became well, I let her work.'
      4. Proportion
         1. kocak laspa ma nowa makos pisalaha
            outside-hot-when-walk-cont.-we-slow
            'The hotter the weather (is), the slower we walk.'
         2. toksali wiki hon itoksa mat pitikambi
            work - hard- ? -we-work -when- we-tired
            'The harder we work, the more tired we get.'

Section 4 contains sentences whose deep structure involves some form of implication. To express such if sentences as in 4.1 Choctaw uses ma (or mat) meaning 'when'. Choctaw encodes deep structure conditionality with a universal quantifier, section 4.2, as any other temporal sentence involving the use of ma 'when'. From this it can be seen that Choctaw has no way to encode logical relations other than to change them into temporal relations. Deep structure contingency and proportion, sections 4.3 and 4.4, also encode as temporal sentences.
2. Causation

1. Efficient cause

1. *al* *mat* *imp* at *činka* *iški* at onthoyoča *impaći* hon *intokno* 
   boy-the-eat-future-mother-the-go after-make- *
   'The mother forced the boy to come home to eat.'

2. *makowa* *hatakoš* *alanakani* *mat* *alatik* ma *iso* 
   angry-because- boy - the- girl- the-hit 
   'Because the boy was angry, he hit the girl.'

3. *hočafo* *hatakoš* onkopa tok 
   hungry-because- steal-past 
   'He stole because he was hungry.'

2. Final cause

1. *alanakani* *mat* *imp* banahos *čoka* *ala* tok 
   boy - the-eat - want - house-come-past 
   'The boy came home to get something to eat.'

2. *hatak* *mat* soba losakabik pisa *či* hoš *imisapa* pičokwa 
   man -the-horse- brown -see -future-cont.-his-field-go 
   tok into-past 
   'The man walked into the field to see the brown horse.'

3. Circumstance

1. *abika* *hatakoš* holisopisat iya *či* kiyo 
   sick -because- school - go-future-not 
   'Since he is sick, he won't go to school.'

2. *alanakani* *yamat* himmitta kat atapa *hatakoš* wattat 
   *boy* - the - young - ? - too-because-hunting-we 
   illiya kat ištilliya kiyo 
   go - ? -he-go - not 
   'Because that boy is so young, we won't take him along.'

Section 4.2 on causation reveals no special markers which would 
distinguish between efficient cause, final cause, and circumstance. 
The word *hatakos*, however, is a near equivalent of the English *because*. 
Thus whenever it appears after any sentence constituent, that constit­
uent is recognized as the direct cause of whatever state or action 
follows in the sentence. Whenever *hatakos* does not occur in a sentence, 
that sentence does not necessarily connote causation although it may 
do so.

3. Contrafactuality

1. *hatak* *mat* aytatoba *iyak* ma anowa kiyo iyala hinla tok 
   man the - store - go-when-I-walk-not-go-I-future-past 
   (if) 
   'If he had gone to the store, I would have gone too.'
2. aytatoba ikiyo tok ma anowa kiy o iyala hitokiyo
   store - not -past-when-I-walk-not-I-go-?
   (if)
   'If he had not gone to the store, I would not have gone.'

3. hatak mat lowak ikbi tok ma na lowa hinla tok
   man -the- fire-build-past-when-?-fire-future-past
   (if)
   'If the man had built a fire, it (house) would have burned down.'

4. hatak mat lowak ikto baco ki tok ma coka pat lowa hitokiyo
   man -the-fire- build -not-past-when-house-that-burn-?
   'If the man had not built a fire, the house would not have burned down.'

5. išbalili tok ma tok čitola hinla tok
   you-run-past-when-past-you-fall-future-past
   (if)
   'If you had been running, you would have fallen.'

6. išbalili tok kiyok ma čitola hitokiyo
   you-run-past-not-if-you-fall-?
   'If you had not been running, you would not have fallen.'

7. kanat iksahoyo ma alala hitokiyo
   anyone-one come after-if-come-
   'If no one came after me, I would not have gone.'

The Choctaw contrafactual sentence as illustrated in section 4.3
is the most regular in form of any of the sentence structures studied
here. Examples 4.3.1-4.3.6 are arranged in pairs. The first sentence
in each pair of contrafactuals has as its constituent parts two positive
clauses. The second sentence in each pair has as its constituent parts
two negative clauses, thus carrying the exact opposite meaning from
the first member of each pair. The phrase hinla tok appearing at the
end of the positive statements is the only subjunctive form or idiom
in this data. Hinla by itself is one of several future tense markers.
By itself tok is a past tense marker. By combining the two, one can
refer to a past action which one did not perform, but which might have
been performed if certain external conditions had come to pass. If
hinla tok does not appear at the end of a sentence, an ordinary two-
clause sentence is formed. Thus example 4.3.1 without hinla tok
would mean simply, 'When he went to the store, I went.' Now, if one
wishes to express the exact opposite meaning of examples 4.3.1, 4.3.3,
and 4.3.5, one needs only to negate the first clause with some form of
kiyo and add hitokiyo onto the end of the second clause.
CONCLUSION

The limited results of this paper bear witness to the fact that all languages are capable of expressing the full range of ideas and thoughts common to all peoples. It is best to get at these surface structures through the use of some systematic organization of deep structures such as described by Longacre and such as those that were briefly explored in this paper. What I have done with Choctaw can, I believe, be profitably done with any other language thus saving much time and effort on the part of a translator.

REFERENCES