



1974

Some Choctaw sentence structures

Stephen M. Swartz
SIL-UND

Follow this and additional works at: <https://commons.und.edu/sil-work-papers>

Recommended Citation

Swartz, Stephen M. (1974) "Some Choctaw sentence structures," *Work Papers of the Summer Institute of Linguistics, University of North Dakota Session*: Vol. 18 , Article 10.

DOI: 10.31356/silwp.vol18.10

Available at: <https://commons.und.edu/sil-work-papers/vol18/iss1/10>

This Article is brought to you for free and open access by UND Scholarly Commons. It has been accepted for inclusion in Work Papers of the Summer Institute of Linguistics, University of North Dakota Session by an authorized editor of UND Scholarly Commons. For more information, please contact zeineb.yousif@library.und.edu.

Some Choctaw Sentence Structures

Stephen M. Swartz

- Introduction
- Body
- 1. Conjoining
 - 1. Coupling
 - 2. Contrast
 - 3. Comparison
- 2. Alternation
 - 1. With only two possible alternatives
 - 2. With more than two alternatives
- 3. Temporal
 - 1. Overlap
 - 2. Succession
- 4. Implication
 - 1. Conditionality
 - 2. Causation
 - 3. Contrafactuality
- Conclusion

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,č,k,b,f,θ,s,š,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 miča miya
man- the-short - and - fat
'The man is short and fat.'
2. hatak at tančik 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 imačokma akma alatik ato nanačonli
boy - ? - hunt-he-likes-and -girl - ? - sew
'The boy likes to hunt, and the girl likes to sew.'
4. našoba ofi θiyoholi ma ofi at našoba 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 aθiha ohoyo miča ala moma kat čata
man -group-woman-and-children-all?-Choctaw
'The men, women, and children all speak Choctaw.'
7. hatak at tanči 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 mica 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 ikayopačo
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 amahoyo ato ikayopačo
our-house-new- good -love-I-my-wife-? - hates
'I love our new home, but my wife hates it.'
3. alanakani at hoši pisa hikiyo alatik ato pinsa
boy -the-bird-sees-not - girl -?- sees
'The boy cannot see the bird, but the girl can.'
4. anakfit ato holiso timanopoli kat imacokma kiyo amba
my-brother-?-book - read - ? -he-likes-not -but
antik ato imačokma
my-sister-?-she-likes
5. čata anopoli kat anona amba naholo anopa non anona 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 makillašo okčaya
dog-all -?- die -black-only one -live
'All the dogs died but the black one.'
8. ofi moma kat ikillo tok emba lakna makillašo 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 iškoli tok anakalahoš 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 čito kat čomofit inšahali
my-dog-big- ? -your-dog-comparative
'My dog is bigger than your dog.'
2. amofit čito kat čimi talawe
my-dog-big- ? -your- same as
'My dog is the same size as your dog.'
3. amofit osi kat čimi inšahali
my-dog-small-?-your-comparative
'My dog is smaller than your dog.'
4. ofit akon ačokma ahnili kat katos ma inšahali
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: inšahali 'comparative degree' and talawe 'same as.' Thus in example 1.3.1, amofit 'my dog' is the first base, čito 'big' is the comparable idea, čimofit 'your dog' is the second base, and inšahali 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. nanaθpoa mat illi kiyok mat okčayo
animal - the-die- or -alive
'The animal is either dead or alive.'

2. With more than two alternatives

1. nakani 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 hoš tamaha ilia či
walk - or - run - into -cont.-town-go - future
'We will either walk or run into town.'
3. nakani mat illia či himmaka kiyok mat onakma kiyok mat
man -the- die-future-today- or tomorrow- or
mišakma
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 hoš 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 pinhinlaš anya tok
masculine-the-rock-throw-cont.-walk-past
'While the man was walking, he kept on throwing rocks.'
4. ohoyo anopoliš banilitakoš hotiθko tok
woman- talk -sitting - cough-past
'As the woman was talking, she coughed.' Literally,
'As the woman was sitting talking, she coughed.'
5. nakani anyatakoš 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 pilayaš 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 hotiθko
 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 toklohoš 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 lakbanahoš anta
 man -the -his-wife-die-? -man -the- alone - cont.
4. nakani mat inčoka anoka anta na nittak toklo onahoš 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 mašolik ma pila hinla
fire-the-goes out-when-we-die-future
'If the fire goes out, we will die.'
2. takon mat išpa mat čabika hinla
apple-the-you-eat-when-you-sicken-future
'If you eat those apples, you will get sick.'
3. hoši at kočak mat labiša taha či
bird-the-outside-when warm-become-future
'If the sun comes out, it will become warm.'

2. Universal quantifier

1. išla čik ma čihi monala či
you-come-when-wait-I-future
'Whenever you come, I'll be waiting.'
2. kanaho ičafičo tok ma yošoba tok
who -we-send -past-when-lost-past
'Whomever we sent got lost.'

3. Contingency

1. ohoyo pat θakafi taha ma toksala činka imisali
woman-that-well-become-when-work-future-allow-I
'After she became well, I let her work.'

4. Proportion

1. kočak lašpa ma nowa makoš pisalaha
outside-hot-when-walk-cont.-we-slow
'The hotter the weather (is), the slower we walk.'
2. toksali wiki hon itoksali 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. ala mat impa činka iški at onthoyoča impači 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 alatic 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 impa banahoš 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 constituent 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 kiyo 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 iktobačo ki tok ma čoka 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-I- ?
'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

Longacre, Robert E. An anatomy of speech notions. SIL:Dallas. 1974.