Achumawi Database: Summary for June 2020

The current backup can be downloaded (with instructions) from the usual location at http://zelligharris.org/achumawi-db.html

The plan for June looked like a routine month of working through the lexicon one word at a time and chasing down their constituent morphemes. There have been some distractions of the sort to which we are all subject in this pandemic time—but the self-quarantine ‘bubble’ provides compensatory insulation, and by far most disruption to that orderly plan are because the process brings to the surface long-standing puzzles which I now have the means to resolve.

1. I straightened out the minimal pair ʰúk “coal” vs. ʰuku “chilly” (as in ʰuku suwí “I’m chilly”). The confusions in the record are because the epiglottal gesture for h disturbs control of the tongue and the larynx.

The disturbance of intended tongue gesture for vowels is I think familiar to readers of these updates. The a vowel shifts forward to [ã] (lah “head”), the short e vowel shifts down toward [ae] (tēhač “acorn”), the i and u vowels become diphthongs (tihuku ‘[dhi̞ o̞ ki̞] ‘run hither’, hitiš [he’ ip̄ o̞s]) “spit”, and the contrast of u and o is neutralized, so that ʰúk and ʰuk were often transcribed with o.

Tongue movement for consonants may also be affected. Because the u vowel is short in ʰúk “coal” and ʰuk “chilly”, there is little time after the h for the back of the tongue to move far enough forward to distinguish k from q, so that the syllable-final k was sometimes heard as q.

The epiglottal gesture affects the larynx in two ways. First, nearby consonants may be laryngealized. This is obvious with sonorants (e.g. cahnač, cahnač “lizard”, aehlā, aehlā “sky”), but unexpected with that final k, which was sometimes recorded as k̓ or q̓ in these words. Secondly, turbulence in S-shaped passage of air flow around the protruded epiglottis can sound like low pitch (or may actually lower the pitch). This makes it harder to perceive the pitch distinction when ʰúk “coal” is pronounced in isolation, without adjacent syllables from which to judge relative pitch. (In addition, the back vowel u lowers all vowel formants.) So sometimes ʰúk “coal” was recorded with low pitch. This is evidently why I recorded low pitch on the first syllable of hukiči “black”, even though the perceived difference in pitch between the first and second syllables is quite slight.

The basis of that compound color term is ʰúk wicci’ “coal-resembling”, parallel to e.g. ahṭi wicci’ “blood-resembling” (for “red”). In 1888, interviewing a young Pit River man on the Round Valley reservation, Jeremiah Curtin wrote hauqdji “black”. In the Powell alphabet that he adapted, q is a spirant, something like [h̃o̞ xci]. I believe that the first syllable of wicci’ was devoiced, though it is possible it was actually elided, producing the shortened form hiku’i. Either way, this suggests that at that when Curtin heard it 122 years ago the shape of this compound was on the way to becoming the downriver form hukiči’ (exactly parallel to īwiiči’ “snow-like” for “white”). The further change to upriver hákūuici’ is probably a later development.

The upshot is that variant forms of “coal” such as ʰúk, ʰuq, and ʰuŋ, some with low pitch, are now all rectified to ʰúk (with the original transcription preserved in a note, as usual). The relatively few
occurrences of ʰuk “chilly” are written consistently with low pitch, and only one lacks context.

But this has also led to several forms in which ʰuk occurs as a root. For the reasons noted above, the pronunciation of áliihúkwací “bad, doing evil” was very challenging to record. What I had discontentedly settled on in the database was álihwóqwací, but I have now rectified this word to áliihúkwací. As we would now expect (see above), the vowel quality of the lii root (“moving the arm/hand; extending”) is pulled toward [ɛ], and the second half of that iɨ vowel is devoiced.

Several other forms emerged from shadow in this light: tiliihúuki [dil̩ʔʰ̩ˈoʊki] “hate” (de Angulo has -ilêhwowych-, alternating ɣ and q, but I suspect he has the pitches wrong), tátahúkwamí “make bad, spoil”, itadahúknici “doing evil”, sátuuhúkwíi “I don’t like the taste”, isuuhúkwací “boring, dull”. These have all been rectified to recognize the húk “black, bad” root. (The “by doing” CV roots in the first stem position will be recognizable from my April 30 report.)

2. Glottal stop has a marginal status in Achumawi, and I took it to be non-contrastive. I have omitted it word-initially before a vowel, where it is optional just as it is in English. It is optional but not so easily disregarded after the final vowel of a participle (ó issí, ó issí’, ó issi’ “talking”) and sometimes after the final vowel of a verb in the 3rd person when it is used with the effect of a participle (yáásíkcani “medicine man”, wiitúupí “rotten”, woh wíniíhúwíí “one who has bear spirit power; bear doctor”. Even when glottal stop occurs intervocally (táq sìla’ám “what shall I eat?”, sásíultááyi “I am glad; thank you”) it might be possible to say that the glottal stop is phonetically inserted when juxtaposed vowels go from low pitch to high pitch (and not when they go from high to low, as in as sìuwí “I want water”). For the present, I am retaining glottal stop wherever I recorded it in all these cases except word-initially before vowel, but watch this space.

There is a y glide in tatíyí “mother”, waayí “father”, tásíyí “good”, and the various forms of the animate copula (twíyí “he is”, chááwa tíyí “where is she?”, etc.), so these are not instances of glottal stop. Indeed, it is possible that the -íc- copula is present in all of them.

3. I have long been troubled by marginal evidence for a glottalized spirant ş. With the glottalized sonorants, the glottal closure is at the syllable margin—e.g. the ’ is before the w in súúwa “basket cap” [súúˈwa] and after the w in áw “wood” [àw']. However, with ş, the glottal stop goes with the stressed/high-pitch syllable: after the s in sis í“I say” and before the s in sánáá’st“I sing a charm”, which have the same s / š root.¹ It comes before the s in [gót tíí’sí] “shovel”, after the s in [as’i] “(yellow pine) tree”, [ís’íní] “backbone”, and [mas’íč] “twenty”.

In all cases, ʃ is fronted, as might be expected with the higher air pressure of an ejective articulation, whereas plain s is free to move farther back toward phonetic [s] (the so-called “California s” in languages that have no s-ʃ contrast). In utterance-final position, I rarely heard an unreleased glottal stop after the fronted s, e.g. tšís “salt” vs. is “person, Indian”, but the glottalization becomes evident where a vowel follows, e.g. before -ayci “native of” in tííssayci “Yana people”, tííssáte “Salt Creek”. After a vowel, these suffixes begin with a sonorant: sáppíqwáté, sáppíiqlé “in a boat”, síítwayci “one from Hayden Hill”, ta hôrácyáté “at a

¹ The verbs glossed “say”, “sing”, and “drink” appear to have the same root with differences in the initial syllable introduced by prefix:

say  tissí  sis’i  īs (differentiated by a preceding ŏ)
sing  těésí  siwáásá īs
drink  tissí  sóósá īs

- 2 -
swimming place”, and sometimes also -máté or -náté: but after a consonant it begins with the gemination of that consonant, as in láhháté “on the head”, tʰīssató “Salt Creek”. The ʃ in tʰīssayci “Yana people” and tʰīssáté “Salt Creek” has been heard in different ways. I heard e.g. [tʰis’ayci], [tʰi’sayci], and [tʰis’sayci], as well as [tʰissayci] with fronted s. Harrington wrote th’sayci, th’sade.

These are the only examples I find, so the evidence is sparse indeed, but I am considering using ʃ in the spelling of these words: tʰis, aṣi, qótiši, išum, mašuc, tʰis. For the verbs of saying and singing, it will be necessary to understand when the glottalization is not audible, and that appears to depend upon a better understanding of syllable stress, e.g. for the difference between sisí (where it is audible) and ò issí’ (where it is not).

Tʰúsýi “good” has high pitch on both syllables, but it is probably tʰús “good” + ìyi a participle form of the animate copula, as noted in (2). The longer form tʰúsýi is usually an adverb (verb or sentence modifier) where tʰús is an adjective. On rehearing audio recordings, there is clearly a glide in these forms and not a simple glottal stop (e.g. qá tatíši tiší in LA49.014.001 at 00:06:48 = LR: Lone Goose Basket Design [sentence 19]).

(In passing reference to #2 in the May 30 report, items such as these which assimilate to a preceding final consonant are suffixes. Others with no such alternations, e.g. có “plural”, may be enclitics.)

4. The waci on álihihkwiči is what de Angulo calls an adverbial “ medio-passive-continuative suffix” -aswadz. It appears to be the familiar auxiliary root c “do” seen in tuci and in what de Angulo takes to be a -ci suffix (as did I until this year) in his Conjugation V. The 3rd person prefix w-, in contrast to the y- 3rd person, indicates habitual or characteristic behavior, or a force of nature. If this analysis stands up, waci is a verb with an impersonal of “one does” or “keeps doing”.

| sóótsúyci | “I got angry” | sóótsúywaci | “I’m angry (still)” |
| ámmi | “eating” | ámwaci | “always eating” |
| • yáámúcci | “he lifts it (with arms)” | yáámúcwaci | “he holds it in arms” |

However, in some verb stems, this (enclitic?) waci is preceded by s, for example:

| yáásá | “he sang” | yáásaswaci | “he was still singing” |
| sóósá | “I drank” | sóósaswaci | “I kept drinking” |
| sáámaati | “I slept” | sáámaataswaci | “I was always sleeping” |
| sáhuumi | “I ran thither” | sáhuumaswaci | “I kept running” |
| wacááci | “grasped with hand” | wacááaswaci | “held up in hand” |

There seems to be no regular phonological difference in the preceding stems, but nor are there occurrences of this s as a separate morpheme with such stems. The choice of stem-final vowel is also an unresolved puzzle, though a is usually volitional. Watch this space. Join in the fun if you have ideas.