

Achumawi Database: Summary for June 2020

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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. *huk* “chilly” (as in *huk 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 [ə] (*láh* “head”), the short *e* vowel shifts down toward [æ] (*téhtač* “acorn”), the *i* and *u* vowels become diphthongs (*tíhuuki* [*dih^é ó^wki*] “run hither”, *híitús* [*he^é tós*]) “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”, *asehlá*, *asehlá* “sky”), but unexpected with that final *k*, which was sometimes recorded as *ḳ* or *q̣* 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 *húkíici* “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. *ahti 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 [*h^é ó^wxi*]. I believe that the first syllable of *wicci* was devoiced, though it is possible it was actually elided, producing the shortened form *húkci*. 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 *húkíici* (exactly parallel to *tíwíici* “snow-like” for “white”). The further change to upriver *hákúici* is probably a later development.

The upshot is that variant forms of “coal” such as *húk*, *húq*, and *húq̣*, 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 *húk* “chilly” are written consistently with low pitch, and only one lacks context.

But this has also led to several forms in which *húk* 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 *ii* vowel is devoiced.

Several other forms emerged from shadow in this light: *tíliihúúki* [dɪl^hh^ɛo'ki'] “hate” (de Angulo has *-iléhwoy-*, alternating *y* and *q*, but I suspect he has the pitches wrong), *tátaahúkʷamí* “make bad, spoil”, *itaahúkʷmíci* “doing evil”, *sátuuhúkʷí* “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 (*yáásikcaní* “medicine man”, *wiituuپی* “rotten”, *woh wíniihúúwí* “one who has bear spirit power; bear doctor”). Even when glottal stop occurs intervocalically (*táq slá’ám* “what shall I eat?”, *sasúúla’áayi* “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 síuwí* “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 *tat’í* “mother”, *waayí* “father”, *t’hús’yí* “good”, and the various forms of the animate copula (*twiyí* “he is”, *c’hááwa tíyí* “where is she?”, etc.), so these are not instances of glottal stop. Indeed, it is possible that the *-íy-* copula is present in all of them.

3. I have long been troubled by marginal evidence for a glottalized spirant *ś*. With the glottalized sonorants, the glottal closure is at the syllable margin—e.g. the *’* is before the *w* in *súúwa* “basket cap” [*súú’wa*] and after the *w* in *áv* “wood” [*áv’*]. However, with *ś*, the glottal stop goes with the stressed/high-pitch syllable: after the *s* in *sis’í* “I say” and before the *s* in *sánáá’si* “I sing a charm”, which have the same *s / ś* root.¹ It comes before the *s* in [*qót tíi’si*] “shovel”, after the *s* in [*as’ú*] “(yellow pine) tree”, [*is’úm*] “backbone”, and [*mas’úc*] “twenty”.

In all cases, *ś* 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 [ʃ] (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. *t’híś* “salt” vs. *ís* “person, Indian”, but the glottalization becomes evident where a vowel follows, e.g. before *-ayci* “native of” in *t’híśśayci* “Yana people”, *t’híśśáte* “Salt Creek”. After a vowel, these suffixes begin with a sonorant: *sápp’hiwáté, sápp’hiiláté* “in a boat”, *síntiwayci* “one from Hayden Hill”, *tahpáacityaté* “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	<i>tissi</i>	<i>sis’í</i>	<i>líś</i> (differentiated by a preceding <i>ó</i>)
sing	<i>téési</i>	<i>siwáásá</i>	<i>lés</i>
drink	<i>tissi</i>	<i>sóósá</i>	<i>líś</i>

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”, *tʰíssáte* “Salt Creek”. The *s* in *tʰísayci* “Yana people” and *tʰíssáté* “Salt Creek” has been heard in different ways. I heard e.g. [*tʰí'sayci*], [*tʰí'sayci*], and [*tʰís'sayci*], as well as [*tʰíssayci*] with fronted *s*. Harrington wrote *thí'saytci*, *thí'sade*.

These are the only examples I find, so the evidence is sparse indeed, but I am considering using *s* in the spelling of these words: *tʰís*, *asú*, *qót tíisi*, *isúm*, *masúc*, *tʰís*. 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 *ó issí* (where it is not).

Tʰúsýi “good” has high pitch on both syllables, but it is probably *tʰús* “good” + *iyí* 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 tatýi tíiyi* 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. *ćó* “plural”, may be enclitics.)

4. The *waci* on *áliihúkʷaci* 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”.

<i>sóótúyici</i>	“I got angry”	<i>sóótúywaci</i>	“I’m angry (still)”
<i>ámmi</i>	“eating”	<i>ámwaci</i>	“always eating”
• <i>yáámúcci</i>	“he lifts it (with arms)”	<i>yáamućwaci</i>	“he holds it in arms”

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

<i>yáásá</i>	“he sang”	<i>yáásaswaci</i>	“he was still singing”
<i>sóósá</i>	“I drank”	<i>sóósaswaci</i>	“I kept drinking”
<i>sáámaatí</i>	“I slept”	<i>sáámaataswaci</i>	“I was always sleeping”
<i>sáhuumi</i>	“I ran thither”	<i>sáhuumaswaci</i>	“I kept running”
<i>wacáaci</i>	“grasped with hand”	<i>wacáásaswaci</i>	“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.