Achumawi Database: Summary for November 2020

The current backup can be downloaded (with instructions) from the usual location at http://zelligharris.org/achumawi-db.html, and I have updated the webonary site https://www.webonary.org/odissi/. Lexicon entries will be enriched with examples in the future. To view examples of roots, prefixes, and suffixes in particular words, open the Lexicon view in the database, right-click the entry, and select Show Entry in Concordance.

This is a good time to broach the distinction between etymology and ‘live’ assembly of morphemes into words. Much of what is done in English by combining words (syntax) is done in Achumawi by combining morphemes into a single word. When the meanings of words have become so specialized that they can no longer easily be decomposed into the meanings of the constituent morphemes the decomposition is called etymology. But the boundary between these is not obvious.

Our sense of what “the meanings” are is a function of our translations into English. The locations of semantic precision and the locations of ambiguity in Achumawi are different from the locations of precision and ambiguity in English. In icasqóóti “smoking a pipe” the ca refers to the grasping the sqót “pipe”. In ikutáámi “smoking tobacco” (as an act of prayer), ku “press with hand” may allude to pressing the tobacco into a sqót, but with tam (ta “make a line, move in a direction, etc.”) plus -m “thither, away”, recorded both with and without glottalization) may indicate gesture with smoke. We see tam in e.g. tykátaami qá accát “Ground Squirrel went out”. In sánaataamí, the n-prefix intensifies the basic meaning so that it is not just “I go out” but “I go to get”. However, the n-prefix can also be iterative, and it would be typical of the language for this verb equally well to mean “I go out again” or “I go out repeatedly”, relying upon context to tell us which sense is intended.

Divergence of meaning in the English gloss, depending on context requires us not only to get at some kind of essential meaning for each morpheme, but also to read their combination rather as one reads the combinations of glyphs in a Chinese ideogram.

Consider these examples involving wam and wak:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>wam</th>
<th>wak</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>tiwááma!, tuuwááma!</td>
<td>uuwááké</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>tiwááme, tuuwáámé</td>
<td>uuwáktáké</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

There are many verbs that I at first analyzed as containing a root wam “severally, separating, going [thither] into”, such as tykánsiíwáámi “jumped back in again” and álaha tóótehómo’oy “(place where) bear (was) torn in two”, wacániéíwální “wind broke up the house”, wacaqisíwalmi “wind twists trees off in middle”, wacaňíwalmi “wind bends trees over”. (In these last three, ca “air moves; move through air” contrasts with its homomorph ca “grasp.”) Are the stems wam and wak composed of
wa + -m “thither” vs. wa + -k “hither”? Is there a similar meaning associated with other occurrences of wa, some common modification, perhaps, of the meaning of an adjacent morpheme?

Dwelling as they do on the acúmmá “river” (lit. “flow thither”) the Pit River people have various place names and other words which combine cu “thrust, flow” plus wa to denote flooding water:

- *ticuuwáýit*: “Horseshoe Bend (flood place)”. The final -t is the “X-place” locative suffix, as in támmit “eating place”. Verbs with stem-final ý collected in my Problems spreadsheet may be related to the ý animate copula.
- *as ticuuwááti*: “water rises”. The t (plus stem-final -i) appears to be a reduction of ta “move in a line, progress, make a sequence”, as in e.g. titammi “fly, go along a line, make a fence”, and twice in titaatit “irrigation ditch” (the third and final -t is the “X-place” locative, as above).
- *icúáwallá*: “Pitville (flooding place)”. The -la is an allomorph of -wa forming place names, preceded by la “move in a direction, make a line”.
- *ticúúwalki*: “flood hither”. The -k is the directional “hither”, and the preceding l appears to be reduced from la “move in a direction, make a line” as above.

Understanding these as water crossing the wéétát “border, edge” of the riverbed brings them together with verbs such as these:

- *tyktatííwalámcí “they were neighbors”.
- *tićiíwalmi “walk next door, go over there”, ticúúwalki “walk from next door, come over here”. The same stem is used when the two deer children fleeing the mother bear walk across the river on the outstretched leg of their uncle Crane: tyktántííwalmi.
- *wílílíyeqwalmi one slides across (on boggy place)

Some verbs with wa + l(a) suggest creating a boundary, for example:

- álisti skaw skaw íwalmi rocks standing in a line
- álisti aqwalmi rocks in a string, rocks all along
- tíliíkwálmi groove an arrow shaft; plow over, cover over with plow.

Other such verbs require further analysis:

- *tatawálkaalé “measuring stick”
- *walááwalki “dew” illááwalkí “being frosty”
- *tiníppʰawwálmi “sharpen it!”

In this problem set, I have currently analyzed the verb stem itʰalúumi “working” as tʰa “hear, obey” + lu “by pulling, as though pulled along” + wam (wa + -m).

At the present level of understanding, this surely appears to be an etymological speculation. But to the point, the distinction between etymology and living morphology depends upon your purposes. For a descriptive grammar claiming to represent the way Pit River people talked in the 19th and early
20th centuries etymology would be strictly subordinated as a details in the lexicon, unless it affected a significant class of words as a morphophonemic regularity; and for the purpose of historical reconstruction, distinguishing them can help with relative chronology, but for the purpose of coining new vocabulary for language revitalization an etymological reconstruction can be just as important as a solidly attested morpheme. Countless examples in the lexicon of the English language attest to this.

Some months ago, in my report for work in June, I speculated that waci (what de Angulo calls an adverbial “medio-passive-continuative suffix” -aswadz) might be the 3rd person prefix w-plus the familiar auxiliary root c “do”. The 3rd person prefix w-, in contrast to the y- 3rd person, generally indicates habitual or characteristic behavior, or a force of nature. In this analysis, waci is an auxiliary verb with an impersonal sense of “one does” or “keeps doing”. Examples that I gave include:

- sóóítúyí “I got angry”, sóóítúywáci “I’m angry (still)”
- ámti “eating”, ámwáci “always eating”
- yáadúwáci “he lifts it (with arms)”, yádúnwáci “he holds it in arms”

The material surveyed above suggest a more general system of verb stems incorporating an auxiliary verb that begins with this impersonal w-. To this we may even be able to add things that have become more ‘lexicalized’ (so to speak) as ‘grammatical elements’, such as

- wa, la, etc. “instrumental”
- wa, la, etc. “place where, place of”
- wáté, láté, etc. “locative”
- wál “comitative” (amít’émíwál jályuyúncán wál íyápte haatítwíw “a woman and a man went to Hat Creek”, háy suwí mí wál tupte kúc “I was planning to go with you”)

In the first three of these, at least, the assimilation of w to a preceding consonant adds weight to the view that ‘lexicalization’ has taken us across the border from live word derivation into etymology.

I spent some time in November trying to pin down the stem ćilák “possess” in tićilákí “possess, have; beget or bear children”; tićiláke “money, possessions, wealth”. After fruitless search for ćil, ćil I was left with an etymology deriving from ćí “stand, be upon” + la “make a line, control a sequence” + -k “hither”. For uses of ćí with meanings other than “using the foot”, consider:

| sááčémí; sááčiimiiyúdámi | I fell; I made it fall | -m downard |
| tándsičellamámé’ | unable to jump over | si move fast, jump |
| tulápcíci | sunset | lup come together, pile |
| wacaspútčíci | (wind, hand) tore the top off | spút pluck out |
| uulúčíci aaʔu | bald mountain | luc clean |

Other forms with ćí:
• číllay “twist”. In: iičíllayí “twisting”, wacacíllayi “he twists it with fingers”, acaacíllyaayáké “twisted”. Perhaps related to rope-making. If it includes la “make a line, control a sequence” it may fall in the problem set with stem-final y, but compare lay “bright, clear”, lálayí “bald”.

• iičísta “island” (cp. tiičísta “put it up high!” immediately before in the same 1973 notes from Lela Rhoades).

The root pil occurs in icuupílí “driftwood pile” (cu “thrust, flow”), ilii pilí “being curly”, yilii pilí “she braids” and in placenames with apíl “branches crossing”. Harrington says this is from yánwaapílcumík, with the annotation “brush falls across the creek. You cannot cross on the brush in the water for it is not stout.” Apparently from a tangle of driftwood on a stream one can harvest a good čapíl, čapílóó, “canoe paddle”.

The final -k seen above in yánwaapílcumík occurs only sporadically at the end of a verb which may also occur without it. Some examples:

• yaakʰáátík “he died” (lit. “he cut”).
• yáásatwík “(clouds) cleared off”.
• yáánámcík číkko “footprint”.
• wálámómcík “it frosts”.
• qʰehé tyátwík ittʰú cahihn “that one killed my dog”.
• qʰehé tyáncícímícík kacu láplé “he lost his bow”.
• sinwaakʰáátík číkko “I cut my foot”.
• allúówa sóóliikacík qa wáhhac “because of hunger I reach for bread”.
• wacúúcík “(water) flows over rim (of bucket)”.
• wáláacácík “(waterfall) shoots into ground”.
• awwaátík qa čul “(spider) is trapping the moon in web” (dim moon predicts bad time).
• sáttít tímmdámí kaa aahí yáádcícík “Glass Mt. look(s) at cloud rises” (ref. to Silver Lake). The t- has been called the infinitive; it is 3rd person in subordinate clauses.
• sánwáháacík “I make bread (wáhhac)”.
• sínnaahá “I’m warm”.
• tytáptééník “went (remote past)”, tytáptík “have gone (recent past)”
• wapliícík “(fire) blazes”

The majority of these are from Curtin in 1888, Radin in 1919, and Harrington ca. 1930. None are from de Angulo (also before 1931). In my notes, only the farthest downriver speakers added the -k. Rile Webster (Madesi) and Edna Webster (Ilmawi) were the most consistent, Lela Rhoades (Itsatawi) less so. When I asked Rile about the glosses that Craven (Big Valley) had given for tytáptééní and tytáptí, he corrected them to tytáptééník and tytáptík with no change of meaning. Nor do I see any obvious semantic distinction between e.g. sóóliikací “I come to ask for a handout” (LR 1972, 1974) and the above sóóliikacík (evening class, 1971, probably Edna).