Achumawi Database

Summary of February 2024 work

You can download the current backup from
• http://zelligharris.org/Achumawi/achumawi-db.html

I have updated the webonary at
• https://www.webonary.org/odissi/

The sections in this report are:
1. Syntax
2. Amqʰá

1. Syntax

Syntax (from Greek σύνταξις ‘an arranging in order’) has two aspects in this language. The inner syntax is similar to what is usually called word derivation in the more familiar world languages. The outer syntax is more like what is usually intended by that word, the arranging of words in larger constructions.

In every language, there is an interplay between these. Morphemes are less closely joined in the outer syntax, and in the inner syntax of word constructions morphemes are more closely joined and more subject to the mutual accommodations which are described as morphophonemic alternations. Languages differ in the balance of work done by each aspect, and a great deal of the topic of language typology concerns placing languages relative to one another along that spectrum of range of differences. In an ‘isolating’ language (Chinese is the usual example) there is very little of the inner syntax constructing words and close-knit phrases; in Achumawi there is a great deal more of it, but there are other languages even farther along the ‘polysynthetic’ end of the spectrum. In language variation and change the status of morphemes may slip from word to enclitic to affix and back, and they can do so in surprisingly few generations (R.M.W. Dixon 1997, The Rise and Fall of Languages).

Most of my work so far has been on the inner syntax, the construction of the ‘verbs’ which may each stand alone as a sentence (for example, lhicááwicka ‘I gave it to you’).

As I begin this three-year focus on writing a grammar, I have begun paying more systematic attention to the outer syntax of Achumawi, marshaling examples of different sentence forms. A sentence form is a sequence of morpheme classes, using the labels that appear on the Lex. Gram. Info. line in the Analysis view into the database. The labeling is subject to refinement over time.

Here’s a first labeling of LR: From the Moon to the Earth:1.1.

qa D qa N V qa N wi. N pro wáté ptep V
qa pálmas qa tiqáatti waci’ qá mááhy’ ca wi čul, amqʰá wáté icócínóo sticákasaswacínóo.

Some morphemes are represented as is because their membership in a larger class is unclear. In sentence-forms, some of these unclassified morphemes turn out to be constants amid the string of variables representing morpheme classes.

After a first labeling, the next step is to identify adjuncts. An adjunct is a morpheme, word, or phrase which may be removed without substantially changing the core meaning of the sentence. The first adjunct, qa pálmas, glossed ‘in the beginning, at first, long ago’, etc., is a sentence adjunct (about the sentence as a whole).
The phrase *mááhíy ca wi* ‘night-dwelling’ is an adjunct on the noun *ćul* ‘sun/moon’.

The phrase *amqʰá wáté icóócíínóo* ‘having been being/doing in that place’ is an adjunct on the verb. The word *icóócíínóo* is a gerund. The ‘-ing’ participle is usually just the bare stem, e.g. *icóóc* ‘doing, being’. This has the past -in and a volitional őo. There are many indications such as this that treating őo as ‘imperative’ and done with it is in fact far from done with it. The syntactic analysis is indispensible for sorting out such things.

Now we have two sentences conjoined by comma intonation. Each sentence is of the form NV, with *qa* obligatory almost always before N.

The territory was the moon, he had been shepherding us.

Sentence forms are a tool for systematically collecting examples of constructions in a language and progressively refining the definition of each construction. The resulting description emerges directly from the data of the given language rather than by presuming that they are examples of what has been described in other languages, much as the Spanish padres imposed categories of medieval Greek and Latin grammars.

This center-and-adjunct analysis was first developed by Zellig Harris as a grammar of ‘word expansions’ (‘From morpheme to utterance’ 1946), then as string analysis (1962), formalized by Aravind Joshi as a family of adjunction grammars, and in tree-adjoining grammar. Adjuncts are directly related to conjoined sentences (such as *mááhíy ca wáté wiįį ‘dwells in the night’ and *amqʰá wáté ekwicóócíįnį ‘there they did things’ i.e. carried on their lives), or are forms of a higher-order verb like ‘cause’. None of the latter kind appear in the example above.

By identifying adjuncts, the language learner, reader, and writer can immediately grasp the dependencies among words. Some adjuncts can be moved, and by relocating them one can produce paraphrases with different emphases, an important skill in language competence.

The analysis into a core sentence plus adjuncts, each with its head (that to which it is adjoined) has a lot in common with the ‘sentence diagrams’ invented by Brainerd Kellogg and Alonzo Reed in the 1800s. There’s even an app for it (for English). Unfortunately, high school English teachers have largely been cowed into believing that this is old-fashioned and that the abstract representations of phrase-structure grammar are more scientific. The dependencies and the possibilities for their alternative arrangements are far less obvious in phrase-structure ‘tree’ diagrams.

This will be a long process. We have a good number of sentences to work with.
2. amqʰá

In working with sentence forms, conjunctions and other words that relate sentences to one another come into prominence. Amqʰá is a kind of pronoun that refers to something that was recently said. The lexicon currently has these 8 entries:

amqʰá ‘that (one), for that reason, thus, that’s why, therefore, so, but, or else …’ (amqʰá ’ú tyămwi ‘it was his’)
amqʰá́ka (amqʰá ka) ‘in that way, therefore, but’
amqʰá́kam (amqʰá kam) ‘thence from that mentioned (agent); however
amqʰáka ‘same as mentioned (agent)’
amqʰákam ‘thence’
amqʰá́wa (amqʰá wa) ‘by means of the same; that’s why’
amqʰá́wáté (amqʰá wáté) ‘located as mentioned; while’; in that way; because’
amqʰá́wátém (amqʰá wátém) ‘nevertheless; but’

I need to reduce 7 of them to sub-entries under the entry for amqʰá. Vowel length with devoicing of a following consonant is automatic at the end of a word, so only amqʰáka and amqʰákam (short a, voiced k) have been fully lexicalized as single words, and the others should all be written as two words. The other constructions may also occur with this reduction, but they are not in the lexicon at this point.

Amqʰá is a kind of pronoun that refers to what was recently said. In the example in the preceding section which was used to illustrate analysis of sentence-forms and adjunct-forms, amqʰá wáté was glossed ‘in/at the aforesaid’, referring to something previously mentioned. The second syllable of amqʰá is qʰá ‘that’, which generally refers to something in the environment, so apparently what makes it refer to something previously said is the morpheme which appears as am in the first syllable. A reduction that comes immediately to mind ma qʰá > maqʰá (with ma ‘and’). Another possibility is amná, which is usually translated ‘but’. However, there are numerous occurrences where that gloss doesn’t fit at all. I’ll look into that next month.

There are differences of emphasis among the several allomorphs qʰá, qʰé, qʰahé, qʰehé, qʰé. (The consonant cluster qʰ is phonetically a strong uvular fricative.) They occur in a number of compounds:

qʰá́wa (=qʰá wa), qʰá́wwa ‘some of them’
qʰállí ‘whatsoever’ (ki wáli qʰállí cé yuwí tuutʰuuki ‘nobody at all came here’)
hamisqʰá́m ‘single, alone’ (hamís + qʰá + m)
qʰammmim ‘many individuals’ (mim ‘only, completely’; qʰamn mim not heard; historical reconstruction may find a relationship to the initial part of qʰám ‘much, many’.)
qʰawéélq ‘in some places; different place’ (wê=?; là, wa, etc. ‘place’)
qʰawéélalq ‘from elsewhere’ (yií ‘is in state’)  
qʰayhé ‘right there’ (JC: qʰayʔhé) (y ‘state’, he=?)
qʰaymí ‘right there’, qʰayhmí ‘right in that area’ (mim ‘only, even’, e.g. it mim ‘I myself’)
qʰé tím ‘right there’(tim ‘indeed’, amqʰá tím ‘that one indeed’)  
qʰaytím ‘in the same place (again), there indeed’
qʰé yá ‘that one indeed; those’
qʰé có ‘those’
qʰwáʔtu ‘from there’ (qʰá wáʔtu or qʰé wáʔtu is possible, but I haven’t come across an occurrence yet)
pʰiʔá ‘this one there’ (pi ‘this’)
qʰaytín ‘in that place’
tʰulqʰá́m ‘once, one time’

Similar but unrelated morphemes:
qʰa, an onomatopoeic representing of clearing one’s throat
tᵃqʰá ‘again’ < tᵃq ‘stick; station’ + (w)a, so also tᵃqʰɑpő ‘on the other hand’ with pa ‘place, put, throw, drop’.
qʰas suwí ‘I’m befuddled’ (qʰas qʰas tuci ‘can’t remember, brain fog’); séeqʰaalási ‘I’m disoriented’ (don’t know what to do, where I am, at a loss, e.g. just came to, drunk, etc.)

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