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 *sýntaxis* ‘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 or 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*	ptcp	V
qa	*pálmas*	*qa*	*tíiqaati*	*wací’*	*qá*	*mááhíy*	*ca*	*wí*	*čul,*	*amqʰá*	*wáté*	*icóócíínóo*	*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).

qa D Sentence adjunct
qa pálm̓as ‘At first’

qa N V *qa* N *wi̓* N pro *wáté* ptcp V
qa tíiq̓aati wací’ qá mááhíy̓ ca wí ċul, amqʰá wáté icóócíínóo sticákasasẃacínóo.

The phrase *mááhíy̓ ca wí* ‘night-dwelling’ is an adjunct on the noun *ċul* ‘sun/moon’.

qa N *wi* N adjunct
mááhíy̓ ca wí ‘night-dwelling’

qa N V *qá* N pro *wáté* ptcp V
qa tíiq̓aati wací’ qá ċul, amqʰá wáté icóócíínóo sticákasasẃacínóo.

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. *icóócí* ‘doing, being’. This has the past *-in* and a volitional *óo*. There are many indications such as this that treating *óo* as ‘imperative’ and done with it is in fact far from done with it. The syntactic analysis is indispensible for sorting out such things.

pro*wáté*ptcp Verb adjunct
amqʰá wáté icóócíínóo ‘in/at the aforesaid’

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

qa N V *qá* N V
qa tíiq̓aati wací’ qá ċul, sticákasasẃacínóo.
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 *mááhíy̓ ca wáté wiy̓í* ‘dwells in the night’ and *amqʰá wáté ckwicóócííní* ‘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 tyˀánuwí* ‘it was his’)
amqʰááka (*amqʰá ka*) ‘in that way, therefore, but’
amqʰáákam (*amqʰá kam*) ‘thence from that mentioned (agent); however
amqʰáka ‘same as mentioned (agent)’
amqʰákam ‘thence’
amqʰááwa (*amqʰá wa*) ‘by means of the same; that’s why’
amqʰááwáté (*amqʰá wáté*) ‘located as mentioned; while’; in that way; because’
amqʰááwátém (*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* > *mqʰá* > *amqʰá*. (with *ma* ‘and’). Another possibility is *aˀmá*, 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:

qʰááwa (=*qʰá wa*), *qʰáwwa* ‘some of them’
qʰálli ‘whatsoever’ (*ki wáli qʰállí c̓é yuwí tuutʰuukí* ‘nobody at all came here’)
haˀmísqʰám ‘single, alone’ (*haˀmís* + *qʰá* + *m*)
qʰammim ‘many individuals’ (*mim* ‘only, completely’; *qʰaˀm mim* not heard; historical reconstruction may find a relationship to the initial part of *qʰáˀm* ‘much, many’.)
qʰawéél̓a ‘in some places; different place’ (*wé*=?; *l̓a, wa*, etc. ‘place’)
qʰawéél̓aayíˀy ‘from elsewhere’ (*yíˀy* ‘is in state’)
qʰayˀhé ‘right there’ (JC: *qʰayʔhé·*) (*yˀ* ‘state’, *he*=?)
qʰayˀmi ‘right there’, *qʰayˀmim* ‘right in that area’ (*mim* ‘only, even’, e.g. *it mim* ‘I myself’)
qʰé tím ‘right there’(*tím* ‘indeed’, *amqʰá tím* ‘that one indeed’)
qʰayˀtim ‘in the same place (again), there indeed’
qʰé yá ‘that one indeed; those’
qʰé c̓ó ‘those’
qwáyˀtu ‘from there’ (*qʰá wáyˀtu* or *qʰé wáyˀtu* is possible, but I haven’t come across an occurrence yet)
piqʰá ‘this one there’ (*pi* ‘this’)
qʰáyˀtún ‘in that place’
tʰúlqʰám ‘once, one time’

Similar but unrelated morphemes:

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