Pit River Languages Project

Summary of work during January 2025

You can download the current Achumawi backup from

- http://zelligharris.org/Achumawi/achumawi-db.html

I have updated the automatically generated Achumawi webonary at

- https://www.webonary.org/odissi/

Since the 20th of the month, wider events with which you are no doubt familiar have interfered with this work. I am engaged with several civic organizations which share concern for the large and diverse immigrant population here. The threatened freeze of federal funding has placed a hold on any expenditures in this project, including payroll, until the National Science Foundation (NSF) sorts it out, Aside from this there have been personal matters including travel to replace a car, some family medical issues and relocations, and an 80th birthday, but so far this linguist is not an endangered species.

In the proposal for the current grant, I have engaged to produce a grammar, and at the end of it to convey the the two FLEx databases (Achumawi and Atsugewi) to the Indigenous Language Network (ILN). As he closes in on earning a PhD in linguistics, Connor is a likely custodian. The database will be shared among active linguistically trained participants using Send/Receive cloud functionality, and shared with other users by distribution of regular backup files as at present, so this is not about transfer from one physical location to another. I expect to continue as a resource for ongoing research and applications, perhaps as PI or co-PI for subsequent funding TBD.

The span of the current grant is 9/1/2023 – 8/31/2026, so the midpoint is at the end of next month, 2/28/2025. A prospect that "concentrates the mind."[1] Noting this approaching milestone, during January I have considered what the sections of a descriptive grammar might be. This helps to bring into focus parts of the data that need to be organized for presentation, and exposes gaps in the analysis so far.

The sections in this report are

1. Grammar
2. Pit River languages: verb templates
3. Some notes on an, n 'change state'
4. Stress
5. Internal reconstruction of -o´o
6. ʾAcẇuké· database project
7. Acúmmá ʾó tiṡi íímaċci'

The last two sections are from Paul Cason and Lisa Craig, reporting their work. This and all prior monthly summaries are archived at https://zelligharris.org/Achumawi/achumawi-db.html.

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1   Samuel Johnson — "Depend upon it, sir, when a man knows he is to be hanged in a fortnight, it concentrates his mind wonderfully."

1   Grammar

My presentation of a descriptive grammar will be from the outside in. Here is a preliminary outline of topics.

1. Complex Sentences

>   Connectives
>   Referentials
>   Subordinate clauses

2. Simple sentences (unanalyzed verbs)

>   The Noun Phrase
>   Adverbs

3. The Verb Phrase

>   The sentential 'verb'
>   Classes of roots (inventory each class)
>   Reductions of roots
>
>   Verb stem templates
>
>   Auxiliaries
>
>   Pronominal affixes

4. Reductions

>   Noun reduced from subordinate clause
>   Other form classes reduced from subordinate clause
>
>   Reductions under metalanguage operators

5. Idioms and frozen expressions (cp. etymology)

>   For example: iwi, tiwi, kantiwi; la'ay (sasúúla'ayíntiwi); tátapẏíwci

There will be an introduction with some discussion of the data, the methodology, and the organization of the presentation. The phonological description is covered elsewhere, but a summary should be included. Stress is not marked in the record, and working out the patterning of stress and intonation is an important project (see #4 below). No grammar is ever complete and finished. (Some students of Pāṇini think so, but his is an idealization.)

2   Pit River languages: verb templates

Comparison with Atsugewi is future work. It is striking that there are more and more diverse classes of roots and affixes in Atsugewi, and there are more and more diverse verb templates in Achumawi.

Achumawi templates. A common verb template in Achumawi can be represented this way:

IN- (*n*) Rcv Rcvc Rcv -D -IN

These morpheme classes are:

IN-	Inflection (pronouns, aspect, etc.)
(*n*)	'go', change state, iterate, ...
Rcv	CV root asserting a relation of the agent to the main root
Rcvc	CVC root, the main root.
Rcv	CV root asserting a relation of the main root to the patient or to something contextual
-D	Adverbial suffix
(*c*)	Auxiliary. This gets involved with *waci*, *kuci*, etc.
-IN	Inflection (*-umá*, *-ícka*)

There is great variety in the combinability of roots in Achumawi templates. For example, the sequences that can occur in the main part of the stem between IN- (*n*) on the left and -D -IN on the right include

Rcv Rcvc Rcv

Rcv Rcvc

Rcvc Rcv

Rcvc

Rcv

This list is not complete. The Rvc roots like *am* 'eat' are more restricted in distribution and combinability with other roots.

The roots are currently classified by their syllable shape, as constrained by the Achumawi syllable canon. Achumawi permits heavy syllables CVV, CVC and light syllables V, CV, and prohibits consonant clusters longer than two.[2] When a CVC root occurs in a secondary position (before or after the main root, and asserting something about it), it may be reduced to CC with an epenthetic vowel before or after it. Correspondingly, a consonant cluster can never be preceded by a long vowel, but conversely the initial

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2   In prefix clusters which present apparent exceptions, the syllable canon is satisfied phonetically with epenthetic centralized vowels. If it is possible to posit underlying CV- forms for apparently C- prefixes, these could be described as reduced vowels in syllables with lowest stress.

consonant in a root may be lengthened after a short vowel, e.g. *am* 'eat' in *tamma!* 'eat!' where the centralized quality of the vowel clearly indicates a short vowel.[3]

Atsugewi template. Len Talmy identifies just one verb template for Atsugewi. His description of the verb template in Atsugewi can be represented this way:

IN- (*p*) IP- Root -DIR -D -DEIC -IN

IN-	Inflection (pronouns, aspect, mood, etc.)
(*p*)	'back'.[4]
IP-	Instrumental Prefix, a CV syllable (usually). Asserts a relation of the agent to the main root
Root	The main root, a CVC root, syllable (usually)
-DIR	Direction/path suffix. The same list of morpheme shapes as for IP- but asserting a relation of the main root to the patient or context.
-D	Adverbial suffix
-DEIC	Deictic suffix
-IN	Inflection (-A is our example)

Talmy treats the positional variants in the IP and DIR slots as distinct morpheme classes, although their inventories and morpheme glosses are identical or nearly so. He describes these mostly CV morphemes as occurring only in those two positions, in contrast to the more flexible distribution of Achumawi CV roots.

Comparing morphemes in the two languages, in some cases, cognates are identical in shape and meaning

> *aw* 'give'

Some morphemes are identical in form but different in meaning. Achumawi has three homophones

> *ma* 'heat/fire'
> *ma* 'see/appear'
> *ma* 'rest'

None of these correspond to either of the phonemically identical Atsugewi homophones:

> *ma* 'feet'
> *ma* 'rain'

Other morphemes are identical in meaning but of different (or only marginally congruent) form

> Achumawi *qʰoq́* 'stab, spear'   :   Atsugewi *in* 'stab, spear'
> Achumawi *ċah́ ~ ċh́* 'into liquid' :   Atsugewi *-íċt* 'into water'

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3   Preaspiration (*taatʰá* 'pound (acorn)!', *táátim* 'fell (a tree)!') and prelaryngealization (*tiiċa!* 'bite!') results in apparently short duration, easily confused with consonant gemination, but the open quality of the vowel is the queue for phonemic length.

4   Is Atsugewi *p* an allomorph of a root, the way Achumawi *n* is an allomorph of a root? The two morphemes in Achumawi with a similar 'back' gloss are not cognate: (1) *laq* / *lq* and (2) the difference between e.g. *sápti* 'I go (from here)' and *sépti* 'I go back, I go home (from here)'. If this is reduced from a *y* stative, it may shed light on the relationship of the two stative morphemes. The imperative *tupté!* (vs. *tepté!*) has the *w* stative, i.e. 'be gone'.

In contrast to Achumawi, the syllable shapes for Atsugewi roots are quite diverse. In his working notes preserved in talmy.001.011.pdf, Talmy lists

> VC
> VCC
> VCCV
> VCV
> VCVC
> VCVCV

Atsugewi admits some clusters that do not occur in Achumawi. A proper comparison must wait, however, as work proceeds on the Atsugewi database.

3   Some notes on *an*, *n* 'change state'

The *an* root occurs as the main root of a verb:

> *Yáána qa tóósi.* 'There goes a deer'

The verb can also indicate vegetable growth. Harrington, in his (somewhat inexplicable) search for place names frequently recorded the participial construction X *ínnááciẏ*, X *ínná* 'where X grows':

> *ġússimalóo ínnááciẏ*, *ġússimalóo ínná* 'place where juniper trees grow'.

When *na ~ n* occurs before the main root, it indicates a change of state or condition

> *timááci*   'look'
> *tinímááci*   'see, find'

In this unstressed position, the vowel is variable.

> *h̓aẏ suwí*   'I'm thinking'
> *h̓aẏ sinúuwí* 'I remember'

The gloss often suggests repetition, iteration, or some other intensification of the main root, perhaps analogous to e.g. English 'he went on hammering'.

I speculate that the *in* 'past' modifier is actually the same root.

> *sáánííní* 'I came', *sl̓háánííní* 'we came' (*s- an -in -i*)

In a story (LR: Spider and Lizard: 16.4; Miscellany: 181.2) this is glossed 'came', but a 'change of state or condition' meaning fits very well at this point in the story. If the verb were *tunni* 'come' with the stative *w* that becomes *u* we might see instead *sóónííní* or *sáwanííní.*

4 Stress

If stress is predictable, and if high pitch generally coincides with stress, it may be possible to simplify the writing by only marking the exceptional stressed syllables that have low pitch. Stress is not explicitly represented in the record. There are several sources of data for identifying stressed syllables, however.

Foremost, we have recordings, and I have a practical grasp of pronunciation.

Vowel syncope in the alternations of CVC ~ CC and CV ~ C provides clues.

> *tasiiċúúci* 'jump up' (by moving fast go up)
> *wacúċci* '(smoke) flows up'
> *tiṫúċci* 'hold with fists'

Stops are more tense and voicing of plain stops after short vowel is reduced in the onset of a stressed syllable. Not taking stress into account, I have thought the t^h must be geminate in *tit^{h}ééwi* 'hear, listen', though actual duration is not a salient feature. The apparent gemination of *c* after negation with *ċé* need not be a special morphological statement if stress is responsible for the phonetic effect, and this also reconciles the fact that the vowel quality of *u* in *ċé tuucó!* indicates a long vowel. The effect in *ċé tuci* is ordinary devoicing of an unstressed final syllable. This needs to be tested for consistency across the data.

5 Internal reconstruction of *-óo*

When the stative root *ẁa* occurs as a postposition after a noun, it has a locative sense. When it occurs after the *-óo* 'source of harvest' suffix it has a *ma* allomorph (*téṫtaaċóoma* 'oak place', *assaẁyóoma* 'sugar-pine place'). This suggests *-*óm* as the underlying (morphophonemic source) form of the *-óo* suffix, cognate with Atsugewi *-op*. (The only other environment for a *ma* allomorph is in *éécim má láẏtu* 'from the other side'.)

This suffix occurs as *-ó* (with devoicing if phrase-final) as well as *-óo* (De Ángulo recorded *-ô*, *-ó*, and *-ò*.) The falling pitch may be a trace of a following vowel, or it may be an auditory misinterpretation of the formant shift in a diphthong *-ów* (as Bauman wrote it). For *o* the center frequencies of F1 and F2 are about 500 Hz and 1000 Hz, respectively, and for *u* (or *w*) they drop to about 800 Hz and 320 Hz, respectively. This can give an impression of falling pitch. The effect is compounded by a falling intonation contour when a tree-bush-plant word is elicited in a citation list or occurs at the end of a phrase or sentence.

6   ’Acẘuké· database project

As the new year has started to settle in we are reminded that we must brace ourselves for possible interruptions to our normality. As unsettling as it may be, our work must continue if we are to be successful in our endeavors.

This month we focused special attention on the inflections in the prefix positions. Of note was pinning down what the difference was between forms such as *sahkíċt* and *spḣahkíċt*. After some consultation, it turns out that *ṗ-* coming before an instrumental prefix and after the 1st person pronoun represents a modification to an action, for example with a stem formed from the verb root *-ahk̇-* ‘step’ and the direction/path suffix *-iċt* ‘into water’ (

      sahk̇íċt   I step into water

      sṗahk̇íċt   I step back into water

Identifying more of these unique features remains the task as the database grows.

7   Acúmmá ’ó tiṡi íímáċci’

Community language class for this new year has begun with continued focus on community requested lessons.

Winter harvesting of elderberry provided an opportunity to create a language lesson on construction of clapper sticks. The goal is to shoot an instructional video for distribution.