LEXICAL BORROWING AMONG SOUTHEASTERN NATIVE
AMERICAN LANGUAGES

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Abstract

Most sources agree that the pre-contact Southeast showed tribes of several linguistic affiliations intermixed throughout the area with much multi-lingualism. To my knowledge, no systematic study of possible borrowings between linguistic non-relatives has been done. This type of study requires fairly complete word lists or dictionaries assembled not with an eye towards comparative reconstruction and precious few such lists have been published. Using materials I can obtain on the Siouan languages Biloxi, Ofo and Catawba, the Muskogean languages Creek, Choctaw and Koasati, the isolates Tunica, Atakapa, and Yuchi, and two languages, Cherokee and Shawnee, with genetic affiliations, Iroquoian and Algonkian, respectively, outside the southeast, I examine lexical fields such as kin terms, birds, animals, numbers, colors, ceremonial terms, medicines, and plants looking for possible borrowings. Both the presence and the absence of specific language pair borrowing are interesting with respect to pre-contact history, the socio-linguistics of the Native Southeast, and the value systems associated with these languages. Specifically, extensive sharing of ceremonial practices, folk tales, and subsistence life-styles is largely not paralleled by extensive borrowing. One wonders why.

The Data

In 1978, I suggested that a study of borrowing among the erstwhile southeastern Indian languages was both necessary and worthwhile; having proved myself unable to motivate others, I am beginning to undertake such studies myself. This paper constitutes a sort of initial progress report.

This research is fraught with difficulties. The published dictionaries are relatively few in number and heterogeneous in organization, transcription and depth of analysis and definition. Data on
additional languages is available only through "personal communication" (Ballard MS.A, Kimball MS.). Other repositories are known or maybe supposed to exist (Haas on Natchez and Creek, BAE and Siebert, on Catawba, Booker on Mikasuki, Mithun on Tuscarora, Voegelin on Shawnee). Nevertheless, there is material and it can be used, and I was curious as to where it would lead.

From the lexicons available to me, I extracted the vocabulary in these semantic domains: trees, plants, birds, persons, numbers, colors, corn, animals, religion and medicine, and socio-economic goods and practices. I present here some miscellaneous findings from several of these and the total results derived from the lists on trees, birds, and tobacco. (It seemed best initially to eschew possible borrowings with semantic shift.) The findings are unexpectedly scanty.

Tobacco was a highly significant religious herb in the Southeast. There are two kinds to be distinguished; ordinary cultivated tobacco, and wild Indian tobacco, or old man's tobacco. Aside from the genetic pair in Ofo and Biloxi, only Yuchi and Creek suggest a borrowing for ordinary tobacco; Yuchi, Creek and Toukawa for Indian tobacco. (Forms from the languages are all cited in the Appendix.)

Corn was only a little more productive. Biloxi and Ofo again shared genetically forms for corn, mortar, pestle, pound, and corn meal. Creek, Koasati and Choctaw share corn, mortar, pestle and pound. Only Yuchi and Atakapa show some possibility of borrowing for corn and corn meal. It is to be noted, however, that in all the languages for which I had forms (Biloxi, Ofo, Yuchi, Creek, Koasati, Tunica, Atakapa, and Shawnee) the form for pestle is derived from mortar; does a matrilineal society reverse markedness for the sexes?

The colors red and white yielded only Siouan and Muskogean cognates; black offered these and potential borrowings between Atakapa and Tunica on the one hand, and Yuchi and Siouan on the other.

For purposes of this compilation, I have included the set for buffalo proposed by Haas (1953). The Biloxi from might be related. But the story is more complicated. The other major ruminant, the deer, shows a Yuchi form that looks like part of the form for buffalo; we - is a common animal prefix in Yuchi. The domestic buffalo, the cow, disturbed these sets upon its entry. Thus, Biloxi, Cherokee, Creek and Koasati all show a form like waka for cow, allegedly derived from Spanish. The Yuchi and Catawba forms could represent a borrowing, but note the Catawba form for deer, and the Yuchi form for buffalo, obviously a derivative of their word for cow. Meanwhile,
the Tunica and Ofo forms reinforce the Yuchi (and Catawba?) for
deer. At this point, it is unclear exactly how many words were
used for buffalo and deer and what was their derivational relation-
ship (if any).

The last set of miscellaneous forms examined exhaustively were
names for other tribes. The Shawnee, Cherokee, Chickasaw, Choctaw,
Atakapa, and Creeks showed up frequently in the dictionaries,
usually in recognizable form. The forms for Chickasaw, Choctaw and
Atakapa were uniform. The forms for Shawnee, Cherokee, and Creek,
however, show at least one form that is quite different; no
explanation is offered here for this difference. The sets for
Biloxi, Koasati, Tunica, and Yuchi are smaller, but are of some
interest. All three forms for the Biloxi are different; the
Koasati are called the same thing by themselves and the Tunica;
both the Biloxi and the Koasati call the Tunica something different
from what they call themselves. The Creeks follow the Yuchi in
naming, but not the reverse. It is obvious that names are being
borrowed here, but, as elsewhere, more of the etymologies must be
known to determine the donors.

One term related to intertribal intercourse shows a fairly
narrow distribution, but one that does cross genetic boundaries:
interpret.

The domain of trees produced several possibilities. Again, we
find Muskogean cognates for hickory, pine, peach, chestnut, slippery
elm, post oak, walnut, tree, leaf, palmetto, and mulberry, and
Siouan cognates for mulberry and palmetto. These two groups also
show some possible borrowings: peach, oak, post oak, pine, dogwood
(Creek and Biloxi), and cedar (Koasati and Biloxi). Muskogean
languages and Shawnee are similar in hickory and peach; Creek and
Cherokee in cedar, acorn, locust(?), apple and peach(?). All
other pairs of languages appear to have had less mutual influence.
Yuchi and Siouan (tree, leaf); Cherokee and Catawba (hickory);
Cherokee and Shawnee (mulberry); Yuchi and Creek (peach); Tunica
and Biloxi (cottonwood); and Tunica and Koasati (dogwood).

The last group to be considered, birds, evinces similar patterns
of frequent cognates, occasional borrowing—except for goose, wood-
pecker and whippoorwill. Siouan cognates occur in bird, chicken,
quail, buzzard, crow, crane, duck, owl, (wren), cardinal and
woodpecker; Muskogean in bird, (chicken), quail, woodpecker,
buzzard, goose, owl, hawk, (bluejay), crane, horned owl, dove,
whippoorwill, yellowhammer, woodpecker, meadowlark, pelican, and
parrot (dove). At least some of the languages in these two large
families share forms for cardinal, bluejay, wren, owl, and horned owl. There appear to be two forms for robin cutting across these lines; one encompasses Catawba and Creek, and the other Cherokee Koasati, and Tunica. Yuchi is included in both of the owl sets, and may also share forms with Siouan languages in duck and chicken. Koasati and Atakapa look alike in duck; Tunica and Muskogean languages look alike for crane; and quail shows similarities between Muskogean and Cherokee. Finally Cherokee and Atakapa may share forms for crow.

We can summarize the numbers of possible borrowings between distinct genetic groups as follows:

Total Potential Borrowings Across Genetic Boundaries

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Siouan</th>
<th>Muskogean</th>
<th>Yuchi</th>
<th>Cherokee</th>
<th>Tunica</th>
<th>Atakapa</th>
<th>Shawnee</th>
<th>Total</th>
</tr>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Siouan</td>
<td>X</td>
<td>12</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>Ø</td>
<td>Ø</td>
<td>Ø</td>
<td>19</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Muskogean</td>
<td>12</td>
<td>X</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>7</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>31</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Yuchi</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>X</td>
<td>Ø</td>
<td>Ø</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>Ø</td>
<td>12</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Cherokee</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>7</td>
<td>Ø</td>
<td>X</td>
<td>Ø</td>
<td>Ø</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>9</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Tunica</td>
<td>Ø</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>Ø</td>
<td>Ø</td>
<td>X</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>Ø</td>
<td>5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Atakapa</td>
<td>Ø</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>Ø</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>X</td>
<td>Ø</td>
<td>5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Shawnee</td>
<td>Ø</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>Ø</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>Ø</td>
<td>Ø</td>
<td>X</td>
<td>3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Totals</td>
<td>19</td>
<td>31</td>
<td>12</td>
<td>9</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>X</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Muskogean is the heavyweight followed by Siouan as nexuses of borrowing.

Some Analysis

It is well known that the Southeastern Indians shared a great deal of their culture -- socio-economic lifestyle, political and kinship organization, religious symbols and practices, beliefs and
folklore, and, of course, environment. The 'borders' were fluid and there was considerable movement and trade. There was a trade jargon (Mobilian) used by most or all groups to the west, and Drechsel (1982) suggests Creek may have been a lingua franca in the south-east, perhaps Shawnee further north. In short, intertribal intercourse, including intermarriage, was extensive. In view of this extensive intercourse, the shared lexicon seems awfully small. Is it possible to speculate why?

It would appear that there is a socio-linguistic rule against borrowing. Mary Haas, personal communication, remarked that in some cases where the history was known, Creek substituted a native form for an earlier borrowing. I have observed Yuchis using Creek forms in English, which they always found humorous, and I have heard them comment on a particular speaker that used English words in her Yuchi.

Postulating this rule is not explanatory, however; it merely formalizes the data. What was the social function of this rule? Since the smaller groups show far less borrowing than the larger ones, one may hypothesize that language served as a mark of identity, especially for these groups, and especially in view of the extensive sharing in all other cultural areas.

There is a corollary to the rule of avoidance of borrowing: in view of the extensive intercourse between the tribes, borrowing could only have been avoided if there had been fairly extensive knowledge of the other, surrounding languages. Drechsel suggested that Mobilian, and perhaps Creek as a lingua franca, acted as barriers to borrowing.

In a sense, the general resistance to borrowing makes any extensive borrowing more interesting. Why are buffalo, goose, peach, and woodpecker so extensively shared, but not others? It should be noted that the buffalo and goose forms are extensively shared to the west as well. Onomatopoeia or sound symbolism might be suggested as explanations, but such would not explain why goose (and woodpecker) of all the birds were thus singled out, nor would such a rationale appear to explain buffalo and peach. One may be forced to seek for some nearly universal symbolic significance for these items, and/or some value precisely associated with their generality. As further evidence in borrowing is sought in other semantic domains in the data, and as forms are pursued outside of the southeast, one hopes for more interesting insights into intertribal relationships in the pre-Columbian period.

As a postscript, let me assure all readers that I avidly seek input from other parties in developing this research.
Bibliography

Abbreviations:

BAEB    Bureau of American Ethnography Bulletin


Dorsey, James Owen, and John R. Swanton. 1912. A dictionary of the Biloxi and Ofo languages. BAEB 47.

Drechsel, Emanuel, 1982. The question of the lingua franca Creek. Paper and handout, 17th MALC.


1982. Noun derivation in Creek (with notes on some other southeastern languages). Paper and handout, 17th MALC.

Lexical Borrowing


Swanton, John R. 1931. Some material for the social and ceremonial life of the Choctaw Indians. BAEB 103.

The forms in this list are reproduced from the sources without analysis or retranscription, except that stress is not shown. Readers should exercise due caution in interpreting the segmental symbols used; consultation with the sources is advised for any further citation. The languages, their abbreviations, and the sources are as follows:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Language</th>
<th>Abbreviation</th>
<th>Source</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Atakapa</td>
<td>Ata</td>
<td>Gatschet 1932</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Biloxi</td>
<td>Bil</td>
<td>Dorsey 1912</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Catawba</td>
<td>Cat</td>
<td>Speck 1969</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Cherokee</td>
<td>Cher</td>
<td>Feeling and Pulte 1975</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Choctaw</td>
<td>Choc</td>
<td>Swanton 1931</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Creek</td>
<td>Crk</td>
<td>Loughridge 1964</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Koasati</td>
<td>Koa</td>
<td>Kimball ms.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Ofo</td>
<td>Ofo</td>
<td>Dorsey 1912</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Shawnee</td>
<td>Sh</td>
<td>Voegelin 1938-40</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Tunica</td>
<td>Tun</td>
<td>Haas 1953</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Yuchi</td>
<td>Yu</td>
<td>Ballard ms.a.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

A few forms are cited from Booker 1982 and Crawford 1979.

acorn: Cher gule, Crk kvlv
Atakapa: Ata atakapa, Bil takapa, Koa atakapa
Biloxi: Bil tanëks, Koa biloksi, Tun halayihku
bird: Ofo deska, Bil kudësk, kutcin, Cat kutcin, (Cher jisgwa); Crk fusuβ, Koa fo:si, Chic kushili, Chickasaw fo:si, Hitchiti fo:si, Mikasuki fo:s-i (forms from Booker 1982)
black: Ofo ifthempị, Bil supị; Chic lusa, Koa lo:ca, Crk lvste; Ata mel, Tun meli; Yu ?i:spi, ?i:spi
blue jay: Ofo deska ithohi, Koa tiskila, Chic ti:nshkila; Cat ti:nde, Yu ts?æ, Crk tsás (Haas: tasi)
buffalo: Tun yaniškaši, Natchez yanasaah, Alabama/Koa yanasa, Crk yanasa, Cher yahnsa, (Bil nsa), Hitchiti yanasi; Yu wedíga
buzzard: Ofo eskaθa, Bil eθka; Cher suli, Crk sulé
cardinal: Ofo deska atchuti, Bil kudëskα atcutkα, Koa tiskomma (see bird, red)
cedar: Cher ajina, Crk veæν; Bil tcuwahana, Koa cowahla
Cherokee: Cat matara; Cher jalagi, Crk celokvKyle, Koa calakki, Yu dž Jalagi; Sh katoθwa
chestnut: Chic otupi, Crk oto-vpe
Chickasaw: Cat teik sa, Koa cikasa, Sh ciikaθa, Tun cikasa
chicken: Ofo abasi, Bil maxi; Yu wetSHA, Cat wi:tkα; Crk totoolose, Koa kolosi
Choctaw: Ata tchakta, Bil tcaxta, Cher ajalda, Koa cahta, Sh ċa?ta, Tun čahta, Yu tšata
corn: Ofo atceki, Bil ayeki; Chic tanchi, Crk veθ, Koa cassi; Ata tso-ots, Yu tsoθo, tsot?o
corn meal: Cat kuspa (corn = kus), Ofo atceki naphasi, Bil ye nupξi; Ata tso-otslili, tso-otsakop, Yu tsoθobiθkha
cottonwood: Bil putitukayudi (ayudi = tree), Tun ropuhtinriθku (rihku = tree)
similar loans?
cow: Cat wade, Yu wedi
Lexical Borrowing

**crane:** Ofo oskxa, Bil o'oka; Crk waku, Koa wahka; Crk watulv, Koa watola, Choc watonlak, watullak, Tun watoruhki

**Creek:** Bil skoki, Koa masko:ki, Sh homasa:ko; Cher agusa, guso?i; Yu pop?a ('one who snoops')

**cray:** Ofo o'ucka, Bil a'ucka; Ata kûk, kahagg, Cher koga

**deer:** Ofo lya, Bil ita, Cat widâboy, Yu we?jâ', Tun ya
dogwood: Bil na'taxpayudi, Crk atypuha; Koa nahiskila, Tun nahika
dove: Choc pachiyoshoba, Crk pvcê, Koa pacihowa
duck: Ofo o'ufana, Bil a'n's(u)na, Yu â'ane; Ata coknûk, Crk cokoki
goose: Choc âlaklak, Karankawa la-ak, Koa salakla, Natche' la'ak,

Tonkawa xelik, Tun la:lahki, Yu â'ala:la; Cher sasa, Sacsasqkwv;

Cat (y)aha, Cho hankha, Crk ahakww

**haw:** Ofo tuta, atishoska, Cat itusi; Crk ayó, Koa alo

**hickory:** Choc okaak, Crk ocê, Koa oca, Sh -o'ceemi-; Cat wâ:nâ'ku', Cher wane?

**horned owl:** Bil txitâmihayi, Cat istugri', Choc iskitini, Crk opv-estekene

(opv = owl), Koa kitini, Yu dži:skii
translation: Crk yvtekv, Koa iyanti:ka, Timucua yatiki (Crawford 1979), Yu jatik'e

**killdeer:** Crk tuwehtv, Tun tuwi

**koasati:** Koa kowasa:ti, Tun ku:ati

**leaf:** Crk to-essê, Koa ittohisi; Cat yép'ha, Yu ?ja?a

**locust:** Choc kalogwekdi, Crk kvtohwe

**meadowlark:** Crk huyv-ceilu, Koa nocilolo

**mocking bird:** Koa fo:si soba:ci (fo:si = bird), Yu sê:bobone (sê = bird)
mortar: Ofo iteatho', Bil itan-; Crk keco, Koa klhoe

**mulberry:** Crk kê, Cher bihi, Koa bihi (<fig), Mikasuki bî:hî, Chickasaw behi (forms from Booker 1982); Ofo fana:ki, Bil a'n:sa:ki:du; Cher kuwa,

Sh mtekwaapalwa (?)

**oak:** Bil udim1skudi, Crk meskvl-

owl: Ofo a(m)pho, Bil pa(da:di), Cat wi'mbata, Choc opa, Crk opv, Koa opa,

Yu tsûp'ane, Tun ?uwa, Ata wawact

**palmetto:** Choc tala, Koa ta:la; Ofo amashûpka, Bil maxo'tka

**parrot:** Crk pvcê-lanê, Koa pacinac:i ( < dove)

**peach:** Crk pycanv, Choc takkon, Koa takkol-, Cher kwana, Ofo oko'nti,

Bil tokona, Sh po?kama, Yu ?ja?o (?ja = tree)

**pelican:** Crk nok-sukcv, Koa noksokca, Tun ?ukara

**pigeon:** Ofo icatho:napka, Bil inetopka; Crk kecvpe, Koa kistapi

**pine:** Crk itcweu, Crk culê, Koa coyi

**post oak:** Bil tca:xu, Choc chisha, Crk cós:kv, (Koa cilaka), Tun çuhki

pound (as in a mortar): Ofo aphp, Bil aphpê; Crk ho:c:i

**quail:** Ofo amaphuska, Bil apuska, Cat ipê:ke', (Yu ñpine); Crk kowikê,

Koa kowayki, (Cher guhgwe)

**red:** Ofo tcuti, Bil tcti; Choc humma, Koa homma

**Robin:** Cat wi'spê:kó:k, Crk hes-pvkww, (Ofo bahu); Cher jisgwogwo,

Koa ciskoko, Tun wi:sk'o:ku, Bil sín:kuki

**screech owl:** Choc ofunlo, Koa afolo
Shawnee: Cat sawan, Bil sawan, Sh sawawanwa; Yu jōšta
slippery elm: Choc balup, Crk lupakv
tobacco: Ofo itani, itani, Bil yani; Yu hitši, Crk hece
tobacco, Indian: Yu jutšhwa, Crk hece atcull pakpagi, Tonkawa na'acwak
tree: Crk ēto, Koa itto; Cat yep, Yu ja
Tunica: Bil tunicka, Koa tanahka; Tun yoroni
walnut: Crk ahahew, Koa hahi
whippoorwill: Bil tcipanakano, Crk cukpēlapēla, Koa cokbilabila,
   Yu tšispilak ne, (Cher tsgwalegwala)
white: Ofo afhan, Bil san; Crk hvtke, Koa hatka
woodpecker: Ofo pathopka, Bil pūkłukayi, Yu sēpha, yapapane (Wagner),
   Cat pakpi', Choc bakbak, Koa bakba, Tun palpahkana; Yu sēkhwakhwane,
   Tonkawa ya'akw
woodpecker, sp.: Crk cacvkwv, Koa cacahka
wren: Ofo tculeska, Bil tcinoheki, Crk celuehkv, colihkv, Ton čihći
yellowhammer: Choc fituktak, Crk fētukkv, Koa fitokko
Yuchi: Crk yutcvlkē, Yu ?judži
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