

TEMPORAL CONDITIONING IN
CHOCTAW SWITCH REFERENCE MARKING*

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O. Introduction

Like other Muskogean languages, Choctaw has a switch reference system for morphologically marking whether or not clause pairs have coreferential subjects. In certain conjoined constructions choice of switch reference affix is conditioned not only on the basis of coreferentiality or non-coreferentiality of subjects but also on the time frame of the states of affairs described. In this paper I identify the temporal conditioning in switch reference marking and then extend the proposed analysis, showing that it provides insights into the semantics of the Choctaw progressive construction.

1. Choctaw Switch Reference

Choctaw switch reference markers are suffixed to the predicate of what we can simply refer to as the 'first clause' of two conjoined clauses. The simplified rule of switch reference marking in (1) accounts for the data in (2) and (3).¹

(1) Switch Reference Marking

- a. Same-subject (SS) marking occurs on clause A (i.e. the first clause) if the subject of clause A is coreferential with the subject of clause B.
- b. Switch-reference (SR) marking occurs on clause A if the subject of clause A is not coreferential with the subject of clause B.

(2) a. Tobi apa-li-cha oka ishko-li-tok.²
bean eat-1Nom-SS water drink-1Nom-Pst
'I ate beans and then drank water.'

b. *Tobi apa-li-na oka ishko-li-tok.
SR

- (3) a. Tobi apa-li-na oka ish-ishko-tok.
bean eat-1Nom-SR water 2Nom-drink-Pst
'I ate beans, and then you drank water.'

b. *Tobi apa-li-cha oka ish-ishko-tok.

In (2) the subject of each clause is 'I'; here only (2a), marked by the SS marker cha, is grammatical. *(2b), with the SR marker na is ungrammatical. This is accounted for by the rules in (1). Conversely, in (3) the subjects of the two clauses are not coreferential; the subject of the first clause is 'I' and the subject of the second clause is 'you'. Only (3a), the variant marked for switch reference, is grammatical; *(3b), marked by the SS affix cha, is ungrammatical.

There are two other sets of switch reference markers, osh/õ and at/ã, which can be used in the same environment. I give examples of the SS markers from all three sets in the nearly synonymous sentences in (4)-(6).

- (4) Hattak-at im-ohoyo ahpali-cha ofi pashohli-tok.
man-Nom 3Poss-woman kiss-SS dog rub-Pst
'The man kissed his wife and then patted the dog.'

- (5) Hattak-at im-ohoyo ahpali-t ofi pashohli-tok.
man-Nom 3Poss-woman kiss-SS dog rub-Pst
'The man kissed his wife and patted the dog.'

- (6) Hattak-at im-ohoyo ahpali-(h-o)sh ofi pashohli-tok.³
man-Nom 3Poss-woman kiss-Pred-SS dog rub-Pst
'The man kissed his wife and patted the dog.'

Although the meanings of (4)-(6) are very close, the sentences differ along a continuum based on the temporal relationship between the actions of the first and second clauses. I claim that the choice of cha, at, or osh as SS marker depends in part on the time frames in which the two events occur.

In (4), the event of the man kissing his wife occurs at some measurable time before the event of the man patting the dog. In (5), the event of the man kissing his wife occurs just prior to his patting the dog. And in (6) the two events occur simultaneously. One might choose to reflect these differences in the English glosses. This can be accounted for by claiming that the choice of switch reference marker is conditioned by the time frame of the two states of affairs, or alternatively, that the switch reference marker marks not only whether or

not the subjects of the two clauses are coreferential but also signals the time frame of the event of the first clause with respect to that of the second clause. The uses of the three sets of switch reference markers are summarized in (7).

| (7) | same subject | switch reference |
|-------------------------------------|--------------|------------------|
| simultaneity | osh | ō |
| first event is immediately prior | at | ā |
| first event is measurably prior | cha | na |

Such temporal conditioning of switch reference markers also occurs in the Pomo languages as described by Oswalt (1961, 1981) and McLendon (1975). The Pomo system, although the subject of some debate, is a fairly rich system in which switch reference markers not only indicate reference but also such features as sequentiality, prior necessity, simultaneity, and others. While the Choctaw system being considered here is not so highly developed (nor does it seem to affect the complete range of conjoining possibilities in any obvious way), the Pomo system gives evidence of other switch reference systems in which the time frames of the states of affairs described are relevant to the choice of switch reference marking.⁴

The at/ā markers display more versatility and consequently the greatest amount of speaker variability in usage. Aside from complex conjunctions which generally take the osh/ō switch reference markers, the at/ā markers appear to be the most prevalent in simple conjunction and subordination. They also vary the most widely with respect to the temporal environments in which they can occur. While cha/na markers always seem to indicate a time lapse of some duration between two events and osh/ō (when used by themselves) appear to uniformly denote simultaneity, the at/ā markers can sometimes occur in all environments. For example, in (8), the cha suffix clearly shows a time differential between the two states of affairs described, but the variants with at and osh are apparently synonymous.

- (8) a. Si-abi:ka-cha alikchi iya-l-a:chf.
1Acc-sick-SS doctor go-1Nom-Fut

'I got sick, so I'm going to go to the doctor.'

- (8) b. Si-abi:ka-t alikchi iya-l-a:chī.
 1Acc-sick-SS doctor go-1Nom-Fut
 'I'm sick, so I'm going to go to the doctor.'
- c. Si-abi:ka-h-osh alikchi iya-l-a:chī.
 1Acc-sick-Pred-SS doctor go-1Nom-Fut
 'I'm sick, so I'm going to go to the doctor.'

Regardless of speaker variability and the potential for using the *at/ā* markers in a variety of environments, close questioning has led to the distinction outlined above and summarized in (7).

Further support for the time frame specification for *cha/na* is evident in (9), cited by Linker (1982).

- (9) Tĕkba^{kā} John-at balili-cha anōti oka ishko-tok.
 first John-Nom run-SS again water drink-Pst
 'First John ran, and then he drank water.'

When setting up a particular time frame with the adverbial *tĕkba* 'first', the speaker chooses *cha* as the SS marker. The sentence clearly indicates that John's act of running preceded by some time his act of drinking water. The choice of *cha* supports the proposed analysis. One might further speculate that the time frame requirement for *cha* is related to other forms of which *cha* seems to be a segmentable part. For instance, the adverbial form *chatok*, which denotes habitual action but which specifically designates that the activity began in some past time and continued to the present (Byington 1915; Jacob, Nicklas, and Spencer 1977; Nicklas 1979). In addition, there is a nominal ending *cha:sh* signifying that the item named is known to the speaker and hearer in some remote past time. This form is opposed to *ka:sh* 'known to speaker and hearer in recent past' and *a:sh* 'known to speaker and hearer'. Therefore, *cha* may well be a segmentable morpheme carrying the meaning of past time.

The requirement of simultaneity for the *osh/ō* pair is evident from the oddness reported by speakers for the sentence in (10).

- (10)?Āpo achi:fa-li-h-osh shilili-li-tok.
 dish wash-1Nom-Pred-SS dry-1Nom-Pst
 'I washed the dishes and dried them.'

Speakers reported that the reason that the sentence in

(10) is questionable is that one cannot wash a dish and dry it at the same point in time. If one requirement for the use of osh in this conjoined construction is that the states of affairs described in the two clauses occur simultaneously, we can account for the reaction of speakers to this sentence. If either cha (11a) or at (11b) is substituted for osh, the sentence is perfectly acceptable.

- (11) a. Āpo achi:fa-li-cha shilili-li-tok.
dish wash-1Nom-SS dry-1Nom-Pst
'I washed the dishes and then dried them.'
- b. Āpo achi:fa-li-t shilili-li-tok.
dish wash-1Nom-SS dry-1Nom-Pst
'I washed the dishes and dried them.'

2. The Choctaw Progressive

The progressive in Choctaw is formed by embedding a clause describing a particular event under one of a number of existential or posture verbs which acts as an auxiliary. This is illustrated in (12).⁵

- (12) Osaposhi a-tōksali-sh āta-li-h.
garden Loc-work=Inc-SS be=Inc-Pred
'I am working in the garden.'

In (12), osh is selected as the SS marker.

Before examining the progressive construction and its interaction with SS marking, consider the sentences in (13)-(15).

- (13) Ofi-yat chokfi kopoli-cha āya-h.
dog-Nom rabbit bite-SS move along-Pred
'The dog bit the rabbit and is now moving along.'
- (14) Ofi-yat chokfi kopoli-t āya-h.
dog-Nom rabbit bite-SS move along-Pred
'The dog (just) bit the rabbit and is moving along.'
- (15) Ofi-yat chokfi kopoli-sh āya-h.
dog-Nom rabbit bite-SS move along-Pred
'The dog is moving along biting the rabbit.'

The glosses in (13)-(15) once again indicate the fact

that the selection of the SS marker reflects the differences in the time frames of the two events.

However, (14) and (15) have additional meanings, given in (14)' and (15)'.

(14)' 'The dog has been biting the rabbit.'

(15)' 'The dog is biting the rabbit.'

These are progressive readings, the general motion predicate āya being used as an auxiliary of the progressive describing the attitude of the dog while biting the rabbit. This use of posture verbs as auxiliaries is not uncommon in Amerindian languages.⁶

As reflected in the gloss in (14)', (14) has a perfective aspectual reading, described variously by native speakers as "The rabbit is not moving any more", "The dog has stopped biting the rabbit", etc. I have rendered this into English by means of the perfect progressive. On the other hand, (15) denotes an action in progress and is generally rendered as the plain progressive, as in (15)'.

The difference between (14) and (15) can be accounted for in terms of the contribution of the particular SS marker used in each case. In (14) the SS marker is at, shown in section 1 to denote a situation in which onē event precedes another (albeit closely) in time. The perfective nature of (14) can thus be attributed to the fact that the at marker denotes a completed action or an action completed before another. On the other hand, the osh marker denotes simultaneity of events. Therefore, the general motion verb is predicated of the event of moving along at a time simultaneous to the occurrence of the event of biting the rabbit; what often constitutes a progressive in many languages. Therefore, an account of the progressive reading in (15) is available.

In both (14) and (15) the relevant tense is "present", that marked on the "auxiliary" matrix verb. This parallels the fact that the time frame is anchored by the "tensed" clause in the preceding examples of conjoined clauses, the switch reference marker indicating the time of the event of the first clause relative to the tensed clause. In the same way, when the "auxiliary" takes past tense, these progressive constructions take on past progressive and past perfect progressive readings, as in (16) and (17), respectively.

- (16) Ofi-yat chokfi kopoli-sh āta-tok.
dog-Nom rabbit bite-SS be=Inc-Pst

'The dog was biting the rabbit.'

- (17) Ofi-yat chokfi kopoli-t āta-tok.
dog-Nom rabbit bite-SS be=Inc-Pst

'The dog had been biting the rabbit.'

By understanding the temporal contribution of Choctaw switch reference markers in certain constructions, the Choctaw progressive construction can be better understood.

NOTES

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¹Cf. Davies 1981a,b for more detailed discussion of Choctaw switch reference marking.

²The following abbreviations are used in this paper: Acc : accusative, Fut : future tense, Inc : incompletive aspect, Nom : nominative, Poss : possessor, Pred : predicative, Pst : past tense, SR : switch-reference marker, SS : same-subject marker, 1 : first person, 2 : second person, 3 : third person.

³Frequently, osh, the full form of the SS marker in question, occurs as sh, with the predicative affix h and the vowel o elided.

⁴John McLaughlin informs me that the Shoshoni switch reference marking system is also sensitive to the time frame of the states of affairs described (cf. Miller 1975 and McLaughlin 1982).

⁵Cf. Nicklas 1979 for further discussion of the Choctaw progressive.

⁶Cf. Langdon 1978 for a detailed discussion of the auxiliary system in the Yuman languages.

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