DIRECTIONAL PARTICLES AND ABSTRACT MOTION IN CHOCTAW

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1 Introduction

It is well-known that motion, both physical and abstract, plays an important role in structuring the semantic representations of lexical items (Gruber 1965, Jackendoff 1983). This paper examines the ways in which the directional particles of Choctaw, a Muskogean language spoken in Mississippi and Oklahoma, yield insight into the semantic structure of that language.

1.1 The descriptive problem

Choctaw has a set of directional particles, shown in (1) below:

1) Group A
   
   pit  'motion away from (a reference point)'
   ut  'motion towards (a reference point)'
        [awut 'motion towards (a reference point)']

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1 Special thanks to Henry Willis who provided all the Choctaw examples not otherwise attributed. Symbols in the orthography have their usual phonetic values, with the following exceptions: <sh> = [ʃ], <ch> = [tʃ], <lh> = [l], and underlining represents nasalization.

The following abbreviations are used: ac = accusative, comp = complementizer, con = constractive, dpast = distant past, ds = different subject, foc = focus, hn = hn-grade ( iterative aspect), irr = irrealis, l = l-grade (a stem form that appears before some suffixes), loc = locative, n = n-grade (durative aspect), m = nominative, part = participle, pl = plural, prev = previous mention, pt = past, super = superessive, ss = same subject, ms = tense.

2 For the purposes of this paper, ut and awut are essentially synonymous. Speakers of Choctaw I consulted considered awut a somewhat archaic variant of ut.

However, Byington (1915) suggests that in 19th century Choctaw, awut and ut contrasted with each other. Awut was used to indicate an endpoint of motion closer to the...
These directional particles are never used alone, but always before some other verb or verb phrase.

There are two descriptive problems that I will address in this paper. First, what is the difference between the directional particles of group A and those of group B? Second, what sorts of predicates involve motion?

1.2 Previous discussion

There has been little discussion of the directional particles in previous literature on Choctaw. Nicklas (1974:209) merely glosses \textit{pit} 'thither' and \textit{ut} 'hither' and says that they "state the direction of the action relative to the position of the speaker."

Ulrich (1986) is the only author to address the difference between group A and group B directional particles. He writes, "The dynamic directional particles [\textit{gt-} and \textit{gt-}] are used to indicate motion of the subject \textit{lt-} and \textit{pt-} are like \textit{gt-} and \textit{gt-} in indicating actions directed toward (\textit{lt-}) or away from (\textit{pt-}) the speaker. However, the static directional clitics are used when the subject is not itself moving, but merely sending something else, physical or otherwise." (pp 276-7)

However, Ulrich himself notes that there are problems with this generalization. Textual data show clearly that \textit{pt} and \textit{ut} occur in cases where the subject is in motion, as in the following examples:

2) \vba \textit{pt} \textit{anumpula chi hosh ilap ilivt nvinh chaha yq \textit{pt} oiya tok

/ \aba \textit{pt} anopol-aach\text-\textit{h-oosh
up away talk-\text{-}1sf-\text{-}t\text{-}n\text{-}p\text{-}part ss

speaker than the endpoint for \textit{ut}. Despite this, the Choctaw Bible almost always uses \textit{awut} and very rarely uses \textit{ut}.

\footnote{I will not discuss here in any detail a third, and more difficult question, that of how the point of reference or (center of deixis) is determined. In general motion is interpreted from the point of view of the speaker when first or second person pronouns are present in the sentence. In the absence of first or second person pronouns, the directional particles generally reflect the point of view of the subject of the sentence. However, there are exceptions to this generalization, and the issue requires more investigation.}
3) Mihma lumvt pem pit vhto cha, a haaka ka pit ilhkoli tok

/Mihma lohma-t puni
and secret-ss boat

pit alhto-chah aahayaakaka
away enter-ss wilderness

pit ilhkoli-ttook
away go-dpast

'And they departed into a desert place by ship privately ' Mark 6 32
[Lit 'They secretly entered a boat and went away to the wilderness ']

2 One event vs two events

I propose that the difference between group A and group B directionals can be described as follows

The group A directionals (pit and ut) are used when the motion is conceived of as forming a single event with the following predicate. Group B directionals (qt and at) are used when the motion is conceived of as a distinct event from the following predicate.

Group B directionals correspond most closely to English phrases like 'go and' and 'come and'.

2.1 Simple cases

In the great majority of case, the distinction between single events and distinct events explains the interpretations of sentences with group A and group B directionals. Consider the following contrasting examples.
In example (4), use of the group B directional \( qt \) implies that there was a distinct event of motion prior to the action of telling. In contrast, the use of the group A directional \( pit \) in (5) does not imply any such motion prior to the telling. Instead, \( pit \) shows that telling is an event in which the motion is directed away from the speaker.

However, there are a few cases which require a bit more discussion.

2.2 Directionals and inchoatives

With certain verbs, the two-event directionals are used in the formation of inchoatives.

6) \( \text{ittola-tok} \quad \text{STATIVE} \)

lie n-\( pt \)

'it lay there'

7) \( \text{At} \quad \text{ittola-tok INCHOATIVE} \)

come\& lie-\( pt \)

'It fell' (Literally 'It came and lay' or 'It came to lie')

Similar uses are found with verbs of entering, such as \( \text{chokkowah} \) 'to enter/be in (sg subj)' \( \text{altho} \) 'to enter/be in (du subj)' \( \text{abithah} \) 'to enter/be in (pl subj)' are ambiguous between stative and inchoative readings. For these verbs, the two-event directionals are used with the inchoative readings.

Choctaw appears to differ from English in the grammatical treatment of events like...

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4 An additional difference between the stative and inchoative senses is that the stative usually occurs in the n-grade (durative) Inchoative senses usually appear in other grades.
falling and entering  Notice that both these verbs involve events of motion that result in a particular final state  English treats the entire semantic complex as a single event  However, Choctaw separates the motion and stative portions of the event grammatically

2.3 Idiomatic uses

These are also some idiomatic uses of the group B particles  For example, \textit{qt iyah} means 'pass by' (literally 'go and go')

8) \textit{okhata paknaka y\text{a} a noho\text{\text{w}}\text{t}, ay\text{v}t im ona, yohmi kv\text{t} on\text{t} ia hi a aahnu tok}

/ \textit{okhata paknaka-y\text{a} aa-noho\text{\text{w}}\text{a-t}}
\textit{water top-ac loc-walk hn-ss}
\textit{aya-t sm-onah, yohmi-kat}
\textit{go by-ss III-reach do so-comp ss}
\textit{qt iy-ahu-y\text{a} aay-ahu-ti\text{\texto}ook}
\textit{go& go-irr-ac loc-think-dpast/}

' he was walking on the water, coming towards them, as if he would pass them by '
Mark 6:48

3 What constitutes motion?

I have claimed above that the single-event directionals \textit{pit}, \textit{ut}, and \textit{awut} are used when the following verb includes a motion component  Verbs with a motion component contrast with stative predicates, and the single-event directionals are inappropriate with statives

9) *\textit{Ofi-yat pit hommah}
\textit{dog-nm away red}

(The dog is red )

Speaking more formally, we may say that the single-event directionals are appropriate with verbs that contain the predicate GO in their semantic representation  In the following sections I identify several classes of verbs which include GO in Choctaw

3.1 Physical motion (and sending)

It is unsurprising that verbs in which there is actual physical motion of objects or people through space count as motion predicates in Choctaw  The following is a partial list of
verbs of physical motion that may be used with the group A directionals

- iyakayyah 'to follow'
- atohnoh 'to send, order'
- tilhuulih 'to send (pl obj )'
- oyyah 'to go up, climb'
- tanablih 'to cross over'
- ilhkohih 'to go (pl )'
- kanallih 'to move'
- kgchih 'to send, to sell'
- pllah 'to throw, send'
- itokaahah 'to throw in the fire'
- kochchah 'to go out'
- ashaachih 'to gather'
- okacuuh 'to throw in the water'
- lhayah 'to throw away'
- abachakaalih 'to lift the head'

Some examples of these verbs follow

10) it pllah toward throw/send
    
    'He threw it (toward me) ' 

11) Pit pllah away throw/send
    
    'He threw it (away from me) '

12) Chokka jla pit kanalli-tok
    house other away move-pt
    
    'They moved to a different house. '

13) Atuk osh okhvtu hash mish tunnv np pit tanablit Katalenes yakmi a okla ona tok
    /Aatokoosh okhatah-aash tanap
    and ocean-prev other side
    
    pit tanabli-t Gadarenes yakmi-ya
    away cross-ss Gadarenes land-ac
oklah ona-ttook /
pl arrive there-dpast

'And they came over unto the other side of the sea, unto the country of the Gadarenes ' 
Mark 5:1

14) Shukha laua ak q put ish pi on tihleli na yvmmak q ont il abehashke

/Shokha lawa-aqg put
hog many-con ac away

ish-pi-q-tihuli-nah yamni-agq
2sl-1pl-super-send 1-ds that-con ac
go& 1pl-be m-exhort

'Send us into the swine, that we may enter into them ' Mark 5:12

I assume that the lexical entry for a verb like putah 'to send' is something like that in
(14) The lexical entries here follow the notational conventions of Jackendoff (1983, 1990)

15) putah 'throw, send'
Verb
[CAUSE ([ ], [EVENT GO ([ ], [PATH ])])]

Note that this entry doesn't tell us anything anything specific about the path of motion—merely
that there is some such path
The lexical entries for put and ut are as shown below. Their semantic contribution to
the sentence is to provide information about the endpoint of a path of motion

16) put 'away from (a reference point)'
Particle
[PATH TO [THERE]]
17) [it 'toward (a reference point)'
particle
___ VP
[PATH TO [HERE]]

3.2 Giving

Verbs of giving also appear with the directional particles, suggesting that GO also appears in the semantic representations of the following verbs

umah 'to give'
upuah 'to give (to several), to distribute'

18) Nana kvt holitompa hokvno ofi puta ma pit hvch lk imokmvnt,

/ Nana-kat holitopa-h-oook-anoh
thing-comp ss holy n-tns-coom-ac2

ofi pootta-ma pit hachik-un-o-kmat /
dog all-that away 2pII-IIII-neg-irr ss

'Give not that which is holy unto the dogs ' Matt 7 6

19) put ipeta tok

/ Pit iputa-ttook /
away give-dpast

"he gave them (to his disciples)" Matt 14 19

The lexical entry for a verb like umah 'to give' is something like the following

20) [umah 'to give'
V
___ NP, NP
[CAUSE [[ ], [EVENT GO ([ ]), [PATH FROM [ ], TO [ ]])]]

Note that verbs of giving show a degree of abstraction from physical motion to the predicate GO. Giving need not involve any physical motion of the object that is given. If
give you a house, the house does not (typically) move. Nevertheless, the semantic representation of the verb *give* does include GO, whether this corresponds to the external world or not.

### 3.3 Perception

The directional particles also show that the following verbs of perception contain the predicate GO in their semantic representation:

- *pisah*: 'to see'
- *hopgkoyoh*: 'to look here and there'
- *hakloh*: 'to hear'

Consider the following examples:

**21)** Yohrm tok kia Causvs wt mishema ha munti na pit pisah mvt, maleit ont aitokpachit,

/Yohmi-ttook-kia Jesus-at mishuma-h-o do so-dpast-but Jesus-nm far off-tns-part ds

mit-nah pit pisa-hmat, mahul-t come-ds away see-when ss run-ss

qt ayokpachi-t /
go& worship-ss

"But when he saw Jesus [coming] afar off, he ran and worshipped him, and " Mark 5:6

**22)** ...Vba pilla ha pit ish hopgkooyo cha

/ aba pillah-ac pit up toward-ac away

ish-hopgkoooyo-chah /
2sf-look 1-ss

"Look now towards heaven." Gen 15 5
Verbs of perception show a further degree of abstraction from physical motion, for what is the moving object in perception? In the folk physics of vision implied by English semantics, this object is an abstract gaze, conceived of as moving from the perceiver to the perceived object. The Choctaw psah 'to see', shows that a similar abstract theme is conceived of as moving along a path from the seer to the thing.

However, Choctaw and English show somewhat surprisingly different conceptions of hearing. In English, sounds are conceived as moving from their sources to arrive at the ear of the perceiver, and the perceiver is the goal of the abstract motion. In Choctaw, however, hearing is like sight—an auditory equivalent of the gaze is conceived of as moving away from the hearer, and the particle put, showing motion away from the reference point, is used.

23) Mihma miko Helot vr yvma pit haklo

/Mihma miko Herod-at yamma pit
and King Herod-nm that away

haklo /
hear

"and King Herod heard of him"

The relevant lexical representations are as follows.

24)

\[
\text{see, psah}
\]

\[
\text{V}
\]

\[
\text{\_ (NP)}
\]

\[
\text{[GO ([GAZE], [PATHFROM [ ], TO [ ]]])}
\]

25)

\[
\text{hear}
\]

\[
\text{V}
\]

\[
\text{\_ (NP)}
\]

\[
\text{[GO ([SOUND], [PATHFROM [ ], TO [ ]]})}
\]
26)\[\text{haklo} \text{h} \text{to hear}\]
\[V \quad \text{(NP\text{\textsubscript{p}})}\]
\[\text{GO ([AUDITORY GAZE], [PATH FROM [I, TO [I]])}\]

3.4 Speech and thought

There is also a motion component in the following verbs of speech and thought, as the use of the directional particles shows.

- anopolih 'to say'\textsuperscript{5}
- tahanah 'to know, recognize'
- hoyoh 'to call'
- mihah 'to say'
- anoolih 'to tell'
- yimmih 'to believe'
- anokfillih 'to think, consider'

Consider the following examples

27) Pit \text{im-anoolih\atilde\']}
away \text{III-tell}
'Tell him!'\textsuperscript{6}

28) Kvna hosh \text{vm anumpa h\atilde\'} haklo cha, auet sa kanch\atilde\’ tok \text{a pit \text{i yimmih hokvto,}}
anokchayvt \text{bilia y\atilde\’ ahayuchi}

/Kanah-oosh \text{am-angpah-a haklo-chah}
who-foc nm \text{1sIII-word-ac hear-ss}

aw\text{int sa-kachu-ttook-a pit}
toward \text{1sII-send-dpast-ac away}

1-yimmih-h-oookatoh aay-okchaya-t
III-believe-\text{trns-com nm2 loc-live n-ss}

\textsuperscript{5} \textit{Aba pit anopolih}, literally 'talk upwards' is idiomatic for 'pray'
bíliya-yá aah-yotchochí /  
forever-ac loc-find

"Whoever hears my words and believes him who sent me shall have eternal life " John 5 24

29) pvska yatuk ash okla pit ik anukfillo kak a tok

/ paska-yaatok-aash oklah pit  
bread-7-prev pl away

ik-anukfill-ok-a-ttook /  
N-think l-neg-obl be-dpast

"...they did not consider the [miracle of the] bread " Mark 6 52

30) mih makinli bq yvvmak ash okla pit ithana tok

/ mih-m-aklhe-q yammak-aash  
same-dem-indeed-ac that-prev

oklah pit ithana-ttook /  
pl away know-dpast

"[immediately] they knew him " Mark 6 54

[In this context, something like "recognized him" is closer ]

The use of the directional particles with these verbs implies a lexical semantics in which thoughts and communication move from the mind of the subject to others in the world. The lexical entries for verbs in this semantic class are something like the following

31)

\[
\text{[yvmihh 'to believe']}
\]

\[
\text{V}
\]

\[
\text{[GO ([THOUGHT], [PATHFROM [ ], TO [ ], I]) ]}
\]
The four semantic fields just outlined—physical motion, giving, perception, and speech and thought—do not exhaust the verbs with motion components in Choctaw. In particular, verbs of orientation and comparison also appear to require GO in their semantic representation, but the constraints of space prevent discussing them in this paper.

4 Summary

The lexical patterns of Choctaw suggest the existence of items such as the visual and auditory gaze, and the abstract motion of thoughts through space. What is the relation between these lexicalizations and conscious thought in Choctaw (or any language)?

An earlier, less cautious, Whorfian perspective tended to equate the two with each other. But this seems too hasty. English lexicalization patterns also support the concept of the gaze, a mythical object or emanation originating in the eye of a seer. Yet speakers of English who say My gaze fell on him need not in any way believe the implicit physics of vision that this sentence implies. In a similar fashion, Choctaw speakers do not necessarily believe that recognizing a person causes your thoughts to move through space towards that person.

A distinction that Talmy (1983) suggests between the "fine-structural level" of language and the "macro-expository level" of language is useful here. The fine-structural level consists of the closed-class and verbal elements of a language, while the macro-expository level uses the full lexical and syntactic resources of the language. Talmy notes that the sort of spatial distinctions which can be expressed at the fine-structural level are a restricted subset of those which can be expressed at the macro-expository level. In particular, the fine-structural level of language often tends to imply a naive physics of the world which may be at odds with higher-level conceptualizations of the world.

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