

## COMANCHE DEICTIC ROOTS IN NARRATIVE TEXTS

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It has been known for some time that the Comanche third person pronouns contain deictic roots, and that these roots occur as well in quite a large number of adjectival and adverbial expressions. The meanings of the roots have been elicited by a number of researchers, though perhaps not with all the specificity that one might wish. What is lacking is, most importantly, published research into the behavior of these deictic roots within reasonably long stretches of narrative. The purpose of the present paper is to make known what I have been able to discover on this latter question.

The following discussion will be in three parts. First I will provide a suitable range of forms to familiarize the reader with the basic data. Next I will briefly illustrate the use of deictics in very short contexts. Finally I will examine the deictics in extended narration.

### I. The Basic Data

With some differences of terminology to be expected in such areas of research, earlier investigators of Comanche (Osborn and Smalley, Casagrande, Canonge) present the following scheme as basic to the third person pronouns:

- (1)    ma- 'close/visible/near at hand'  
      -i- 'close/near at hand'  
      -o- 'distant/at a distance'  
      -u- 'distant/out of sight/invisible/removed'  
      -e- 'scattered/various'

We see a five-way contrast based on spatial ranking from the speaker, the least clear distinction being that between ma- and -i-. Nowhere in the literature have I been able to find any discussion of these two forms, and when I once asked an aged Comanche if there was any difference, her answer was, "Same thing."

The roots given above take various suffixes marking number and case. For purposes of illustration, the nominative forms will be given here. (Transcription, roughly phonemic, follows Canonge except that voiceless vowels and occasional stress markings are not indicated, ' replaces ? for the glottal stop, and ± replaces ʌ for the high back unrounded vowel.)

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- (2) singular ma' 'he/she/it visible', etc.  
           i'                   :  
           o'                   :  
           u' 'he/she/it invisible', etc.
- dual       mahri, marikwi 'they (2) visible', etc.  
           itihí, itikwi                   :  
           ohri, orikwi                   :  
           uhri, urikwi 'they (2) invisible', etc.
- plural     marií 'they visible', etc.  
           itií                   :  
           orií                   :  
           urií                   :  
           etií 'they scattered', etc.

The two dual forms at each step of the ranking scheme are, so far as is known, used interchangeably. Notice that there is no singular \*e' or dual \*etihí, \*etikwi, the forms being anomalous.

In addition to their appearance in pronouns, as above, the deictic roots also occur in a large number of other adjectival and adverbial constructions. In many of these constructions all of the roots except ma- can take a prefixed s- whose meaning has not been definitely established. The following examples illustrate the range of data in which the deictic roots appear. In many of these forms the spatial ranking scheme is extended to include temporal and other realms.

(3) Pronoun

u bunitu'i ma' 'He/she/it (near) will see him/her/it (invisible).'

ohri bunitu'i ma' 'He/she/it (near) will see them (dual distant).'

ma bunitu'i orikwi 'They (dual distant) will see him/her/it (near).'

(4) Adjective

(s)itií renahpi' 'this (near) man'

(s)orií renahpi' 'that (distant) man'

(s)etií renahpi'níí 'these/those (scattered) men'

(5) Locative, directional adverb

(s)uku 'there (invisible)'

makihu '(to) here (near)'  
 (s)ohkoté 'from there (distant)'  
 (s)u'ana 'there (invisible) somewhere'  
 si'ane'té 'at/from this (near) point'  
 (s)ebu '(in) various directions'

(6) Temporal adverb

sibe'nikiyu 'from now on'  
 sube'sé 'at that (invisible) time'

(7) Manner adverb

sini 'in this way'  
 seni 'in various ways'

We turn now to the following question: How are the deictic roots given above used by the Comanche in actual speech situations? Elliott Canonge's Comanche Texts will serve as corpus.<sup>1</sup> Notice, first, that the root -e- 'scattered/various' seems to be in a class by itself since it alone does not refer to a given range in the extended spatial ranking system, and furthermore can be used, apparently, only in reference to three or more items. This root appears never to be obligatory, even when a speaker is referring to what can emically occur in a scattered state, such as buffalo, birds, etc. Rather, as is true of the broader category 'number' in general, speakers seem to use it only for emphasis or clarification. Thus not every reference to physically scattered items will involve the use of -e-, whose frequency of occurrence is in fact quite low. The following are examples of the option (forms containing the relevant root, and translation, are underlined):<sup>2</sup>

- (8) sitiikise' tuibihtsi'anii...sehka ta'siwoo'a tamariimoaku sonitoohkaku mariikihu kiahupiití 'As these buffalo were grazing, these young men went up to them.' 69:6,7
- (9) sitiikise' u basanuahka hunu'ru mi'anu pií pomapiha ehtu huuma ma tsahni'i'etikaku ma u'uruhkunu 'When it had gone down and dried up, these ones went along the creek and found their pickings in various places as they hung on trees.' 123:26

The root -e- is substitutable for any other deictic root if one wishes to call attention to scattered referents. The remainder of this paper will focus on the other four deictic roots.

## II. Use of Deictics in Short Contexts

For purposes of discussion, I will distinguish between 'short contexts' and 'extended narration'. The former category is made up of the usual sort of illustrative sentences collected in the field along with elicited vocabulary items and found in publications such as those cited at the beginning of section I of this paper. This category also includes some of the speech attributed to characters in much longer narratives, which themselves are either told under 'natural' conditions or elicited by the linguist. 'Extended narration' will be discussed in section III.

Within Comanche Texts are found several examples of assertions, commands, and questions spoken by characters in the various stories, and much of this speech is of the short context type: quite short, isolated sentences that do not make up a flowing discourse. Selected fragments of this speech will be given here in order to further illustrate what seems to be a simple and straightforward use of deictic roots.

In one story a woman hears a noise outside her tipi and asks her husband

(10) hini us 'What's that?' 100:17

using the root -u- since the cause of the noise is invisible to her.

In another story a bear transports a woman to his cave. Drawing up before the entrance, he tells her

(11) itsa' n $\dot{i}$  kahni 'This is my house.' 38:22

using the root -i- 'close/near at hand'. A moment later his wife comes out toward them and the husband warns her

(12) keta' ihka t $\dot{i}$ taati wa'ihp $\dot{i}$ 'a mar $\dot{i}$ nip $\dot{i}$ ha suwait $\dot{i}$  'Don't try to hurt this little woman.' 29:27

again using this same root.

In another story an Indian is given some meat by two whitemen. As they walk away from him he comments to himself

(13) nohi' tsaaku orikw $\dot{i}$  t $\dot{i}$ r $\dot{i}$ k $\dot{i}$ raiboo'n $\dot{i}$ kw $\dot{i}$  n $\dot{i}$  hanik $\dot{i}$ nu 'Those white robbers fixed me up very well.' 97:32

using the root -o- since the men, though visible, are no longer in his immediate surroundings.

In one story a little boy steals a small wooden wagon. His mother

makes him return it and then tells him

- (14) keta' kwasiki<sub>i</sub> sinihku u'ahrina atihina nohi'a yaari<sub>i</sub> 'Next  
time don't take any stranger's toy this way.' 83:32

with the root -i- in the manner adverb marking the 'immediacy' of the situation.

Occasionally, however, we find what appears to be an aberrant use of one root or another. In one story, for example, a man kills an Osage and then, fearing reprisals, flees with his family back to the main encampment. As they arrive among the others he tells them

- (15) okiho n<sub>i</sub>' p<sub>i</sub>hkuti<sub>i</sub> n<sub>i</sub>m<sub>i</sub> kima'ikuti<sub>i</sub> wasaasi'a pehka'i 'I  
killed an Osage over there at the place we came from.'  
100:23

In this fragment, 'over there' has the root -o- even though it is fairly clear that the indicated place is at the far end of the spatial ranking scheme and thus should take -u-. However, the overlapping glosses attributed to -u- and -o- at the beginning of section I of this paper suggest that, for some speakers at least, there is no clear cutoff between an appropriate use of one root as opposed to the other.

That this may be true is also suggested by data from Shoshoni reported by Miller. The Shoshoni demonstrative system is as follows:<sup>3</sup>

- (16) -i- near  
-e- not quite so near  
-a- far, but in sight  
-u- not in sight, usually far  
ma- makes no distinction, covers all the above

Miller states, however, that some dialects use -o- in place of -u-, or as an additional out-of-sight form, closer than -u-.

In the present Comanche and Shoshoni data, then, we may have an example of the extensive gradation within Numic languages that has been commented on by the Voegelins and others. Unravelling the details of this gradation must remain a problem for future research.

### III. Use of Deictics in Extended Narration

Turning now to the question of deictic roots in longer stretches of continuous discourse, we ask how the Comanche Texts narrator employed these roots within each story as she narrated it to Canonge. Here we will be looking for interaction or relationships between two or more roots which, possibly, could not show up in shorter contexts.

In almost all of the stories the point of beginning is marked by

(19) u kwasikise' ubinakwi paaru okwemi'a 'Its tail went floating behind it in the water.' 93:7

ohkaka puuni mekise' suri "Look at that," said those ones.' 93:8

paakihi urii bunihka su'ana niniywi' pahabimi'a 'As they looked in the water, there an alligator went swimming.' 93:9

surikise' suhka niniywi'a otsa' imi nimi maka'i me u niikwiiyu 'Those ones said to that alligator, "That's what we fed you." 93:10

surikise' timahkupa' uwakatu pahabikinu 'That panther came swimming towards it.' 93:11

sitikise' niniywi' maatu tunehtsinu 'This alligator ran towards it.' 93:12

sitikise' timahkupa' sihka niniywi'a tsoapika marikinu 'This panther touched this alligator's shoulder.' 93:13

The narrator then immediately shifts back to 'far distant/invisible' -u- forms as she tells how both the panther and the alligator die as a result of their wounds and how the men leave the scene.

Example (19) is representative of the fact that there is virtually no interplay in the narration of the stories between -u- and -o-, except for a limited number of adverbial distinctions as noted above in (18). But there is shifting from -u- to -i- in contexts of heightened intensity (and possibly for other reasons).

Is there any interplay between -u- and ma-, comparable in some way to the highlighting use of -i- as opposed to -u-? It appears that the answer is no, despite the overlapping glosses attributed to these near-distance forms -i- and ma-. The ma- forms play a somewhat ambiguous yet special role in the Comanche Texts stories. Consider the following fragment in which the narrator begins, as usual, with -u- in su'ana 'there somewhere'. She then uses ma- in reference to the introduced character while retaining -u- in the repeated locative, and finally retains ma- for the character (and her child) while shifting the focus of the locative through the use of -i- in si'ana 'here somewhere'.

(20) soobe'sikitsa' ria su'ana wakare'ee' tariebuhipaha hikiki hikikahti 'Long ago it is said there somewhere a turtle was sitting in the shade of little weeds.' 35:1

titaatî ma tîe'tîkîse' su'ana ma kîma'kî karîrî animuiha  
 pîmi pî pia'a maka'eku rîkîbîni 'As its mother was feeding  
 flies to it, her little child was sitting there beside her  
 eating them.' 35:2

si'anakîse' mahri yîkwîhkaku piakwasinaboo' marîîkî bitînu  
 'As they were sitting here, a big snake arrived among them.'  
 35:3

From examples such as this, one may perhaps conclude that narrative ma- falls somewhere between the far distant -u- and the very near -i-. It may be that the narrator is shifting gradually to the near range, rather than in one sharp leap as in earlier examples. This is probably not the correct explanation of ma- in this passage, however. Consider the following fragment, in which a mother watches her son disappear down a path:

- (21) surîkîse' u pia' ke ma nabuniku titaatî nî rua' tî'iyatîwee  
 me yîkwîtî u napîhu mi'anu 'When he wasn't visible his  
 mother said, "My poor little son is afraid," and followed  
his path.' 83:29

It is true that in the next sentence (83:30) the son is referred to with an -i- form. Notice, however, that in (21) we have first a shift from -u- to ma-, and then immediately a shift back to -u-, all for the son. I believe that the correct account of ma- in both (20) and (21) has little to do with shifts in the spatial ranking scheme per se.

Miller has stated that ma- in Shoshoni demonstratives 'makes no distinction, covers all of the above' (recall (16) above). This may be the case for Comanche as well, though perhaps not in the sense that Miller has intended it for Shoshoni. While examples of shifting from -u- to ma-, as in the above fragments, do exist in Comanche Texts, the most common environment for ma- is illustrated by the following example. Two men stop at a couple's house for food. After eating, they are all on their way to town and

- (22) sîtîkwîkîse' pîhîwaka mahri tîhka'inîkwî mahrîmunakwî  
 nuraami'a 'These two (couple), with whom they (men) had  
 eaten, went in front of them (men).' 57:7

Notice that -i- occurs in the main clause subject, while ma- occurs both in the subordinate clause and in the main clause adverbial. Examination of (20) and (21) will show that there also ma- is in a secondary status, never the subject of the main clause.

It appears that in Comanche the role of ma- in extended narration is to mark a second third person referent (the term 'extended narration' again being distinguished from the short contexts discussed in section II of this paper). The root thus has an obviative function, though it does

not fulfill this function as completely or regularly as obviative forms in the Algonquian languages.

Another example will clarify this obviative use of ma-. Notice that in the following passage, the narrator flips back and forth between two characters at close range. In each consecutive sentence the grammatical main clause subject takes -i- and the second referent takes ma-.

(23) sit̥k̥ise' wihnu ma pia' ma w̥htuinu 'Then (this) his mother waited for him.' 82:15

sit̥k̥ise' t̥itaat̥i tuin̥ihp̥i' mawakatu kimari̥ w̥n̥ihupiit̥i  
'This little boy came toward her and stopped.' 82:16

sit̥k̥ise' ma pia' p̥i tuupiha ma tsaht̥k̥ika hina ini  
ipinakw̥iku yaahka me u niikw̥iiyu 'When he set down his water, (this) his mother said to him, "What are you carrying behind you?"' 82:17

In the first and third sentences of this example, -i- refers to the mother and ma- to the son. In the second sentence, -i- refers to the son and ma- to the mother. Notice, then, that use of ma- versus -i- does not consistently track a particular character. Instead, the character mentioned first in each sentence (the subject) takes -i-, and any second character takes ma-.

It must be stressed that the above account of narrative ma- is tentative. It is not the case that every 'second mention' character throughout every story is marked by ma-. In fact, there are counterexamples in both directions. The obviative use of ma- occurs most often at the near range, that is when the main clause subject is an -i- form. But ma- occurs much less frequently in second mention status when the main clause subject is an -u- form. In this case all other forms in the sentence tend to be -u- as well. But even at near range, where the main clause subject takes -i-, the second mention status is occasionally filled by -i- forms rather than ma- forms. The last sentence of example (19) above contains this use of -i- in the genitive form sihka nin̥iy̥wi'a 'of this alligator'.

Whether the use of ma- as an obviative root is an innovation in Comanche or extends further back into Uto-Aztecan, why it is restricted so severely to contrast with -i- forms rather than -o- or -u- forms, and many other questions remain for future research.

## NOTES

1 Canonge's Comanche Texts is the only readily available source of texts in Comanche. The volume, now out of print but available in microfiche, contains 36 short narratives, most of them traditional, from a single speaker born in the early 1880s, with word-by-word translations. Included are coyote stories, fairy tales and fables, stories on manners and morals, adventure stories, and stories on obtaining and preparing food. Buller's dissertation, a potentially rich source of additional textual material, unfortunately gives only English translations. His work, therefore, cannot contribute to an understanding of deictics as discussed in the present paper.

2 Numbers following translations refer to page and sentence in Canonge.

3 I follow Miller's practice in not using single quotation marks here. He is apparently giving explanations rather than glosses per se.

## REFERENCES

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