

**Acquisition in the Context of
Language Revitalization:
the Adult L2 Learner Varieties of
Chickasaw**

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Chickasaw

- Muskogean language of the U.S. Southeast today spoken by members of the Chickasaw Nation in south-central and southeastern Oklahoma
- ~ 50 fluent native speakers, who are all over the age of 60 and bilingual in English
- Chickasaw Language Revitalization Program dedicated to documentation and revitalization since 2007
- Ongoing adult immersion program called the Chikasha Academy, which began in October 2015

Chikasha Academy

- Native speakers and adult second language learners
- Semi-structured immersion, lead by the experienced learners
- 1hr sessions, ~4hrs/day, 5 days a week
- All sessions recorded for documentation
- Academy learners are hired as full-time employees
- Aim for conversational fluency after 2 years
- Sustainable model of intergenerational language transmission between learners and speakers

Fluency Levels/Learner Varieties

Novice:

- Low: *single* practiced/memorized words/phrases
- Mid: *varied* practiced/memorized words/phrases
- High: simple sentences, *some* memorized phrases

Intermediate:

- Low: *converse* on familiar topics, simple sentences/questions
- Mid: converse on familiar topics, *series* of connected sentences
- High: converse easily on familiar topics

How do learners progress their fluency?

Comparing Early Grammatical Features

- Person: active-stative
 - e.g. *anompoli-li* and *sa-tikahbi*
- Tense: unmarked present, *-tok* past, and *-a'chi* future
- Connectives: depends on what is connecting
 - *micha* 'and' between nouns
 - Switch-reference between verbs
 - e.g. *-cha* 'and SS' *-na* 'and DS' between verbs

Novice-Low learners use almost no inflection.

(Jason's 2nd day (~5hrs) – no inflection)

**obyā *inkāna' *pisa. *micha *chokka'. *impa. *nosi.*
be.night friend see and family eat(it) go.to.sleep

Obyakmā ankāna' micha anchokka' pisala'chi. Impala'chi.
Nosila'chi.

'(To)night (I'm going to) see (my) friends. And (my) family. (I'll) eat. (I'll) go to sleep.'

(missing switch-reference, person, and TAM marking)

Novice-Mid (Jason, 21 wks / ~5mos, ~120hrs)

saokchatok hashi' kanalli hanná'li. kafi' ikbilitok.

'I woke up at 6:00. I made coffee.'

kafi' ishkolitok. toksali' mintilitok. sahopobatok.

'I drank coffee. I came to work. I was hungry.'

ayalitik "Sonic." "burrito" apalitik. yammak illa.

'I went to Sonic. I ate a burrito. That's all.'

Able to use **person** and **tense** affixes on familiar, primed/
practiced words.

Novice-High (Jason, 13mos, >600hrs)

*oblaashaash hashi' kanalli hanná'li **saokchatok** *micha
taanal**litok**. kafi' ikbil**litok**. oka' yopil**litok**. aatoksali' onal**litok**
hashi' kanalli ontochchí'na. waaka' nipi' ittalatta'a'
apal**litok**. oklhiliaash holba' aapisa' pisal**litok**. nosil**litok**
hashi' kanalli awa-chaffa.*

'Yesterday at 6:00 I woke up (and) I got up. I drank coffee. I bathed. I arrived at the office at 8:00. I ate a hamburger. Last night I watched a movie. I went to sleep at 11:00.'

- **person** and **tense**, but no **switch-reference**.

Intermediate Learners

hattakat tawáacha hoohikíya. 'The two are standing there.'

haatokoo ihooat stokchank yoklicha hikiyaakookya.

'So then the woman grabs a waterman and is standing there, too.'

haatokoo hattakat ihooa naachi ima'chi.

'So then the man is going to give the woman a blanket.'

haatokoo ihooat kanihka ayokpahootoko hattakat naachi imatok.*

'So then the woman is really happy *because the man gave her a blanket.'

yammak illa. 'The end.'

(Brandon, intermediate-low, 10/15)

Intermediate learners...

Although they use a smaller number of morphemes than native speakers, become comfortable with person, tense, and some switch-reference.

But, they also exhibit many variants noticeably different from how Chickasaw is described, including:

- Regular omission of “obligatory” case suffixes
- Use of connective verbal suffixes as connective words
- Appear to have “simplified” a complicated use of dative agreement, e.g. in ‘have’ constructions

Dative Agreement in Chickasaw

- Dative set of affixes, originally marked applicative object:

am-anompoli 'she's talking to me'

a-nokhánglo 'she's sad for me'

- But through a couple of complicated syntactic processes, have now become the subjects of many intransitive and transitive verbs.

amalhtaha 'I'm ready'

ankaniya 'I lost it'

Learners struggle the most with dative, since many verbs are not semantically predictable.

Dative 'have' constructions

- Described as having double nominatives:

Chipotaat ánta / áshwa / áyya'sha. 'The kid(s) are there.'

Bobat chipotaat imáyya'sha. 'Bob's kids are there.'

'Bob has kids.'

- Intermediate learner varieties:

- *ofi' toklo' amáshwa.* 'I have two dogs.'

- *chipota oshta' amáyya'sha.* 'I have four kids.'

Careful Comparisons of Varieties

- Learner Variety/ies
 - Developing from input variety, not described variety
- **Academy Speaker Variety – the Input Variety/ies**
 - From the 7 speakers involved in the Chikasha Academy
 - Notable variations from the Described Variety
 - Representative of a *bilingual* speech community that has undergone changes during rapid language shift
- Described Variety
 - From the published descriptive work (Munro & Willmond 1994, etc.)
 - Includes a dictionary and grammar book for teaching
 - Most data is from speaker Mrs. Catherine Willmond, who is not involved in the Academy

The Input Variety/ies

That variety/ies spoken by native speakers involved in the Academy differ significantly from the described variety.

- e.g. with the 'have' constructions, the speakers have reanalyzed these to have dative subjects
 - *ofi' chimántakat íma?* 'do you still have a dog?'
 - *chipota oshta' chimáyya'shataa?* 'do you have four kids?'

(no nominative case, different from Described)

Acquisition, Revitalization, and Change

- Very few studies of adult second language speakers/learners of endangered languages (Neely 2015, Haynes 2010)
- But many scholars have observed and predicted that revitalized language varieties, spoken by adult learners, will be very different from the variety spoken by native speakers because of “simplifications” by the learners (Holton 2009, Sasse 1992, Goodfellow 2002)
- However, much of the observed “simplification” in Chickasaw learner varieties stems from variation in the speech of the native speakers in the Chikasha Academy, which we can see because of the recordings of the Academy sessions.

Language Acquisition and Change

- Language acquisition studies of endangered languages should be careful not to overlook the source of variation(s) in the input variety
- Or the agency of language learners and language revitalization programs (the speech community).
- The CLRP is aware of the certain inevitability of language change from second language acquisition, but seeks to mitigate the changes through the Academy.
- The CLRP refers to this as “mediated language change.”

Conclusions

- The learner varieties of Chickasaw show “simplifications”, but these are not simply due to the learners’ L1 interference
- Rather they come from the input variety, the speech of native speakers which varies from the described variety
- Future studies of acquisition of endangered languages should be careful in comparing learner varieties to a described variety
- This may obscure how successful learners have been in acquiring the input variety and its variations

Conclusions

- Additionally, careful comparisons will avoid reinforcing harmful puristic language ideologies (Holton 2009)
- And further support the many calls for more documentation of variation in endangered language communities (e.g. Mithun 2013).

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