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NOUN INCORPORATION IN THE MUSKOGEAN LANGUAGES

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[Noun incorporation was formerly often thought to be characteristic of American Indian languages as a whole. While it is now definitely known that the process is not pan-American, its complete area of distribution (especially as a non-functional survival) cannot yet be plotted. For this reason it is of considerable interest that the process can be demonstrated to exist as a survival in the Muskogean languages, particularly since its occurrence in these languages has not previously been reported.]

1. The Muskogean family of languages¹ was formerly spoken throughout most of the territory now comprising the states of Mississippi, Alabama, and Georgia, together with adjoining sections of Tennessee and Florida.² For the most part the tribes speaking these languages have now been removed or driven away from their original homes, and some of them have become extinct. The extant languages are Choctaw, Chickasaw, Muskogee (or Creek), Seminole, Alabama, Koasati, Hitchiti, and Mikasuki. The first four of these are now spoken in eastern Oklahoma within the confines, respectively, of the former Choctaw, Chickasaw, Creek, and Seminole Nations. Moreover, Choctaw is spoken by a small group which remained in eastern Mississippi and by a number of scattered remnants in Louisiana, and Seminole is spoken by many of the Seminole Indians of Florida. Alabama and Koasati are now spoken in eastern Texas and western Louisiana respectively. Hitchiti, practically extinct, is remembered by less than a half dozen individuals living in the Seminole Nation in Oklahoma. The largest group of Mikasuki speakers comprise a part of the Seminoles of Florida, though a few (mostly recently arrivals from Florida) are also to be found in the Seminole Nation.

With respect to the nomenclature applied to these languages, it should be pointed out that the terms Choctaw and Chickasaw are of political rather than linguistic significance, since the two dialects are but subvarieties of the same language. The same is true of Muskogee and Seminole, and of Hitchiti and Mikasuki.

In working out the genetic classification of the Muskogean languages, it has been found that they may be subdivided into two main groups, Western and Eastern. The first of these contains only Choctaw (and its subvariety Chickasaw); the second comprises all the remaining languages. This second division

¹ Except where otherwise indicated, the material on which this paper is based is taken from my own field notes on these languages. The field work of Muskogee was financed by two grants (in 1936 and 1937) from the Department of Anthropology, Yale University. During the second of these trips certain Choctaw and Hitchiti materials were also collected. The collection of Koasati materials and additional Muskogee materials comprised a part of the work done on the history of the towns of the Creek Confederacy under a grant from the Penrose Fund of the American Philosophical Society in 1938-9.

² See the map supplement to *Handbook of American Indians*, Part I, ed. by Frederick Hodge (Bureau of American Ethnology, Bulletin 30; Washington, 1907).

may in turn be divided into three subgroups: Alabama-Koasati, Hitchiti (including Mikasuki), and Muskogee (including Seminole).³ Most of the illustrative material provided in this paper is taken from Choctaw, Koasati, and Muskogee, a sufficiently wide representation to indicate that noun incorporation was a characteristic of Proto-Muskogean.

2. Noun incorporation, far from being the exotic process it was once considered, has been shown by Sapir⁴ to be but one of several possible varieties of stem composition. Specifically, it is the formation of a derivative verb stem by compounding a noun stem with a verb stem.

While the process is reflected to some degree in all of the groups and subgroups of the Muskogean family, it is not a productive process in any of the individual languages. In some of them, indeed, its existence could not be demonstrated (perhaps not even suspected) without reference to the other languages. The only language which contains a set of nouns clearly related to the petrified nominal elements found in certain Muskogean verbs is Muskogee.

3. In Muskogee the three most important incorporable nouns (in their typical incorporating forms) are *nok-* 'neck', *fik-* 'heart', and *cok-* 'mouth'.⁵ These are respectively related to the possessed noun stems⁶ *-nókwa* 'neck',⁷ *-fi'ki* 'heart', and *-cókwa* 'mouth'.

The incorporated noun *nok-* as employed in Muskogee always refers to the neck or throat. Sometimes the verbal derivative containing the noun can be completely analyzed:

nokfayyítá 'to wring . . . by the neck', lit. 'to neck-wring' < *nok-* + *fayy-ítá*⁸
'to wring, crank . . .'

noksómki 'hoarse', lit. 'throat-lost' < *nok-* + *sómki-i*⁹ 'lost' (past participle
of *somk-ítá* 'to get lost')

In other cases, however, the verb stem to which *nok-* has been attached does not have an independent existence in the language:

nokfípíta 'to seize . . . by the throat'

nokcipítá 'to choke . . .'

nokkaca'kkoycítá 'to strangle . . .'

nokmilíta 'to swallow a liquid'

The incorporated noun *fik-* 'heart' is found to occur, appropriately enough,

³ The reasons for this classification are set forth in my article, *The Classification of the Muskogean Languages*, to appear in the Sapir Memorial Volume (in press).

⁴ Edward Sapir, *Language, an Introduction to the Study of Speech* 69-70 (New York, 1921).

⁵ For an explanation of the system of orthography employed in Muskogee, see my article, *Ablaut and its Function in Muskogee*, *LANG.* 16.141-50 (1940).

⁶ A possessed noun stem is one which cannot be used without a personal pronominal prefix referring to the possessor, e.g. *canókwa* 'my neck'.

⁷ Whenever the suffix *-wa* is preceded by a consonant (as in *-nókwa* and *-cókwa*), it is dropped when it would come to stand before an element beginning in a consonant. This accounts for its loss in the incorporating forms *nok-* and *cok-*. The same rule applies when such words are compounded with nouns rather than verbs, e.g. *-cokháłpi* 'lip' < *-cókwa* + *háłpi* 'skin, hide'.

⁸ The suffix *-ita* is the regular infinitive ending of Muskogee.

⁹ The suffix *-i* is a Muskogee participial ending.

in a number of verbs referring to sorrow, jealousy, and fear. As a general rule such verbs are analyzable:

fiknokkitá 'to get sad, sorrowful', lit. 'to get heartsick' < *fik-* + *nokk-itá*
'to get sick'

fikcakhítá 'to get jealous', lit. 'to get heart-stuck-in' < *fik-* + *cakh-itá*
'to get to be sticking up in'

fiksomkitá 'to get scared, frightened', lit. 'to get heart-lost' < *fik-* + *somk-*
itá 'to get lost'

fikhamkitá 'to become brave', lit. 'to become heart-oned (i.e. singlehearted)'
< *fik-* + *hamk-itá* 'to get to be one'¹⁰

fiktackitá 'to get out of breath', lit. 'to get heart-cut-off' < *fik-* + *tack-itá*
'to get cut off'

The same element also occurs in one unanalyzable verb *fikhonnitá* 'to stop, quit, cease'.

The Muskogee element *cok-* 'mouth' occurs with less frequency than do the other incorporable nouns. In the examples given below only the first is analyzable:

cokpaykitá 'to put ... in the mouth' < *cok-* + *payk-itá* 'to put one thing
in ...'

coksa'kkitá 'to carry ... in the mouth'

cokna'hítá 'to talk like one who is demented'

4. The most common incorporated noun in Koasati is *nok-*, referring to the neck or throat. It is to be derived from a Proto-Muskogean stem **nok-* rather than directly from the regular Koas.¹¹ word *-no'bi* 'neck',¹² which in turn is derived from PM **-nokbi* (cf. Hitch. *-nokp-i* 'neck'). The element *nok-* is found in several derivative verbs of Koasati, only a part of which are analyzable:

nokpanayli 'to wring ... by the neck' < *nok-* + *panayli* 'to twist ...'

nokpannici 'to wring ... by the neck'

noktitifka 'to grab ... by the throat' (cf. Choc. *noktitiffi*, having the same meaning)

nokbi'li 'to get choked on food' (the same in Ala.)

nokwoyahli 'to belch'

noksolotka 'to get thirsty', lit. 'to get throat-dry' < *nok-* + *solotka* 'to
get dry'

no'halatka 'to get a crick in the neck', lit. 'to get neck-caught' < *no-* (var.
of *nok-* before *h*) + *halatka* 'to get caught'

In the examples given above the reference to the neck or throat is clear. On the other hand, in a word like *noksi'pa* 'to get angry' the reference is somewhat

¹⁰ Muskogee numerals belong to the verb system; see LANG. 16.148.

¹¹ The following abbreviations are used for names of languages: Koas. = Koasati; Hitch. = Hitchiti; Choc. = Choctaw; Ala. = Alabama; Musk. = Muskogee.

¹² The Koasati phonemic system may be briefly described as follows: There are four voiceless stops, *p*, *t*, *k*, and *c* (phonetically [č]); one asymmetrical voiced stop, *b*; four voiceless spirants, *f* (bilabial), *ɬ*, *s*, and *h*; and five voiced sonorants, *y*, *w*, *m*, *n*, and *l*. There are three vowels, *i*, *a*, and *o*. When not accompanied by the length phoneme, *i* is [i] except in word-final position, where it is [e]; *a* is [A]; *o* is [ʊ]. When accompanied by the length phoneme, the vowels are lengthened and their qualities undergo a change, thus *i'* is [e'], *a'* is [a'], and *o'* is [o'].

obscure until we discover that in Choctaw (see §6) a number of words referring to various passions also contain *nok-*, e.g. Choc. *nokhobi'la* 'to get angry'. The Koas. and Ala. word *nokcoba* 'to stop, quit' likewise contains *nok-*; note that the Musk. word of the same meaning (*fikhonnitá*, §3) contains *fik-*.

The incorporated noun *cok-* 'mouth' is somewhat rare in the Koas. material, having been found so far in only two words:

cokso'ka 'to kiss ...' < *cok* + *so'ka* 'to suck on ...', the Ala. term is *cokso'nka* < *cok-* + *so'nka* 'to suck on ...'

ilico'hokfi 'to put ... in one's mouth' < *ili-*, reflexive pref., + *co-* (var. of *cok-* before *h*) + *hokfi* 'to put one thing in ...'

There are no independent examples of the incorporated noun *fik-* 'heart' in the available Koas. material and it seems likely that no such examples exist. The word *ficcakhi* (< earlier **fikcakhi*) 'to be jealous' has been borrowed from Musk. *fikcakhitá* (§3).¹³

5. In the available Hitchiti material I have found only one example of an incorporated noun, *nok-* in *nokpafi'ki* 'to choke', but it seems likely that more examples will be found when more material can be collected.

6. The incorporated nouns of Choctaw show an interesting situation. Only one noun is so used, namely *nok-*, but it covers much the same semantic territory as it is covered in Muskogee by both *nok-* 'neck, throat' and *fik-* 'heart'. Most of the examples quoted in this section are taken from Byington's dictionary.¹⁴ Since the element *nok-* is not related to *-ko'nla*, the regular Choc. stem for 'neck', the analysis of Choc. derivative verbs containing this element was not known to Byington. Nevertheless, because of his long contact with the tribe, his material is exceptionally rich in verbs of this type.

These verbs fall into two main semantic categories, the first of which comprises those which contain a clear reference to the neck or throat:¹⁵

noktaka'li 'to have something stuck in the throat', lit. 'to get throat-locked'
< *nok-* + *taka'li* 'to hang, stick, lock'

noktiliffi 'to strangle ... , grab ... by the throat', lit. 'to throat-squeeze ...'
< *nok-* + *tiliffi* 'to squeeze ... with the fingers'

nokšikā'nli (B) 'to smart, tingle in the throat' < *nok-* + *šikā'nli* 'to tingle in the nose'

nokbiki'li 'to be stifled as from overeating' < *nok-* + *biki'li* 'to press up against ... with a point or the end of anything'

noksakki (B) 'to be choked, strangled in water'

¹³ The Koasati were one of several independent tribes conquered by the Creeks and incorporated by them into their confederacy.

¹⁴ Cyrus Byington, A Dictionary of the Choctaw Language (Bureau of American Ethnology, Bulletin 46; Washington, 1915). Examples quoted from this source are indicated by a capital B placed in parentheses. Unmarked examples are taken from my own notes.

¹⁵ In quoting the forms from Byington's dictionary certain transliterations have been introduced in order that the orthography might be consistent with that used for the other Muskogean languages. Such transliteration has been facilitated by my own knowledge of the language; the following brief description of Choctaw phonemes is taken from my own notes: There are four voiceless stops, *p*, *t*, *k*, and *č*; one asymmetrical voiced stop, *b*; five voiceless spirants, *f* (bilabial), *l*, *s*, *š*, and *h*; and five voiced sonorants, *y*, *w*, *m*, *n*, and *l*. The vowel system is the same as that given for Koasati (footnote 12).

noklamalli (B) 'to choke or suffocate'

nokpowalli (B) 'to feel nauseated' < *nok-* + **-powalli* (cf. *powaliči* 'to cause the waves to roll high')

nokšitiifi, *nokšiniifi* (B) 'to hang ... by the neck'

noksiti·li (B) 'to choke ... with a cord', lit. 'to neck-bind' < *nok-* + *siti·li* 'to tie, bind ...'

nokšila (B) 'to be thirsty', lit. 'to be throat-dry' < *nok-* + *šila* 'to be dry'

nokšammi (B) 'to be hoarse'

nokfoko·wa 'to hiccough'; also *nokfičo·wa*, *nokfičo·li* (B)

The second semantic category of verbs built up by means of *nok-* comprises those which contain reference to sorrow, fear, passion, or pain. In contrast to Choctaw, Muskogee verbs of this category are generally built up by means of *fik-* 'heart' and thus we see that in Choctaw *nok-* has taken over the functions of both *nok-* and *fik-* as these are employed in Muskogee:

nokha·nklo 'to be sorry'

nokwilo·ha (B) 'to be sad, sorrowful'

nokwanniči (B) 'to tremble through fear', lit. 'to neck-tremble' < *nok-* + *wanniči* 'to shake, tremble'; note that *nok-* adds the notion of fear to the complex

noklaka·nčiči (B) 'to startle ...'

nokšobli (B) 'to frighten, terrify, intimidate ...'

noklibiša (B) 'to be in a passion', lit. 'to be neck-heated' < *nok-* + *libiša* 'to become heated'

nokpalli (B) 'to be interested, excited, tempted'

noktata 'to be jealous'

nokhobi·la (B) 'to be mad, angry'

noktala·li (B) 'to quiet, appease, soothe ...', lit. 'to neck-set ...' < *nok-* + *tala·li* 'to set, place one thing'

nokhammi (B) 'to ache'

In addition, a number of Choctaw verbs referring to palpitation are built up by means of *nok-*:

nokvimikači (B) 'to palpitate'

nokwimikači (B) 'to shake, tremble, palpitate, as after an effort at running'

noktimikači (B) 'to beat, pulsate, as the heart or pulse'

noktimiči (B) 'to palpitate quickly'

7. This concludes the evidence for the presence of noun incorporation in Proto-Muskogean. The process is not a free one in any of the modern languages and in Choctaw, for instance, evidence for its existence cannot be adduced without comparison with the other languages. Even in Muskogee, where the process seems to be best preserved, no new formations of a similar type can be made.

Since the process is no longer a free one, it is not surprising that it has not been previously reported as a characteristic of the Muskogean family. Other American Indian families and languages definitely known to employ the process include Shoshonean, Iroquoian, Pawnee, and Kutenai.¹⁶ Muskogean may now be added to this list with the qualification that here the process is found as a survival only.

¹⁶ Franz Boas, *Race, Language and Culture* 213 (New York, 1940).