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PREFACE

This textbook was written for use in the Choctaw language courses at Southeastern Oklahoma State University and the Broken Bow High School and in response to the many requests for teaching materials which have been received by the Choctaw Bilingual Education Program from individuals all over the country.

None of the authors are experienced language teachers. We looked at a variety of other language textbooks and developed a format which we thought would be suitable to our purpose and within our ability to complete within the available time.

It was our intention to include in each lesson a section called "Conversations" containing short conversational exchanges of an idiomatic sort, or model sentences illustrating the major grammatical rules of that lesson. We also planned to have texts for reading spaced throughout the units. Eventually the need to finish in some form began to outweigh the need for these materials; we have included those prepared, although we abandoned these ideas for the work as a whole.

It seems unlikely that course materials will ever be prepared for Choctaw comparable to those available for languages commonly taught, which provide a carefully graduated, cumulative course of study over several college semesters. We are not in a position to produce such materials in the foreseeable future. We can fairly easily produce a reader with grammatical notes. We have therefore set ourselves the task here of covering all the essential grammar of Choctaw, to the end that a student, having completed this book, will have a good bird's-eye-view of Choctaw

grammar, if not mastery of it, and will be in a position to go on to texts and conversations with grammatical notes.

We have kept vocabulary to a minimum, but we have tried to introduce all of the classes of words which are connected with rules of grammar in any way, so that the only vocabulary to be learned after this will be the large open classes.

The first few lessons were written as a committee. After that, Nicklas drafted the lessons and one or both of the other authors edited them. Many hours were spent selecting a vocabulary of the most essential 1000 Choctaw words, and the vocabulary used here was selected from that list. The longer list itself will soon be published.

Many people have made some contribution to this work, and all cannot be named. Viola McCurtain of Talihina, Justin and Lucy Hardy of Lawrence, Kansas, and Cynthia Billy of Broken Bow have all contributed to the basic research underlying a book such as this. Rev. Randy Jacob is responsible for convincing us to return to the use of the traditional Choctaw alphabet. Betty Keeton has designed the layout and typed the manuscript.

Finally, we all express our thanks to the families for their cooperation and support. We hope that you will find this work more or less well suited to its intended purpose.

Betty Jacob
Dale Nicklas
Betty Lou Spencer

Durant, Oklahoma
1977

INTRODUCTION

This book has been designed to teach you all the essentials of Choctaw grammar, and the most essential Choctaw vocabulary. When you have completed it, you should have a good bird's-eye-view of the structure of Choctaw-- even if you have not mastered it; and you should know all of the most essential words of Choctaw. In short, you should have a foundation such that with the help of a vocabulary, reference grammar, and reader, you can continue to whatever level of mastery you want to achieve.

The main emphasis here has been grammar. Once one knows the grammar of a language he can use the language itself. One can always learn new vocabulary. Indeed, most of us continue learning new words all of our lives. Therefore, vocabulary has been kept to a minimum. This does create some monotony in the grammatical exercises, but taking the first steps in a new language is almost bound to be somewhat monotonous anyway. You will learn all of the important pronouns, adverbs, conjunctions, and prepositions in common use.

Each teaching unit has several parts which we now describe.

PATTERN SENTENCES. The first eight units only have this feature. These "conversations" are either short idiomatic exchanges of an everyday sort or model sentences; in either case, they illustrate basic grammatical patterns and should be memorized.

WORDS TO MASTER. Here you will find all the new words to be learned for each unit, to enable you to perform the grammatical exercises. All the words used in this book are basic, everyday words. They should be thoroughly memorized.

DIALECT NOTES. These sections will introduce you to some of the different ways of pronouncing certain words. When a given word has more than one common pronunciation, we have used that which is, in our opinion, most common or most like the language of the Choctaw testament. The other pronunciations are presented in these sections.

SECTION ONE, etc. The numbered sections present the grammar to be learned. Under each section, subsections discuss the main grammatical rules, point out minor rules or complications, and provide exercises to practice what you learned.

SENTENCE PATTERNS. These sections attempt to put all together the materials you have learned in the numbered sections into idiomatic sentences, for additional drill and review of the entire unit.

BUILDING WORD POWER. These sections attempt to lighten the load of learning the vocabularies by providing additional interesting information about certain words, or by showing how some words have been formed from others.

In addition, scattered through the units are sections on Choctaw history or language history. The purpose of these sections is to help you appreciate the Choctaw language as a language with a history which bears in its present form the imprint of events in Choctaw history.

After you have completed this book, you should go on to study the summary of Choctaw grammar and basic vocabulary which will soon be produced. You should also obtain the forthcoming Choctaw reader as a means of furthering your knowledge of the language. You should use your knowledge of Choctaw at every opportunity.

A SHORT SURVEY OF GRAMMAR

Since Choctaw grammar is quite unlike English, or any other language you are likely to be familiar with, it will be helpful to prepare for the lessons which follow by looking over some of the main points.

Pronouns. The personal pronouns are *vno* 'I', *pishno* 'we', *chishno* 'you', *huchishno* 'you all'. There are no words for 'he, she it, they'. Even these pronouns are used only for emphasis.

Each personal pronoun has a number of shorter forms which are attached to other words. Sometimes they are written with a space between them and the word they attach to, for easy reading. These short forms are called echoes, and there are three sets of them:

- (1) passive: *sv, pi, chi, hvchi, i*
- (2) dative: *vm, pim, chim, hvchim, im;* and
- (3) actor: *li, il, ish, hvsh.*

Nouns. Nouns do not change form for the plural; for example, *ofi* means both 'dog' and 'dogs', depending on the context.

The passive echoes are added to some nouns to show possession; but the dative echoes are generally used for this purpose:

<i>sv nishkin</i>	my eye	<i>vm ofi</i>	my dog
<i>chi nishkin</i>	your eye	<i>pim ofi</i>	our dog
<i>nishkin</i>	eye, eyes	<i>ofi</i>	dog, dogs

Verbs. Verbs have three possible endings: *-t*, *h*, and \emptyset (nothing). The *-t* and \emptyset forms correspond usually to English infinitives or -ing forms: *Impvt mintih!* 'Come and eat!', *Impvt bininlih.* 'He is (sitting and) eating.' The *-h* forms are used as main verbs: *Impah.* 'He is eating'.

Verbs also undergo internal changes which add something to their meanings:

<i>vpa</i>	to eat
<i>úhpa</i>	to eat all of a sudden
<i>úmpa</i>	to be eating
<i>vhámpa</i>	to keep eating
<i>ápa cha</i>	to eat and . . .
<i>áiyapa</i>	to finally eat, to eat completely

Present, past and future tense are expressed by adverbs which follow the verb; note that there are three past tenses:

<i>Hakloh.</i>	He hears it.	
{ <i>Hakloh.</i>	He just heard it.	
	<i>Haklo tuk.</i>	He heard it.
	<i>Haklo tok.</i>	He heard it (long ago).
<i>Hakla chih.</i>	He will hear it.	

The actor echoes tell who performs the action:

subj	<i>Impa li tuk.</i>	I ate.
	<i>Il impa tuk.</i>	We ate.
	<i>Ish impa tuk.</i>	You ate.
	<i>Hvsh impa tuk.</i>	You all ate.
	<i>Impa tuk.</i>	He (she, it, they) ate.

The passive echoes tell who something is done to:

do.	<i>sv pisa</i>	to see me
	<i>pi pisa</i>	to see us

<i>chi pisa</i>	to see you
<i>huchi pisa</i>	to see you all
<i>pisa</i>	to see him (or her, it, or them)

The dative echo tells who something is given to: 1.0

<i>um pila</i>	to send to me
<i>chim pila</i>	to send to you
<i>im pila</i>	to send to him

The verb 'to be a, to be the' has the forms *sia* 'I am', *pia* 'we are', *chia* 'you are', *huchia* 'you all are', and *a* 'he is, she is, they are, etc.'; *a* is used only if *tuk* or *tok* follows it:

<i>Hattak siah.</i>	I am a man.
<i>Hattak.</i>	He is a man.
<i>Hattak a tuk.</i>	He was a man.

There is no verb 'to be' in the sense of to be in a place. When asked 'Where is your brother?', one says 'He is sitting there', or . . . 'standing there'. Instead of saying 'The book is on the table', one says 'The book is lying on the table'. In other words, *sit, stand, lie, set,* and the like are used for 'to be (in a place)'.

There are several ways of expressing 'to have'.

Adjectives. Adjectives in Choctaw are not used with the verb 'to be'; the adjective itself is a verb. It takes internal changes:

<i>chito</i>	to be big
<i>chinto</i>	to be largish
<i>chieto</i>	to be absolutely large

The passive echoes tell what the subject is:

Sv chitoh. I am big.
Chi chitoh. You are large.
Chitoh. He is large.

OR who or what is being described

There are no comparative and superlative forms like bigger-biggest; instead, one says 'to surpass in size' and 'to surpass all in size'.

Singular-Dual-Plural. Some verbs and adjectives have different singular and plural forms; some verbs also have a third dual form:

<i>chito</i>	for one to be big
<i>hochito</i>	for several to be big
<i>hikia</i>	for one to stand
<i>heli</i>	for two to stand
<i>hiyohli</i>	for several to stand

Postpositions. Choctaw has postpositions rather than prepositions; one says 'table on' rather than 'on the table'. The postpositions take passive echoes, largely:

<i>chukka itikba</i>	in front of the house
<i>svtikba</i>	in front of me
<i>pitikba</i>	in front of us

Conjunctions. These are quite interesting. For example, there are three ways of expressing 'or', which depend on whether you are making a statement, making a denial, or asking a question. In addition, almost every conjunction comes in two forms, one used if the subjects of the two sentences joined are the same, the other used if not.

Articles. The basic articles are *a* 'the, a', *ma* 'that', and *pa* 'this'. They have one form when part of the subject of the sentence (*vt*, *mut*, *pvt*), and another form otherwise (*a*, *ma*, *pa*). They can be modified to express emphasis or focus:

<i>Hattak mut</i> . . .	That man . . .
<i>Hattak muto</i> . . .	THAT man . . .
<i>Hattak mak osh</i> . . .	It was that man that . . .

Word Order. Choctaw noun order is often quite different from the English. For example 'those three big green sassafras trees' is:

<i>iti</i>	<i>kafi</i>	<i>okehamali</i>	<i>hohito</i>	<i>tuhchina</i>	<i>mut</i>
trees	sassafras	green	big	three	those

As difficult as this may seem, you will find that this different order will soon come naturally.

The verb comes at the end of the sentence:

S O V

<i>Hattak</i>	<i>vt</i>	<i>ofi</i>	<i>pisa</i>	<i>tuk.</i>	The man saw a dog.
man	the	dog	saw	past	

NP ⇒ N (AP) (ART)

Adverbs follow the word they modify:

<i>chito</i>	<i>fehna</i>	very big	<i>tuklo</i>	<i>makulla</i>	only two
big	very		two	only	

Conclusion. As you can see, Choctaw grammar is quite different from English. It is an advantage at the outset to know something about these differences. We tend to think that the language we learned from childhood is absolutely "natural," and that other languages must be basically just like it--only the words being different. One's first encounter with a

language like Choctaw can be quite a shock. But if you have some idea about what you are getting into, the shock will be less, and learning will be easier. That is the purpose of this short survey. And it is a good time to find out what is coming up and give it some time to "soak in."