

Another Look at Atakapa

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1. Introduction

In this paper I re-examine one text, out of a total of nine, first analyzed by John Swanton appearing in the Gatschet and Swanton (1932) Atakapa dictionary. Specifically, I examine the first text to appear in this dictionary, which he titled, *The Western Atakapa*. However, I believe that Swanton's title for this story is in error, since the story is actually referring to the *Hiyekiti* 'the sunrise people,' or Eastern Atakapas, not the Western Atakapas.

Since Swanton largely did not dissect the component parts of individual Atakapa words in his text glosses, the moderately agglutinative nature of the Atakapa language was largely disguised, making it appear almost isolating or pidginized. In fact, Atakapa is typologically similar to other eastern Native North American languages in which prefixes and suffixes are attached to a head, or root, word. My further examination of Atakapa sheds light on the component parts of Atakapa words, providing more insight to its agglutinative grammatical and typological nature.

2. Language background

Atakapa¹ (ISO 639-3: aqp) is a now dormant, moderately agglutinative, head-marking language with predominant SOV constituent order. Atakapa is an isolate, not known to be related to any other language, although it may have formerly been part of a larger language family including Bidai and Akokisa, both of which became dormant before being documented.

Atakapa was spoken by several small bands along the Gulf coast between Vermilion Bay, Louisiana and Galveston Bay, Texas, and up the Trinity River, until the early twentieth century (Mithun 1999: 344). According to Atakapa narrative (the text included here) (Gatschet and Swanton 1932: 11), the wife of the Western Atakapa chief Lo came to found a new nation of Atakapas "yonder toward the rising sun" (ibid.), those who came to speak the Eastern (Atakapa) Dialect. Western Atakapas lived around Lake Charles. Swanton estimated a population of between 1000-3500 ca. 1805 (Swanton 1946: 94).

Atakapa has object pronouns prefixed to verbs while subject pronouns are suffixed. Verbal prefixes include objective pronominal prefixes in three persons and two numbers, reflexive, and reciprocal (Mithun 1999: 345); verbal suffixes include a plural and future, continuative, two past tense forms (perfective and imperfective), subjective pronominal suffixes in three persons and two numbers and a negative. I have analyzed Atakapa as a part of the Lower Mississippi Valley (LMV²) Sprachbund (see Kaufman 2014 dissertation, forthcoming), as well as being, at least marginally, part of what I term the Rio Grande Valley (RGV) Sprachbund, extending from

¹ The name 'Atakapa' is an exonym bestowed upon them by Western Muskogean, perhaps via the Mobilian Trade Language, meaning "Maneater," apparently due to the supposed Atakapan custom of ritual cannibalism.

² Abbreviations used in this paper are as follows: 3s = 3rd subject; ASRT = assertive; DEF = definite; EMPH = emphatic; IMPF = imperfective; INST = instrumental; LMV = Lower Mississippi Valley; LOC = locative; NEG = negative; NZR = nominalizer; PERF = perfective; PL = plural; RCP = reciprocal; REDUP = reduplication; RFL = reflexive; STG = something; SUB = subordinate.

modern southwestern Louisiana to northeastern Mexico, including Karankawa and Coahuiltecan languages along the Rio Grande River.

Atakapa shares certain grammatical and lexical elements with other languages of the LMV. Atakapa and Chitimacha appear to have had intense contact owing to their geographic proximity; for example, both Atakapa and Chitimacha have a focus (used on nouns) and assertive (used on verbs) emphatic suffix *-š*.

3. Text

In my presentation of the text, I adopt a four-tiered interlinear glossing system. The first tier is as the story appears in the dictionary with Swanton's orthography. The second tier is my modification of the spelling, e.g., replacing <c> with <š>. The third tier is my gloss, and, in some cases, re-segmentation of the first tier based on my in-depth analysis of the language.

The Eastern Atakapas

1. Yukhiti	icak	waci	a	nep	nun	nultihinst	tul
Yokiti ³	išak	waši	a	nep	nun	nul-ti-hinst	tul
Indian	person	old	here	below	village	live-3s.PL-IMPF	lake
2. oci	nun	nultihinst.		Tepuk	nec	hihulat	Cecnec
oši	nun	nul-ti-hinst		tepu	neš	hi-hul-at	šeš-neš
edge	village	live-3s.PL-IMPF		peach	tree	there-plant-PERF	fig-tree
3. hihulat.		Kiwilc		ol	nec,	tepu	kutskuts
hi-hul-at		kiwilš		ol	neš	tepu	kuts-kuts
there-plant-PERF		white.man		persimmon	tree	peach	red-REDUP
4. hihulat.		Moyu[m]		kimat,	tsoots,	konan	olol
hi-hul-at		moyu[m]		kimat	tso'ots	konan	ol-ol
there-plant-PERF		pumpkin		bean	corn	potato	sweet-REDUP
5. Yains(o).	Lans	al,	cako,	kanan,	nohamc	ayip,	ndi
ya-ins-(o)	lans	al	šako	kanan	nohamš	ay-ip	ndi
eat-IMPF-?	deer	meat	bear	turtle	chicken	swamp-LOC	catfish
6. pit,	ian,	yao	laklak,	coknok	nokteu	melmel,	
pit	ian	yau	lak-lak	šok-nok	nok-teu	mel-mel	
perch	bowfin	bass	hard-REDUP	STG-wing	wing-tail	black-REDUP	

³ The term Yokiti or Yukiti (/o/ and /u/ are often used interchangeably) may be from Atakapa *yok* 'sing' + *kiti*, possibly meaning 'people' (*-kiti* is a pluralizing pronominal suffix [Gatschet and Swanton 1932: 67], which may be related to this *kiti* form), perhaps being *Yokkiti*, meaning 'People Who Sing.' (Gatschet and Swanton [1932] often represent the lengthening of the /k/ phoneme by <kh> in Swanton's transliteration, which seems to support this translation.)

7. enkewict, enkewišt pheasant	anhipon, an-hipon ear-fold	akip ak-ip water-LOC	tsok, tsok squirrel	patsal patsal kantak?	copc, šopš ?	†akičt, †akišt ?		
8. konen konen potato	ayip, ay-ip swamp-LOC	kathopc, kathopš lily	nauohox, nauohox chinkapin	ggui, kui(?) prickly pear	ol, ol persimmon	alin alin grape		
9. hicom, hišom small	alin alin grape	hickam, hiškam large	hilanwol hilan-wol med.plant-fruit	tei, tei vine	kulcwalc kulšwalš peanut			
10. yains. ya-ins eat-IMPF	Yukhiti yokiti Indian	mon mon all	cokiti šok-iti STG-go.before	cakkeat šak-ke-at PL-have-PERF	cokoi šok-koi STG-speak			
11. tanuk tanuk one	mon mon all	cokiyai šok-iyai STG-rise.up	otsi otsi above	taneuts. taneuts other	[Lo Lo Lo	cokoiyit šok-koi-(y)it STG-speak-PERF		
12. hal hal last	yukhits(?) yokits Indian	cakicakip šak-išak-ip PL-person-LOC	ut. ut toward	Lo Lo Lo	hilai hilai wife	yokhiti yokiti Indian		
13. wineulat wine-ul-at find-3s.PL-PERF	Hiyekiti hiye-kiti sunrise-people	cakyonhulet. šak-yo(ŋ)-hul-it PL-call-3s.PL-PERF		Kaukau kaukau sun	hiyekiti hiye-kiti sunrise-people			
14. hiyan hi-yan there	nun nun village	nultehinst]. nul-ti-hinst live-3s.PL-IMPF	Tawatwenat ta-wat-wen-at stand-come-talk-PERF	Utsutat utsutat God	ut. ut to	Cukakulet šok-ak-ul-it STG-dance-3s.PL-PERF		
15. Utsutat utsutat God	ut. ut to	Cec tsiš baby	pum pum dance	wacaci waš-aš-i old.very	pum pum dance	pumulat. pum-ul-at dance-3s.PL-PERF	Icak išak man	hilai hilai wife
16. tanuk tanuk one	keat, ke-at have-PERF	icak išak man	hilai hilai wife	tsik tsik two	keen ke-en have-SUB	hatse'ec. hatseeš bad	Palnal Palnal Palnal	
17. hilai hilai wife	waci waši old	pamnimat. pam-nima-(a)t beat-kill-PERF	Hilai hilai wife	taxnik taxn-ik other-INST	pamat, pam-at beat-PERF	Palnal Palnal Palnal		
18. hilai, hilai wife	waci waši old	kic kiš woman	pamnimat; pam-nima-(a)t beat-kill-PERF	yil yil day	lat lat three	himatol himatol four	u u or	

19. tatixi n ta-at ha icat pamlike mon. Kaukau am n an ike
 ta-tixi n ta-at ha išat pam-lik-š mon kaukau am n an ike
 stand-lie and stand-PERF his head beat-mash-ASRT all water drink and ear rise
20. n tahe n tat.
 n tahe n ta-at
 and come.out and stand-PERF
21. Hakit hukicak hokyalulha uxts hiantset wet
 hakit hok-išak hok-yal-ul-ha uxts hišntset wet
 3P RCP-person RCP-marry-3s.PL-NEG be.able brother sister
22. a hinak kicet okyalul inak.
 a hinak kišet (h)ok-yal-ul inak
 this like sister RCP-marry-3s.PL like
23. Wociņa hinaket. Kec n cakyol tec maņ cakmaņmaņet,
 wošinga (h)inak-it keš n šak-yol teš maņ šak-maņ-maņ-it
 naked like-PERF woman and person-evil hair long PL-long-REDUP-PERF
24. cakyol katnau cakaxc Hatyulco nohik cak(h)atkopcen
 šak-yol katnau šak-ha-ha-š hat-yul-šo noh-ik šak-(h)at-kopš-en
 person-evil beard PL-have-NEG-ASRT REFL-paint-REFL red.paint-INST PL-REFL-white-SUB
25. hatmelco; hakit icak kau hatmelco pumul nau
 hat-mel-šo hakit išak kau hat-mel-šo pum-ul nau
 REFL-black-REFL their person dead REFL-black-REFL dance-3s.PL feather
26. hakit icatip hatnainst hatidsom, hakit ciņcnani
 hakit išat-ip hat-na(u)-inst hat-itson hakit šiņ-š-na-ni
 3 head-LOC REFL -put-IMPF REFL-little 3 rattle-DEF-make-NZR?
27. tikpum nekin hakit naxcnan.
 tik-pum ne-kin hakit nak-š-na-n(i)
 place-dance land-LOC 3 sound-DEF-make-NZR?

The following version of the bracketed section was given by Delilah Moss:

28. Lo yukiti hal coxkoyit yukhit cacicak ut. Lo
 Lo yokiti hal šok-koi-(y)it yokit(i) šak-išak ut Lo
 Lo Indian last STG-speak-PERF Indian PL-person toward Lo
29. hilai yukhiti wineulat. Ha cacicak Hiyekiti
 hilai yokiti wine-ul-at 3 šak-išak Hiye-kiti
 wife Indian find-3s.PL-PERF 3 PL-person sunrise-people

30. cakyonçulat.	Kaukau	kac-kin	wineulat.	Hiyekiti
šak-yoŋ-š-ul-at	kaukau	kaš-kin	wine-ul-at	hiye-kiti
PL-call-ASRT-3s.PL-PERF	water	high.water-LOC	find-3s.PL-PERF	sunrise-people
31. cakyonçulat,	nunkin	tohulat	kakau iyetsne	ut
šak-yoŋ-š-ul-at	nun-kin	to-hul-at	kakau iye-(i)ts-ne	ut
PL-call-ASRT-3s.PL-PERF	village-LOC	sit-3s.PL-PERF	sun rise-up-EMPH	toward

4. Translation

The old Atakapa people lived in villages below this place, on the borders of the lakes. They planted peach trees. They planted fig trees. They planted apple trees and plum trees. They planted pumpkins, berries, corn, and sweet potatoes. They ate of them. They ate deer meat, bear (meat), turtles, turkeys, catfish, perch, the choupique, gaspergou, ducks, geese, pheasants, rabbits, water turkeys, squirrels, muscadines, kantak (China briar), marsh potatoes, water chinkapins, chinkapins, cactus pears, persimmons, small grapes, big grape, the soko, and peanuts. The Indians [Atakapas] had many chiefs, one being head of all the rest. [Lo was the last head chief. The wife of Lo was a foundling. Her nation was called Easterners (Eastern Atakapa). They lived in villages over yonder toward the rising sun. The [Atakapa] prayed standing to One-Above. They danced the sacred dance to One-Above. They also danced the young people's dance and the old people's dance. A man had but one wife, and when a man had two it was a bad thing. Palnal's older wife beat him to death. His other wife [he had three] beat him. When Palnal's older wife beat him to death his body lay on the ground three or four days with the head mashed in. The water he had drunk ran out of his ears. Relatives were not allowed to marry, since it was as if brothers married sisters and sisters married brothers. They went almost naked. Women and children wore their hair long; the men did not wear beards. They danced painted with red and white paint and, when relatives had died, with black paint and with feathers on their heads, sounding a rattle at the dancing place.

Delilah Moss's version of the bracketed portion:

[Lo was the last chief of the Indians. Lo's wife was a foundling. Her relatives were Easterners (Eastern Atakapa). They found her during a high tide. They called them Easterners (or Sunrise People) because they lived in villages toward the sunrise.]

5. Text analysis

Line 1: Swanton rather vaguely mentions that the suffix *-ne* (with supposed variants *-na* and *-n*) is a "volitional and sometimes apparently instrumental" (1932: 22) (this is in addition to the *-n* [*-in*] "subordinating suffix" (ibid.)). However, primarily based on context, I have reanalyzed the suffix *-(h)ins(t)* in *nul-ti-(h)ins(t)* as an imperfective (IMPF) past tense in opposition to the perfective (PERF) past tense suffix *-at* or *-it*. (See also Line 5 note below.)

Line 2: I have glossed the prefix *hi-* as 'there' in place of Swanton's 'indefinite (INDF).' The Atakapa word *hiyan* 'there' supports this gloss, plus the fact that Chitimacha (a neighboring language with which Atakapa was in close contact) also has *hi* for 'there.'

Line 3: We can see that reduplication was a productive process in Atakapa, e.g., *kuts-kuts* 'red.'

- Line 5: Swanton lists the suffix *-n* as “volitional and sometimes apparently instrumental” (1932: 22). This seems of little help, however, in the use of this apparent *-(h)ins(t)* suffix, which, based primarily on context, I have chosen to gloss as an imperfective (IMPF) past tense in opposition to *-at* and *-it* as perfective (PERF) past tense suffixes. *-ins* seems to be a variant of *-(h)ins(t)*. I am unclear, however, as apparently was Swanton, what the *-o* suffix may indicate. An /h/ ~ /Ø/ alternation is a key feature of the LMV Sprachbund (see Kaufman 2014, forthcoming), which is apparent with this suffix.
- Line 7: Here we see one of two Atakapa words for ‘water,’ *ak* (Eastern Dialect) and *kakau* or *kaukau*, and Akokisa *kakō* (1932: 56), both of which appear in this text, the latter as *kaukau* (lines 19 and 30). In line 31, *kaukau* also appears as the word for ‘sun.’ There appears to be more than a little confusion between these terms. (Also see Line 13 note). “The eastern dialect of Atakapa uses [ak] for water, and the form survives in western Atakapa in related and derived uses” (Troike 1964: 97).
- Line 10: This line displays two examples of the valence-reducing prefix *šok-* (which I gloss as STG ‘something’), from the word *šok* ‘thing, something, someone.’ Both are forms of the word for ‘chief’: *šok-iti* ‘someone (who) goes (walks?) before’ and *šok-koi* ‘someone (who) speaks.’ Other compound nouns bearing this prefix in this text are: *šok-nok* lit. thing-wing ‘bird,’ *šok-iyai* lit. thing-rise.up ‘chief,’ *šok-ak* lit. thing-dance ‘dancer.’
- Line 13: As noted in Line 7, there is some confusion in Swanton’s (1932) dictionary about the words for ‘water’ and ‘sun’: in the present text *kaukau* is given as ‘sun’ in lines 13 and 31 and as ‘water’ in 19. In his dictionary, however, ‘sun’ is *ka'kha-u* (1932: 178) and ‘water’ is *kakau'* (1932: 180), indicating an apparent difference in the phonetic quality of the middle *k* (aspirated?) and possibly a difference in stress (first syllable stress in the former and final syllable stress in the latter).
- Line 17: Here we see an example of one of several serial verb combinations used: *pam-nima* ‘beat-die.’ Such verb serialization was also a productive process in Atakapa, with the following example also demonstrated in this text: *ta-wat-wen* lit. stand-come-talk ‘pray’ (line 14).
- Line 19: The positional *ta-tixi* ‘stand-lie’ seems odd, but it parallels a similar positional construction in Tunica (see Kaufman dissertation, forthcoming), indicating likely contact between Atakapa and Tunica, both of which were spoken in the LMV.
- Line 23: The prefix *šak-*, apparently from the word *išak* ‘person,’ is often used as an indefinite plural form prefixed to nouns. This is similar to the use of *oklah* ‘person/people’ as a plural marker in Choctaw (Broadwell 2006: 41) and is likely a result of LMV language contact.
- Line 24: The compound noun *šak-yol*, lit. person-evil, is a metaphor for ‘child’ or ‘children,’ used in addition to the word *nomš*. The reflexive form in Atakapa was apparently a circumfix: prefix *hat-* and suffix *-šo*, as the word *hat-yul-šo* ‘paint themselves’ demonstrates.
- Lines 26 and 27: Here are two examples of musical instrument names *šijšnani* and *nakšnan(i)*. These were glossed and translated by Swanton as merely “calabash rattle” for the former and “sounded” for the latter (1932: 10), although Swanton also translates *nakšnen* as “a musical instrument like a xylophone, from 2 to 3 feet long, used in accompanying dances; the violin was afterwards so called, and all other stringed instruments” (1932: 84). I have reanalyzed these, parsing them into what I believe are their component parts, i.e., *-š* DEF, *-na* ‘make,’ and *-n(i)*, a possible nominalizer or, as Swanton referred to it, “sometimes apparently instrumental” (1932: 22).

6. Conclusion

I must echo Haas, in referring to Swanton's earlier Biloxi and Ofo dictionary (1912), with a one word change, that "[i]t is not easy to make adequate use of the materials at our disposal on [Atakapa]" (1969: 290). A re-examination of this first text in Swanton's (1932) dictionary reveals that much work needs to be done on the language. This is a task made difficult by the simple fact that the language is now, and has been for many decades, dormant with no surviving native speakers. Making the task even more difficult is the fact that the language had no surviving relatives that were documented with which data could be compared. Needless to say, this makes solving certain problems, such as those related to phonetics, phonology, and stress, all but impossible to solve.

I have brought a fresh analysis to this text and the Atakapa language by shedding light on certain facts about the language that may have formerly been hidden by a lack of detailed glosses and etymological description. Ideally, all of the texts in the Gatschet and Swanton (1932) dictionary should be re-examined as with the one here. Also ideally, the dictionary should be revised and updated with a more thorough analysis of etymology and grammar, not only for the sake of Atakapa descendants who would like to learn the language of their ancestors, but also for the benefit of linguists and other scholars who would find the intricacies of Atakapa etymology and grammar interesting and helpful in future comparative and historical studies.

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