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POSSESSOR ASCENSION IN CHOCTAW*

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0. Introduction

There is a possessive construction in Choctaw in which a dative affix in the verbal complex is interpreted as referencing the possessor of some nominal in the clause. Therefore, (1b) can have the same meaning as (1a).¹

- (1) a. Am-ofi-t m̄ko ȳ-takkon apa-tok.
 1Poss-dog-Nom chief 3Poss-apple eat-Pst
 'My dog ate the chief's apple.'
 b. Am-ofi-t m̄ko takkon im-apa-tok.²
 1Poss-dog-Nom chief apple 3Dat-eat-Pst
 'My dog ate the chief's apple.'

In (1a) possession is marked on the direct object, m̄ko ȳtakkon 'chief's apple', by means of the possessive affix underscored in the example. In (1b) this affix does not occur, but in its place a dative agreement marker appears preverbally.

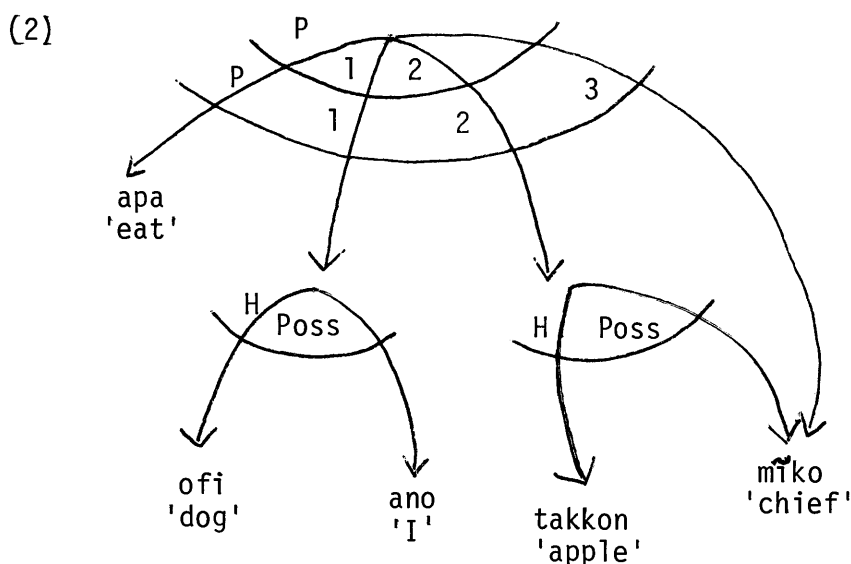
In his discussion of Choctaw possessives, Nicklas (1975) claims that a dative prefix which 'echoes' the possessor has simply been bound to the predicate. However, the present paper argues that in (1b) the possessor, m̄ko 'chief', has been raised from its role in the possessive construction to bear the indirect object relation in the clause. This construction, Possessor

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Ascension (PA) to 3, has been proposed for Georgian (Harris, 1976) and Tzotzil (Aissen, to appear).

The analysis is carried out within the framework of Relational Grammar as described by Perlmutter and Postal (1977, to appear). Within the framework of Relational Grammar, the grammatical relations (GRs) subject, direct object, and indirect object are taken as primitives of linguistic theory and are referred to as 1, 2, and 3, respectively.³ Clause structure is represented by a set of arcs with a common clause node as tail and a linguistic element, or nominal, as head. Each arc is assigned an R-sign, the name of the GR the head bears to the clause, and a coordinate to denote the linguistic level, or stratum, at which it bears the relation.

Under the PA analysis, the clause in (1b) has the structure represented by the Relational Network abbreviated by the stratal diagram in (2).⁴



The diagram in (2) reflects three important facets of the PA construction: i) miko 'chief' bears the Possessor relation in the Possessor-Head construction, ii) miko 'chief' bears no relation to the clause in the initial stratum, and iii) miko 'chief' is the Possessor of takkon 'apple' and that it is an indirect object in the clause. Clauses such as (1b) are henceforth referred to as PA clauses.

1. Possession in Choctaw

Possession can be indicated in a variety of ways in Choctaw, but most commonly a possessive marker is prefixed to the possessed nominal. When the Possessor appears as a free-standing nominal,

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e.g., miko 'chief' in (1), it precedes the possessed nominal; pronominal Possessors are generally marked by the possessive prefix alone, as am 'my' in (1).⁵

There are two sets of possessive affixes. One set of affixes, which is the same as the set of dative agreement affixes, is used to mark alienable possession. These are the variety used in (1). The other set of affixes, which has the same form as the set of accusative agreement affixes, is used to mark inalienable possession. Most body parts and many of the kin terms require possessive affixes from the inalienable set, as in (3) and (4).

(3) Hattak-ma-t sa-shki hopi-tok.
man-Dt-Nom T_{Poss}-mother bury-Pst
'That man buried my mother.'

(4) Sa-foni-at hottopa.
T_{Poss}-bone-Nom ache
'My bones ache.'

2. The Possessor as an indirect object

In this section evidence is presented that the Possessor in PA clauses behaves in the same manner as indirect objects in Choctaw.

2.1 Dative agreement. The first argument that the raised Possessor heads a 3-arc is the fact that it determines dative agreement in the verbal complex. In Choctaw the nominals of a clause which bear term relations, i.e., 1, 2, or 3, determine nominative, accusative, or dative agreement. A nominal heading a 3-arc determines dative agreement.⁶ In the clauses in (5) and (6), the indirect object determines dative agreement.

(5) Hattak-at taso taththapi am-atobbi-tok.
man-Nom dollar five T_{Dat}-pay-Pst
'The man paid me five dollars.'

(6) Na chōpa holisso ĩ-hopi:la-li-tok.
shopper paper 3_{Dat}-distribute-1_{Nom}-Pst
'I distributed the papers to the shoppers.'

In (5) ano 'I' determines dative agreement, am '1_{Dat}', in the verbal complex. In (6) the dative agreement, ĩ '3_{Dat}', is determined by na chōpa 'shoppers'.

In PA clauses the Possessor determines dative agreement on the predicate. In (1b) miko 'chief' determines the dative agreement im '3_{Dat}'. In (7b) dative agreement, ã '1_{Dat}', is determined by the Possessor, ano 'I'.

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- (7) a. Ofi-t sa-bbak kopo:li-tok.
 dog-Nom 1Poss-hand bite-Pst
 'The dog bit my hand.'
 b. Ofi-t iɓbak ʔ-kopo:li-tok.
 dog-Nom hand 1Dat-bite-Pst
 'The dog bit my hand.'

The fact that the raised Possessor determines dative agreement argues for its indirect objecthood.

2.2 Placement of agreement. Further evidence that the Possessor heads a 3-arc is the fact that the agreement it determines occurs in the same position as that determined by indirect objects: it follows nominative agreement.

In (8), the dative agreement determined by alla 'child' follows the nominative agreement determined by the subject, ish '2Nom'.

- (8) Alla towa ish-^ʔi-pila-tok.
 child ball 2Nom-3Dat-throw-Pst
 'You threw the ball to the child.'

In (9b), the PA clause, the agreement of the Possessor follows the nominative agreement.

- (9) a. Am-ofi ish-hottopali-tok.
 1Poss-dog 2Nom-hurt-Pst
 'You hurt my dog.'
 b. Ofi is-sa^ʔ-hottopali-tok.
 dog 2Nom-1Dat-hurt-Pst
 'You hurt my dog.'

The placement of the agreement in the PA clause provides evidence that the Possessor heads a 3-arc.

It should be noted that if the agreement determined by the Possessor precedes nominative agreement, the clause is ungrammatical (10).

- (10)*Ofi am-ish-hottopali-tok.

2.3 Reflexivization. A third argument for indirect objecthood comes from reflexives. In Choctaw, reflexives are marked by the affix ili or by ilim/il^ʔ when the reflexive is an indirect object. The antecedent must be a subject at some level of structure.

- (11) Hattak-at alla-yā il^ʔ-kāchitok.⁷
 man-Nom child-Dt=Obj Refl=Dat-sell-Pst
 'The man_i sold the child to himself_i.'

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In (11) the reflexive appears in its dative form and marks a nominal which heads a 3-arc.

The raised Possessor may appear as a dative reflexive (12b).

- (12) a. Am-alla ti:k-at ʔ-takkon apa-tok.
 1Poss-daughter-Nom 3Poss-apple eat-Pst
 'My daughter_i ate her_{i/j} apple.'
 b. Am-alla ti:k-at takkon ilim-apa-tok.
 1Poss-daughter-Nom apple Refl=Dat-eat-Pst
 'My daughter ate her own apple.'

The clause in (12a), which is not an example of PA, is ambiguous: the Possessor of the apple may either be the subject of the clause, *amalla ti:k* 'my daughter', or another party. In the PA clause in (12b), however, it is clear that the subject of the clause is also the Possessor of the apple since only subjects can be antecedents of this form of reflexive. Therefore, raised Possessors can appear as reflexives in the same manner as indirect objects.

Unraised Possessors cannot be so reflexivized. In (13a), the dative reflexive affix, *ilʔ*, is used as a possessive affix (in analogy with the identity of some possessive and dative affixes), and the result is ungrammatical. In order to show the subject is definitely the Possessor, the construction in (13b) must be used.⁸

- (13) a. *Am-alla ti:k-at ilʔ-takkon apa-tok.
 1Poss-daughter-Nom Refl=Poss-apple eat-Pst
 ('My daughter ate her own apple.')
- b. Am-alla ti:k-at ʔ-takkon akʔnli apa-tok.
 1Poss-daughter-Nom 3Poss-apple self eat-Pst
 'My daughter ate her own apple.'

2.4 Case marking. Choctaw distinguishes two cases for free-standing nominals in a clause. Subjects take nominative case marking, the suffix *-(a)t*. Non-subjects can be optionally marked for objective case, which occurs as nasalization of the final vowel of the determiner or as the suffix *-ã*.⁹ Both cases are illustrated in (14).

- (14) Ohoyo-ma-t mʔko-yã iskali im-a:-tok.
 woman-Dt-Nom chief-Dt=Obj money 3Dat-give-Pst
 'The woman gave the money to the chief.'

In (14), the subject, *ohoyoma* 'the woman', is marked for nominative case and the indirect object, *mʔko* 'chief', is marked for objective case. Therefore, indirect objects can take objective case marking.

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In a PA clause, the raised Possessor can take objective case marking.

- (15) a. Ohoyo-ma im-alla-t hitha-tok.
 woman-Dt 3Poss-child-Nom dance-Pst
 'The woman's child danced.'
- b. *Ohoyo-mā im-alla-t hitha-tok.
 woman-Dt=Obj 3Poss-child-Nom dance-Pst
- c. Ohoyo-mā alla-t ʔ-hitha-tok.
 woman-Dt=Obj child-Nom 3Dat-dance-Pst
 'The woman's child danced.'

In (15a), the non-PA clause, the Possessor, *ohoyoma* 'the woman', is unmarked for case. As (15b) shows, if the Possessor in the non-PA clause is marked for objective case, the clause is ungrammatical.¹⁰ However, in the PA clause (15c), the raised Possessor can take objective case marking. Therefore, the Possessor can take the same case marking as an indirect object. These facts provide another argument for the indirect objecthood of the Possessor in PA clauses.

3. Arguments against a Possessive Affix Float analysis

In this section two arguments are given against an alternative to PA, referred to here as Possessive Affix Float (PAF).¹¹ Under the PAF analysis, the PA clauses are analyzed as having floated the possessive affix from prenominal to preverbal position.

3.1 Placement of the affix. In section 2.2 it is shown that in the PA clauses the affix in the verbal complex which references the Possessor must follow a nominative agreement affix. When the affix referencing the Possessor precedes nominative agreement, the clause is ungrammatical (10). It should be remembered that this is precisely the position dative agreement affixes occupy (8). A grammar incorporating PAF treats these facts differently from a grammar making use of the PA structure.

A grammar including the PAF analysis must include two statements, one specifying that floated possessive affixes follow nominative agreement in the verbal complex and another specifying that dative agreement must follow nominative agreement in the verbal complex. Such a grammar treats as accidental the fact that floated possessive affixes and dative agreement affixes occur in the same position; it offers no explanation.

On the other hand, a grammar incorporating PA need make only a single statement: dative agreement follows nominative agreement in the verbal complex. Since indirect objects determine dative agreement and since under the PA analysis the Possessor bears the indirect object relation, the affix in the verbal complex which

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references the Possessor is a dative agreement affix. Therefore, there is no need to make a special statement for the position of the affix referencing the Possessor; the analysis offers an explanation as to why the two types of affixes occur in the same position.

3.2 Inalienable possession. Another argument against the PAF comes from PA clauses in which the possessed nominal takes a possessive affix from the inalienable series. As pointed out in section 1, most body parts and many kin terms take an inalienable possessive prefix. In (16a) *sa* marks first person singular possession. If *iiyi* 'leg' were marked by the alienable possessive prefix, *am*, this would not refer to the leg that is attached to my body but to one that I own by some other means. Since the possessive affix is merely floated to preverbal position, the PAF analysis predicts that inalienable possessive prefixes should be able to appear in the verbal complex. However, as (16b) shows, if the inalienable prefix appears preverbally, the clause is ungrammatical.

- (16) a. *Sa-yyi-t kobafa-tok.*
 1Poss-leg-Nom break-Pst
 'My leg broke.'
 b. **Iyyi-t sa-kobafa-tok.*¹²
 c. *Iyyi-t a-kobafa-tok.*
 leg-Nom T_{Dat}-break-Pst
 'My leg broke.'

As (16c) shows, when the Possessor is referenced on the predicate, it occurs as dative agreement.

For these reasons, the PAF analysis must be abandoned in favor of the PA analysis. Data presented in the following section provide further arguments for this conclusion.

4. Arguments for the PA analysis

The arguments against the PAF analysis in section 3 provide evidence that these clauses are consistent with a PA analysis. In this section additional arguments are given for the ascension of the Possessor in the PA clauses.

4.1 Lack of possessive marking. Evident in the data examined thus far is the absence of possessive marking on the possessed nominal in PA clauses. This lack of marking provides evidence that the Possessor has ascended out of the Possessor-Head construction.

This can be seen by looking at data such as that in (17). If the possessive affix remains on the possessed nominal and a dative marker occurs in the verbal complex (17c), the meaning of the clause is different from a straight PA clause (17b).

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- (17) a. Am-ofi ish-ʔhollo.
 1Poss-dog 2Nom-love
 'You love my dog.'
 b. Ofi is-sam-ʔhollo.
 dog 2Nom-1Dat-love
 'You love my dog.'
 c. Am-ofi is-sam-ʔhollo.
 1Poss-dog 2Nom-1Dat-love
 'You love my dog for me.'

In (17c), the first person singular agreement, sam, marks a benefactive meaning (cf. footnote 2). (17c) cannot simply mean 'You love my dog'.

4.2 Constituency of the Possessor. In non-PA clauses, the Possessor and Head are both constituents of a nominal node. The Possessor may not move out of this construction; it must appear in the position preceding the Head. In (18b), the Possessor miko 'chief' occurs prior to the subject, amofi 'my dog', and the Head, takkon 'apple', follows the subject. This clause is ungrammatical. In (18c), the Possessor follows the possessed nominal; this clause is also ungrammatical.

- (18) a. Am-ofi-t miko ʔ-takkon apa-tok.
 1Poss-dog-Nom chief 3Poss-apple eat-Pst
 'My dog ate the chief's apple.'
 b. *Miko am-ofi-t ʔ-takkon apa-tok.
 c. *Am-ofi-t ʔ-takkon miko apa-tok.

The situation is different in PA clauses. Although the Possessor often retains its position preceding the possessed nominal, as in (19a), it can appear in clause-initial position (19b), or it may occur following the possessed nominal (19c).

- (19) a. Am-ofi-t miko takkon im-apa-tok.
 1Poss-dog-Nom chief apple 3Dat-eat-Pst
 'My dog ate the chief's apple.'
 b. Miko am-ofi-t takkon im-apa-tok.
 c. Am-ofi-t takkon miko im-apa-tok.

The fact that the Possessor may appear in positions other than directly preceding the possessed nominal provides an argument that the two are no longer constituents of a single nominal node. This provides an argument that the Possessor has ascended out of this construction.

4.3 Co-occurrence with an initial indirect object. The PA structure in (2) asserts that the Possessor ascends to head a 3-arc, i.e., it bears no grammatical relation to the clause in the initial stratum.

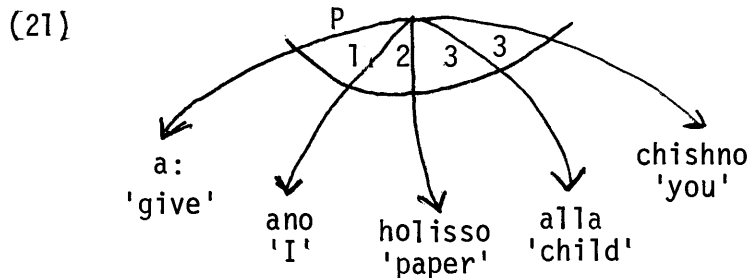
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PA clauses which contain an initial indirect object provide an argument that the Possessor in PA clauses does not head an initial 3-arc.

- (20) a. Alla *chĩ-holisso im-a:-li-tok.*
 child 2Poss-paper 3Dat-give-1Nom-Pst
 'I gave your papers to the child.'
 b. Alla *holisso chim-im-a:-li-tok.*
 child paper 2Dat-3Dat-give-1Nom-Pst
 'I gave your papers to the child.'

(20a) contains an initial indirect object, *alla* 'child'. In (20b), the Possessor has ascended to head a 3-arc, accounting for the additional dative marking, *chim* '2Dat'.

If the Possessor in (20b) were to head a 3-arc in the initial stratum, the structure would be that in (21).



The structure in (21) is a violation of the Stratal Uniqueness Law, proposed by Perlmutter and Postal (1977, to appear), stated informally in (22).

- (22) Stratal Uniqueness Law
 No basic clause may contain more than one arc with a given term R-sign in a given stratum.

(21) violates the Stratal Uniqueness Law by virtue of having two 3-arcs in the initial stratum. Unless one is willing to abandon the Stratal Uniqueness Law, (21) cannot be the structure for (20b).

One might wish to argue that Possessors in PA clauses actually bear the Benefactive relation in the initial stratum of structure and advance to head a 3-arc in a later stratum. The rationale behind this approach would be that (20b) can also mean 'I gave the papers to the child for you'. However, there are PA clauses in which the possibility of a benefactive reading is consistently rejected by native speakers.

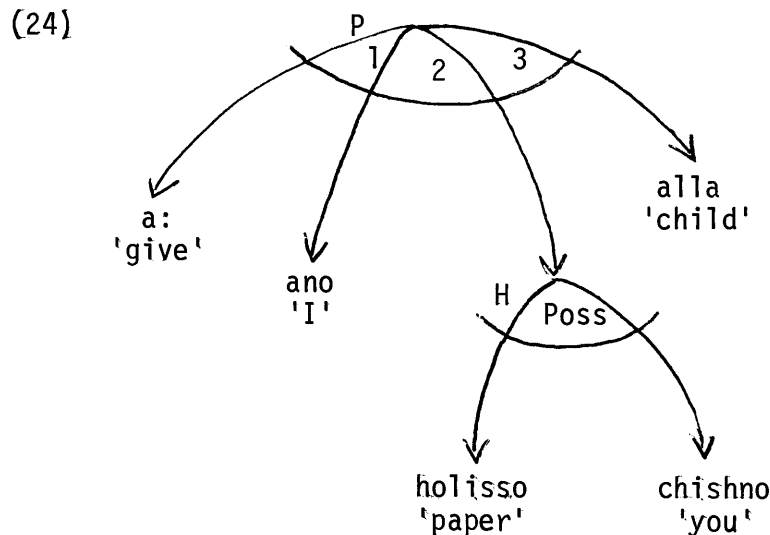
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- (23) a. Chīm-alla-t cha:ha.
 2Poss-child-Nom tall
 'Your child is tall.'
 b. Alla-t chī-cha:ha.
 child-Nom 2Dat-tall
 'Your child is tall.'
 *'The child is tall for you.'

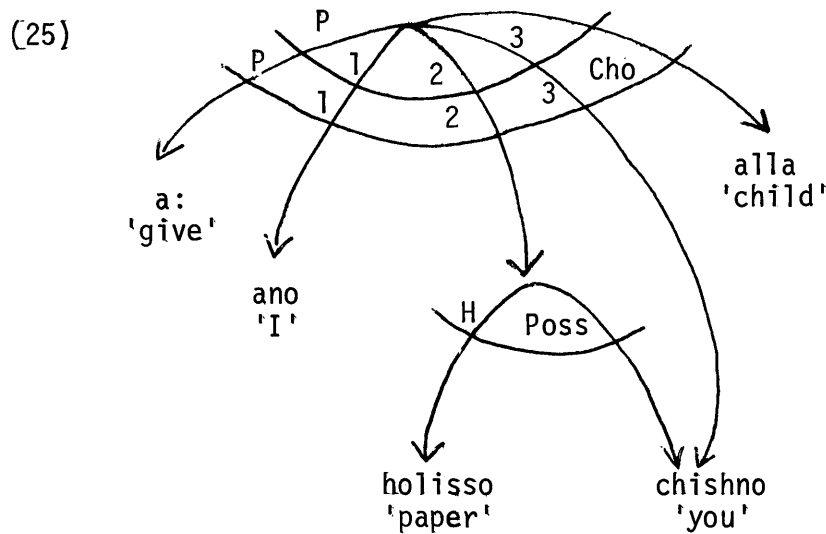
(23b) cannot be given a benefactive reading. Therefore, there is no reason to suspect that Possessors in PA clauses ever bear the Benefactive relation in the clause structure.

The fact that the Possessor is not an initial indirect object or Benefactive does not, however, preclude the possibility that it bears some other GR in the initial stratum of PA clauses.¹³ Whatever GR the Possessor might bear in the initial stratum, under an analysis which does not include PA, it will be necessary to account for the fact that this nominal carries the semantics of possession and it will be necessary to determine which nominal designates what is possessed.

Whatever the character the mechanism might take, it is unnecessary under the PA analysis. Under the PA analysis, (20a) has the structure in (24) and (20b) the structure in (25).



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(24) and (25) directly reflect the fact that (20a) and (20b) can have the same meaning since the initial strata of the two structures are identical. The fact that chishno 'you' is the Possessor of holisso 'paper' in (20b) is also easily captured since the two occur in a Possessor-Head construction. Under the PA analysis of (20b) the question of what GR chishno 'you' might bear need never be broached.

Therefore, the PA analysis of certain Choctaw clauses avoids problems that confront an analysis which does not make use of this structure.

4.4 Additional evidence against initial indirect objecthood.¹⁴ In section 4.3, the argument against the initial indirect objecthood of the Possessor in PA clauses is based on a desire to maintain the Stratal Uniqueness Law. If this is abandoned as a universal law of grammar, the possibility remains open that the Possessor does indeed head an initial-stratum 3-arc. However, there exist data from reciprocals which provide empirical evidence against the initial indirect objecthood of the Possessor in PA clauses.

Reciprocals in Choctaw are marked by the morpheme itti. When the reciprocal occurs as an indirect object, the dative form, ittim/ittĩ, is used, as in (26) and (27).

(26) Hattak-at chokka ittĩ-kāchi-tok.
 man-Nom house Recip=Dat-sell-Pst
 'The men sold houses to each other.'

(27) Ohoyo toklo-ma-t iskali ittim-a:-tok.
 woman two-Dt-Nom money Recip=Dat-give-Pst
 'The two women gave money to each other.'

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(26) and (27) provide evidence that reciprocals can occur in place of initial indirect objects.

An analysis of PA clauses in which the Possessor bears the indirect object relation in the initial stratum of the clause predicts that Possessors in PA clauses should be able to occur as reciprocals. However, this prediction proves false. In (28), the reciprocal morpheme cannot be interpreted as pertaining to the possession of the houses. Instead, the reciprocal morpheme has a benefactive meaning.

- (28) Hattak-at mĩko-yã chokka ittim-ĩ-kãchi-tok.
 man-Nom chief-Dt=Obj house Recip=Dat-3Dat-sell-Pst
 *'The men sold each other's houses to the chief.'
 'The men sold the houses to the chief for each other.'

As can be seen in (29), under regular possession conditions, PA is possible in this clause (29b).

- (29) a. Hattak-at mĩko-yã ã-chokka ĩ-kãchi-tok.
 man-Nom chief-Dt=Obj 1Poss-house 3Dat-sell-Pst
 'The man sold my house to the chief.'
 b. Hattak-at mĩko-yã chokka am-ĩ-kãchi-tok.
 man-Nom chief-Dt=Obj house 1Dat-3Dat-sell-Pst
 'The man sold my house to the chief.'

Likewise, although PA is possible in clauses in which a: 'give' is the predicate (20b), the Possessor in PA clauses cannot appear as a reciprocal (30).

- (30) Ohoyo toklo-ma-t hattak-yã iskali ittim-im-a:-tok.
 woman two-Dt-Nom man-Dt=Obj money Recip=Dat-3Dat-give-
 Pst
 *'The two women gave each other's money to the man.'
 'The two women gave money to the man for each other.'

Since reciprocals can occur in place of initial indirect objects, (26) and (27), but they cannot occur in PA clauses as referencing the Possessor, (28) and (30), these data provide an argument that the Possessor in PA clauses does not bear the indirect object relation in the initial stratum of these clauses.

5. The formulation of PA in Choctaw

In his observations on Choctaw possessive constructions, Nicklas (1975) states that the construction identified here as PA is restricted from occurring with certain kinship terms (generally those marked with the inalienable possessive prefix). However, the PA construction is more tightly constrained than this.

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For instance, a Possessor may not ascend from a host which is the subject of a transitive clause.

- (31) a. Am-ofi-t chokfi athpoa thioli-tok.
 1Poss-dog-Nom sheep chase-Pst
 'My dog chased the sheep.'
 b. Ofi-t ʔ-chokfi athpoa thioli-tok.
 dog-Nom 1Poss-sheep chase-Pst
 'The dog chased my sheep.'
 c. Ofi-t chokfi athpoa ʔ-thioli-tok.
 dog-Nom sheep 1Dat-chase-Pst
 'The dog chased my sheep.'
 *'My dog chased the sheep.'

The PA clause in (31c) cannot be interpreted such that the subject of the clause, ofi 'dog', is the possessed nominal; this meaning must be conveyed as in (31a). Rather, in (31c), the direct object chokfi athpoa 'sheep', is interpreted as the possessed nominal.

Likewise, Possessors cannot ascend from hosts which are indirect objects. In (20b), repeated below, the possessed nominal cannot be the indirect object, alla 'child'; possession must be interpreted as pertaining to holisso 'paper', the direct object.

- (20) b. Alla holisso chim-im-a:-li-tok.
 child paper 2Dat-3Dat-give-Pst
 'I gave your papers to the child.'
 *'I gave the papers to your child.'

A careful look at the PA data reveals that Possessors can only ascend from hosts which are direct objects of transitive clauses or subjects of intransitive clauses.¹⁵ This is precisely the set of nominals for which the term 'absolute' has been introduced by linguists working with 'ergative' languages. Therefore, PA in Choctaw must be restricted to hosts which bear the Absolute relation in a clause.¹⁶

Keeping in mind the restriction against Possessors of certain kin terms ascending, the condition on PA in Choctaw can be stated informally as:

- (32) Possessor Ascension
 A Possessor may ascend to head a 3-arc in the clause in which its host is a dependent if and only if its host heads an Absolute-arc.¹⁷

6. Consequences of the PA analysis

The PA analysis of the Choctaw data has a number of implications for diverse areas of linguistic theory.

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6.1 The Relational Succession Law. In the work that ultimately led to the theory of Relational Grammar, Perlmutter and Postal (1972) propose the Relational Succession Law (RSL). One statement of this law appears in (33).

(33) The Relational Succession Law

An ascende^e assumes within a clause into which it ascends the grammatical relation of its host NP.

Comparing the RSL with the statement of PA in Choctaw (32) reveals that the Choctaw PA structure violates this law. Therefore, if the analysis presented here is correct, the RSL cannot be maintained as a universal law. Of course, this assertion is not novel. The PA to 3 proposals for Georgian (Harris, 1976) and Tzotzil (Aissen, to appear) both provide the same evidence against the RSL. The Choctaw data therefore merely confirm that while the RSL may be true in many cases, it is not an inviolable law of grammar.

6.2 The question of syntactic levels. The PA construction in Choctaw provides evidence that it is necessary to recognize more than a single level of syntax. Obviously, the PA analysis is embedded in a framework which recognizes more than a single syntactic level, and the PA structure itself is an argument for more than a single syntactic level since at least two levels of syntax are represented in the structure. However, this argument can actually be made apart from the PA structure.

The condition on PA in Choctaw stated in (32) specifies that only nominals which head Absolute-arcs can be hosts for ascension. In a grammar which recognizes only a single level of syntax there can only be one absolute nominal per clause. This owes to the definition of absolute and the fact that it is a syntactic concept. Therefore, a single-level grammar predicts that in any given Choctaw clause only one nominal in that clause can be a potential host for PA. However, there are clauses in Choctaw which allow more than one nominal to be the potential host of PA. The Antipassive clause in (34c) can have the same meaning as either (34a) or (34b).

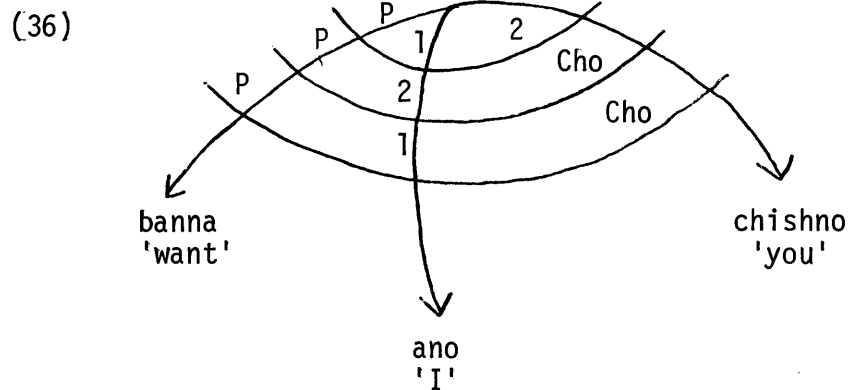
- (34) a. Am-issoba-ya-t t̃achi banna.
 1Poss-horse-Dt-Nom corn want
 'My horse wants corn.'
 b. Issoba-ya-t ă-t̃achi banna.
 horse-Dt-Nom 1Poss-corn want
 'The horse wants my corn.'
 c. Issoba-ya-t t̃achi ă-banna.
 horse-Dt-Nom corn 1Dat-want
 'My horse wants corn.'
 'The horse wants my corn.'

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Since the clause in (34c) can have the same meaning as either (34a) or (34b), this means that both issoba 'horse' and tāchi 'corn' must head Absolutive-arcs at some level of structure.

Davies (to appear) argues that the clause in (35) has the structure in (36).¹⁸

(35) Chī-sa-banna.
2Acc-1Acc-want
'I want you.'



The diagram in (36) includes two nominals which bear the Absolutive relation. Chishno 'you' bears the Absolutive relation in the initial stratum, and ano 'I' bears the Absolutive relation in the second and final strata.

If the clauses in (34) have the Antipassive structure in (36), omitting details of possession and lexical items, then the ambiguity of (34c) can be accounted for: each nominal heads an Absolutive-arc at a different level of structure. Therefore, the ambiguity of (34c) argues that it is necessary to recognize more than a single level of syntax. Single-level syntactic theories encounter difficulty in accounting for this phenomenon.

6.3 The notion 'absolutive'. The notion 'absolutive' was first introduced by linguists to account for phenomena in languages which display ergative morphology. However, as stated in section 2.4, Choctaw is not an 'ergative' language but a nominative/accusative language (or perhaps better, a nominative/objective language).¹⁹ The case system treats transitive and intransitive subjects in the same manner: they both receive nominative case marking.²⁰ However, the formulation of PA in Choctaw (32) makes specific reference to a nominal 'which heads an Absolutive-arc'. The PA construction in Choctaw therefore provides evidence that the Absolutive relation cannot be considered to be strictly in the domain of 'ergative' languages; it must be recognized as a linguistic concept of potential relevance for any human language.

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7. Conclusion

The goal of this paper has been to characterize a certain set of possessive phenomena in Choctaw, arguing for a Possessor Ascension to 3 analysis. In combination with the existing proposals for Georgian (Harris, 1976) and Tzotzil (Aissen, to appear), further evidence has been provided for the inclusion of the Possessor Ascension to 3 construction in the inventory of structures needed to characterize natural language. In doing so, further evidence has also been given that the Relational Succession Law cannot be maintained as an inviolable law of grammar. Additionally, the restriction of PA hosts in Choctaw to nominals which bear the Absolutive relation provides interesting results on two fronts. First, since certain Choctaw clauses allow more than one PA host, it is necessary to recognize more than a single level of syntax. Second, since Choctaw is a nominative/objective language, it is necessary to recognize the relevance of the Absolutive relation in languages which do not display ergative morphology.

FOOTNOTES

*Choctaw is a member of the Muskogean language family and is currently spoken primarily in Oklahoma and Mississippi. The data presented here were elicited from a number of native speakers in Oklahoma and a consultant living in San Diego who speaks a variety of the Oklahoma dialect. Many thanks go to them.

I would also like to thank David Perlmutter for comments on an earlier draft of this paper. Any errors are, of course, my own.

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¹The following abbreviations are used in the morphemic glosses of the data:

Nom-nominative	Loc-locative
Acc-accusative	Pst-past tense
Dat-dative	Dt-determiner
Obj-objective	1-first person
Refl-reflexive	2-second person
Recip-reciprocal	3-third person
Poss-possessive	

²The clause in (1b) can also mean 'My dog ate the apple for the chief'. With this interpretation, the dative agreement signals a benefactive meaning associated with miko 'chief'. The dative agreement determined by Benefactives can be attributed to a Benefactive-3 advancement, in which a nominal heading a Benefactive-arc in stratum heads a 3-arc in a later stratum. Many of the PA clauses to be examined here have a possible benefactive reading in addition to the possessive reading. The meaning intended by the

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speaker depends on the context in which it is uttered. Since this paper is concerned with the possessive construction, only the possessive readings of the clauses will be given in the translations unless otherwise warranted by the data.

³Other grammatical relations recognized by Relational Grammar include Benefactive, Locative, Instrumental, Chomeur, and others.

⁴In (2), H and Poss abbreviate 'Head' and 'Possessor', respectively.

⁵Free-standing pronominal forms are generally reserved for emphasis in Choctaw. Pronominal reference is generally indicated by agreement affixes on the predicate and possessive affixes on possessed nominals.

⁶Third person nominative and accusative agreement is either \emptyset or unmarked. Third person dative agreement is undifferentiated for number. The system of agreement in Choctaw works independently of levels. The basic conditions stated in (i) must be applied disjunctively in the order a, b, c.

(i) Agreement

- a. Nominals heading 3-arcs determine dative agreement.
- b. Nominals heading 2-arcs determine accusative agreement.
- c. Nominals heading 1-arcs determine nominative agreement.

Cf. Davies (1980) for a more detailed account of Choctaw agreement.

⁷The = notation in the morphemic gloss indicates that a single morpheme signals more than a single meaning. Therefore, ili signals both the notion 'reflexive(Refl)' and the notion 'dative (Dat)'.

⁸Unlike the reflexive data discussed above, the construction in (12b) need not have a subject as antecedent. Therefore, (ii), in which the direct object is the antecedent, is grammatical.

- (ii) John-ã ɽ-chokka akĩnli a-pisa-li-tok.
 John-Obj 3Poss-house self Loc-see-1Nom-Pst
 'I saw John at his own house.'

⁹The rule of case assignment can be stated informally as: a nominal which heads a 1-arc in any stratum is assigned nominative case and a nominal which heads a 1-arc in no stratum is assigned objective case. Cf. Davies (1980) for further discussion of the Choctaw case system.

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¹⁰This argument pertains only to Possessors in Possessor-Head constructions which bear the subject relation. Objective case marking is possible on Possessors in Possessor-Head constructions which bear GRs other than subject.

¹¹Norris (1979) and Stemberger (1979) both propose a PAF analysis for the PA clauses.

¹²(16c) also appears in Nicklas (1975).

¹³Cf. Tuggy (1980) for arguments against the PA analysis for Spanish.

¹⁴I would like to thank Paul Postal for a comment that led to the discovery of the data in this section.

¹⁵The data in Nicklas (1975) also reflect this fact.

¹⁶A nominal is said to head an Ergative-arc if it heads a 1-arc in a transitive stratum. A nominal is said to head an Absolutive-arc if it heads a 2-arc or a 1-arc in an intransitive stratum. Therefore, if a nominal heads an Ergative-arc in stratum c_i , it bears the Ergative relation in that stratum; likewise, if a nominal heads an Absolutive-arc in stratum c_i , it bears the Absolutive relation in that stratum. Cf. Postal (1977) for formal definitions of ergative and absolutive within the framework of Relational Grammar.

¹⁷It appears that it is necessary to mark a few predicates as not allowing PA. However, this class seems to be quite small and semantically and syntactically diverse.

¹⁸Cf. Davies (to appear) for a discussion of Antipassive in Choctaw and arguments supporting Postal's (1977) universal characterization of Antipassive.

¹⁹Dixon (1979) claims that Choctaw has a split system of morphologically marking predicates, thereby implying that it is an 'ergative' language. He bases his analysis on the fact that intransitive clauses show two types of morphology. In clauses such as (iii), the subject determines nominative agreement.

(iii) Bali:li-li-tok.
run-1Nom-Pst
'I ran.'

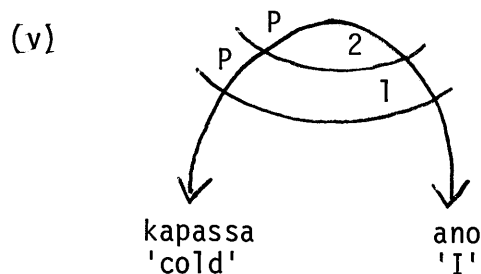
On the other hand, in the intransitive clause in (iv), the subject determines accusative agreement.

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(iv) Sa-kapassa.
 1Acc-cold
 'I am cold.'

Dixon claims that the data in (iii) and (iv) demonstrate that some intransitive subjects behave in the manner as transitive subjects (iii) and others behave in the same manner as direct objects (iv). In many cases this is true since many transitive subjects determine nominative agreement and many direct objects determine accusative agreement.

However, it is also possible to account for these data in terms of the distinction of unergative and unaccusative clauses. According to the Unaccusative Hypothesis (Perlmutter, 1978), there exist clauses which have initial intransitive strata which contain a 2-arc but no 1-arc. This nominal is then advanced to 1 by Unaccusative advancement. Under an unaccusative analysis, (iv) has the structure in (v).



By proposing the unaccusative analysis of clauses such as (iv), one avoids the somewhat questionable conclusion that Choctaw is an 'ergative' language. Cf. Davies (1980) and Norris (1979) for arguments for the inclusion of the Unaccusative Hypothesis in Choctaw.

²⁰Cf. footnote 9 for the condition on nominative case marking in Choctaw.

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