

Your name:

The UK Linguistics Olympiad 2017



Problem 8. Choctaw (20 marks)

Choctaw is a native American language spoken in Oklahoma and Mississippi by around 10,000 people.

Here are some Choctaw sentences with their English translations.

Q.8.1. Write the missing sentences 13-17 on your answer sheet.

| | Choctaw | English |
|-----|-----------------------------|--|
| 1. | Baliililitok. | I ran. |
| 2. | Baliilitok. | He / she ran. |
| 3. | Baliililih. | I've run / I am running. |
| 4. | Johnat niyah. | John is fat. |
| 5. | Pamat kayyah. | Pam is pregnant. |
| 6. | Baliililih. | He / she has run <i>or</i> He /she is running. |
| 7. | Chikayyah. | You're pregnant. |
| 8. | Saniyah. | I'm fat. |
| 9. | Hattakat chaahah. | The man is tall. |
| 10. | Hattakat taloowatok. | The man sang. |
| 11. | Hattak chaahah piisalitok. | I saw the tall man. |
| 12. | Hattak chaahah ishpiisatok. | You saw the tall man. |
| 13. | answer sheet: 13 | He / she saw John |
| 14. | answer sheet: 14 | I sang |
| 15. | answer sheet: 15 | You're singing |
| 16. | answer sheet: 16 | I'm pregnant |
| 17. | answer sheet: 17 | He / she saw the fat man |

Your name:

The UK Linguistics Olympiad 2017



Q.8.2. Here are some more examples. Once again, your task is to write the missing translations for 28-32 in your answer sheet.

| | | |
|-----|-----------------------------|------------------------|
| 18. | Sayyit sabashah. | My leg is cut. |
| 19. | Sapiisatok. | He / she saw me. |
| 20. | Issapiisatok. | You saw me. |
| 21. | Hattak anolitok. | He/she told the man. |
| 22. | Ofit sayyi sakopolitok. | The dog bit my leg. |
| 23. | Ofit amofi kopolitok. | The dog bit my dog. |
| 24. | Chimanolilitok. | I told you. |
| 25. | Amanolitok. | He / she told me. |
| 26. | Sashkit hattak piisatok. | My mother saw the man. |
| 27. | Sashkit chibaliilitok. | Your mother ran. |
| 28. | Chiyyit chibashah. | answer sheet: 28 |
| 29. | Chiyyit bashah. | answer sheet: 29 |
| 30. | Amofi ishpiisatok. | answer sheet: 30 |
| 31. | Shki ampiisalitok. | answer sheet: 31 |
| 32. | Amofit chiyyi chikopolitok. | answer sheet: 32 |

Your name:

The UK Linguistics Olympiad 2017



Answer sheet for Problem 8. Choctaw

| | Question 8.1 | | Question 8.2 |
|-----|--------------|-----|--------------|
| 13. | | 28. | |
| 14. | | 29. | |
| 15. | | 30. | |
| 16. | | 31. | |
| 17. | | 32. | |

Your name:

The UK Linguistics Olympiad 2017



Solution and marking.

Scoring (max 23)

- Q.8.1. (max 13)
 - 2 points for each correct Choctaw verb (underlined).
 - 1 for one error
 - 1 for each other correct word.
- Q.8.2. 2 points for each correct English sentence. (max 10)
 - 1 for one mistake.
- Score positively – give credit for each target Choctaw word, ignore extra non-target words.
 - But in Choctaw insist on correct affixes and order;
 - if A ... B should be B ... A, accept A but not B.
 - Insist on correct number (singular/plural) and tense/aspect in English.
 - Accept an English noun only if its grammatical function is right.
 - Reject active-passive exchanges even if the meaning is the same.
 - But accept minor copying errors in Choctaw.
- Score generously – if different scores are possible, choose the highest.

| | Question 8.1 | pts | | Question 8.2 | pts |
|-----|--------------------------------|-----|-----|--|-----|
| 13. | John <u>piisatok</u> . | 3 | 28. | Your leg is cut. [not: You cut your leg] | 2 |
| 14. | <u>Taloowalitok</u> . | 2 | 29. | Your leg is cut. [not: You cut your leg] | 2 |
| 15. | <u>Ishtaloowah</u> . | 2 | 30. | You saw my dog. | 2 |
| 16. | <u>Sakayyah</u> . | 2 | 31. | I saw my mother. | 2 |
| 17. | Hattak niyah <u>piisatok</u> . | 4 | 32. | My dog bit your leg. | 2 |

Your name:

The UK Linguistics Olympiad 2017



Commentary

This problem is mainly about the pronouns for first and second persons singular. Just like languages such as French, Spanish, Modern Greek and Arabic, Choctaw treats these as affixes, rather than as separate words as in English. The main issue in this problem is how these pronouns are used for showing possession, as in 'my dog' or 'your mother'.

A verb can in principle consist of 5 morphemes: # -2 + # -1 + Base + #1 + #2

- Slots # -2 and #1 are for subject pronouns. If there is no such pronoun, the subject is third person 'he/she'.
- Slot # -1 is for object pronouns (e.g. is-sa-piisa-tok, 'you saw me')
- Slot #2 is for a tense marker (-tok 'past', -h 'present' plus details not relevant here)

Each of the first two persons has three different sets of pronoun affixes, which we can call sets A, B and C:

| | Set A | Set B | Set C |
|------------------------|---------------------|-------|-------|
| first person singular | -li | sa- | am- |
| second person singular | ish- (is- before s) | chi- | chim- |

- Set A: subject of a verb (-li is a suffix at #1, but ish- is a prefix at # -2), e.g. piisa-li-tok, 'I saw', ish-piisa-tok, 'you saw'.
- Set B:
 - direct object of a verb at # -1, e.g. sa-piisa-tok 'he/she saw me'
 - subject of an adjective, e.g. sa-niya-h 'I am fat'
 - 'inalienable' possessor of a noun, e.g. sa-yiyi 'my leg', sa-shki 'my mother'
- Set C:
 - indirect object of a verb at # -1, e.g. am-anoli-tok 'he/she told me'
 - 'alienable' possessor of a noun, e.g. am-ofi 'my dog'

Alienable possession is for things that we may or may not have (e.g. 'dog'), in contrast with the inalienable possession of family members (e.g. 'mother') and body parts (e.g. 'leg'). The distinction is relevant to Choctaw grammar in two ways:

- Alienable and inalienable possession use different pronoun forms as shown above.
- Both kinds of possession can be shown by a pronoun attached to the possessed noun, but inalienable possession can also be marked on the verb or adjective (e.g. Chi-shki-t chi-niyah, 'Your mother is fat')

Nouns have suffix -at (-t after a vowel) if they are subject (e.g. Johnat niyah, 'John is fat').