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Alexander Francis Chamberlain and
The Language of the Mississaga Indians of Skūgog

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In 1889 Franz Boas came to the then two-year-old Clark University in Worcester, Massachusetts. It was his first university position, following six years in the field, first among the Inuit of the Northwest Territories and then among several different First Nations peoples of British Columbia. Clark was the first university in America to offer a program of study in anthropology.

In 1890 Alexander Francis Chamberlain came to Clark as a doctoral student in anthropology. On 12 June 1891 he presented his thesis, The Language of the Mississaga Indians of Skūgog, to Franz Boas. He was Boas’ first student, and the first American Ph.D. in anthropology.

BACKGROUND

Alexander Francis Chamberlain was born in Norfolk, England, in 1865. When he was still young his family emigrated to Peterborough, Ontario, by way of upstate New York. He was educated at the University of Toronto, earning a BA in modern languages and ethnology in 1886. In 1887 he was appointed Fellow in Modern Languages at University College, Toronto, and became an examiner in German and modern languages at several universities in Toronto, including the University of Toronto, and in German and French for the Department of Education of Ontario. As a graduate student, he began fieldwork among the Ojibwes living on Seugog Island, just north of Oshawa. This initial fieldwork formed the basis of his Toronto master’s thesis, with the degree awarded in 1889. In 1890 he accepted a fellowship in anthropology at Clark. The following year he was awarded the first Ph.D. in anthropology in the United States. That summer he went to British Columbia to begin fieldwork among the Kutenai, and when Boas left Clark the following year, 1892, he was appointed to fill Boas’ position as lecturer in anthropology. He remained at Clark until his premature death at the age of 49 of complications arising from undiagnosed diabetes. He was a prolific scholar. In a career that
The Mississaga of Scugog

Scugog Island dominates a small lake just north of Oshawa, Ontario, and is now connected to the mainland by a causeway. The band of Ojibwe who live on Scugog call themselves Mississaga. Their early history is part of Chamberlain’s introduction. Peter Jones’s journal in the late 1820’s mentions a small settlement of Indians around Lake Scugog, but the ancestors of the Mississaga of Scugog that Chamberlain studied came from Balsam Lake and bought their land on Scugog Island out of their annuities in the 1840s. The community has always been small. In 1884, just a few years before Chamberlain first went there, they numbered only 43.

Chamberlain’s thesis

Chamberlain’s thesis is 84 pages long, with opening remarks on the history of the community and what one might today call a grammatical sketch. The biggest section is the vocabulary, which will be the focus of this paper.

The rest of the work contains several sections on texts, songs and names. The text section contains eight texts, given all first in English and then in Ojibwe. The song section contains 13 song fragments only the first six of which were collected by Chamberlain himself. The next four sections are onomastic – one on tribal and ethnic names, one on place-names, one on names of mythological characters, and one on personal names. Chamberlain then closes with four sections that comprise a literature survey including both comparative data and other Mississaga and Ojibwe sources, including a translation of a French-Mississauga manuscript dating from the late 18th or early 19th century.

The etymological vocabulary

Chamberlain’s work on the language of the Mississaga presents some particular challenges in interpretation. The wordlist that is at the core of it contains 662 articles containing Ojibwe words. Because the list was developed from an English word list, there are a number of articles that have no Ojibwe gloss.

Chamberlain’s transcription system

Chamberlain’s work is pre-phonemic, and Boas was still in the process of developing his approach to transcriptional practice at the time he supervised Chamberlain. Boas’s approach was also apart from the line of research which the then recently formed International Phonetic Association had just begun to develop. Thus there are many inconsistencies in transcription that arise from an attempt transcribe impressionistically, without the established reference points that are implicit in today’s fully developed transcription systems. As we will see, there are many apparent inconsistencies in Chamberlain’s transcription. He also records a lot of variants. I would argue that such inconsistency is a product of Boas’ approach, and not a weakness in Chamberlain’s technique. Chamberlain was a talented polyglot, and it is not likely that he would have had problems in transcription. It also seems safe to assume that his knowledge of several languages would provide an adequate grid of distinctions for general transcription purposes.

Furthermore, there is reason to believe that the language Chamberlain described was in the middle of two significant sound changes – the voicing of lenis consonants and the reduction of vowels that is the precursor of the vowel deletion that spread eastward across Michigan and southern Ontario in the middle of the 20th century.

The vowels

Chamberlain gives the following transcription system for vowels (1892:11):

1. a as in English hard
   ā as in English father
   ā as in English law
   e as in English pen
ō as in English fresh (but more strongly uttered)
ē as in English there
i as in English pin
i as in English pique
o as in English not
ô as in English note
u as in English luck
û as oo in English boor

Between the u in run and the final vowel
of German haben or English flower
āu as in the New England cow
ūu as in English new (not ūū)

Unnoted is the fact that he marks stress. When the stressed vowel has no
diacritic, he writes an acute accent, as in (2a); when there is a diacritic, he
writes an accent following the vowel, as in (2b):

(2a) ńūgik for nūgik ‘otter’
ōmūkasin for omūkisín ‘his shoe’
eikṓ for zhigag ‘skunk’
(2b) pēcik for bezig ‘one’
migwēn for migwān ‘feather’
pimū̄n̓ for binamése ‘he walks’

The transcription of stress is the weakest point of Chamberlain’s work.
Occasionally he writes stress on unexpected syllables, but mostly he fails
to write it on syllables on which it would be expected.

Based on the fact that Chamberlain was Anglo-Canadian and living
in eastern Massachusetts, I propose that the transcription be interpreted as follows:

(3) ą [a]
ā [aː]
ā [aː]
ē [eː]
ē [eː]
i [ɪ]
i [ɪ]
o [oʊ]
o [oʊ]
u [ʊ]
û [u]

Several of these interpretations require some discussion. Firstly, I
believe that the macrons represent quality rather than length. There are
numerous examples of phonemically short vowels which Chamberlain
transcribes with macrons, e.g.,

(4) ńūp̓ for nūb̓i ‘water’
ńām̓ for nām̓a ‘sturgeon’
oč̓min for oč̓min ‘strawberry’
pimū̄ for binamése ‘he walks’

Contemporary Eastern Ojibwe has prominent quality distinctions redundant
to length distinctions, as reported in Rhodes (1976). So it is not surprising that Scugog, which is close to Peterborough and Rama, should
share this trait.

Second, the vowel of hard in much of New England is a slightly
fronted low vowel, IPA [a], in contrast to that of father. While most of the
instances of (a) represent phonemic a or aa, there are a few examples of
(a) for phonemic e:

(5) ąssens for ens ‘shellfish’ (Chamb. ‘clam’) (also: ēssens)
nā biebičen for naačibisín ‘earring’
wā wadaweswig for waawatsaweg ‘fireflies’
waamūgčí for wēmitōgwi ‘Frenchman’
wā wabmēbenak for wēwēbimak ‘fishing rod’
papa djikögeči for bebezhigoxači ‘horse’

This line of reasoning is somewhat weakened by the fact that there are
more instances of e that are transcribed with (ā):
Nonetheless, the vast majority of instances of (a) represent either a or aa. It is entirely credible that many inconsistencies of the sort in (6) involving diacritics are typographical errors. There are some glaring cases that point to a lack of adequate proofing or correction:

(7) Chamberlain actual
ótstók for ojībi/k 'rock, root'
mískwá for mískwaaw 'green' 'it is red'
(Chamb. notes "(properly, "it is red")")

Given that the difference between vowel plus accent and vowel plus macron is at least as subtle as the difference between the glosses in (7), it is entirely possible that some (or perhaps all) of the examples in (6) are typographical errors.

Next, the (á) is used relatively rarely, but it represents either a or aa as in (8a) or a or aa as in (8b):

(8a) ótómánden for oodoónaan 'his heel'
móóktóši for móoshkáhsii 'bittern' (C. 'heron')
ní'binong for niibi:nong 'last summer'
(8b) ondék for anaalú 'crow'
cágéndé for zhaaga:naash 'Englishman'
cikôg for chigaag 'skunk'
ícikwóndem for ishkwaandem 'door'

Lastly, the single biggest inconsistency in Chamberlain’s transcription of vowels is his treatment of final syllables. A large number of forms have schwa or one of the transcriptions of a in final syllables where long low vowels are expected. Examples of open syllable cases are given in (9a), closed syllable cases in (9b):

(9a) ótst'ke for odaaké 'he steers'
pimu:sni for bimose 'he walks'
pima'táke for bimadóogaa 'he swims'
ótsi:we for ozaawaa 'it is yellow'
(9b) ícikwóndem for ishkwaandem 'door'
cáci:mek, 
açawá:mek for azaawameg 'salmon'
wìgwes for wiigwaas 'birch bark'

The fact that Chamberlain transcribes so many examples of reduction in final syllables suggests that it was probably a real phenomenon. To the best of my knowledge, the closest similar thing in Ojibwe is that long vowels in final syllables in Manitoulin Ottawa are shortened, but without any quality adjustment.

Precursors to vowel deletion

Chamberlain’s record of Scugog Ojibwe prefigures the vowel deletion that swept eastward across Ontario in the mid-twentieth century. In his word list there are a number of words that have the wrong vowel quality in short initial vowels, as in (10), suggesting that vowel reduction had begun at least in initial syllables:

(10) óewartáci for agwadaashii 'sunfish'
ônit for anit 'fish spear'
ekweti:sens for ikwetens 'girl'

Further evidence is found in those few forms which Chamberlain transcribes with a reduced initial syllable, as in (11a), or without an initial syllable, as in (11b):

(11a) n-do'dón for nindoonaam 'my mother'
níči for nindo: 'my heart'
(11b) káwíwin níčiwin for gaanwi wanízíshin 'it isn't good'
(NB: no negative inflection)
sé'ma for aseemaa 'tobacco'

The consonants

Chamberlain’s transcription of consonants has as many problems as his transcription of vowels. In the case of consonants, he not only undertranscribes the contrast of lenis and fortis, but he has trouble with the quality of sibilants, as these examples show:

(12) sasá:gi for zhaxhair 'crane (bird)'
misa:kwoo'dó'n for mishakwadoon 'beard'
osawá:skóginé'biikons for oshaawashko-ginébigoons 'green snake'
pí'dikins for bizihi:nsins 'call'
This is particularly true in shk clusters, which Chamberlain frequently transcribes as (sk):

(13) mēskimut for mashkimod ‘bag’
məskwāwə for mashkwaw ‘it is hard’
məskwātē for mashkwade ‘prairie’
wābiski c’ōmā for wābiski-zhooNTyaa ‘silver’

Consonant voicing

At the time when Chamberlain was doing his fieldwork, the sound change which voiced lenis consonants was just starting in the southern Ojibwe-speaking region. As late as 1939, the change was not yet complete in Walpole Ottawa, where Bloomfield (1958:3) notes:

The lenes are usually voiceless; between vowels and especially after a nasal they are often partly or wholly voiced ...

Chamberlain’s transcription has a significant proportion of voiceless symbols for lenes:

(14) ⟨k⟩ for g 40%
⟨t⟩ for d 44%
⟨p⟩ for b 46%
⟨ē⟩ for j 33%

Dialect affiliation

There are several lexical items which point to the expected view that Chamberlain recorded a variety of Eastern Ojibwe (cf. Rhodes 1976), e.g.:

(15) Chamberlain
ningga ‘my mother’
ndō’dōn nndoodoom ‘my mother’ (child’s form) nmaaamaan
ntēti (n)(lede ‘my father’ (child’s form) nbaaamān
ā’ninā’tik aninātig ‘sugar maple’ snaamān
nīciiwgan ntsihtigwean ‘my head’ ndib
nīpīwa ntiibwa ‘much’ nībina
mē’-nīwēci mewinázh ‘long ago’ zaazhī

Ottawa
ngashi
nmaaamaan
snaamān
ndib
nībina
zaazhī

Particularly telling is the last form, mewinžha. Eastern Ojibwe has a very odd phonological process that nasalizes a stressed vowel when a following nasalized vowel is in an unstressed syllable. Chamberlain’s transcrip-
and Jones et al. (1877), as well as Chamberlain’s thesis. Since this dialect is moribund and underattested, a more serious look at these sources is warranted, in spite of weaknesses in the quality of the materials.

REFERENCES


Jones, Peter, James Evans, and George Henry. 1877. *A collection of Ojibway and English hymns, for the use of the Native Indians.* Toronto: Methodist Missionary Society.


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Word Order and Discourse in Menominee

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The purpose of this paper is to examine surface word order in Menominee, and to identify which factors, if any, are correlated with surface variations. In order to do this I conducted a preliminary text-based study tracking the position of overt nominals relative to their clause-mate verbs. I also conducted an elicitation experiment with native speakers from the Menominee Reservation. The scope of the study is limited to the positioning of arguments (subjects, objects and second objects) relative to the verb. The results indicate that NPs are most frequently postverbal in Menominee. Furthermore, preverbal occurrence of NPs is correlated with factors associated with discourse focus: indefiniteness and emphasis. Also, a correlation between preverbal position and clause type was observed. But an apparent correlation between word order and verb type is shown to derive from an interaction of verb type and discourse factors.

PREVIOUS WORK ON ALGONQUIAN WORD ORDER

I present below some claims that have been made previously about word order in various Algonquian languages. This survey is not intended to be exhaustive, but to represent a range of the facts and explanations that have been brought forward.

Menominee: OVS (Bloomfield 1962)

Bloomfield states his observations about Menominee word order in terms of violable tendencies. He lists the types of arguments which tend to be pre- or postverbal as follows:

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