



Choctaw Verb Agreement and Universal Grammar (Studies in Natural Language and Linguistic Theory)

William D. Davies

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The Choctaw language, indigenous to the southeastern United States, now with its greatest concentrations of speakers in Mississippi, Oklahoma, and Los Angeles, has in the main escaped the scrutiny of theoretical linguistics. It is not that Choctaw is an intrinsically uninteresting language—a quick glance at a clause with five agreement controllers and a mismatch between the case of a free-standing nominal and its agreement affix should dispel that notion. Rather it is, I think, the question of what we can learn from a language in which NPs don't move around, "WHs" don't front, and gaps simply arise from pronominalization. My hope is that the present volume, taken together with a growing literature spurred on by the work of Pam Munro and her students at UCLA, will bring Choctaw into the light of day and into the circle of languages considered when constructing theories that define "possible human language".

The present study, a revision of my 1981 dissertation (University of California, San Diego), focuses first and foremost on the Choctaw agreement system, taking this as the key to the structure of Choctaw syntax. The immediate goal, then, is to provide a unified account of the structures and rules underlying the agreement system. Along the way a range of grammatical phenomena is examined, taken as evidence for particular structural configurations, and incorporated into a well-integrated account of morphological and syntactic facts. The results bear on a number of current issues, including the Unaccusative Hypothesis, the existence of demotions, the nature of antipassive, disjunctive rule application, universals of causative constructions, and others. For these reasons Choctaw deserves the scrutiny of theoreticians. The data forming the corpus for analysis represent a variety of Oklahoma Choctaw. They were collected from a native speaker in San Diego between 1978 and 1982 and from various speakers in Oklahoma during two extended visits to Broken Bow in 1980. I IX PREFACE x

wish to thank the speakers who helped me by sharing their language and encouraging my studies. My work on Choctaw was supported in part by funds from the National Science Foundation (through grant number BNS78-17498 to the University of California, San Diego), the American Philosophical Society (through a Phillips Fund grant), and the Department of Linguistics at UCSD.

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