

Title: Morphological Classes as Indicators of Polycategoriality in Choctaw and Cherokee

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The Choctaw (Muskogean) and Cherokee (Iroquoian) data here touch on two related theoretical problems: the mechanism by which a morphologically unmarked full word form may change lexical category, and the morphological or syntactic level (root, lexeme, phrase) in which lexical category is instantiated or appears. The analysis is made in light of a particular hypothesis, polycategoriality, which holds that at a certain level of representation, some forms are not specified for category. It is shown that Choctaw has, in particular, a large and distinct morphological class that exhibits full liquidity among the categories verb, noun, adjective, participle, and adverb without change in morphological form, as well as fairly highly, but not perfectly, restricted meanings in the resulting words – what we would think of as a high degree of polycategoriality. However, it also has a clearly distinct morphological class that, in strong contrast, permits no derivation and no conversion to other lexical categories whatsoever. This class is, unsurprisingly; associated with the semantic classes of kinship, body parts, and natural species. Choctaw also shares with Cherokee, though to a much more limited degree, the employment of a bound lexical root that may appear in any category, including closed classes, and in any semantic class. In Cherokee, the use of the bound lexical root is the common method of word formation. This bound lexical root is remarkable in its degree of semantic freeness. Cherokee words have highly constraining morphology that permits no confusion about lexical category, but words related by a common root have little predictable output. These roots are therefore acategorial: they do not permit a speaker to manipulate them in a rule-governed way to produce a regularly related set of sister forms or regular derivatives.

Although the Choctaw class of neutral and categorially fluid roots lends evidence for a theory of late lexical insertion, such as Distributed Morphology ( Halle and Marantz 1993), the rigidity of the Choctaw primary noun class argues for category assignment at a level not higher than the lexeme. The robust derivational and inflectional morphology in Cherokee may support in part a late lexical insertion, but the high degree of acategoriality in its roots, the compounding of those roots, and other features of its morphology in word formation, in particular the unpredictability of argument structure, demands a fuller analysis than can be given with a solution that depends primarily on accommodation to syntax. These data argue for the probability that languages appeal to mixed and identifiable processes in word formation, and that one such strategy is a set of polycategorial roots, associated with preferred semantic classes.

Halle, M. and A. Marantz. 1993. Distributed morphology and the pieces of inflection. In *The view from Building 20*, Eds. K. Hale and S. J. Keyser, 111-176. Cambridge, MA: MIT Press.