LINGUISTIC SPECULATION ON THE PRE-HISTORY OF THE
CHEYENNE PEOPLE

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Résumé. Les données linguistiques font ressortir six stades dans l'évolution du cheyenne à partir du proto-algonquin: 1) le pré-cheyenne; 2) un période de transition; 3) le proto-cheyenne; 4) les dialectes historiques; 5) la fusion des dialectes historiques; et 6) l'apparition des dialectes modernes. Le présent article expose ces différentes étapes et les met en corrélation avec une hypothèse sur l'histoire du peuple cheyenne.
I regret that I cannot be present at this 1974 Algonquian Conference in Ottawa, for I am new in the area of Algonquian studies and I know I could learn much from this body of researchers. I have been studying the Cheyenne language in Montana for just a little over three years now, and the only Algonquian I have really looked at concerned only its relationship to the Cheyenne language—a kind of flying-by-the-seat-of-the-pants attitude. But since I seem to be the only linguist in this century to have spent a full three years with the Cheyenne people (as distinct from well-intentioned missionaries with a flair for languages, like Reverend Petter, my esteemed predecessor), I feel it is time to share with others in the field some confirmations for the Algonquian work concerning Cheyenne which has been done so far, and some additional information to shed more light in the dim Cheyenne corner—and thereby perhaps help others working in the Comparative Algonquian field.

Though I should like to have more than a seat-of-the-pants attitude toward Comparative Algonquian, my present viewpoint has been very valuable in my work on the Northern Cheyenne Reservation, where I am engaged in setting up a practical orthography and literacy program. Armed with my single book that treats Algonquian Studies and reconstructed Algonquian words, I have been able to make difficult decisions on the writing system with some authority and assurance that, no matter how strange those decisions might have seemed at the time, history did and would bear me out.

More specifically, when you have a gnawing feeling about something at the back of your mind for months or years, what a relief it is to re-read that same Algonquian article you've read three times before, and find that
someone else has unwittingly given you the justification for your notion. For instance, the Cheyenne language has a series of pre-aspirated or breathy stops (hp, ht, hk) which alternate with, on some deep level, the normal unaspirated stops (p, t, k)—and that syllables of the simple, unaspirated variety (pa, pe, po; ta, etc.) contrast with the aspirated or complex syllables (pâha, pêhe, pôho; tâha, etc.). It is difficult, without a great deal of discussion, to explain this properly since it seems to impinge on so many different "levels" of analysis—but the "ontogeny recapitulates phylogeny" dictum gives ample justification for this analysis of modern Cheyenne. (Any other analysis would really be an injustice to Cheyenne, given its historical development.)

**WHEN DID CHEYENNE DIALECT OF ALGONQUIAN BECOME CHEYENNE LANGUAGE?**

It is often quite difficult to select a specific point in the history of a language at which it became "mature", no longer a child-dialect of its parent. As the persistent question goes, is French a language in and of itself, or merely a corruption of Latin? But because of the massive, overwhelming changes which transformed an Algonquian dialect into the Cheyenne language at some indeterminate time in the past (I suggest a time period of about 1500 years ago), I have set up major categories for talking about Cheyenne as:

- PRE-CHEYENNE (dialect of Algonquian)
- TRANSITIONAL CHANGES
- PROTO-CHEYENNE (model for today's language)
- HISTORICAL DIALECTS (Tsehése-nestse and So?taaé-nestse)
- MERGING OF HISTORICAL DIALECTS (The Battle)
- MODERN DIALECTS (Northern, Southern, and town-dialects)

(Refer to FIGURE A for a visual overview.)
PRE-CHEYENNE

I hardly have to speak to this audience concerning the well-known process in Amerindian cultures of smaller groups splintering off from larger groups in search of more food, more elbow-room, or whatever. It was during one of these numerous, unremembered, unrecorded events that the ancestors of the Cheyennes set up a new, separate camp—and began modifying old traditions and creating new ones more in tune with their new surroundings.

And, of course, with separation in distance and time from the larger groups, the pre-Cheyenne people's differences became more and more pronounced—especially in their speech. The quantity and quality of changes which took place in the transition from Algonquian to Cheyenne are extensive, and my conception of them is probably still imperfect, but those changes do seem to belong to five major areas:

I. LOSS of Algonquian sounds
II. MODIFICATION of Algonquian sounds
III. COMPLETE CHANGE of Algonquian sounds
IV. CREATION of Cheyenne sounds in new places
V. REASSIGNMENT of Cheyenne final syllables

TRANSITIONAL CHANGES

In deference to the amount of time allotted, I shall leave the finer details of this discussion for the Appendix, and shall list here only the bare-bones framework of the changes.

I. LOSS: There seems to have been a drive for simplification, and a tendency to make the Cheyenne language much more regularly syllabic than Algonquian had been. Many Algonquian consonant clusters were lost in Cheyenne (i.e., pre-nasalized stops, labialized stops, fricative-stop clusters).
Also, as a counter-example to that drive for more regular syllabicity, the Algonquian -p- and -k- sounds were sometimes lost from inter-vocalic positions (the cause of Cheyenne long vowels and vowel clusters), and word-initial positions, especially the -k-. The latter causes more conflict because it left Cheyenne words as vowel-initial, while a section below will discuss the fact that Cheyenne could not tolerate Algonquian vowel-initial words, but changed them to h-initial.

II. MODIFICATION: The three major modifications of Algonquian sounds into slightly different Cheyenne sounds were (a) breathy stop modification, where Algonquian (p,t,k) were changed into the pre-aspirated Cheyenne (hp, ht, hk) in perhaps all non-initial (V...V) positions where they were not dropped out; (b) long vowel to short stressed vowel modification, by which Cheyenne lost all Algonquian long vowels, but compensated for the loss by developing an accent on a proximate vowel; and (c) fricative modification, where (since Cheyenne can only tolerate še but not *ša or *šo) the fricative was changed into either s or x whenever vowel changes caused front vowels to become non-front. This last is most evident in words like *šekaakwa (skunk) changing into xaoʔo.

III. COMPLETE CHANGE: The most dramatic change here involves what I have equally dramatically called the Great Cheyenne Cataclysmic Vowel Shift (*i → e, *e → a, *a → o, *o → e). This change deserves such a grandiose title since there were only four vowels in Algonquian to begin with, and Cheyenne reduced them into three, and then made them all change places with each other in musical-chairs fashion. A major exception to the GCCVS is that many *wa syllables changed into e instead of the expected wo.

Also, there were many consonant clusters common in Algonquian that did
not survive into Cheyenne—primarily because at least eight of them (xp, xpw, pw; θk, xk, xkw, skw, kw) developed into single glottal stops. Some of these, the fricative+k combinations, often became -ʔk- clusters instead of plain glottals, and this alternation became important in ensuing dialects.

And the final change here concerned the transformation of all Algonquian *l-sounds and most *θ-sounds (some were deleted) into Cheyenne -t-. (And, of course, this must have been ordered later than the modification of *t into -ht).

IV. CREATION: The only change here concerns the creation of initial-h in Cheyenne for words which were Algonquian vowel-initial (heʔko instead of *eʔko for "bone"). As mentioned before, this is opposite to the tendency for dropping initial *k-sounds, thereby leaving the Cheyenne words vowel-initial.

V. REASSIGNMENT: The Cheyenne language must have somewhere between 30-40 different pluralizers for nouns, and it was not until about a year ago that I noticed that singular words in Cheyenne were quite often shorter than the singulars in Algonquian. Often, it turns out, the last syllable of the Algonquian word forms the basis for the plural of the Cheyenne word (*li → te or [tse]). This reassignment seems to be a solution to a number of problems concerned with pluralization in Cheyenne. (Refer to FIGURES B & C for Changes and *PA/Ch Correspondences.)

PROTO-CHEYENNE AND THE HISTORICAL DIALECTS

This stage of the language, after all of the above sound changes had taken place, I refer to as Proto-Cheyenne—it was not the Cheyenne that we know today, because that was still a long time ago; but the changes from this
point were quite minor considering what the language has just gone through.

For one reason or another, this group speaking Proto-Cheyenne split again, I believe, into the historical sub-tribes that now make up what we call the Cheyennes: the tse-Tséhééstáhase (the ones who are like us) and the Soʔtaaéʔoʔo (no known translation). These two groups were separated for probably hundreds of years, and they developed and changed in slightly different ways. (NOTE: these have been spelled in the literature as "Tsistsistas" and "Suhtaio"; I hope the use of the old spellings will be discontinued.)

There were two main sound-differences between the Tséhéésenestse and Soʔtaaé-nestse dialects (-nestse refers to speaking) as they developed separately: one was that the speakers of Tséhéése-nestse pronounced -ʔk- clusters where the Soʔtaaéʔoʔo pronounced only the glottal; and the other is that the speakers of Soʔtaaé-nestse began pronouncing all of their -ke- syllables as -tšе-. (I'll admit this is a still imperfect conception, since the Soʔtaaéʔoʔo often pronounces -ʔtšе- sequences—suggesting that the palatalization rule probably preceded Soʔtaaéʔoʔo k-dropping. More work is needed here.) (Refer to FIGURE D for dialectal variations of words.)

It was also during this separation of the two dialectal groups that each sub-tribe was given its particular Covenant with the Creator (Maʔheoʔo): the tse-Tséhééstáhase received their Sacred Arrows (Maahőtse) through their prophet Sweet Medicine (an old man of the tribe told me that the Sacred Arrows were given to the Cheyennes exactly 668 years ago); and the Soʔtaaéʔoʔo received their Sacred Buffalo Hat (Esēsevono) through their prophet Erect Horns. The two sub-tribes were by now living completely separate lives, and each had different religious ceremonies which revolved around their Sacred Covenants.
MERGING OF HISTORICAL DIALECTS: THE BATTLE

The Cheyenne people today speak of the battle which took place hundreds of years ago when the tse-Tsêhéstâhâse and the So?taae?o discovered each other and began fighting. It is said that during the battle, the warriors on each side suddenly found they could understand the "enemy" when the others shouted battle instructions to their own warriors. A half in fighting was called (for the highest sacrilege against Ma?heo?o was for one Cheyenne to kill another): and from that time on, with the feasting and rejoicing that took place from finding a group of long-lost relatives, the two sub-tribes joined again into the one tribe called Cheyenne (a Siouan name). The Cheyenne culture now had two Sacred Covenants, and the language became richer because of the two changed dialects joining together.

THE MODERN DIALECTS: NORTHERN, SOUTHERN, AND TOWN-DIALECTS

To add to the confusion, there are two major modern dialects (any many minor ones) which traditionally included about equivalent numbers of tse-Tsêhéstâhâse and So?taae?o. The major modern dialects were caused by the geographical separation imposed on the Cheyenne Tribe by the United States Government: the Southern (in Oklahoma) were placed there in "Indian Territory" to get rid of them; and the Northern (Montana) are basically the descendants of those who escaped and fled north—as chronicled in The Last Frontier by Howard Fast, and Cheyenne Autumn by Mari Sandoz.

The speakers of So?taae?nestse have almost all died out at this point (having been the dialect of the "minority group" when the sub-tribes merged); there is only a handful of old-timers left. On the Northern Cheyenne Reservation though, the Cheyennes rate the various reservation towns on how well they have kept that which is by community standards "good Cheyenne": Birney rates
highest; then Busby, Lame Deer, and Ashland (a border-town) as lowest. Even so: at this point the Northern Cheyennes may well keep the language alive--there are still 10-15\% of the children coming to school speaking Cheyenne, and other understanding it.

In Oklahoma, on the other hand, where there is no reservation and most Cheyenne enclaves are like Ashland (more white than Cheyenne), I am told it would be an almost impossible task to find even 50 Cheyenne speakers under the age of thirty.

If the Cheyenne language remains alive in either place, it will be the result of both psychological counter-warfare ("Cheyenne is Neat," "Bilingual is Beautiful," "Cheyenne Beats English") and the acceptance of our new writing system and notions on literacy and language research. If I do my work properly here, Cheyennes will soon begin attending these conferences and telling you for themselves the kinds of conclusions and decisions they have made with the benefit of their native intuitions about Cheyenne.
APPENDIX

THE TRANSITIONAL CHANGES FROM ALGONQUIAN TO CHEYENNE

(1) LOSS of Algonquian Sounds:

   a. Pre-nasalizations heard before Algonquian stops (mp, nt, nk) were dropped in the transition to Cheyenne. Sometimes the dropping seems to do strange things to adjacent vowels, but I haven't been able to pin down any regularity yet.

   b. Triple-consonant-clusters (skw, xkw, xpw) which occurred in Algonquian have disappeared from Cheyenne.

   c. Some simple consonant clusters, especially labialized stops (kw, pw) and fricative-stop combinations (xp, xk, θk), common in Algonquian, have also disappeared from Cheyenne. Certain other fricative-stop combinations (sk, hk) also disappeared, only to reappear from another source (k → hk) looking the same as the original.

   d. The -l- and -θ- sounds disappeared from Cheyenne.

   e. The p's and k's in Algonquian that occurred between vowels sometimes just dropped out of words altogether—and k's at the beginnings of Algonquian words tended to drop out of Cheyenne words (leaving some Cheyenne words vowel-initial); p's and t's fared much better word-initially.

   f. The -i- sound of Algonquian disappeared as a distinctive sound in Cheyenne—although the remnant of phonetic difference is sometimes still heard (the [i] of šeʔše for 'duck' versus the [ɛ] of hetane for 'man'), the environment is always predictable: before alveolar or palatal fricatives.

   g. The -c- or -č- (if, as I assume, that does indeed refer to a palatal affricate) was never heard again in Cheyenne in the same parts of the words where Algonquian pronounced them—although the Soʔtaaʔoʔo did reintroduce the
sound later as a substitute for k before e (what I write as -tše-).

h. The -y- sound I see written in reconstructed Algonquian words disappeared from Cheyenne. -y- is in Cheyenne a purely phonetic by-product of e before a, o, or h.

i. The -w- sound seems to have also dropped completely from Cheyenne as a distinctive sound (now a phonetic by-product of o before e or a) by either dropping out completely, helping form glottals, or changing into h.

j. Many times syllables at the ends of words were lost (or reassigned, as in section 5 below), so that Cheyenne words became shorter than the originals.

(2) MODIFICATION of Algonquian Sounds:

a. Under "Breathy Stop Modification", *p → hp, *t → ht, *k → hk. In other words, there came to be a breathy quality associated with the beginnings of those sounds (the ones that didn't drop out under LOSS) in intervocalic positions): they became pre-aspirated; or, as Dr. Frantz once said in trying to explain them, they became de-voicing stops--because an important consequence of this modification is that these new breathy stops provide the basis for much of the devoicing or whispering of vowels that characterizes the speaking of Cheyenne today. On the deepest level of abstraction, then, there are actually at least two sets of stops--the regular (ptk) sequence, and the breathy (hp, ht, hk) sequence--and both sets are from historically different pasts. Because of these breathy stops, we can get sequences of devoiced syllables (no more than 2 at once), which produce odd sounding words like náhtáhtoóno (my spine).

b. Evidence points to the fact that where two similar vowels occurred next to each other in Algonquian (one long vowel?), quite often they came into Cheyenne as a short, single vowel--but one which has high stress. For
instance (refer to Figure C), an original -oo- in Algonquian will usually be found in Cheyenne as -é-; an original -ii- will also be found as -é-; an original -ee- will be found as -á-; and -aa- as -ó-. This solves the problem of where much of the inherent or lexical stress in Cheyenne words comes from. Long Vowels, or any two vowels, in present-day Cheyenne almost always come from the fact that the original two vowels were separated by a -p- or -k- that was lost. It is very confusing that some tendencies were toward regular syllabification, and others away from it.

c. Sometimes in modern Cheyenne the -š- sound is forced to modify into either an -s- or -x-. This is basically because Cheyenne tolerates only -še-syllables, not *ša or *šo. Notice the following forms for "two of," "two" and "bi-": nēše, nexe, neso. That is, if you start with the basis of -še- and then change the vowel to something else, the fricative must change as well—both diachronically and synchronically. Additionally, note the archaic form for "my uncle" nēše and "our uncles" nēxane.

(3) COMPLETE CHANGE in Algonquian Sounds:

a. The Great Cheyenne Cataclysmic Vowel Shift, as already mentioned, squeezed one vowel out of existence (phonologically), and made the others change their positions: *i → e, *e → a, *a → o, *o → e. Because there were two sources for present-day Cheyenne e (three, including the next change), it should not be surprising that -e- is the most common vowel sound in Cheyenne.

b. The major exception to the GCCVS is that a -wa- syllable in Algonquian most usually changed into a straight -e- vowel instead of *-wo-. But if it was a -kwa- syllable, the -w- generally combined with the -k- sound to produce a glottal (see c. below), to produce -ʔo- instead of the rarer -hke- which was sometimes produced.
c. Many consonant clusters (mentioned in LOSS above) did not survive into Cheyenne—not because they were truly lost, but they were changed into simple glottal stops. Word correspondences show that the following consonant clusters (and perhaps a few more) were replaced by glottals: xp, xpw, pw; 9k, xk, xkw, skw, škw, hkw, kw. In fact, we can even say about the k-set that those k-sounds which were preceded by fricatives often became the glottals which sometimes permit k's adjacent to them and sometimes not (ʔ/ʔk alternation), depending on the dialect. Refer to Figure D for examples of this.

d. And as for the -l- and -θ- sounds, word correspondences show that the -θ- just dropped out altogether sometimes (the -l- only rarely)--but most of the time both of these sounds changed into Cheyenne -t-. Since new t's were created in this way, but no new p's or k's, -t- sounds are more frequent in Cheyenne than p's or k's--but probably less frequent than glottals, since there were so many consonant clusters that produced glottals.

(4) CREATION of Cheyenne Sounds: As mentioned, it seems that Cheyenne could not tolerate Algonquian vowel-initial words, and so in numerous instances those words begin with h-sounds. Therefore, Cheyenne says hotame for "dog" instead of *otame; heʔe for "woman" instead of *eʔe; and heʔkonotse for "bones" instead of *eʔkonotse.

(5) REASSIGNMENT of Syllables: Note Figures B & C for the numbers of syllables in Algonquian singular nouns which became the basis for Cheyenne plurals.
FIGURE

SIMPLIFIED HISTORICAL CHART

ALGONQUIANS

Arapaho  Blackfeet  Cree  Delaware  Fox  etc.

PRE-CHEYENNE  (dialect)

THE CHANGES:  Great Cheyenne
Cataclysmic Vowel Shift
Breathy Stop Modification, etc.

tse-Tsehestahase  So?taae?o  (historical dialects)
(Sacred Arrows)  (Sacred Hat)

PROTO-CHEYENNE  (language)

CHEYENNE

Northern  (Montana)  Southern  (Oklahoma)

Tsehese-nestse  So?taa?nestse

FIGURE B

WHAT CHANGES TOOK PLACE BETWEEN ALGONQUIAN AND CHEYENNE?

(numbers refer to examples in figure c)

a) Great Cheyenne Cataclysmic
   Vowel Shift
   (applies to all words, #1-21
b) Exception to GCCVS: wa → e (8, 18)
c) Long Vowel Modified to Short Stressed Vowel (2, 3, 7, 9, 10, 14, 16, 17,
   18, 19, 21)
d) Changes of Algonquian-p:
   .1 p became hp (5, 21)
   .2 p lost between some vowels (9, 13)
   .3 xp, xpw, pw became glottal stops (11)
e) Changes of Algonquian-t:
   .1 t became ht (5, 11, 12)
   .2 t remained t in many places (13)
f) Changes of Algonquian-k:
   .1 k became hk (14, 18)
   .2 k lost between some vowels (16, 17)
   .3 k lost at word-initial (7)
   .4 θk, xk, xkw, skw, kw, some hk, became glottal stops (1, 3, 4, 7, 13,
   14, 16, 17)
g) Loss of Algonquian-l: changed into t (10, 15)
h) Loss of Algonquian-θ:
   .1 θ changed into t (6, 8, 18)
.2 θ sometimes deleted (1, 20)

i) Modification of š-fricative:
   .1 š changed into x before a (17)
   .2 š changes into s before o

j) Loss of Algonquian pre-nasalization:
   .1 m lost before p (5)
   .2 n lost before t, k (18)

k) Creation of h before Algonquian vowel-initial words (1, 4, 14, 18)

l) Last Syllable forms pluralizer base (2, 4, 8, 9, 11, 12, 14)
FIGURE C

SOME ALG/CHEY COMPARISONS

(letters refers to rules in figure b)

1. "beaver": k; a; b; f.4
   a m e \(\theta k\) wa
   h o m a ? e

2. "berry": a; c; l
   m i i n a l i
   m é n o t s e = plural

3. "black": a; f.4; e.1; c
   m a h k a t e e w i i
   m o ? o h t a v e

4. "bone": k; a; f.4; l
   o \(\theta k\) a n i
   h e ? k o n o t s e = plural

5. "brain": a; e.1; j.1; d.1
   t e m p i
   h t a h p e

6. "breast": a; h.1
   m e \(\theta e n i\)
   m a t a n a

7. "day": f.3; a; c; f.4
   k i i s o k w i
   e s e ? e

8. "dog": k; a; h.1; b
   a \(\theta e m\) wa
   h o t a m e

9. "duck": a; c; d.2; l
   s i i ? s i i p a
   s e ? s e o? o = plural

10. "egg": a; c; g
    w a a w a l i
    v o v o t s e

11. "hand": a; d.3; e.1; l
    n e x p e t o n i
    n a ? a h t s e n o t s e = plural

12. "mouth": a; e.1; l
    m e t o o n i
    m a h t s e n o t s e = plural

13. "night": e.2; a; d.2; f.4
    t e p e \(\theta k\) i
    t a ? e

14. "pipe": k; a; f.4; c; f.1; l
    o x p w a a k a n i
    h e ? ó h k o n o t s e = plural
15. "pus": a; g

16. "red liquid": a; f.4; c; f.2

17. "skunk": i.1; f.2; a; c; f.4

18. "star": k; a; h.1; b; j.2

19. "ten": a; e.1; c

20. "three": a; h.2

21. "white, light": a; c
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NOTES

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2. As far as the reconstructed Algonquian words go, they fall into three main groups in my comparison work with Cheyenne: perfect or near-perfect correspondences; a few odd and unusual correspondences; and a great many with no understandable correspondences at all.

3. There is an extremely interesting phonological process in Cheyenne concerning the origin of some of these accents. This same abstract phonological process is also found as a major process in many Siouan languages. That is the process of (in intervocalic positions near the end of a word) dropping the glottal, adding an accent to the final vowel, and then adding the suffix or compounding word. Some examples:

   hotóvaʔa + oʔo-----------------hotóvaʔaoʔo
   Soʔtaaʔe + nestse-------------Soʔtaaʔe-nestse
   kósáʔe + hótame---------------kósáʔe-hótame

4. The name "Cheyenne" seems to come from a Siouan word which has been given to me as Shahiela, which sounds like it must have come from the Lakhota dialect. Of course, it would make more sense to me if it had come more directly through the Nakhota version of Shahiena.