

UDC 81'443.5

DOI: 10.34671/SCH.SVB.2019.0304.0019

## POLYSYNTHESIS IN THE LANGUAGES OF AMERICAN INDIANS

© 2019

**Manafova Aynura Murad**, Candidate of degree of Philosophy of ASPU,  
Senior teacher

*Azerbaijan State University of Economics*

(1001, Azerbaijan, Baku, Independence Street, 6, e-mail: [aynura\\_manafova@mail.ru](mailto:aynura_manafova@mail.ru))

**Abstract.** The grammatical structure of the languages of American Indian tribes' languages is based on traditional morphology (the grammatical parts which form words) and syntax (the way words conjoin to form a sentence). It should be emphasized that in grammar, just as in phonological or semantic structures, American Indian languages as well as any other language in the world do not contain anything that could be deemed primitive or underdeveloped. Every language is as complex and efficient as Latin, English, or any other European language. Linguistic processes in the world concern this group of languages. Globalization and integration in the world has led to the rapid standardization and unification of languages, including the American Indians. It is believed that the conservation and disappearance of many languages of the American Indians can be suspended through the written fixation of dialects and dialects, the expansion of the network of primary schools and courses on the study of endangered languages. Of great importance is the social environment in which conditions are created for the preservation of the national-cultural autonomy of certain ethnic groups, including language. An essential role in preserving a language is played by the style of thinking of its carrier.

**Keywords:** languages of the American Indians, polysynthetic languages, language families, sociolinguistics.

## ПОЛИСИНТЕТИЗМ В ЯЗЫКАХ АМЕРИКАНСКИХ ИНДЕЙЦЕВ

© 2019

**Мамафова Айнура Мурад кызы**, старший преподаватель

*Азербайджанский государственный экономический университет*

(1001, Азербайджан, Баку, улица Независимости, 6, e-mail: [aynura\\_manafova@mail.ru](mailto:aynura_manafova@mail.ru))

**Аннотация.** Грамматическая структура языков племен американских индейцев основана на традиционной морфологии (грамматические части, которые образуют слова) и синтаксисе (то, как слова соединяются в предложение). Не следует считать, что в грамматике, как и в фонологических или семантических структурах, языки американских индейцев, как и любой другой язык в мире, не содержат ничего, что можно было бы считать примитивным или недостаточно развитым. Каждый язык такой же сложный и развитый, как латынь, английский или любой другой европейский язык. Языковые процессы в мире касаются и этой группы языков. Глобализация и интеграция в мире привела к стремительной стандартизации и унификации языков, в том числе американских индейцев. Считается, что консервацию и исчезновение многих языков американских индейцев можно приостановить через письменную фиксацию диалектов и наречий, расширение сети начальных школ и курсов по изучению исчезающих языков. Большое значение имеет социальная среда, в которой созданы условия для сохранения национально-культурной автономии отдельных этнических групп, в том числе языка. В сохранении языка существенную роль играет и стиль мышления его носителя.

**Ключевые слова:** языки американских индейцев, полисинтетические языки, языковые семьи, социолингвистика.

**INTRODUCTION.** The grammatical structure of the languages of American Indian tribes' languages is based on traditional morphology (the grammatical parts which form words) and syntax (the way words conjoin to form a sentence). It should be reiterated that in grammar, just as in phonological or semantic structures, American Indian languages as well as any other language in the world do not contain anything that could be deemed primitive or underdeveloped. Every language is as complex and efficient as Latin, English, or any other European language.

**METHODS.** Languages of the North American Indians exhibit a great grammatical diversity and there is no grammatical properties which would characterize these languages as a group if they were present or absent (in the examples shown below the symbols not present in Latin alphabet were taken from phonetic alphabets). At the same time, there are some characteristics not unknown elsewhere in the world, but found in every American Indian language, which is wide-spread enough to be associated with languages in the American continent.

**RESULTS.** Polysynthesis in a fairly large part of North American Indian language families is one of these. Polysynthesis is often considered as the presence of very long words in a language. However, in fact it is about the words that combine various meaningful parts (affixation and compounding). In this case one word may be translated into European languages as a whole sentence. For example, in Yupik (Eskimo-Aleut language family) the single word *kaipiallulliniuk*, formed from the pieces *kaig-piar-llru-llini-u-k* [be hungry-really-a past tense – apparently - indicative-two of them], meaning in English **‘two of them were really hungry’** is a word that gives a whole sentence in English when translated.

Presentation of a noun as a part of a verb is not a productive grammatical property in English. However, it can be found in such well-established fixed compounds as *to babysit*, *to backstab*. But this compounding is common in many Native American languages. For example, in Southern Tiwa (Kiowa-Tanoan language family) language *tiseuanmuban* (*ti-seuan-mü-ban*) is translated as **‘I saw a man.’** [I.him-man-see-PAST.TENSE] [2, p.1].

Other traits found in many North American Indian languages are shown below:

In verbs, the person and number of the subject are commonly marked by prefixes or suffixes—e.g., Karuk *ni-’áhoo* **‘I walk,’** *nu-’áhoo* **‘he walks.’** In some languages, an affix (prefix or suffix) can simultaneously indicate the subject and the object that it acts on—e.g., Karuk *ni-mmah* **‘I see him’** (*ni-‘I.him’*), *ná-mmah* **‘he sees me’** (*ná-‘he.me’*).

In nouns, possession is widely expressed by prefixes or suffixes indicating the person of the possessor. Thus, Karuk has *nani-ávaha* **‘my food,’** *mu-ávaha* **‘his food,’** and so on. (*compare* *ávaha* **‘food’**). When the possessor is a noun, as in **‘man’s food,’** a construction like *ávansa mu-ávaha* **‘man his food’** is used. Many languages have inalienably possessed nouns, which cannot occur except in such possessed forms. These inalienably possessed nouns typically refer to kinship terms or body parts; for example, Luiseño (Uto-Aztecan family), a language in Southern California, has *no-yó* **‘my mother’** and *o-yó* **‘your mother’** but no word for **‘mother’** in isolation. [2, p.4].

The following grammatical features are not common in North America, though they are characteristic of several territories:

In most American Indian languages there are not noun declensions like in Latin and Greek, but it is found in some

languages of California and the U.S. Southwest. For example, Luiseno has the nominative *kii:a* 'house,' accusative *kiiš*, dative *kii-k* 'to the house,' ablative *kii-ŋay* 'from the house,' locative *kii-ŋa* 'in the house,' instrumental *kii-tal* 'by means of the house.'

In many languages first person plural pronouns (forms of 'we,' 'us,' 'our') show a distinction between a form inclusive of the addressee, 'we' denoting 'you and I,' and an exclusive form, 'we' meaning 'I and someone else but not you.' An example from Mohawk (Iroquoian family) is the inclusive plural *tewa-hia:tons* 'we are writing' ('you all and I') contrasted with the exclusive plural *iakwa-hia:tons* 'we are writing' ('they and I but not you'). Some languages also have a distinction in number between singular, dual, and plural nouns or pronouns. For example in Yupik: (Aleut-Eskimoan) *qayaq* 'kayak' (one, singular) — *qayak* 'kayaks' (two, dual) — *qayat* 'kayaks' (plural, three or more).

Reduplication, the repetition of all or part of a stem, is widely used to indicate distributed or repeated action of verbs; e.g., in Karuk, *imyahyah* 'pant' is a reduplicated form of *imyah* 'breathe.' In Uto-Aztecan languages, reduplication can also signal plurals of nouns, as in Pima *gogs* 'dog,' *gogogs* 'dogs.' In many languages, verb stems are distinguished on the basis of the shape or other physical characteristics of the associated noun; thus in Navajo, in referring to motion, 'an' is used for round objects, *tan* for long objects, *tin* for living things, *la* for ropelike objects, and so on.

Verb forms also frequently specify the direction or location of an action by the use of prefixes or suffixes. Karuk, for example, has, based on *paθ* 'throw,' the verbs *paáθ-roov* 'throw upriver,' *paáθ-raa* 'throw uphill,' *paáθ-ri-paa* 'throw across-stream,' and as many as 38 other similar forms. Several languages, especially in the West, have instrumental prefixes on verbs that indicate the instrument involved in performing the action. For example, Kashaya (Pomoan family) has some 20 of these, illustrated by forms of the root *hč<sup>h</sup>a* 'knock over' (when unprefixated, 'fall over'): *ba-hč<sup>h</sup>a* 'knock over with snout,' *da-hč<sup>h</sup>a* 'push over with the hand,' *du-hč<sup>h</sup>a* 'push over with the finger,' and so on.

Lastly, many languages have evidential forms of verbs that indicate the source or validity of the information reported. Thus, Hopi distinguishes *wari* 'he ran, runs, is running,' as a reported event, from *warikŋwe* 'he runs (e.g., on the track team),' which is a statement of general truth, and from *warikni* 'he will run,' which is an anticipated but as yet uncertain event. In several other languages verb forms consistently discriminate hearsay from eyewitness reports.

#### PHONOLOGY

North America languages exhibit as much diversity in their pronunciation systems as in other features. For instance, the Northwest Coast linguistic area languages are extremely rich in terms of the number of contrasting sounds (phonemes): in Tlingit there are more than 50 phonemes (47 consonants and 8 vowels). Quite the opposite, the Karuk language has only 23 phonemes. For comparison, English has about 35 (24 of them are consonants).

The consonants which are commonly found in most North American Indian languages consist of several phonetic contrasts that are not present in European languages. The Native American languages use the same phonetic mechanisms as other languages, but many of the languages also employ other phonetic traits as well. The glottal stop, an interruption of breath produced by closing the vocal cords (such as the sound in the middle of English *oh-oh!*), is a common consonant. Glottal consonants are rather common in western North America languages. They are produced not by air from the lungs as are all English speech sounds, but rather produced closed glottis and rose, so that the air contained above the vocal cords is exhaled when the mouth closed for pronunciation of that consonant is opened. This is represented with an apostrophe; it differentiates, for example, Hupa (Athabaskan) *teew* 'underwater' from *t'ew* 'raw.'

The number of consonantal contrasts is also often distinguished by a larger number of tongue positions (places

of articulation) than is found in most European languages. For example, many of the languages distinguish two types of sounds made with the back of the tongue—a velar *k*, much like an English *k*, and a uvular *q*, produced farther back in the mouth. Labialized sounds, sounds with simultaneous lip-rounding, are also common.

#### VOCABULARY

In American Indian languages, as in other languages, the lexical source is composed both of simple word stems and of derived structures. This derivation processes involves affixation (prefixes, suffixes) in addition to compounding. Some languages use internal sound alternations to make other words, similar to the case of English *song* from *sing*. For instance, in Yurok the words *ponet* 'ashes,' *prncrc* 'dust,' *prncrh* 'to be gray.' As mentioned above, new lexical items can also be formed by way of borrowing from other languages.

It should be noted that, in these languages, as a rule, the meaning of a lexical item cannot necessarily depend on its historical origin or from the meaning of its parts. For example, the name of an early 19th-century trapper, McKay, entered Karuk as *mákkay* but with the meaning of 'white man.' A new word was created when it was compounded with a native noun *váas* 'deerskin blanket' to give the neologism *makáy-vaas* 'cloth,' which in turn was compounded with *yukúkkku* 'moccasin' to give *makayvas-yukúkkku* 'tennis shoes.' At each stage of vocabulary formation, meaning is determined not simply from the etymological source but also by arbitrary extensions or limitations of semantic value.

Vocabularies vary in terms of the number and type of things they designate. One language may make much specific discriminations in a particular semantic area, while another may just have a few general terms; the difference is correlated with the importance of the semantic area for the particular society. Thus, English is very specific in its vocabulary for bovine animals (*bull, cow, calf, heifer, steer, ox*), even to the point of lacking a general cover term in the singular (what is the singular of *cattle*?), but for other species it has only general cover terms. For example, before borrowing names for species of salmon, English had only the generic term *salmon*, whereas some Salishan languages had distinct names for six different species of salmon. North American Indian vocabularies, as would be expected, embody semantic classifications that reflect Native American environmental conditions and cultural traditions.

The number of terms relevant to salmon in languages of the Pacific Northwest reflects the salience of salmon in those cultures. For instance, in some domains, English may make more distinctions than some Native American languages do and in others fewer distinctions than made in those languages. Thus, English discriminates 'airplane,' 'aviator,' and 'flying insect' while Hopi has a single, more general term *masa'yataka*, roughly 'flier,' and, whereas English has the single general term 'water,' Hopi differentiates *paahu* 'water in nature' from *kuuyi* 'water (contained)' and has no single 'water' term.

#### LANGUAGE AND CULTURE

The apparent attractive character of American Indian languages displayed through vocabulary, grammar, and semantics, has inclined the scholars to speculate about the relationships between language, culture, and thought or "worldview". According to certain hypothesis, each language embodies a unique structure of the universe and regulates the individual's habits of perception and thought of every individual, while also determining the aspects of the associated nonlinguistic culture. Edward Sapir put it in 1929:

"Human beings do not live in the objective world alone... but are very much at the mercy of the particular language which has become the medium of expression for their society.... The fact of the matter is that the "real world" is to a large extent unconsciously built up on the language habits of the group.... We see and hear and otherwise experience very largely as we do because the language habits of our community predispose certain choices of interpretation." [2; 3; 9].

DISCUSSION. This idea was further developed, largely on the basis of work with American Indian languages, by Sapir's student Lee Whorf and is now often known as the Whorfian (or Sapir-Whorf) hypothesis. Whorf's initial claims focused on acute differences between English and Native American ways of expressing "the same thing." Based on such linguistic differences, Whorf refers to underlying differences in habits of thought and tries to show how these thought patterns are reflected in nonlinguistic cultural behavior. In his famous works Whorf claimed that language determines thought. His best-known examples involve the treatment of time in Hopi. Whorf claims that Hopi was better suited for physics science than any European language. According to Whorf, for Hopi the events and processes are essential, while for English – things and relations. Hopi grammar emphasizes aspect (how an action is performed) rather than tense (when an action is performed).

REFERENCE:

1. Сепир Э. Отношение американистики к общему языкознанию // Сепир Э. Избранные труды по языкознанию и культурологии. М.: Прогресс 1993 – 656 с.
2. *American Indian Languages: The Historical Linguistics of Native America* by Lyle Campbell. Review by: Doris Bartholomew // *Language*, Vol. 75, No. 3 (Sep., 1999), pp. 596-600
3. Krauss, Michael. 1979. *Na-Dene and Eskimo-Aleut*. // In: Lyle Campbell and Marianne Mithun (eds.). *The languages of Native America: historical and comparative assessment*, pp. 803-901. Austin and London: University of Texas Press.
4. Kroeber, A.L. *Handbook of the Indians of California*. New York Dover, 1976. Rept. of Bulletin 78 of the Bureau of American Ethnology of the Smithsonian Institution. Government Printing Office, Washington, DC, 1925.
5. Stephen Powers. *Tribes of California*. USA Geographical and Geological Survey: Ethnology, Vol. III. P. 24,79,161
6. Beck, Mary Giraud. *Heroes & Heroines: Tlingit –Haida Legend*. Anchorage: Alaska Northwest Books, 1989.
7. *Native Americans /American Indian religion* // <http://www.ducksters.com/history/>
8. *Fifteen native tales about the northern lights* // <http://goodnature.nathab.com/>
9. *North American Indian languages* // [https://universalium.academic.ru/281284/North\\_American\\_Indian\\_languages](https://universalium.academic.ru/281284/North_American_Indian_languages)