**Key to dictionary entries**

**Term**

**Form of Speech**

**abani (v)**

to cook over fire, barbecue, smoke (food), cure, dry (a ham, etc.)

**Definition**

**Parts of speech**

Most words in Choctaw belong to three parts of speech:

- **noun (n.):** a person, place or thing: *ofi* ‘dog’.
- **verb (v.):** an action or a state of being: *hliohli* ‘to chase’.
- **adjective (adj.):** a word that describes or modifies a noun: *ofi lusa* ‘a black dog’. Adjectives are closely related to verbs in Choctaw.

In addition, Choctaw has several smaller classes of words.

- **pronoun (pro.):** a type of noun that replaces a noun phrase: *chishno* ‘you’.
- **conjunction (conj.):** a word used to join words or phrases: *hihki* ‘even so’.
- **demonstrative (dem.):** a word modifying a noun or appearing independently and used in pointing: *ilppa* ‘this’.
- **interrogative (interr.):** a word that asks a question: *kuta* ‘who’.
- **indefinite (indef.):** a word that does not refer to anything in particular: *kuna* ‘someone, anyone’. Indefinites are closely related to interrogatives in Choctaw.
- **interjection (interj.):** a word that functions as a complete sentence: *Yakoke!* ‘Thank you!’.
- **numeral (num.):** a number: *achuffa* ‘one’.
- **postposition (p.):** a word following a noun phrase and indicating a relationship between that noun phrase and the sentence: *oka anuka* ‘in the water’. It is like a preposition in English, but it comes after a noun phrase instead of before it.
- **marker:** an element needed for grammar: *ofi lusa yut* ‘the black dog (as a subject)’.
Phonetic spelling

Choctaw spelling does not always reflect pronunciation perfectly. We have added a phonetic spelling for those who are learning a word for the first time.

In phonetic spellings, the following consonants are pronounced as in English: [b], [ch], [f], [h], [k], [l], [m], [n], [p], [s], [sh], [t], [w], [y], [th] is used to represent the hl sound (technically, a voiceless lateral fricative). The letters [a], [i], and [o] are used for short vowels, while [aː], [iː], and [oː] are used for long vowels. The nasal vowels are spelled [aⁿ], [iⁿ], and [oⁿ]. Hyphens are used to divide words into syllables.

Choctaw has a system of pitch accent. If you listen to a fluent speaker pronounce a word like shukha ‘hog’, the voice will go up at the end. If the same speaker says the word shukcha ‘bag’, the voice starts out high, and then goes down:

\[
\text{shuk-} \quad \text{ha} \quad \text{[shok-} \quad \text{ha]} \quad \text{‘hog’} \quad \text{shuk-} \quad \text{cha} \quad \text{[shók-} \quad \text{cha]} \quad \text{‘bag’}
\]

We indicate these distinctions in the phonetic spelling. The noun shukha is spelled phonetically as [shok-ha], while the noun shukcha is spelled phonetically as [shók-cha], with an accent indicating the high syllable. The accent appearing on the second to last syllable of a word can be important in signalling that the noun is derived from a verb:

\[
\text{hoponi [ho-po-ní] v. to cook} \\
\text{hoponi [ho-pó-ní] n. a cook}
\]

Entries vs. subentries

Forms that are closely related may be listed as subentries instead of main entries.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Entry</th>
<th>Description</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>afabi</td>
<td>left (the direction)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>→ibbak afabi</td>
<td>n. the left hand</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

When a form includes a marker and the form is a noun, we list the form as a main entry:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Entry</th>
<th>Description</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>isht abeka</td>
<td>a disease, sickness</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

When a form includes a marker and the form is a verb, we list the form as a subentry under the root verb:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Entry</th>
<th>Description</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>abeka</td>
<td>to be sick</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>→isht abeka</td>
<td>v. to be sick with (an illness)</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Verbal forms including the prefixes a-, ai-, oritti- are listed as main entries and as subentries.
Using the Dictionary

Like any language, Choctaw has rules for combining words in sentences. Students of the language should consult a textbook or a fluent speaker for explanations of how to use words in this dictionary. We provide a very brief sketch here to those without other sources.

Commands. A simple verb in its dictionary form can be used as a command:
- Taloa! Sing!
- Ishko! Drink!

Negative commands use *na* after the verb and *ish* ‘you’ or *hush* ‘you (plural)’ before the verb:
- Ish taloa *nna*! Don’t sing! (said to one)
- Hush potoli *nna*! Don’t touch! (said to two or more)

‘Let’s’ commands use *kil* before a verb beginning with a vowel or *ke* before a consonant:
- Kil *impa*! Let’s eat!
- Ke *taloa*! Let’s sing!

Objects. An object is a noun phrase that is affected by an action. Objects come before a verb in Choctaw:
- Pishukchi *ishko*! Drink milk!
- Pishukchi *kil* *ishko*! Let’s drink milk!

For clarity, objects can be followed by the object marker *a*.

Subjects. A subject can be added before the verb. The subject is followed by the subject marker *ʋt*:
- Hattak *ʋt* tokso*li*. The man is working.
- Hushi *yut* taloa. The bird is singing.

The subject marker is *ʋt* after a consonant. After a vowel, it’s usually *yut*. After a few nouns, it’s *hυt*.

There is no Choctaw pronoun for ‘he’, ‘she’, ‘it’, or ‘they’:
- Tokso*li*. (He/she/it) is working.
- Taloa. (He/she/it) is singing.

Once the subject is established, subjects are understood from context.

When a verb has a subject and an object, the subject comes first:
- Ofi *yut* pishukchi *ishko*. The dog is drinking milk.

Adjectives. Adjectives in Choctaw come after the noun that is modified:
- Hushi *lusa* *yut* taloa. The black bird is singing.

In the above sentence the adjective *lusa* ‘black’ modifies the noun *hushi* ‘bird’. Adjectives in Choctaw can also be used as predicates, without a form of ‘be’:
- Hushi *yut* *lusa*. The bird is black.

‘Be’ sentences. A noun can also be used as a predicate:
- Hattak *ʋt* Chahta. The man is Choctaw.
- Ohoyo *yut* ikhunanchi. The woman is a teacher.

‘I am’, ‘you are’, etc. are expressed as follows with nouns:
- Chahta *sia*. I am Choctaw.
Chahta chia. You are Choctaw.
Chahta hupia. We are Choctaw.
Chahta huchia. You (all) are Choctaw.

**Question markers.** A question asking for a yes or no answer is marked by adding ho after the verb:
- Taloa ho? Is he/she/it singing?
- Chahta chia ho? Are you Choctaw?

The question marker has the form o after a consonant and yo after an adjective.

**Li/ish person markers.** The Li/ish person markers identify who is performing an action:
- impa li I am eating
- ish impa you are eating
- impa he/she/it is eating
- il impa we are eating
- hush impa you (all) are eating

Notice that li is the only person marker following the verb, and that ‘he/she/it’ has no marker. Il takes the form e before a consonant.

**Su/chi person markers.** The Su/chi person markers are used for the objects of actions:
- su piša he/she/it sees me
- chi piša he/she/it sees you
- piša he/she/it sees him/her/it
- pi piša he/she/it sees us
- hupi piša he/she/it sees all of us
- huchi piša he/she/it sees you (all)

Su/chi person markers are also used for the subjects of adjectives (words describing emotions, etc.) and less active verbs:
- su nukoa I am angry
- chi nukoa you are angry
- nukoa he/she/it is angry
- pi nukoa we are angry
- hupi nukoa all of us are angry
- huchi nukoa you (all) are angry

When a verb has a subject and an object, a Li/ish person marker and a Su/chi person marker can be combined:
- chi piša li I see you
- ish su piša you see me
- e chi piša we see you

Notice that the subject (Li/ish) person marker comes before the object (Su/chi) person marker when these are both before the verb.
Um/chim person markers. Choctaw also has Um/chim person markers. These often mean ‘to’ or ‘for’ someone:

- **Um anoli** he/she/it is telling it **to me**
- **chim anoli** he/she/it is telling it **to you**
- **im anoli** he/she/it is telling it **to him/her**
- **pim anoli** he/she/it is telling it **to us**
- **hupim anoli** he/she/it is telling it **to all of us**
- **huchim anoli** he/she/it is telling it **to you (all)**

Before consonants, the Um/chim person markers take the form $a$, $chi$, $i$, $pi$, $hupi$, and $huchi$. The Um/chim person markers can be used with the Li/ish person markers:

- **ish pim anoli ho?** are you telling it **to us?**

Possession. Person markers are also used for possession. For most nouns, the Um/chim person markers are used:

- **Um ofi** my dog
- **chim ofi** your dog
- **im ofi** his/her/its dog
- **pim ofi** our dog
- **hupim ofi** our dog (all of us)
- **huchim ofi** your (all) dog

Before consonants, these are $a$, $chi$, $i$, $pi$, $hupi$, $huchi$.

For some nouns, the Su/chi person markers are used:

- **Su** haksobish my ears
- **chi** haksobish your ears
- **pi** haksobish ears, his/her/its ears (no mark)
- **hupi** haksobish our ears
- **huchi** haksobish your (all) ears

The nouns that take the Su/chi person markers are usually parts of the body or family terms, though some parts of the body and family terms take the Um/chim person markers.

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1 Many people say $pi$ haksobish, $huchi$ haksobish, and $hupi$ haksobish in certain contexts.
**Tense and possibility.** Choctaw has several tenses. There is no marker for the present tense. To form a past tense, *tuk* is used:

- **toksuli** he/she/it is working
- **toksuli tuk** he/she/it worked, he/she/it did work

To describe something in the remote past, *tok* is used instead:

- **toksuli tok** he/she/it worked a long time ago

To express the future tense, *achi* is used:

- **toksuli achi** → **toksula chi** he/she/it will work
- **ishko achi** → **ishka chi** he/she/it will drink
- **impa achi** → **impa chi** he/she/it will eat

As the example above shows, you delete the last vowel of the verb and move the *a* of the future tense over to replace it. The marker *ahinla* ‘can, may’ follows the same rule:

- **toksuli ahinla** → **toksula hinla** he/she/it can work

**Negation.** One way to express ‘not’ is with *kiyo*:

- **toksuli kiyO** he/she/it is not working

Another way is to add a suffix -*o* to the verb and to use a special set of negative person markers. The following pattern is used for actions done on purpose:

- **ak impo** I have not eaten
- **chik impo** you have not eaten
- **ik impo** he/she/it has not eaten
- **kil impo** we have not eaten
- **huchik impo** you (all) have not eaten

For adjectives (emotions, etc.) and less active verbs, the following pattern is used:

- **ik su nukshopo** I am not afraid
- **ik chi nukshopo** you are not afraid
- **ik nukshopo** he/she/it is not afraid
- **ik pi nukshopo** we are not afraid
- **ik hupi nukshopo** all of us are not afraid
- **ik huchi nukshopo** you (all) are not afraid

**Pronouns.** Choctaw has a set of personal pronouns:

- **uno** I
- **chishno** you
- **pishno** we
- **hupishno** we (all)
- **huchishno** you (all)

The personal pronouns may be used together with the person markers. The person marker agrees with the personal pronoun:

*Uno ak kia anumpuli li.* I also am speaking.
Possessive pronouns indicate a possessor of something understood in context:

- `ummi` mine
- `chimmi` yours
- `immi` his/hers/its/theirs
- `pimmi` ours
- `hupimmi` all of ours
- `huchimmi` all of yours

Example:

Isht ishko mut ummi. That glass is mine.

Demonstrative pronouns are used for pointing or referring:

- `iluppa` this, these
- `yunmmat` that, those

The same words are used after nouns, where they have the form `iluppot` and `yunmmot` for a subject, and `iluppa` and `yunmma` for an object:

- Chukka `iluppot` tohbi. This house is white./These houses are white.
- Chukka `yunmmot` lusa. That house is black./Those houses are black.
- Chukka `iluppa` ish pisa ho? Do you see this house/these houses?
- Chukka `yunmma` ish pisa ho? Do you see that house/those houses?

The demonstratives may also be shortened:

- Chukka `put` tohbi. This house is white./These houses are white.
- Chukka `mut` lusa. That house is black./Those houses are black.
- Chukka `pa` ish pisa ho? Do you see this house/these houses?

Interrogatives are used for asking questions:

- `nanta` what
- `kuta` who

Indefinites are used for notions like ‘something’ or ‘someone’:

- `nana` something
- `kuna` someone

**Postpositions.** English has prepositions that come before their objects. Choctaw has postpositions that come after their objects:

- Chukka `nutaka` underneath the house
- Chukka `paknaka` over the house
- Chukka `bilika` near the house
- Chukka `anuka` inside the house
- Chukka `tikba` in front of the house
- Chukka `apata` beside the house
- Chukka `ašhaka` behind the house
Common affixes and markers in dictionary entries. The prefix *a-*(or ai-)* is used to specify a location:

- **binili** (one) to sit
- **abinili** place where one sits: chair

The prefix *itti-* is used to mean ‘each other’ or ‘together’:

- **hokli** to grasp
- **ittihiokli** to grasp each other

The suffix *-chi* is often used to mean ‘cause’ or ‘make’:

- **binili** (one) to sit
- **binilichichi** to cause (one) to sit, to seat

Several markers are used to indicate direction:

- **pit** pisa to look that way
- **et** pisa to look this way
- **ont** pisa to go look
- **ant** pisa to come look
- **akka** ia (one) to go down
- **uba** ia (one) to go up
- **falamüt** ia (one) to return going
- **falamüt** minti (one) to return coming

Markers of direction come before the person markers:

- **Et s**u pisa! Look at me (this way)!
- **Et um anoli!** Tell it to me (this way)!

Other markers indicate notions like location, use of an instrument, or accompaniment:

- **o_hikia** (one) to stand on (something)
- **isht ikbi** (one) to make with (a tool)
- **awant** ia (one) to go along with (someone)
- **iba** taloa to sing with (someone)

Plural forms of verbs. Verbs in Choctaw that describe motion or position often have special forms based on how many are involved in the action:

- **ia / ittiachi / ilhkoli** (one) / (two) / (three or more) to go
- **bininli / chiya / binohmaya** (one) / (two) / (three or more) to be sitting
- **hikia / hinli / hiyohmaya** (one) / (two) / (three or more) to be standing
- **ittonla / kaha / kahmaya** (one) / (two) / (three or more) to be lying
- **takanli / takohlila / takohmaya** (one) / (two) / (three or more) to be hanging
**Changes in verb shape.** The pronunciation and spelling of a verb will sometimes change depending on how the verb is used.

- *takchi* to tie
- *tahakchi* to tie quickly
- *tahåkchi* to tie repeatedly
- *taiyakchi* to have finally tied
- *tåkchi* to be tying (and then doing something else)

The dictionary does not include all of these derived forms. When they are included, they are listed as subentries.
References


Symbols and abbreviations

adj. adjective
adv. adverb
conj. conjunction
dem. demonstrative
gr. var. grammatical variant
indef. indefinite
interj. interjection
interr. interrogative
n. noun
num. numeral
pro. pronoun
sp. var. spelling variant
v. verb
∥ example
♦ cultural note