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The UK Linguistics Olympiad 2020

Round 2



Problem 5. Arapaho nouns (20 marks)

Arapaho is an Algonquian language spoken by about 1,000 people in Wyoming and Oklahoma in the United States.

Here are some Arapaho nouns in the language's official written form, plus the English meaning. Each noun has several grammatical forms.

For further explanations (including the meanings marked with *) and the questions, see the next page.



singular	plural	obviative singular	locative singular	
hisei	hiseino?	hisein	hiseinewe?	woman
hotii	hotiiwo?	hotiiw	hotiiwowe?	car
nebi	nebiho?	hibio	nebihewe?	my* older sister
neicet	neicetino		neicetine?	my* hand
nooku	nookuho?	nookuo	nookuhowe?	beaver
hisee3	hiseeto?	hiseet	(a)	pine tree
(b)	ooto		ooto?	leg
beici3	beicito		beicite?	tooth
coox	(c)	(d)	(e)	enemy
ce?einox	ce?eino3o		ce?eino3e?	bag
hinen	hinenino?	(f)	(g)	man
wotoo	(h)	(i)	wotoohe?	pair of pants
(j)	wo3onohoeno	(k)	wo3onohoene?	book
(l)	(m)	nii?eihio	(n)	eagle
ce?ibes	ce?ibexo	(o)	(p)	block (of wood)
benes	(q)	(r)	(s)	arm
(t)	nesiho?	(u)	(v)	my* uncle

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Notes:

- The greyed-out cells indicate that the form does not exist.
- ʔ and ʒ are both consonants. ʔ is a glottal stop, the sound in the middle of “uh-oh,” and ʒ is θ, the *th* in *think*.
- Arapaho pronunciation also involves tones, which have not been included in this problem.
- The ‘obviative’, sometimes called the ‘fourth person’, is a noun form used in some languages to express how relevant an entity is. If some third-person entities (i.e., ones that are neither the speaker nor the listener) are less important than others to the conversation, they will be given the obviative marking, while the more important ones will take the standard third-person marking.
- *: One example of how obviation works involves the words whose meaning is shown as ‘my*’. In the basic uses, the possessor is indeed the speaker (i.e. ‘my’) but in the obviative it shifts to a less central third person (‘his’ or ‘her’).
- The ‘locative’ is a noun form used to indicate a location – e.g., the locative form of ‘field’ would mean ‘in the field’ or ‘on the field’.

Q5.1. On your answer sheet, add the missing forms (a)-(v). If you think the form does not exist, write N/A.

Q5.2. Explain your solution on a separate sheet.

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Solution and marking.

Marking (max 22)

- 1 point for each completely correct word. No half marks. (max 22)

a	hiseetewe? or ...owe?	b	oo3	c	coo3o?
d	coo3	e	coo3owe? or ...ewe?	f	hinenin
g	hineninewe? or ...owe?	h	wotooho	i	N/A
j	wo3onohoe	k	N/A	l	nii?eihii
m	nii?eihiiho?	n	nii?eihiihewe? or ...owe?	o	N/A
p	ce?ibexe?	q	benexo	r	N/A
s	benexe?	t	nesi	u	hisio
v	nesihewe?				

Commentary

Semantics

Nouns are classified as animate or inanimate semantically – note, body parts are inanimate, while “pine tree” and “car” are animate (all others are obvious).

Three of the examples (one’s older sister, one’s hand, one’s uncle) are possessed and contain a possessive prefix ne~hi.

Morphology

Stems

Nouns have two “stems”, S1 and S2, related by the following rules for going from S2 → S1:

	S1	←	S2
a.	-V		-Vh, -Vn, or -Vw
b.	-t		-tin
c.	-n		-nin
d.	-3		-t
e.	-x		-3
f.	-s		-x

All rules except (a.) can be performed in either direction. Another way of analysing the changes between S2 and S1 would be to assimilate many of the stem changes into a single

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"chain", as in: s -- x -- 3 -- t -- tin [if S2 ends in any of these, change to S1 by shifting one place to the left, on this chain], each step showing a kind of softening or reduction. The same reduction process would extend beyond the chain to Vh/n/w > V and nin > n. This process is similar to the 'soft mutation' of Welsh.

Inflectional rules

	singular	plural	obv. sing	loc sing
animate	S1	S2+o?	S1+o if S2= -h otherwise S2	S2+Vwe? V = o/e if stem contains o/e
inanimate	S1	S2+o	N/A	S2+e?

Note the limited vowel harmony in the locative singular. Note that this rule can be described, consistently with the data, in several consistent ways, including:

- if root contains e, then V = e
- else V = o

*Alternative solution: consistently with the data, this pattern can be explained as:

- V = e (for humans)
- V = o (for non-humans)

This alternate solution is not an actual rule in Arapaho, but since it fits the data given, it was scored identically, in both parts (R1 and R2), to the vowel harmony solution.

Possessive prefixes

The prefix "ne-" indicates possession (in English, "*my ..."). In the obviative singular, when this form exists (i.e., for animate nouns):

- ne- → hi-

(One way of explaining why this change happens is that the grammatical person is different in the obviative.)