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AUTHOR Armagost, James L.  
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INTERPRETING ST. CLAIR'S COMANCHE TEXTS:  
Objective Case Marking and 'Same Subject'  
Dependent Clauses

James L. Armagost

**Abstract:** St. Clair's Comanche texts, collected in 1902, appear to exhibit a very uncharacteristic form of objective case marking along with 'same subject' dependent clause types unknown elsewhere in the language. Proper interpretation of the materials and the circumstances in which they were transcribed leads to an analysis in which turn-of-the-century Comanche was unremarkable, at least in the matters considered here.

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Introduction

As a student under Boas, Harry Hull St. Clair collected nineteen Comanche texts while in Oklahoma Territory in 1902. His retranscription of original field notebooks comprises some 948 Comanche lines, with a roughly accurate interlinear English translation (St. Clair 1902). The texts vary greatly in length, the longest running 177 Comanche lines while the shortest is a mere eight. The subject matter is almost exclusively Coyote stories; in addition there is one personal reminiscence and one humorous story about losing a horse. At least three speakers contributed to the collection, but unfortunately the name of the person(s) responsible for half of the stories is not recorded. The breakdown is as follows: Uesi, one story; Esikona, three stories; Isakona, six stories; unattributed, nine stories.

These materials constitute the earliest examples of extended texts in Comanche. The fact that they were recorded by a student trained in phonetic transcription makes them even more valuable.<sup>1</sup> They contain much information on matters of phonology, morphology, syntax and discourse, both from a diachronic and from a synchronic perspective. In addition, St. Clair's experimental wax cylinder recordings are among the earliest attempts to use the phonograph in a field setting (Stocking 1974:460). These cylinders have been preserved and, once they become available to the

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scholarly world, should provide information beyond that recorded in the manuscripts themselves.<sup>2</sup>

As an example of the overall appearance of the texts, Figure 1 shows the single very short story attributed to Uesi.<sup>3</sup> Although a few minor transcription questions remain, it can be seen that St. Clair's cursive form is quite easily read even if one has no great familiarity with Boasian notation. Superscripts, such as [ʰ] in lines 4 and 7, represent voiceless vowels, a common feature of Comanche phonetics. Spaces between transcription clusters largely correspond to word or phrase boundaries. The fact that boundaries are recorded in this way suggests a relatively word-by-word dictation style by the narrator. This does not mean that each word is pronounced carefully or with clarity, i.e. so as to exhibit distinctions fully. But it is important because of a particular feature of Comanche pronunciation known as inorganic devoicing, by which a short unstressed prepausal vowel is optionally devoiced. At a relatively shallow level all Comanche words end in a glottal stop or a vowel (monophthong or diphthong). The number of consonants falling before a space in Figure 1 suggests the extent to which short final vowels are not recorded by St. Clair, either because he failed to perceive their voiceless quality or possibly because the speakers deleted rather than devoicing them.<sup>4</sup>

St. Clair's materials contain various cases of what appears to be syntactic oddity when compared both to what must have been the case before Comanche's recent separation from Wind River Shoshoni, and to what we know of the language in the period since the nineteen forties. If these cases cannot be explained in some satisfactory way, we are left with a very strange situation. The forms recorded by St. Clair would constitute, at worst, a set of changes by the language as a whole that were later completely reversed, or at best, a sort of branching out by a subset of speakers whose particular variety of the language has left no subsequent trace. That neither of these speculative histories actually took place follows from the interpretation of the text materials to be outlined here.

#### Objective Case Marking

Suffixes mark a number of distinctions in Comanche's nominal system, which includes nominative,

possessive and objective case and singular, dual and plural number. I will here focus on objective case marking, a summary of which is found in Table 1.<sup>5</sup> Gaps in the dual and plural portions of the table represent the fact that inanimate or even nonhuman nouns are often uninflected for number. When it does occur, on the model of the other dual and plural forms, it is a form of emphasis. Singular forms take one of five suffixes, including zero.<sup>6</sup> /-i/ and /-a/ mark the largest number of forms, with /-a/ predictable after stems ending in /h/ or /ʔ/. As can be seen, /-i/ often coalesces with the stem final vowel or, in effect, replaces it; in some nouns it is simply added to the stem. /-hka/ is predictable for deictic elements, while /-hta/ occurs after the nominalizer /-pin/. A few nouns have no distinct objective singular form.

		<u>singular</u>	<u>dual</u>	<u>plural</u>
-i	tʰeʔtʰi 'child'	tʰeʔti	tʰeʔtihi	tʰeʔtii
	puku 'horse'	puki	pukunihi	pukunii
	moʔo 'hand'	moʔe		
	paa 'water'	pai/pae		
	woinu 'instrument'	woinui		
-a	ʔahpʰiʔ 'father'	ʔahpʰiʔa	ʔahpʰiʔanihi	ʔahpʰiʔanii
	haici 'friend'	haiciha	haicihihi	haicinihi
-hka	su 'that (one)'	suhka	suhci	sucii
-hta	huupi 'tree'	huupihta		
-∅	kahni 'house'	kahni		

Table 1. Nominal inflection: objective case

In (1) I give a number of examples in which the expected situation, as represented by Table 1, is actually found in the St. Clair texts. In these and subsequent examples the first line is a noncursive adaption that preserves much of the character of St. Clair's notation, while the second is a modern, relatively broad transcription consistent with that used for various Numic languages.

- (1a) éhka bödöedi  
 'ʔehka pi'tʰeʔti  
 '(those-OBJ) his children-OBJ'

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- (1b) nohíjadi wihtúaβai!  
 'nohi? 'caati 'wihtuaβai?  
 'have a very good-OBJ kettle'?
- (1c) saka ijápöa  
 'sahka 'ʔisapí?a  
 'that-OBJ Coyote-OBJ'
- (1d) bökákoa  
 pí'kaku?a  
 'her grandmother-OBJ'
- (1e) mayúyup harókaru!<sup>i</sup>  
 ma'yuyupíha 'rɪhkaru?ɪ  
 'will eat his fat (ones)-OBJ'
- (1f) ötömapa  
 ʔi'timí+píha  
 'your trade-OBJ'<sup>8</sup>
- (1g) suka sokoβíta  
 'suhka 'sokoβihta  
 'that-OBJ earth-OBJ'
- (1h) döpiht-daná-noraíyaru!<sup>i</sup>  
 'típihta 'nahní? 'rayaaru?ɪ  
 'I'll just carry a rock-OBJ'

The expected *-hka* marks the demonstratives in (1a,c,g), while (1a,b) have *-i*, (1c,d,e,f) have *-a*, and the final two examples have *-hka*. What makes the data in (1) worthy of comment is the fact that such forms are very infrequent in the texts. Their existence does show, however, that St. Clair's speakers had, at least in some minimal way, the singular objective pattern characteristic of Shoshoni and later Comanche. But this immediately raises the question of why such forms should occur so infrequently. One possible answer could be that for these speakers objective case marking is optional, though we will see that further data make this hypothesis highly unlikely.

For the large set of forms that fail to show the expected objective suffixes one can distinguish two general patterns, to which I now turn. Understanding these patterns leads to a solution to the problem posed above. Consider first the following objective phrase:

- (2) wáhat cacát dōhōyaní  
 ?? 'wahaht 'cacaat 't+h+yanihí/'t+h+yanihí  
 ?? 'two good horses-OBJ'

Here the noun shows the expected /-i/ suffix, as I have shown in the second line with two forms differing in optional vowel devoicing. What St. Clair evidently heard as stress is in fact the dual objective with intervocalic /h/ either very weakly articulated or deleted entirely. Some varieties of Comanche are very inconsistent on [h], whether intervocalically or before a consonant.

For the numeral and adjective in (2) we cannot say that objective case is simply unmarked (cp. ['caati] in (1b)). As we saw above in reference to Figure 1, the lack of word final vowels on these forms is explainable in two ways: either St. Clair failed to perceive these as voiceless, or (less likely) the speakers deleted them entirely. In either case we can easily provide the following clarification of (2):

- (3) wáhat cacát dōhōyaní  
 'wahahtI 'cacaatl 't+h+yanihí/'t+h+yanihí  
 'two-OBJ good-OBJ horses-OBJ'

In (3) the first two words are grammatically singular. The adjective is reduplicated and dual number is marked only in the noun. Given the probable circumstance of repeated word-by-word dictation as St. Clair strove to retranscribe his first rough notations, this example then falls together with those of (1), once the effect of prepausal devoicing is taken into account.

Similarly explained examples are very frequent. Compare (4) with (1d).

- (4) suka BE káku  
 'suhka β+'kaku?A  
 '(that-OBJ) her grandmother-OBJ'

However, given the abundance of such superficially unmarked forms one might entertain alternate accounts, for example the possibility that it is only the first nominal element in an objective phrase that is overtly marked. To the extent that word-by-word dictation with rather rampant prepausal devoicing is judged to be unlikely, such very frequent forms as the following

could be taken to argue for something like the suggested alternate hypothesis:

- (5a) ika döǝpö  
 ?? 'ʔhka 'tǝhpǝ?  
 ?? 'this-OBJ child'
- (5b) suka Bötökap  
 ?? 'suhka β+'tǝhkapǝ  
 ?? '(that-OBJ) his food'
- (5c) wáhat kakánaBöci  
 ?? 'wahahtI 'kakanaβ++ci?  
 ?? 'two-OBJ poor (ones)-OBJ'

Two lines of evidence lead to a firm rejection of the alternate hypothesis in favor of the interpretation in (6) involving prepausal devoicing.

- (6a) 'ʔhka 'tǝhpǝʔA  
 'this-OBJ child-OBJ'
- (6b) 'suhka β+'tǝhkapǝhA  
 '(that-OBJ) his food-OBJ'
- (6c) 'wahahtI 'kakanaβ++ciʔA  
 'two-OBJ poor (ones)-OBJ'

First, all the above examples involve forms that select /-j/ or /-a/. We must ask the fate of forms marked for objective case in other ways. (7) gives an objective phrase containing 'earth', a typical noun subcategorized for the /-hta/ suffix (cp. (1g)).

- (7) ik<sup>a</sup> sokoβit  
 'ʔhka 'sokoβihtA  
 'this-OBJ earth-OBJ'

The nominative form for 'earth' is [sokoβi], which means that the only possible analysis for (7) is that given.<sup>9</sup>

The second reason for preferring the prepausal analysis is that forms such as that in (8) do occur, though with very low frequency. There is no question here that St. Clair heard the final voiceless vowel.

- (8a) ʔhka nöhópihta  
 'ʔihka n+ 'huupihta  
 '(this-OBJ) my tree-OBJ'
- (8b) bötúkí  
 p+ 'tuhki  
 'his flesh-OBJ'

For the forms in which an expected /-i/ or /-a/ is not recorded, the easiest overall account therefore claims that the suffix is present both morphologically and phonologically, and most likely phonetically as well even if this physical manifestation is largely obscured by devoicing.

The second general pattern that can be found in ostensibly objective forms that seem to lack overt case marking involves an implicit claim about biuniqueness made by St. Clair's notation. Consider the phrases in (9).

- (9a) dópíhtö  
 't+pihta  
 'rock-OBJ'
- (9b) dáçöwítö ékopaitö  
 'taac+kwiti 'ʔekopait+  
 'has seven-OBJ tongues'<sup>10</sup>

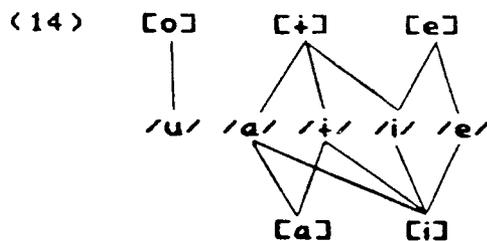
St. Clair claims that the vowel is identical in the first and third syllables of (9a) and the second and fourth syllables of the first word in (9b). He also claims that both words in (9b) end in the same vowel. But in fact we know that the last vowel of (9a) is underlying /a/ since we are again dealing with the /-hta/ suffix.

What of the last vowel in the first word in (9b)? It cannot be /a/ since the nominalizer here is /-t+n/, which should select the objective suffix /-i/. Is there any reason to believe that the transcribed [ö] could represent underlying /i/? It turns out that there are other very clear cases of just this, having nothing to do with inflectional suffixes. Consider the following:



- (13c) nohépönid  
 'nohihp+nit+  
 'were playing'      [e] from /i/)
- (13d) nayönid  
 'na?yinet+  
 'were laughing'      [i] from /e/)
- (13e) dúnejin  
 'tunehc+nU  
 'ran'      [i] from /+/)
- (13f) sömanö koßín  
 's+mini+hkoßanU      [i] from /a/;  
 'broke himself up'      [a] from /+/)

Considering just the few examples in (9) through (13) then, which by no means exhaust the data, we have the following pattern:



My purpose here is not to question St. Clair's phonetic transcription, but rather to illustrate the unexpected relationships between the surface and deep phonological levels in his materials. Such wholesale violations of biuniqueness virtually guarantee the phonetic overlap of certain objective and nominative tokens, as in (12). Until one has grasped the nature and extent of this overlap, it is easy to think that St. Clair's speakers exhibited a hitherto unknown pattern of objective phrase inflection.

Same subject dependent clauses

Turning now to verbal inflection, I want to point out one difficulty in the pattern of dependent clause marking exhibited in St. Clair's texts. In certain dependent clauses Comanche marks whether the subject includes or excludes the subject of the next higher clause. The former case is marked by the so-called 'same subject' suffix /-(h)ci/ on the lower verb, as (15) illustrates.

- (15a) uDóya çiyáke nókigwait  
 ʔu'royaahci 'yakenuhkik<sup>u</sup>ait+  
 'taking it, (he) ran off crying'
- (15b) manákçi dóBonin  
 ma'nakíci 'tíβuninU  
 'hearing it, (she) awoke'
- (15c) kóaçi mían<sup>hu</sup>  
 'kíahci 'miʔanU  
 'going out, (they) left'
- (15d) daóŋçe súrsö íjapö  
 'taʔuríci 'suríʃt+ 'ʔisapí?  
 'meeting (him), Coyote (said)'

These examples are typical of the most common pattern in St. Clair, in which /-(h)ci/ marks an event prior to that named by the main verb. These dependent clauses contain background material, summarize and tie one or more events to another, etc.

The texts also contain a fair number of examples in which /-(h)ci/ appears to occur in totally unknown patterns. In (16), for example, this suffix seems to occur with /-ku/, one of the 'different subject' suffixes.

- (16a) uBákarök<sup>u</sup>çi  
 ?? ʔu'βaakarí-kU-ci  
 'where there was a waterhole'
- (16b) çihakóihomíak<sup>u</sup>çi  
 ?? 'cihakooihumia-kU-ci  
 'are starving'

The semantic contradiction in the indicated analysis of (16) is so unlike what is known of both Shoshoni and Comanche that it simply cannot be correct.

Two additional perplexing examples are given in (17). Here /-(h)ci/ seems to cooccur with two aspect markers, the completive in (17a) and the progressive in (17b).

(17a) óXtu mánin ciwúnu umúwörían  
 ?? 'ʔohtu mani-nú-ci 'wihnu ʔu'muwɛɛianU  
 'crossed there; then spit it out'

(17b) spti nqkimáR ɕibúnin  
 ?? 'sooti 'nokima-cl-ci 'puninU  
 'saw many moving along'

At least for (17a), where a single participant is involved, one might propose an extension of the known Shoshoni-Comanche pattern. It could reasonably be argued that presence of completive /-nuh/ in such an example is an innovation in which the aspect marker is introduced into the dependent clause to emphatically mark the lack of temporal overlap in the two events. (17b) remains totally unaccounted for, however.

It turns out that all these problematic examples are explained if interpreted differently. None of them contain the same subject suffix /-(h)ci/ but another marker /s+n/, which I provisionally gloss 'intensive'. This clitic can be translated in a number of ways indicative of its functional range. For example, in (18) it corresponds to English 'still' and in (19) to 'early'.

(18) 'ʔomoma 'on foot'  
 'ʔomomfs+ 'still on foot'

(19) 'pɛcɛku '(in the) morning'  
 'pɛcɛkust+ '(in the) early morning'

But /s+n/ can also mark larger constituents. For example, some of St. Clair's speakers chunk discourse by marking the beginnings of paragraphs with /-s+n/ in sentential second position.<sup>11</sup>

If one examines a number of tokens of /-s+n/ in St. Clair's materials it becomes apparent that both the

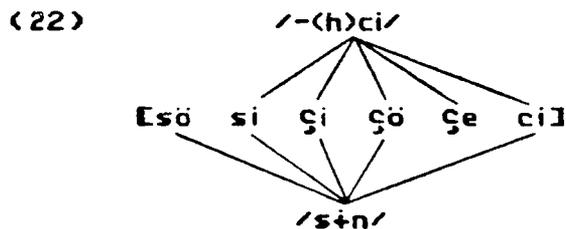
consonant and the vowel are variously transcribed. Three possibilities beyond the examples directly above are shown in (20), where INT in the gloss indicates presence of this particle.

- (20a) mayán sikániβet<sup>u</sup> mayán  
ma'yaanUs+ 'kahniβetU ma'yaanU  
'took it INT, took it toward camp'
- (20b) ok<sup>u</sup> Bídöhc çi  
'?okU 'βit+hcIs+  
'arriving INT there'
- (20c) uhánçisö döhyarçin  
ʔu'haniçis+ 't+h+yaco?inU  
'doing it INT, (he) got on horseback'

On the other hand, the same subject dependent clause marker /-(h)ci/ is itself variously transcribed. Consider the following examples:

- (21a) suka būniac daórçe  
'suhka 'pohniacIhA 'taʔurçci  
'meeting that skunk'
- (21b) unímarci mían  
ʔu'nimarçci 'miʔanU  
'begging him, (he) left'
- (21c) núhkçi bötóçtö dáuran  
'nukIci p+'t+e?ti 'taʔuranU  
'running, (she) found her child'
- (21d) sömö onúkwçö  
's+me ʔo'niik<sup>w</sup>Ici  
'having said that to him'

These and additional examples support an analysis in which the dependent clause marker /-(h)ci/ largely overlaps transcriptionally with the intensifier /-s+n/. Ignoring prepausal voiceless (or deleted) vowel data, we find at least the following St. Clair forms:



Returning now to a reconsideration of (16) and (17), in which /-(h)ci/ appears to occur in totally unknown patterns, we can see that the correct interpretation of St. Clair's notation is as follows:

- (23a) uBákarók<sup>u</sup>ʃi  
ʒu'baakar<sup>+</sup>-kU-s<sup>+</sup>  
'where there was a waterhole INT'
- (23b) ʃihakóihom<sup>i</sup>ʃak<sup>u</sup>ʃi  
'cihakooihumia-kU-s<sup>+</sup>  
'are starving INT'
- (23c) óXtu mánin ciwúnu umúwör<sup>i</sup>ʃan  
'?ohtu 'mani-nU-s<sup>+</sup> 'wihnu ʒu'muw<sup>i</sup>ʃianU  
'crossed there INT, then spit it out'
- (23d) spti nqkimáR ʃibúnin  
'sooti 'nokima-rI-s<sup>+</sup> 'puninU  
'saw many moving along INT'

The correctness of this interpretation is demonstrated not only by examples such as (20b,c), in which we find both /-(h)ci/ and /s+n/ in what is known to be a permitted sequence, but also by examples such as (24), which does not involve a dependent clause but merely /s+n/ posing as /-(h)ci/.

- (24) nanónʃi önánsutaikihinö<sup>12</sup>  
'nahn+n<sup>i</sup>-s<sup>+</sup> ?+'nan<sup>i</sup>sutaik+kin<sup>+</sup>  
'we just INT came to worship you'

### Conclusion

Not every occurrence of St. Clair's [ʃi] is a manifestation of /-(h)ci/. Just as for the objective forms considered above, so also for the dependent clause and 'intensive' data must we contend with rather extensive transcriptional overlaps. Whether these texts

accurately reflect the various speakers' pronunciation cannot be determined at present. While the overlaps far exceed the limit that I am aware of for more recent Comanche, we cannot simply dismiss them by claiming that St. Clair had a bad ear. It can be hoped that eventual examination of copies of his cylinder recordings will allow resolution of this matter as well as the question whether the speakers deleted or merely devoiced various vowels.<sup>13</sup>

#### NOTES

1. Sources of information on early forms of Comanche are limited. They include several short vocabularies and records of common phrases written by English or Spanish speakers, such as Harston 1963 and Rejon 1866, and various official records of names, etc. As an example of the latter, see my comments on Thomas 1929 (Armagost in press).
2. The Federal Cylinder Project of the American Folklife Center, Library of Congress, is currently attempting to identify various recordings, of which St. Clair's Comanche materials are a part. Taped copies, it is hoped, will soon be available for study.
3. Slightly edited English translations for over half of St. Clair's texts appear in Lowie '909. See Canonge 1958 for later examples recorded from a speaker who was still a fairly young woman when St. Clair was in Oklahoma Territory.
4. St. Clair is known to have complained to Boas of difficulty in finding suitable speakers (T. Kavaragh and D. Shaul, personal communication). It is possible that those he worked with exhibited final consonants resulting from the increasing pervasiveness and prestige of English.
5. The focus on objective forms is prompted by two facts. First, there are very few possessive forms in the texts. Second, nonsingular possessives are identical to nominative forms, while possessive

singular is distinctive only for a subset of nouns ending phonetically in [ɨ].

6. Comanche's phonemic system is as follows:

p	t	c	k	k <sup>w</sup>	ʔ
	s				h
m	n				
		y		w	
		i	ɨ	u	
		e	a	o	

To predict certain vowel qualities and occurrences of [h] it is necessary to have an additional consonantal phoneme whose specific feature composition cannot be uniquely determined. This is not included in the few relevant citations given in this paper. Capitals in phonetic notation represent both optional, prepausal voiceless vowels and also so-called organic, or obligatory, voiceless vowels triggered by a following /s/ or /h/ (but not by [h] from another source).

7. 'Kettle' is not marked as an object since it is part of the compound 'to have a kettle'.

8. As a complement of /suwɔai/ 'to want', this is technically a possessive form. Recall from footnote 5, however, that such a singular noun has identical objective and possessive forms.

9. It could be suggested that the suffix is instead the nominalizer /-tɨn/, in nominative form. But this suffix is impossible here since the absolutive /-pin/ is already present. (Absence of [h] is irrelevant to the argument given St. Clair's inconsistency in recording it.)

10. [ʔekopai] 'to have tongue(s)'.

11. In Canonge 1958 paragraphs are regularly marked by the clitic particle /seʔ/ 'contrast', which plays this role only sporadically in the St. Clair texts. See lines 3, 4 and 6 of figure 1.

12. The h in St. Clair's ...hɨ... 'come' can only be interpreted as an erroneous retranscription of what must have been ...ki... in his notebook entry.

13. Realistically, of course, one should not expect too much of these old recordings. Filtering the signal for removal of unwanted surface noise before tapes are prepared for public distribution may force us to accept various matters as forever moot.

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