A NOTE ON PLAINS APACHE WARPATH VOCABULARY

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This note looks at a Plains Apache anatomical term found in Bross (1971). The term is considered an "old word" by Bross's consultants. However, when the former is compared to a similar word from Opier and Hoijer's (1940) account of the Chiricahua Apache warpath language, it appears that this term may be evidence of the much attested (Bittle 1979), but little documented, Plains Apache warpath vocabulary.

[KKEYWORDS: Plains Apache, warpath vocabulary, anatomical terms, Chiricahua Apache]

1. Introduction. Recently, in looking over an article by Bross (1971) (based on Bross 1962) on anatomical terms in "Kiowa Apache" (now Plains Apache), I came upon an interesting Plains Apache anatomical form—one that, it seems to me, provides more evidence for the belief that Plains Apache had a warpath vocabulary (Bittle 1979). Warpath vocabularies have been documented for both the Chiricahua Apache and the Western Apache of the Southwest (Opier and Hoijer 1940 and Basso and Goodwin 1971:265). This brief note offers an analysis of the Plains Apache form and attempts to place it within its cultural context.

2. Plains Apache words for 'heart'. In the early 1960s, while he was a graduate student at the University of Oklahoma, Bross elicited a number of Plains Apache anatomical terms. Bross was a part of the summer field school program run by William Bittle at the University of Oklahoma (for a discussion of Bittle's work with Plains Apache, see Webster 2007). Bross (1971:16) gives an opening description of some 166 Plains Apache anatomical terms. Among the forms listed are these two forms for 'heart':

(1) -jee 'heart'
(2) -bedushdaaye 'heart', 'that which I move about by means of'

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Bross provides the following information on the second, more marked form: "C [a consultant] gives this term as an old word for the heart, which describes the heart as the source of liveliness and motion. B [also a consultant] recognizes the term, but says that it is not used at the present." Note that B was, according to Bross, a "linguistic purist" (1971:2). From reading through Bross's discussion of the elicitation of lexical items, I conclude that Bross tended to have more confidence in the forms produced by B.

The first form is clearly cognate with other Athabaskan terms for 'heart' (see Hoijer 1956; 1963). Elsewhere, Bittle (1963) gives the Plains Apache form as 'jee' 'chest, heart', which dovetails with the comments Bross (1971:16) makes about 'jee': "This word refers to the location of the heart, the center of the chest. B says the Indians are wrong in thinking that the heart is in the center of the chest. He says the white man is correct in thinking that the heart is on the left." Hoijer (1963:7) gives the Plains Apache form as 'jeeh' 'heart'.

Thus, the first form that Bross cites is the expected Athabaskan cognate. The second form, however, is of some interest. Some years ago, I wrote an article reanalyzing the function of Chiricahua Apache warpath language (Webster 1998), using data provided in Opler and Hoijer's (1940) article on the topic. I was therefore familiar with the Chiricahua Apache warpath vocabulary. When I read Bross's form bedahishdaaye 'heart, that which I move about by means of', I recognized that this Plains Apache form was similar to the Chiricahua Apache form beeijn̪ááí 'heart, that by means of which one lives' (Opler and Hoijer 1940:630).

3. Bedahishdaaye as warpath vocabulary. I would like to suggest that the form bedahishdaaye 'heart, that which I move about by means of' may be a remnant of the attested but little-documented Plains Apache warpath vocabulary (Bittle 1979). Hoijer (Opler and Hoijer 1940) notes that the dikoqhè or novice warrior vocabulary of the Chiricahua Apache were circumlocutions and were often based on verbs that included a nominalizing enclitic such as -it or -it (Hoijer considers the latter to be an archaic form; see Opler and Hoijer 1940:626–27 and Webster 1998: 103–4).

The Plains Apache form can be analyzed as containing a nominalizing enclitic -ye (related to the Plains Apache form -i [Bittle 1963:89]), the verb form -daa 'to move', the first-person subject -sh-, the hi- imperfective, daa- 'about', and the instrumental be-:

(3) be- -daa -hi- -sh- -daa- -ye
    instrumental about imp 1S to move the one

'that which I move about by means of'

This parallels the Chiricahua Apache dikoqhè form 'heart', beeijn̪ááí 'that by means of which one lives':

(4) bee- -ji- -ndáá- -i
    instrumental 4S to live the one

'that by means of which one lives'

Here, -i is a nominalizing enclitic, -ndáá- is the verb form 'to live', -ji- the fourth-person subject pronominal prefix, and bee- the instrumental. The fourth-person subject marker tends to be used for "individuals" who are considered "socially distant" (the dead and certain relatives through marriage being canonical examples).

Bross (1971) represents the form bedahishdaaye as an inalienable noun, and thus it aligns in distribution with other Plains Apache anatomical terms, which are inalienably possessed. I believe that the form was most likely at one point an independent nominalized verb, but it appears to have been reanalyzed as an inalienable noun by C so that it would fit with the paradigmatic distinction made between alienable and inalienable nouns. That is, C may have reanalyzed the form so that it would behave more like other anatomical terms.

The Plains Apache form clearly fits Hoijer's description of the forms of the dikoqhè vocabulary in Chiricahua (Opler and Hoijer 1940:626–27). It is a verb form with the attendant nominalizing or relativizing enclitic, -ye. It is also an abstract circumlocution. The form is based on the same kind of circumlocutionary logic in both Plains Apache and Chiricahua Apache. Such circumlocutions, however, were also used when referring to objects whose names bore a similarity to that of a recently deceased individual. Opler and Bittle (1961:386) describe some of the attendant speech practices among the Plains Apache as follows: "There could not be any direct reference to him [the deceased]. His name could not be mentioned, particularly in the presence of his relatives, and words that were similar to or identical with his name could not be uttered. Persons who had used a certain kinship term for the deceased now addressed those of similar relationship with secondary terms." The fact that dikoqhè vocabulary includes a term for 'heart', however, is suggestive. It could be argued that a Plains Apache warpath vocabulary would overlap in some ways with the Chiricahua Apache warpath vocabulary. As Hoijer remarks, "it is notable that the great majority of the war-path terms belong to an archaic stratum of linguistic formation" (Opler and Hoijer 1940:227).

4. On the context of elicitation. Bittle attempted to find evidence for a warpath vocabulary among the Plains Apache but was not satisfied with his results:
One of the disappointing aspects of this phase of the author’s work with the Kiowa Apache was his inability to elicit any definite information on a warpath language. Almost all informants agreed that there were “special words” that were used when men were away from camp on raids, but none could recall any examples of such words. On three occasions, older informants recalled what were “old time ways of talking on the warpath,” particular words which varied in important ways phonetically from the more commonly employed terms. But no informant was able to provide an example. (Bittle 1979:45)

It is important here also to note that none of the Plains Apache men that Bittle worked with had “ever participated in a raid” (Bittle 1979:44). There was general agreement that there had been a warpath language, but since none of the consultants Bittle worked with had ever participated in these raiding activities, they most likely never learned the vocabulary. This point brings us back to Bittle’s remark: “C gives this term as an old word for the heart, which describes the heart as the source of liveliness and motion. B recognizes the term, but says that it is not used at the present” (1971:16). Two of Bross’s consultants knew the term bedahishdaave as an “old word” that was no longer in use. In the anatomical term elicitation session, Bross had, I believe, unwittingly elicited a Plains Apache warpath term. Neither C nor B knew that it was a warpath term. Considering that neither had ever learned the warpath vocabulary, but may have heard the word independently of the warpath context, it is easily understandable that they would consider it an “old word” that had fallen out of use. That would also explain why the form had been reanalyized as an inalienable anatomical term by C.

On the other hand, when Bittle attempted to formally elicit warpath vocabulary items, his consultants remembered that there had been a warpath vocabulary, but they could not remember specific examples because it is likely they did not encounter the form(s) as warpath vocabulary, but as “old words.” As Bittle (1979:46) states: “The lack of evidence of a war-path language is not surprising, considering the fact that at the time this data was collected there were no more than twenty-five persons who were even partially fluent in Kiowa Apache. The language is now approaching extinction, and even relatively few of those terms which must have been widely used in the language (e.g. plant and animal names, place names, etc.) cannot be recalled.”

Willem de Reuse (personal communication, 2000) reports a similar example from his fieldwork with San Carlos Apache. There one finds the term tl’ego hidíné “watermelon”, which is glossed as ‘it is eaten at night’. This is also, as de Reuse notes, the same form found in the Chiricahua Apache warpath vocabulary: tl’ego hídní “watermelon” (Oppler and Hoijer 1940:633). According to de Reuse, this form is not recognized as a remnant of the warpath vocabulary (on Western Apache warpath vocabulary, see Basso and Goodwin 1971:264–66). Rather, it is the unmarked form for ‘watermelon’.

So here again, we have a warpath term that is no longer recognized as such. In this case, it has become the standard form for ‘watermelon’, while in the example I have discussed, the warpath term was remembered as an “old word.” Direct attempts to elicit warpath vocabulary in both cases would not have resulted in the elicitation of a warpath term.

5. Conclusion: on “old words.” The goal of this short note has been to suggest that a warpath vocabulary term was remembered by Bross’s Plains Apache consultants; it was, however, not remembered as a warpath term but as an “old word.” If that is the case, then it provides further evidence for Bittle’s contention that the Plains Apache people did carry over certain practices (i.e., a warpath vocabulary) “associated with the Southwestern Apachean groups” (1979:33). The goal is also, once again, to call attention to places where languages linger. There is much, I would argue, that “old words” can still tell us.

REFERENCES


