

Lokoshat Chakwihili' Afama: Gourd Encounters a Possum

Joshua D. Hinson

Chickasaw Nation / University of Oklahoma

Joshua.Hinson@chickasaw.net

This article presents an original story in Chickasaw, narrated, translated and transcribed by the author. First the author provides some autobiographical information and a discussion about naming practices in Chickasaw. Then the story about Lokosh and Possum is presented, first in Chickasaw and then the English translation.

Keywords: Chickasaw, naming, personal narrative, storytelling

1. Katahaat Lokosh? 'Who is Lokosh?'

While I'd like to claim that Lokosh is a great cultural hero among the Chickasaw, this is not the case. I would even settle for the status of a revered trickster like *Chokfi'* for the southeastern Indians, or *Saynday* for the Kiowa, but sadly this is also false. *Lokosh*, the subject of this story, is in fact, me. I was born in Memphis, Tennessee in the fall of 1978. My grandmother Faye Elizabeth Cox Nichols and my mother Charla Nichols Hinson are citizens of the Chickasaw Nation, *Kowishto' Iksa'* (Panther Clan), *Imatapo Inchokka'* (Their Tent People House). They are also of Choctaw, English, Irish, Scottish, and Welsh descent. My father Waymon Ray Hinson is a lineal descendant of *Hoboi-Hili-Miko* (Good Child King) Alexander McGillivray, Wind Clan, of Hickory Ground and Joe Vann, Cherokee. He is also of PeeDee, Waccamaw, Edisto, English, and French descent.

I was born into what I consider a very typical mixed blood Indian family. We lived outside the Chickasaw service area in Oklahoma. Our cultural identity was really that of proud descendants, who while knowledgeable of our family history and the prominent role that our ancestors played in Chickasaw survivance from the 1730s to present, had little to no interaction, political, social, or otherwise, with our tribal people in Oklahoma. Of course we had a great many relatives in the Chickasaw Nation, many of whom were intimately involved in the daily activities of the Chickasaw Nation. Living in west Texas, we simply had little to no access to our people, beyond our immediate cousins, aunts, and uncles.

My Chickasaw connection was really through my great grandmother, Charlie Perkins Cox, who was an original Chickasaw enrollee. The stories of her life, and the stories of her ancestors, retold by her daughter - my grandmother - had a significant bearing, for me, on what it meant to be Chickasaw. Still, my great grandmother was a product of the all-too-efficient boarding school system, and she had very little cultural knowledge. To this day I am unsure if she could speak or understand any Chickasaw at all. I know my grandmother never learned to speak it.

I began to really engage with my Chickasaw ancestry, and explore what it meant to be Chickasaw, when my first son was born. Levi arrived in the spring of 2000. I called him *Chokfi'* (Rabbit) because it seemed like a good name for him. I wanted for him something more than I had - a real sense, from birth, of his place in the world as a Chickasaw person. I wanted to give him access to his language, history, and culture to a degree that I was not afforded.

So with that I began in earnest to learn to speak my language. Through self-study, trial and error, spending summers in the Chickasaw Nation, particularly hanging out with native speakers and trying to talk, I developed a certain proficiency by the time my second son arrived. Noah, who is called *Labaachi'* (Talks All the Time), was born at Carl Albert Indian Health Facility in the late winter of 2005. I greeted him with Choctaw hymns after he was clean and swaddled. Some of the first words he heard were in his language.

Since that time I have continued to strive to grow my cultural understanding, and particularly my language skills. I also engaged with tribal artists, learning to make ballsticks, rattles, horn spoons, and other art forms. My artistic production on paper and canvas shifted completely to tribal themes using the visual language of our Mississippian ancestors. When my two adopted children, Ruslan, called *Minko'* (Leader) and Andrey, called *Chakwihili'* (Possum) arrived in 2011, I had a secure, confident and solidly-formed identity as a Chickasaw person. I know who I am, where I come from, and what my ancestors suffered through to ensure that I can stand up today. I serve my people as the director of the department of Chickasaw Language, Chickasaw Language Revitalization Program.

I am a blessed man.

2. Nanna Hochifo Ishtanompoli: About Naming

In general, we as Chickasaw people gave up traditional naming a long time ago. While some speakers still have Chickasaw nicknames, as did many others of their generation, it is rare to find a Chickasaw person with a proper Chickasaw name. Even my own children have Christian names, with Chickasaw names bestowed on them by me. This would have been the way it was done in the old days, the father choosing names from his mother's line. According to Speck's consultant *Shahbichi*, Chickasaw fathers would name their child three days following their birth. They did this in consultation with their relatives, who would suggest a name taken from clan ancestors. The father would report this name to his wife, who would dress the child's neck with a handkerchief, ribbon, or beads (Speck 1950). Male children were called *Kabi'* and female children were called *Kiq'o* until their naming took place. For male children, these personal or family names were supplanted by war names following adulthood (Swanton, 1928). War names were emblematic of war deeds, and an individual could receive many of them over their lifetime, and in the cases of grave mistakes in battle, a warrior could be reduced to his child name. Reducing a man from *Pqatabi* (He Whooped and Killed) to *Chola* (Fox) would surely be a mighty blow to his esteem.

In my case, I received my Christian names at birth, and was given a Chickasaw name only as an adult, perhaps appropriately at a time when I embraced my identity as a mixed-blood Chickasaw person, rather than a white person with Chickasaw ancestry. For me, these are quite different things. I felt comfortable as a Chickasaw descendent, but not confident enough in my appearance, my raising, nor my cultural knowledge to claim to be a 'real' Chickasaw.

I am glad that I changed my thinking on this.

A speaker named JoAnn Ellis, who, out of all the living speakers, I have learned from the longest, decided that she was going to name me Gourde. We were sitting in my office, talking about nothing really, when she made a comment about my apparent affinity for gourds (given that I had a great many in my office at the time). She was most taken with an incredibly large

dipper gourd that I keep on top of a bookcase. JoAnn looked at me and said simply, ‘That’s a good name for you - *Lokosh*, that’s your name now.’ Beyond the obvious, there may have been some other motivation for my naming. There was a Chickasaw man in the community who was called *Lokosh*. He died many years ago, but it could be that I recalled him to her mind. I also have a decidedly round, gourd-like torso, which could also account for my naming. At any rate, I was from that point known simply as *Lokosh*.

It is a good name I think.

3. Nannanqli' Ishtanompoli: About Stories

As I have written elsewhere (Haag, ed. 2016, manuscript in preparation) humor or joke stories are a vital sub-genre of traditional storytelling. These humor stories are based on fact, embellishments of true stories that are retold again and again because they are often truly, exceptionally humorous, particularly if the audience knows the storyteller or the story subject well. Still others are mythical, fantastical stories with scant truth, and still others are told solely to induce laughter, which Indian people like to do.

This is my attempt at telling a real *nannanqli'*. This event really happened – right in the middle of Ada, Oklahoma. We were living on 16th Street at the time, in an original Ada township home, right across from the First Baptist Church. We had had an ongoing problem with curious possums (surely they felt comfortable scavenging from our trash and rooting under our home, knowing that we were a good Indian family that would not kill them). One evening an unlucky possum wandered into our yard and the following is what ensued.

I think it is a pretty good story altogether.

4. Lokoshat Chakwihili' Afama

1. Oklhili chaffakā Lokosh imihoo táwwa'at nosikat káyya'hattook aachi.
2. Nosit káyya'hattookō kochcha' nannahmat ittibakaká'chittook aachi.
3. Lokoshat hánglohmat imihooā imasilhlhakat, “Ishhánglotaa? Kochcha' pilla nannahmat ahántaha'ni, ittibakaká'chi.” aachittook. “Ī, hángloli.” anompifalammichittook.
4. Káyya'hakat ĩ'makat haklottook.
5. Anōwa' ittibákkakli'chihmā Lokoshat imaachihmā, “Pistayalimak illa, hattak honkopa'at abooha chokkowa mihaha'ni,” aa'shna imihooat, “Yahmishanha'shki!” imaachittook.
6. Haatokoot Lokoshaashoot hi'kacha aahashtahli'mā onahmat kochcha' pitpisahmā chakwihili'oot wáyya'ana pisattook.
7. Chakwihili'mat wáyya'at okkis-oshi'ā ibichchala' akallochittook.
8. Naahollaat okkis-oshi'mā ‘crawl space grate’ hochifo.
9. Lokoshat kochchahmā chakwihili'at ibichchala' akallochitokoot achóshsho'wakat ĩ'mattook.
10. Chakwihili'mat ibichchala' ishkochocha mihahookya ishkochocha ki'yokittook.
11. Kanĭhkā wahhaalattook.
12. Lokoshat chakwihili'ā imaachikat “Ishkatihmihaat ishánta? Amambooha nota' chokkowa ishmiyataam? Achipilala'ni chibannataa?” imaachittook.

13. Chakwihili'at anompifalammichikat “HISSESSSSSSSS!” imaachittook.
14. Chakwihili'at hashaakmat “HISSESSSSSSSS” chimahánchi bíyyi'ka.
15. Chakwihili'at hashaat ta'hacha ántat wahhaalattook.
16. Lokoshat písattook chakwihili'at ibichchala' akallochikat hashaaka.
17. Kaníhká wahhaalattook.
18. Ibichchala' ishkochecha ki'yokittook.

19. Lokoshat chakwihili' apila bannahookya apilakma chakwihili'at kisila'ni imahoobattook.
20. Kisila'ni ikbannohootokoot abooha anonka' falamat o'nacha naafkishto' fokhacha ilbak fokhi' ooti'shcha fokhakmat kochcha' onahookya chakwihili'mat talhofficha kaniyattook.
21. Kaniht talhoffittooká Lokoshat ikitha'nokittookookya chakwihili'at talhofficha kaniyattook.
22. Chakwihili'at talhofficha haksi chihmit áattook.
23. Chokfóllo'ha chihmit áattook.
24. Lokoshat aachikat “Chakwihili'mat Shimmanooli'ootokchícha. Chakwihili'mat Chikashshootokmat Chikashshanompa' anompafalammichaa'nikya.” aachittook.
25. Yammak illa.

4.1 Gourd Encounters a Possum

1. Some time ago Gourd and his wife were laying together asleep [they say].
2. They lay there asleep and outside the house something was making a knocking sound [they say].
3. When Gourd heard it he asked his wife “Are you hearing that? Something might be out there, making a knocking sound,” and she answered “Yes, I hear it,” he said [they say].

4. They remained laying there, listening together.
5. When the knocking sound came again, knocking and knocking, Gourd said to her “I have to go see it, a criminal might be trying to break into the house.” and she said “Be careful.”

6. So Gourd got up, and getting to the window he was looking outside and saw a possum there.
7. Standing there the possum had his nose stuck tightly in a little door.
8. White folks call this little door a crawl space grate.
9. Gourd went outside and the possum's nose was truly stuck tightly in the little door.
10. The possum was trying to get his nose out – really trying to get it out, but his nose would not come out [they say].
11. He was really struggling there, [they say].

12. So Gourd asked the possum “Why are you here? Are you trying to get in under my house? Do you want me to help you?”.
13. The possum answered “HISSESSSSSSSS!”.
14. When possums are scared or angry they really hiss at you.
15. The possum was completely angry, struggling there.
16. Gourd was looking at him and his nose was stuck tightly in the little door, so he was very angry.
17. He really struggled there.
18. He was unable to get free, [they say].

19. Gourd wanted to help the possum but if he helped him and the possum got free, the possum might bite him.
20. He didn't want to get bitten so he went back inside the house and getting his coat and gloves, put them on and went back outside – but the possum was free, and going away.
21. How the possum got free, Gourd didn't know but possum was free, his nose no longer stuck tightly in the little door.
22. The possum was free and going along like he was drunk.
23. He was like a drunk person. He was going along as if he was half-drunk, [they say].
24. Gourd said “That possum must've been a Seminole possum. If that possum had been a Chickasaw possum, he would've answered me back in Chickasaw,” he said.
25. That's it.

Appendix: A Note on Chickasaw Writing and Sounds

Chickasaw has two primary orthographies that are used in the community and in the literature. One orthography, often referred to as the analytical orthography, was created by Dr. Pam Munro with Chickasaw speaker Catherine Willmond (1994). This is the orthography used in this paper. The analytical orthography includes the following characters: ', a, aa, ʌ, b, ch, d, e, f, h, i, ii, ɪ, k, l, lh, m, n, ng, o, oo, ɔ, p, r, s, sh, t, u, v, w, y, z. Borrow words can contain other characters, such as: d, e, g, r, u, v, z. Twenty-one of the characters represent consonants and approximants, which are summarized in Figure 1, with examples given in Figure 2.

	Bilabial	Labio-dental	Alveolar	Post-Alveolar	Palatal	Velar	Glottal
Plosive	p, b		t			k	ʔ
Nasal	m		n				
Affricate				tʃ			
Fricative		f	s	ʃ			h
Lateral Fricative			ɬ				
Approximant					j	w	
Lateral Approximant			l				

FIGURE 1. Chickasaw consonant phonemes (from Gordon, Munro and Ladefoged 2001)

p	/paska/	paska	'bread'
b	/balaʔ/	bala'	'bean'
t	/topa/	topa	'bed'
k	/koni/	koni	'skunk'
ʔ	/ofiʔ/	ofi'	'dog'
tʃ	/tʃa:ha/	chaaha	'she is tall'
f	/fala/	fala	'crow'
s	/sintiʔ/	sinti'	'snake'
ɬ	/ɬipa/	ɬhipa	'it is dry'
ʃ	/ʃantiʔ/	shanti'	'rat'
h	/hika/	hika	'she stands up'
m	/mahli/	mahli	'wind'
n	/nitaʔ/	nita'	'bear'
l	/lapiʃ/	lapiʃ	'horn'
j	/jala/	yala	'locust larva'
w	/wa:kaʔ/	waaka'	'cow'

FIGURE 2. Examples of the modern orthography (from Gordon, Munro and Ladefoged 2001)

Chickasaw has three phonemic short vowels /i/, /o/, and /a/, three phonemic long vowels /i:/, /o:/, and /a:/, and three phonemic nasal vowels /ĩ/, /õ/, /ã/. The vowels are summarized in Figure 3, with examples given in Figure 4.

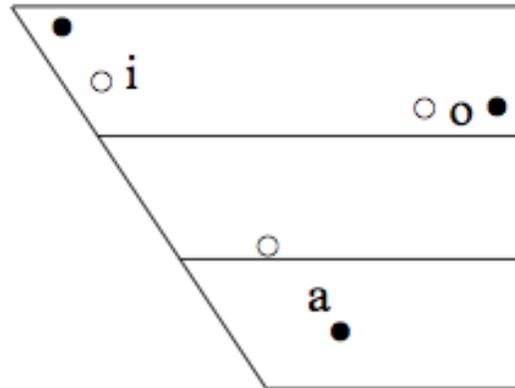


FIGURE 3. Chickasaw vowel phonemes (from Gordon, Munro and Ladefoged 2001)

i	/pisa/	pisa	‘she looks at him’
i:	/pi:ni?/	piini'	‘boat’
ĩ:	/ĩ:sinti?/	ĩsinti'	‘his snake’
a	/paska/	paska	‘bread’
a:	/saha:ʃa:/	sahashaa	‘I’m angry’
ã:	/ipã:ʃi?/	ipashi'	‘hair’
o	/ofi?/	ofi'	‘dog’
o:	/iho:/	ihoo	‘woman’
õ:	/isõ:laf/	isõlash	‘tongue’

FIGURE 4. Examples of the modern orthography (from Gordon, Munro and Ladefoged 2001)

References

- GORDON, MATTHEW, MUNRO, PAM, AND LADEFOGED, PETER. 2001. 'Illustrations of the IPA: Chickasaw' *Journal of the International Phonetic Association*. 31/2.
- HAAG, MARCIA. 2016 (to appear). *A Listening Wind: Native Literature from the Southeast*. University of Nebraska Press.
- MUNRO, PAM AND CATHERINE WILLMOND. 1994. *Chikashshanompaat Holisso Toba'chi: Chickasaw: An Analytical Dictionary*. Norman and London: University of Oklahoma Press.
- SPECK, FRANK. 1907. "Notes on Chickasaw Ethnology and Folklore." *Journal of American Folklore*. pp. 50-58.
- SWANTON, JOHN R. 1928. "The Social and religious beliefs and usages of the Chickasaw Indians." *Forty-fourth Annual Report of the Bureau of American Ethnology to the Secretary of the Smithsonian Institution*, 169-274. Washington: United States Government Printing Office.