

## CHAPTER 1

# The Chitimacha Language: A History

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The history of the Chitimacha language is a remarkable story of cultural survival. This chapter tells a part of that story, discussing the interactions between Chitimacha and other languages in the Southeast prior to colonial contact, the persecution of the Chitimacha people under the French, the language's documentation by early linguists and anthropologists, and finally its modern revitalization.

Chitimacha is a language isolate—that is, unrelated to any other known languages—spoken in the present-day town of Charenton, Louisiana, on the Bayou Teche. Formerly it was spoken over the entire region from the Mississippi River in the east to Vermillion Bay in the west (see figure 1.1). By the time the Chitimacha people first appear in the historic record in 1699 (Margry 1880:155), they had already suffered drastic depopulation, in large part as a consequence of European diseases that had spread outward from Spanish Florida in the early 1500s (Thornton 2004).<sup>1</sup> At the time of contact with the French in 1699, an estimated three thousand Chitimacha people remained (Mooney 1928:9; Swanton 1952:203). Beginning in 1702, Louis Juchereau de St. Denis began a series of unauthorized raids on villages in Grand Terre to obtain captives to sell to French colonists at Mobile. Distrust for the French grew among the Chitimacha, culminating in the murder of Jesuit missionary Jean-François Buisson de Saint-Cosme in 1706. In retaliation, Governor Jean Baptiste Le Moyne de Bienville sent French Canadians and tribal allies in the region to attack the Chitimacha, the first in a series of attacks on the Chitimacha that continued intermittently until a 1718 peace accord (Swanton 1911:337–42). As a result of the many Chitimacha people taken captive during the war, the majority of enslaved people in early colonial Louisiana were Chitimacha (Swanton 1911:338). By 1725, only a few hundred Chitimacha survived, with an estimated one hundred males living at Bayou Plaquemine in present



Alongside the original wax cylinders stored in the American Philosophical Society Library were Swadesh's field notes and draft grammar, dictionary, and text collection in the language—more than one thousand pages of materials in all (Swadesh 1930, 1939c). The tribe soon initiated the Chitimacha Language Restoration Program. In 1997, under Walden's leadership, the program developed daily language classes at the tribal elementary school as well as a preschool language program and worked with the software company Rosetta Stone to produce language-learning software (Abramson 2010; Bittinger 2010; Hieber 2010). Each of the approximately one thousand registered tribe members today has free access to the software.


In addition, the recent availability of digital copies of archival materials has facilitated a wave of new research on the language. Though Chitimacha featured prominently in the linguistic and anthropological literature in the first half of the twentieth century as a result of Swadesh's fieldwork and that of his predecessor John R. Swanton (Swanton 1917, 1919; Swadesh 1933, 1934a, 1946a), the language received little attention again until the twenty-first century. In the past decade or so, however, Chitimacha has been discussed in several overviews of the languages of the Americas (Mithun 1999; Waldman 2006) and the US Southeast (Brightman 2004; Martin 2004; Goddard 2005) and has been the focus of several theses (Weinberg 2008; Iannucci 2009). A recent proposal (though not widely accepted) also suggested a long-distance genetic relationship with Mesoamerican languages (Brown, Wichmann, and Beck 2014). Numerous studies have examined various aspects of Chitimacha grammar and diachrony, including the development of its class of preverbs (Hieber 2014a, 2018, forthcoming), its system of verbal person marking and agent-patient alignment (Hieber forthcoming), the structure of Chitimacha discourse (Hieber 2016a), and verbal valency and transitivity (Hieber 2016b, 2017).

Since the end of the war with the French in 1718, statements to the effect of “the Chitimacha are now all but extinct” have appeared so many times in the literature—decade after decade well into the twentieth century—as to be absurd (Gatschet 1883; Swanton 1911, 1912; Swadesh 1933). Yet today the language is beginning to thrive again. Far from going extinct, the Chitimacha language has instead awoken from its sleep and entered a modern renaissance. This chapter briefly outlines that story, looking at both the prehistory and history of the Chitimacha language, before turning to some aspects of Chitimacha grammar that appear to be shared with other languages of Louisiana and the Southeast.

## CONTACT WITH THE SOUTHEAST

Although the Chitimacha language is an isolate, it shares several grammatical features with other languages of Louisiana and the US Southeast. This section provides just three examples of ways in which the grammar of Chitimacha has been drastically affected by its interactions with other languages in the region: in its use of positional auxiliary verbs, switch-reference, and finally agent-patient marking.

The Muskogean languages to the east, the Tunica language to the north, and the Atakapa language to the west all have a set of verbs called positional auxiliary verbs. These auxiliary verbs indicate the position of the subject—whether sitting, standing, or lying down. This pattern is seen throughout the southeastern United States (Campbell 1997:342). The particular verbs are different for each language, as table 1.1 shows, but the general pattern is the same.

 **Table 1.1. Comparison of Positional Auxiliary Verbs in Several Southeastern Languages**

Gloss	Chitimacha (isolate)	Atakapa (isolate; Swanton 1929)	Choctaw (Muskogean; Broadwell 2006:209–11)	Tunica (isolate; Haas 1946:349–51)
sit	<i>hi-</i>	<i>kē</i>	<i>átta-</i>	<i>-na</i>
stand	<i>ci-</i>	<i>ta</i>	<i>hikíya-</i>	<i>-hki</i> (exist)
lie	<i>pe-</i>	<i>tíxt</i>	<i>ittóla-</i>	<i>-ra</i>

In Muskogean, these positional auxiliary verbs replaced an earlier set of auxiliary verbs that were incorporated into the main verb, changing their function in the process (Booker 1980:186–87). The same process seems to have occurred in Chitimacha. The future tense marker *-cuy-* (sing.), *-di-* (pl.) clearly derives from the verb *cuw-* (sing.), *dut-* (pl.; go, walk). Likewise, the progressive marker *-qix-* comes from an archaic linking verb *qix-* (be).<sup>2</sup> Originally, *cuw-* and *qix-* were independent auxiliary verbs, and over time they joined with the main verb and became tense markers before being replaced by the new positional auxiliary verbs. These changes directly mirror the ones that took place in Muskogean. So Chitimacha shares not only this grammatical pattern but the history through which the pattern developed.

Another grammatical feature found in Muskogean languages is switch-reference, a method of marking verbs to indicate whether the next clause will have the same subject or a different subject. Chitimacha does not have a specific set of switch-reference markers, as the Muskogean languages do, but it did develop its own means of accomplishing the same function. The

participial suffixes *-k* (after consonants), *-g* (after vowels), and *-tk* (after /n/) are either used with auxiliary verbs, as in example (1), or to modify a noun, as in example (2) (Swadesh 1939b:206–7).

(1) Kix qatin nuhcpa-pa *giht-k* hi-qi?<sup>3</sup>

horse make.run-NZR want-PTCP be-NE.SG

“Do you want your horse to run?” (lit. Are you *wanting* your horse to be made to run?) (Swadesh 1939d:A67f.2)

(2) Kaatspa-nk qam qoonak hix *get-k* qap duud-x-naqa.

stick-INSTR everything INSTR beat-PTCP here go-IPFV-NE.PL

(They came *beating* him with sticks and so forth.) (Swadesh 1939d:A9a.2)

However, the participle also developed a third function, allowing clauses to be chained together into long sequences of events or ideas (Hieber 2016a). This typically involves a series of participial clauses each taking the suffix *-k*, followed by a final clause with a fully conjugated main verb. Example (3) illustrates this construction.

(3) Piya xih hi *gaatst-k*, wetk we nux *gapt-k* qutp ki  
 cane belly there *cut-PTCP* then the stone *take-PTCP* leather in  
 qapx *waatst-k*, huygi qapx *qutii-g*, wetk we piya gaatsn ki  
 together *wrap-PTCP* good together *tie-PTCP* then the cane cut.piece in  
 hi *xahct-k*, wetkx huygi kas *hukt-k*, wetkx hesigen qutp  
 to *put.in-PTCP* then good back *close-PTCP* then again leather  
 hi *gapt-k*, we piya gaatsn we qutp ki qapx *waatst-k*,  
 there *take-PTCP* the cane cut.piece the leather in together *wrap-PTCP*  
 huygi qapx *qutii-g*, weyt hugu kas *nucmii-g*, kas hamca-ax-naqa.  
 good together *tie-PTCP* that it.is back *work-PTCP* back keep-IPFV-NE.PL  
 (They cut a cane joint, take the stones and wrap them in hide, tie them well, put them  
 into the section of cane, cork them well, again take hide and wrap the cane section  
 in the hide, tie it well, and, having prepared it in that way, they save it.) (Swadesh  
 1939d:A71c.3)

Some expository texts recorded by Swadesh consist almost entirely of such chains of participial clauses, with very few main verbs. Why did this phenomenon become so common in Chitimacha? An examination of how participial clauses are used in the Chitimacha corpus shows that they are used only when the subject of the participial clause is the same as the subject of the following clause (Hieber 2016a). Otherwise, a fully conjugated main verb is used. This is the same pattern of switch-reference as seen in Muskogean, only

accomplished indirectly through the participle *-k* rather than with dedicated markers for same and different subjects.

A final example of a grammatical pattern shared with other languages of the Southeast is known as agent-patient marking, where different suffixes are used depending on whether the participant involved in the action has control over it. For example, in Creek (Muskogean), the agent marker *-ay-* is used when the subject acts deliberately, while the patient marker *ca-* is used when the subject lacks control of the action (Martin 2011:168–69). Chitimacha shows a similar pattern but with an important difference: the form of the agent and patient markers is practically the same; instead, the position of the markers differs (Hieber forthcoming). Compare examples (4) and (5).

- (4) *quc-ki-cuy-i*  
 do-1sg.P-IRR-NF.SG  
 (you will do me [well]) (Swadesh 1939d:A49d.16)
- (5) *quci-cu-ki*  
 do-IRR-1sg.A  
 (I will do [it]) (Swadesh 1939d:A17e.23)

Example (4) shows that *-ki* appears before the irrealis (future) marker *-cuy-* when the speaker does not have control of the action, whereas example (5) shows that *-ki* appears after *-cuy-* when the speaker does. How did this pattern arise? That the irrealis marker *-cuy-* was originally an auxiliary verb meaning “go,” so that the construction in (4) was historically two words, *qucki cuyi*, meaning something like “you will go so that I do” or “you will go and make me do.” But when Chitimacha speakers reanalyzed these as a single verb, merging them together, the person suffix *-ki* remained in the middle. Since the *-ki* in the middle referred to the participant having the action done to it, while the *-ki* at the end of the second verb referred to the participant doing the action, these two versions of *-ki* were reanalyzed as the patient and agent suffixes, respectively. These changes were undoubtedly modeled on the similar agent-patient patterns in Muskogean and other languages of the Southeast and would have been facilitated by the simultaneous change in auxiliaries, discussed earlier. This helps explain why in Muskogean the agent and patient suffixes are different forms, while in Chitimacha they are the same form in different positions. Chitimacha co-opted its own native grammatical material for new purposes, mimicking patterns found in other languages of the Southeast.

In all three of these cases, Chitimacha borrowed a grammatical pattern from neighboring languages without borrowing the related vocabulary or

grammatical affixes. For instance, Chitimacha borrowed the positional auxiliary pattern yet did not borrow the words for *sit*, *stand*, and *lie*, instead using its own native words. Why did this happen?

The southeastern United States, including Louisiana, is considered a linguistic and cultural area, meaning that the peoples of the region share numerous cultural and linguistic traits that cannot result from a common origin (since Chitimacha is unrelated to any other language in the region): “The defining feature of Native cultures and histories in the region is first, a long history of cultural integration within the region” (Jackson and Fogelson 2004:1). Exogamy (marrying people from outside one’s own community) was widespread in the historical Southeast, abetting contact between different cultures in the region (Speck 1907:208). In addition, “the area was integrated by the exchange of goods, people, and ideas such that it comprised one grand diffusion sphere. Communication was facilitated by well marked trail systems and by the use of dugout canoes on the river and coastal courses” (Jackson, Fogelson, and Sturtevant 2004:38). Groups within the Southeast were also highly mobile, often changing the sites of their villages (Swanton 1911:360–64).

What all this means for Chitimacha grammar is that Native Americans in the Southeast were very likely multilingual, knowing the language of their family as their first language, the language of their spouse as their second, and a language of trade and broader communication as a third. Such rampant multilingualism constitutes the perfect environment for grammatical borrowing as occurred in Chitimacha. When speakers adopt another language, they are frequently influenced by ways of speaking from their first language and use structures from the second language in ways that map to structures from their first. Speakers of Chitimacha who also knew a Muskogean language, for example, probably used the auxiliary verb construction to convey the equivalent of the agent-patient distinction. Over time, this construction must have become so frequent as to become routinized and eventually a fixed part of Chitimacha grammar.

So while Chitimacha is an isolate, it was hardly isolated. Instead, the Chitimacha people were part of the diverse cultural exchange of people, goods, and languages of the Southeast that thrived for hundreds of years prior to European contact, a fact that had significant repercussions on the history of the Chitimacha language.

## PREHISTORY AND COLONIAL CONTACT

As best we know, the Chitimacha and their ancestors have lived in the Louisiana region for thousands of years. From the archaeology of the region, we know that Chitimacha participated in the Hopewell mound culture, which

was distinguished by its large burial mounds, arising around 100 BCE and flourishing with the arrival of farming in the area (ca. 700 ACE) until its decline prior to the fifteenth century (Haywood 2009:3.26). Numerous mound sites have been found along the Bayou Teche (Bernard 2016:25), and the Chitimacha continued to entomb their dead in mounds into the colonial period (Kniffen, Gregory, and Stokes 1987:259) and even the twentieth century, with two mound burials occurring in 1926.

As Jackson, Fogelson, and Sturtevant (2004:39) note, “Ever since the discovery of the elaborated iconography of Mississippian period art, popularizers and scholars have sought to establish connections between the Southeastern Ceremonial complex (formerly called the Southern cult) and the civilizations of Mesoamerica.” This holds true for Chitimacha as well. There have been several attempts to show a genetic relationship between Chitimacha and certain languages of Mesoamerica (Brown, Wichmann, and Beck 2014; Swadesh 1960), potentially implying a Mesoamerican homeland for Chitimacha. However, these proposals have not been widely accepted (see Campbell and Kaufman 1983; Campbell 1997 for a critique of older proposals). Moreover, if the suggested relationships are true, they would be at such great time depth that the ancestors of the Chitimacha still could have migrated to Louisiana millennia ago. Indeed, the Chitimacha language shares a sufficient number of grammatical features with other languages of the US Southeast to suggest that the Chitimacha people have lived in their present vicinity for some time.

Like nearly all Native peoples of the Americas, the Chitimacha were subject to European diseases well before making direct contact with the Europeans themselves. Although the documentary and archaeological evidence for mass epidemics is actually rather scant, archaeological evidence and early historical accounts make clear that parts of the Southeast had been greatly depopulated by the time the French settled in Louisiana in 1698 (Thornton 2004). Moreover, exposure to European diseases was continual throughout the colonial period, plaguing Native populations well into the 1800s (Thornton 2004:51). Native American population decline in the Southeast appears to have been more of an ongoing process than a onetime catastrophic event.

In any event, when the Chitimacha first appear in the historical record, their estimated population of about three thousand individuals may have been a mere fraction of their former numbers. They are first mentioned by Iberville on February 17, 1699, when he wrote, “The chief and seven others came to me to sing the calumet . . . allying me with four nations to the west of the Mississippi, which are the Mougoulachas, Ouacha [Washa], Toutymascha [Chitimacha], Yagueneschito [Yagnechito]” (Margry 1880:155; translation by author). It is also possible, however, that Europeans encountered Chitimacha-speaking peoples as early as 1543, when Hernando de Soto’s expedition reached the mouth of



the Mississippi River. When Iberville ascended the Mississippi River some 150 years later, he met several Washa people (Swanton 1911:297), who, along with the Chawasha, were said by Bienville to speak practically the same language as the Chitimacha (Goddard et al. 2004:189). While Swanton (1911:298–300) cautions that the actual settlements of the Washa were most likely further inland on Bayou La Fourche, the Washa were clearly active along the Mississippi. Swanton (1911:342) seems to think that the Chitimacha themselves were also originally situated on the Mississippi, near the northern end of Bayou La Fourche. Indeed, these villages may have been the remnants of the Yagnechito, who lived in the region during the war with the French and were said by Iberville to speak Chitimacha. If the Washa, Chawasha, Yagnechito, or Chitimacha were present along the Mississippi as early as the Soto expedition, they might have met Soto's men. In fact, Swanton (1938) even raises the possibility that one of these groups attacked Soto's men with spears at the mouth of the river, a story that persists in Chitimacha oral history to this day (Laudun 2011). It is also likely that Robert de La Salle, who explored the Mississippi from north to south in 1682, would have met with Chitimacha-speaking peoples, since he also explored the waterways around the Mississippi delta, although there is no evidence of contact with Chitimacha in any of the records from that expedition.

The French did not generally explore either Bayou Teche or Bayou La Fourche (the main areas of Chitimacha settlement) in the early 1700s (Bernard 2016:43; Brightman 2004; Swanton 1911:337), and the war with the French forced the Chitimacha to retreat into the difficult-to-navigate waterways along the sea, so little more is known of the Chitimacha during the colonial era. After peace with the French in 1718, they appear only sporadically in the historical record until the late 1800s. By 1784, the tribe had been reduced to just a few villages—at least two in Iberville Parish around Bayou La Fourche, at least one on Bayou Plaquemine, and two others on Bayou Teche (Charenton and one unknown) (Hutchins 1784:46).

## DOCUMENTATION

While the earliest documentation of many languages in the Americas stems from the work of Jesuit missionaries, who were motivated by a desire to preach to Native Americans in their own language, no such work was undertaken for Chitimacha despite an early visit by Jesuit priest Paul du Poisson (1727). However, another common source of documentary materials in the early United States was vocabulary lists recorded as part of a broad research program on Native American languages outlined by Thomas Jefferson. Motivated in part by the philological and historical linguistic research coming

out of Europe in the late eighteenth century, Jefferson was fascinated by the questions of whether Native American languages and cultures could be traced to a “common origin” and of their relationships to Indo-European languages. Cognizant of the fact that these languages were rapidly disappearing, Jefferson wrote,

It is to be lamented then, very much to be lamented, that we have suffered so many of the Indian tribes already to extinguish, without our having previously collected and deposited in the records of literature, the general rudiments at least of the languages they spoke. Were vocabularies formed of all the languages spoken in North and South America, preserving their appellations of the most common objects in nature, of those which must be present to every nation barbarous or civilized, with the inflections of their nouns and verbs, their principles of regimen and concord, and these deposited in all the public libraries, it would furnish opportunities to those skilled in languages of the old world to compare them with these, now, or at any future time, and hence to construct the best evidence of the derivation of this part of the human race. (1801:193–94).

Jefferson also disseminated a standardized 287-item word list comprising what he considered the “most common objects in nature”—*fire*, *water*, and the like. Three members of the American Philosophical Society (of which Jefferson was also a member)—Peter S. Duponceau, Albert S. Gallatin, and John Pickering—pursued Jefferson’s program in earnest, collecting numerous vocabularies of Native American languages. Jefferson (1808) compiled these vocabularies into a comparative list, which became the basis for Gallatin’s (1836) influential first attempt at a classification of the languages of the Americas.

The first known documentation of the Chitimacha language is a vocabulary recorded in 1802 at Attakapas Post at the request of Martin Duralde, commandant of the Post of Opelousas. A copy the Duralde (1802) vocabulary was sent to Duponceau and today is housed at the American Philosophical Society Library. That vocabulary was later published by Vater (1820), and data from the vocabulary were included in the first major attempt to classify the languages of the Americas by Gallatin (1836) as well as in John Wesley Powell’s (1891) revised classification undertaken as part of his work with the Bureau of Ethnography.

The Duralde vocabulary and accompanying anthropological sketch are written in French, and the Chitimacha words likewise use a French orthography (although Duralde says he had transliterated them from a Spanish orthography). Discrepancies in spelling aside, Duralde’s list shows no significant differences from later documentation by Albert Samuel Gatschet (1881a), Swanton (1908), and Swadesh (1930) (a fact also noted by Swadesh [1946a:313]). Table 1.2

**Table 1.2. Comparison of Chitimacha Vocabulary, 1802, 1881, and 1930**

Gloss	Duralde (1802)	Gatschet (1881a)	Swadesh (1930)	Practical*
fire	teppe	tep	tep	Tep
water	ko	ku	ku'	Kuq
earth	nelle	ne, ne-i	ney'	Neyq
air	poko	poko, poku <sup>n</sup>	poku	Poka
sun	thiaha	tcha, tchia-a	č'a'a	Jaqa
moon	pantne	pa <sup>n</sup> , pan, pant <sup>n</sup>	pan'	Panq
star	pacheta	pāshta	pa:šta	Paaxta
day, light	uacheta	washta	wašta	Waxta
night	timan	tchi'ma	č'ima	Jima

\* Deviations from the International Phonetic Alphabet are as follows: <aa> = /a:/, <b> = /p'/, <c> = /tʃ/, <d> = /t'/, <dz> = /tʃ'/, <ee> = /e:/, <g> = /k'/, <ii> = /i:/, <j> = /tʃ'/, <oo> = /o:/, <q> = /ʃ/, <ts> = /tʃs/, <uu> = /u:/, <x> = /ʃ/, <y> = /j/.

presents a small selection of vocabulary items comparing the transcriptions of Duralde, Gatschet, and Swadesh and that of the modern practical orthography.

At the end of the nineteenth century, research on Native American languages largely fell under the auspices of the Smithsonian Institution, which founded the Bureau of American Ethnology to research Native American cultures in 1879. Gatschet, a linguist and ethnologist trained in linguistics in Europe who moved to the United States to study Native American languages, joined the bureau when it was formed and did significant work with southeastern languages, including Chitimacha. He visited Charenton for several weeks between December 1881 and January 1882 and worked with Baptiste Angélique at a village on Grand Lake. Angélique was a Creole person of color who grew up in close proximity to the Chitimacha but was not Chitimacha himself. He was approximately seventy-six years old at the time. According to Gatschet (1883:149), roughly sixteen to eighteen Chitimacha people were living on Grand Lake and another thirty-five resided at Charenton, and about half of them still spoke Chitimacha. Gatschet (1881b) recorded enough material for a dictionary consisting of 1,273 file slips (generally with multiple words/phrases per slip) and a long expository text about Chitimacha traditional culture. These materials and his accompanying field notes are now housed in the Smithsonian at the National Anthropological Archives (Gatschet 1881a). Gatschet (1883) published a short anthropological sketch of the Chitimacha but said little about the language other than that it “seems to be extremely polysynthetic” (156). He never published either the texts or vocabulary, but both Swanton and Swadesh obtained copies of Gatschet’s materials and incorporated his data into their own.

In the early 1900s, the field of anthropology was undergoing drastic changes as a result of the influence of Franz Boas, the father of modern anthropology. Boas stressed the notion of cultural relativism and the importance of studying cultures on their own terms. Swanton was one of Boas's earliest students at Columbia and in 1900 became the first formally trained anthropologist to join the Bureau of American Ethnology (Jackson, Fogelson, and Sturtevant 2004:35). Swanton became interested in working on Chitimacha after seeing Gatschet's materials in the Smithsonian archives (Swanton 1905) and at Boas's direction traveled to Charenton in 1907, returning again in 1908, 1917, and 1918 (Swanton 1920:2).

Swanton worked with Chief Paul, who is perhaps the person most responsible for the survival of the Chitimacha language today. Paul worked with Swanton during all four of his visits as well as with Swadesh during the 1930s. Approximately 75 percent of all the documentary material on Chitimacha comes from him. According to Swanton (1920:2), "The language has fallen so much into disuse that [Paul] could recall many things only with difficulty and there is reason to believe that it has lost many forms and much of its original richness," but this statement seems to have resulted more from Swanton's inability to puzzle out the grammar of Chitimacha than any linguistic deficiency on the chief's part. Swanton confused an adjective-making suffix, *-gi*, with a first singular patient suffix, *-ki* (Swanton 1920; Hieber forthcoming), and calls the first singular gerund *-ka* a continuative marker (Swanton 1920:31), among other issues. But Chief Paul dictated eighty-eight texts—many quite lengthy—to Swadesh two decades later, with little to no evidence of language obsolescence. Swadesh (1946a:312–13) later observed, "Remarkable in the terminal history of Chitimacha is the purity with which it was preserved. . . . Chitimacha shows no signs of influence by French or English, nor is there anything suggestive of internal disintegration, unless the presence of alternate equivalent forms is such a symptom." Even Swadesh (1939b), whose grammatical analysis is significantly more accurate than Swanton's, attributes certain grammatical alternations to mere free variation, implying a kind of randomness to the language. He says, for example, that "a peculiarity of Chitimacha is the presence of a number of cases of alternate equivalent forms, not different as to meaning. . . . In the adjective there are often three or more forms for the singular, as *žiwi*, *žiwgi*, *ži'niš*, *žiwa*, *žiwg(š)* 'bad'" (1946a:315). However, a more detailed look at the Chitimacha corpus shows that these forms are actually the gerund/infinitive "to be bad," the adjective "bad," the patientive adjective "having become/been made bad," the noun "bad thing," and the participle "being bad" (with or without the topic marker *-š*), respectively.

What Swanton and Swadesh attributed to language obsolescence or lack of grammatical structure was in fact a deft command of the language on the

part of Chief Paul. His texts show nuanced control of such semantic subtleties as the agent/patient distinction, use of directional preverbs, and use of various verbal suffixes—constructions that both Swanton and Swadesh had difficulty analyzing. Paul’s ability to productively employ grammatical forms in novel constructions becomes more evident when comparing his texts to that of another speaker, Ducloux, who worked with Swadesh in the 1930s. She dictated twenty-two texts, but her discourse shows less productive use of these constructions, some of which seem to have become fossilized expressions. As one example, Ducloux used the word *gapt-* by itself to mean “take away” (Swadesh 1939a:86), whereas Paul used the appropriate preverb to express the sense of “away,” depending on context—*hi gapt-* (take there) or *kap gapt-* (take up)—suggesting that Ducloux’s ability to use the preverbs productively was not quite as robust as her uncle’s. Ducloux also used more French borrowings than did Chief Paul and used the French /v/ where Paul used /w/. For the most part, however, Ducloux’s speech was extremely fluent; other differences in the way they used certain constructions are difficult to spot.

The discrepancy between Swanton and Swadesh’s descriptions of Chitimacha grammar and Paul and Ducloux’s skillful use of the language shows just how easy it was for even cultural relativists in the tradition of Boas to view Native American languages or their speakers as deficient, when in fact the discrepancies were a matter of ignorance on the part of the linguists—a valuable lesson for today’s fieldworkers.

Swadesh, a famous student of Edward Sapir, began fieldwork on Chitimacha in 1930, producing the most comprehensive set of documentary materials on the language to date. In 1931, he made a number of wax cylinder recordings, which are still available in digital form (albeit of very poor quality), and by 1934, he had produced sixteen composition notebooks filled with words, sentences, and transcribed texts (Swadesh 1930). By 1939, he had prepared drafts of a dictionary of approximately thirty-five hundred words (Swadesh 1939a); a collection of 120 texts and their translations, with the Chitimacha portion totaling 160 typed pages (Swadesh 1939d); and even a thorough, 238-page descriptive grammar (Swadesh 1939b). These were never published, perhaps partially as a consequence of the political challenges facing Swadesh at the height of the McCarthy era in the late 1940s, when he lost his position at the City College of New York as a result of his leftist political ideologies (Hymes 2006:248–50). Swadesh worked in the Boas Collection at the American Philosophical Society starting in 1949, at which point he seems to have deposited his nearly finished manuscripts and ceased further work on the language.

Though Swadesh’s Boasian trifecta of a grammar, dictionary, and text collection was never published, the Chitimacha data he collected and the articles he published using those data came to have a tremendous and enduring impact on

the field of linguistics. His work on Chitimacha was influential in his formulation of the phonemic principle (Swadesh 1934b), and indeed, his description of Chitimacha phonology (1934a) was the first sketch of a Native American language to apply phonemic principles. Swadesh (1948) was also one of the first to draw attention to the issue of language endangerment, for which he used Chitimacha as a prominent example. Though Swadesh's controversial theory of glottochronology would later make him well known in linguistics, his first attempt at historical reconstruction was actually an attempt to show a genetic relationship between Chitimacha and Atakapa (Swadesh 1946b, 1947). (This attempt was mostly ignored and receives little credence from modern tribal members or linguists.) The Chitimacha language was therefore a prominent influence on the early development of American linguistics.

## REVITALIZATION

After Swadesh's work in the 1930s, very little was done with the Chitimacha language for almost seventy years (though see the comparative work of Haas 1951, 1952). James Crawford (1975:62) recorded fourteen words from Emile Stouff in 1969; one of the few remaining basket weavers still remembers a number of terms relating to weaving; and elderly members of the tribe remembered a few words into the 2000s (Rosetta Stone 2007); however, the language was no longer used in the community. And, as was often the case for Native American communities, tribal members were not made aware that extensive documentary materials existed on their language until the 1980s. Even then, several more years passed before the Chitimacha tribe had the resources to undertake a language revitalization program. The tribe opened a casino in 1992 and used part of the revenue it generated to finance the Cultural Department and hire several tribal members to work on the revitalization project. After enlisting the help of a linguist who had studied under Swadesh decades earlier, the Cultural Department embarked on a broad language revitalization program, beginning work on a comprehensive dictionary aimed at elementary school students, offering both youth and adult language classes, and creating language primers. Today, language instruction starts six weeks after birth at Yaamahana (the Child Development Center, the tribal preschool) and has been incorporated into the K–8 curriculum at the tribal elementary school. Night classes have also been offered for adults, and some of the tribal members who attended that class have gone on to join the revitalization program. For the first time in decades, the Chitimacha language is a prominent feature of public events, with most occasions including an opening prayer and the

Indian Pledge of Allegiance in Chitimacha as well as signs in both English and Chitimacha.

In 2007, the Chitimacha tribe won a worldwide grant competition from the software company Rosetta Stone to create language-learning software. The Rosetta Stone Endangered Language Program, where I served as Editor from 2008 to 2013, worked with various Native American and First Nations educators and nonprofits to produce language-learning software, granting all rights to the sales and distribution of the product to the indigenous organizations. In conjunction with the Endangered Language Program, the Chitimacha Cultural Department worked tirelessly over the course of two years to produce a Chitimacha Rosetta Stone, which was officially released in 2010. The software is now provided free to every tribal member and has been incorporated into the language curriculum in the tribal elementary school. The tribe subsequently invited me to continue working with them in their revitalization efforts, and today, the members of the Cultural Department and I are working to produce various classroom materials and finalize the dictionary for the elementary school.

What Duralde, Gatschet, Swanton, and Swadesh thought was an attempt to capture the last remnant of the Chitimacha language before it faded into history was in fact the beginning of a linguistic revival. Thanks to the inexhaustible work of speakers like Baptiste Angélique, Delphine Ducloux, and especially Chief Benjamin Paul, who spent nearly three decades working with linguists to document his language, as well as the monumental efforts of the Cultural Department of the Chitimacha Tribe, the future of the Chitimacha language is looking bright again.

## NOTES

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1. European diseases may have affected the Chitimacha as early as Hernando de Soto's expedition, which reached the mouth of the Mississippi River in 1543 (Swanton 1939).
2. More precisely, *-cuy-/di-* is an irrealis marker, and *-qix-* is an imperfective.
3. Glossing abbreviations are as follows: A agent, INSTR instrumental, IPFV imperfective, IRR irrealis, NF non-first-person, NZR nominalizer, P patient, PL plural, PTCP participle, SG singular.

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