The status of implicit agents in Choctaw non-active verbs

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1 Introduction

The ‘causative alternation’ in English:

1. Suzie smashed the cup. [active]  
   2. The cup smashed. [non-active]

→ Object of active (transitive) corresponds to subject of non-active (intransitive).

Many Choctaw verbs participate in a causative alternation:

2. a. Hattak mat áyishko kólitok.
     hattak-m-at aayishko koo-li tok  
     man-DEM-NOM cup smash-ACT-PST
     ‘The man smashed the cup.’ [active]

   b. Áyishkot kówatok.
      aayishko-t koow-a tok  
      cup-NOM smash-NACT-PST
      ‘The cup smashed.’ [non-active]

→ Unlike English, active and non-active verbs have distinct morphology.

Today: the meaning of the non-active verbs.

• Non-actives are syntactically intransitive, but have a range of meanings:

(3) a. i. koo-li ‘she smashed it’  
    ii. koow-a ‘it smashed’

   [non-active = inchoative]

b. i. fam-mi ‘she whipped him’  
    ii. fam-a ‘he got whipped’

   [non-active = passive]

c. i. lohm-i ‘she hid it’
    ii. lom-a ‘she hid (herself)’

   [non-active = reflexive]

d. i. filim-mi ‘she turned it over’
    ii. filim-a ‘she turned her head’

   [non-active = body-action]

→ A way to think about inchoative (3a) vs. passive (3b) meanings:

   - Inchoative = absence of implicit agent.
   - Passive = presence of implicit agent.

Research questions:

1. Which non-active verbs have, or lack, implicit agents?
2. How can we investigate this systematically?
3. How can we investigate this quickly and reliably?

Methodology:

§3 Develop two diagnostics for the presence of an implicit agent
§4 Develop two diagnostics for the absence of an implicit agent
§5 Develop typology of Choctaw non-active verbs

Preview of results

• Some non-actives ban implicit agents  → inchoatives
• Some non-actives mandate implicit agents  → (lexical) passives
• Some non-actives allow implicit agents  → (true) mediopassives


   Although it is clearly undesirable to add to this terminological confusion, I believe ‘non-active’ is desirable for two reasons. Firstly, it implies nothing about the meaning of these verb forms (which vary, as I show here); secondly, it evokes the existing scholarship on non-actives in Greek, Hebrew and some other languages, to which the Choctaw non-active is quite similar in function—see section.

2. Filima also has an inchoative interpretation ‘it flipped over’.
Why is it important?

• **More accurate English definitions** for non-active verbs in ongoing Mississippi Choctaw Lexicon Project.

§6 How can the status of a non-active be determined quickly and reliably in fieldwork contexts?

2 Background on Choctaw

2.1 Language status

• Western Muskogean, closely related to Chickasaw.

• Spoken by:
  – People of all ages in the Mississippi Band of Choctaw Indians (MBCI).
  – Mainly elderly people in the Choctaw Nation of Oklahoma.

• Data presented here is from fieldwork conducted by me in Mississippi, 2017-2019.

• All materials are retained by the MBCI Language Program.

2.2 Orthography

• 1st line: MBCI Modern Orthography (no pitch-accent; spaces mismatched with M-word boundaries).

• 2nd line: Modified Traditional Orthography (Broadwell 2006), with morphemic decomposition (more phonemic).

(4) *Alikchi ma¯ chi abikah ish im ahóbah.*

  (MBCI Orth.)
  alichki-m-a¯ chi-abiika-h ish-im-ahooba-h

  (Mod. Trad. Orth.)
  doctor-DEM-obl 2SG.ABS-sick-TNS 2SG.ERG-DAT-seem-TNS

‘You look to the doctor like you’re sick.’

N.B.:

• Underlined vowels (ã i ô) are **nasalized** (/ã i ô/).

• Vowel length varies predictably (according to a rule of iambic lengthening).

2.3 Morpho-syntax

• Fairly rigid SOV; NOM/OBL(ique) case-marking:

(5) *Alikchi yat alla ma¯ masálicháchih.*

  alichki-yat alla-m-a¯ masaali-ch-aachi-h

  doctor-nom child-dem-oblique heal-caus-fut-tns

‘The doctor will heal that kid.’

• Pervasive argument drop:

(6) *Im átok.*

  pro pro pro im-aa-tok

  DAT-give-pst

‘She gave it to him.’

• Active agreement system (for 1st/2nd-person arguments):

(7) a. *ii- chi- aapil-aachi¯-h***

  1PL.ERG-2SG.ABS-help-FUT-TNS

  ‘We will help you.’

b. *ii- talow-aachi¯-h***

  1PL.ERG- sing-FUT-TNS

  ‘We will sing.’

c. *chi- ll-aachi¯-h***

  2SG.ABS-die-FUT-TNS

  ‘You will die.’

4. I adopt the ‘1ERG/ABS/DAT’ terminology I have been using in recent work (Tyler 2019, to appear-a, to appear-b). Various other terminologies have been used, notably ‘I/II/III’ (Munro and Gordon 1982; Munro 1984) also employed by Broadwell (2006).
2.4 The causative alternation

Many verbs participate, but it is not productive:

- There are many gaps, subject to much dialectal/idioclectal variation. Judgments from one speaker:

(8) a. i. lob-bi "she pulled it up"
   ii. *lob-a

b. i. lhokaf-fi "she peeled it off"
   ii. *lhokaff-a
   [cf. Ulrich 1986:310]

- ...and 'quasi-gaps', where the non-active exists only as a nominalization:

(9) a. i. anok/f-il-li "she thought it"
   ii. anokfíl-a "a thought"
   iii. *anok/fil-a ("it was thought")

b. i. hopooni "she cooked it"
   ii. ho<lh>póni "hominy"
   iii. *ho<lh>poni ("it was cooked")

Most previous work focuses on the morphology of the alternation, which is quite variable:

(10) a. i. bash-li "she cut it"
     ii. bash-a "it got cut" [-li/-a]

b. i. apissa-li "she straightened it"
   ii. apissa-Ø "it is straight" [-li/-Ø]

c. i. haloppa-chi "she sharpened it"
   ii. haloppa-Ø "it is sharp" [-chi/-Ø]

d. i. takaa-chi "she hung it (sg.)"
   ii. takaa-Ø "it hung (sg.)" [-chi/-li]

e. i. achifa-Ø "she washed it"
   ii. a<ch>chifa "it got washed" [-Ø]<1>

f. i. awash-li "she fried it"
   ii. a<1>wash-a "it (got) fried" [-li]<1>+a

5. Turning stative/adjectival verbs into causatives with -li (cf. 10b) is marginally productive.

- I ignore all morphology, focus solely on meaning.

→ Specifically, the presence vs. absence of an implicit agent.

In many languages, presence/absence of an implicit agent can be diagnosed with agent-phrases and causer-phrases [Alexiadou et al. 2006; Kaluli 2006]:

(11) a. The window was slowly cracked (√ by Mary / × from the pressure). [implicit agent]

b. The window slowly cracked (× by Mary / √ from the pressure). [no agent]

→ But Choctaw lacks agent/causer-phrases! So we have to look for other tests.

Next:

§ Two diagnostics for the presence of an implicit agent

§ Two diagnostics for the absence of an implicit agent

Previous work on the Choctaw causative alternation

- Byington (1870): short list of morphological patterns.
  "The passive is formed so variously that rules are not attempted." (p.345)


- Ulrich (1986): long list of morphological patterns (p.307); short comment on interpretation:
  "The semantic relation between a [non-active] and the corresponding [active] is sometimes active/passive (like 'to cut' and 'to be cut'), and sometimes active/middle (like transitive and intransitive 'to open')." (p.117)

- Broadwell (2006): longer comment on interpretation, relevantly:
  "The Choctaw transitive-intransitive alternation applies to a different range of verbs than those which undergo the English causative alternation..." (p.126)
3 Diagnosing the \textit{presence} of an implicit agent

An \textit{agent} must be present in order to...

\begin{itemize}
\item license a purpose clause.
\item license a rationale clause.
\end{itemize}

3.1 Licensing purpose clauses

How the test works: Purpose clauses require an agent\footnote{The purpose clause test is often thought of as determining whether there is an argument capable controlling the PRO subject of a \textit{non-finite} purpose clause:}

\begin{enumerate}
\item a. She fried the eggs [so that Mark would be happy]. (overt agent)
\item b. The eggs were fried [so that Mark would be happy]. (implicit agent)
\item c. #The eggs fried [so that Mark would be happy]. (no agent)
\end{enumerate}

\item Some Choctaw non-active verbs license purpose clauses:

\begin{enumerate}
\item fammi/fama ‘whip’/’be whipped’
\item tabli/tapa ‘cut down’/’be cut down’
\end{enumerate}

(12) a. \textit{She fried the eggs [so that Mark would be happy].}
\textit{The purpose clause test is often thought of as determining whether there is an argument capable controlling the PRO subject of a \textit{non-finite} purpose clause:}

b. \textit{The eggs were fried [so that Mark would be happy].}

(15) \textit{awashli/alwashli ‘fry’ (tr./’be fried’/’fry’ (intr.))}

\begin{enumerate}
\item a. \textit{The eggs would be fried [so that Mark would be happy].}
\textit{The purpose clause test is often thought of as determining whether there is an argument capable controlling the PRO subject of a \textit{non-finite} purpose clause:}

b. \textit{The eggs were fried [so that Mark would be happy].}
\end{enumerate}

\item Other non-active verbs fail to license purpose clauses:

(16) bokaffi/bokaafa ‘burst’ (tr./intr.)

\begin{enumerate}
\item a. \textit{The window smashed to steal the money.}
\textit{The purpose clause test is often thought of as determining whether there is an argument capable controlling the PRO subject of a \textit{non-finite} purpose clause:}

b. \textit{The window was smashed to steal the money.}
\end{enumerate}

(17) \textit{kooli/koowa ‘smash’ (tr./intr.)}

\begin{enumerate}
\item a. \textit{The ball burst [to scare the child].}
\textit{The purpose clause test is often thought of as determining whether there is an argument capable controlling the PRO subject of a \textit{non-finite} purpose clause:}

b. \textit{She burst the ball [to scare the child].}
\end{enumerate}
**Purpose clauses – interim summary**

Some representative verbs:

(18) | NACT verb | Licenses purp. cl.? |
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th></th>
<th></th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>/n.sc/a.sc/c.sc/t.sc</td>
<td>✓</td>
<td>✓</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>fama 'be whipped'</td>
<td>✓</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>alwasha 'fry/be fried'</td>
<td>✓</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>koowa 'smash'</td>
<td>✓</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

- **Difficulty of deployment**: high!
  - **Time-consuming**: need to establish a corresponding grammatical active sentence.
  - **Prone to false negatives**: the test is ‘passed’ when a ‘✓’ judgment is given on a pragmatically-strange sentence.
    • Therefore many verbs with implicit agents will receive ‘✓’ judgments because the sentence is unnatural/bizarre.
  - **Prone to false positives**: there is a confounding effect of stative semantics—see Appendix A.

### 3.2 Licensing rationale clauses

How the test works: rationale clauses (a subset of ‘because’-clauses) require an agent:

(19) a. I closed the door [because it was cold]. (overt agent)
    b. The door was closed [because it was cold]. (implicit agent)
    c. #The door closed [because it was cold]. (no agent)

- Some Choctaw non-active verbs license rationale clauses:

(20) **chokcholi/chokchowa ‘tickle’/’be tickled’**

a. Allosi m-á chokcholitok yoppachi pinna hátoko.
   Allosi-m-a chokcholi-tok
   baby-DEM-obl 1PL.ERG-tickle.ACT-PST
   [ yoppa-chi pi-nna-h-aatok-o ]
   laugh-CAUS 1PL.ABS-WANT-TNS-because-DS
   'We tickled the baby because we were trying to make it laugh.' [active]

b. Allosi mat chokchowatok yoppachi pinna hátoko.
   Allosi-m-at chokchowa-tok
   baby-DEM-NOM tickle.NACT-PST
   [ yoppa-chi pi-nna-h-aatok-o ]
   laugh-CAUS 1PL.ABS-WANT-TNS-because-DS
   'The baby was tickled because we were trying to make it laugh.' [non-active]

(21) **icholi/ichowa ‘write’/’be written’**

a. Holisso icholi-li-tok
   holisso icholi-l-itok
   paper write.ACT-1SG.ERG-PST
   [ alla tik-m-á im-isht-ilaawata sa-nna-tok-oosh ]
   [child girl-DEM-obl DAT-INSTR-brag 1SG.ABS-WANT-PST] 'I wrote the poem because I wanted to impress a girl.' [active]

b. Holisso chito mo-ma kat ichowah, ohóyo allíhi okla im isht iláwata banna hátoko.
   holisso chito-ma-k-at ichowah
   paper big all-COMP-NOM write.NACT-TNS,
   [ ohooyó allíhi okla im-isht-ilaawata banna-h-aatok-o ]
   woman group PL DAT-INSTR-brag want-TNS-because-DS 'All books are written because people want to impress women.' [non-active]

- Other non-actives fail to license rationale clauses:

(22) **kooli/koowa ‘smash’ (tr./intr.)**

a. Okla kochchahi kiyo átoko ápisa kólilitok.
   [ okla kochch-ahii-kiyo-aatok-o ] aapisa kooli-li-tok
   PL go.out-MOD-not-because-DS window smash.ACT-1SG.ERG-PST
   'Because they couldn’t get out, I smashed the window.' [active]

b. #[ Okla kochchahí kiyo aatok-o ] aapisa-yat koowa-tok.
   PL go.out-MOD-not-because-DS window-NOM smash.NACT-PST
   'Because they couldn’t get out, the window smashed.' [non-active]
4.1 Licensing ilaap 'by itself'

How the test works: expressions like 'by itself' or 'of its own accord' are only licensed in the absence of an agent (Chierchia [1989/2004] Koontz-Garboden [2009]).

(25) a. *I closed the window of its own accord. (overt agent)
    b. *The window was closed of its own accord. (implicit agent)
    c. The window closed of its own accord. (no agent)

• Some non-active verbs license ilaap 'by itself':

(26) Himmak ni/t_tak lashpa hátoko bálokka at ilaap shil_aachi̱h.
   himmak nittak lashpa-h-aatok-o hot-bálokka-at ilaáp self shil-aachi self dry
   'Because it is hot today, the pants will dry by themselves.'

• Other non-active verbs reject ilaap 'by itself':

(27) Akakoshi car apakna bóhli na ilaap alwashatok.
   akakoshi car apakna bóohli-na ilaap alwash(strtolower) tok
   egg car on.top put.LG-and-Ds self fry
   'I put the egg on top of the car and it fried by itself.'

(28) #Ilaap famaa-tok.
    self whip
    'He was whipped by himself.'

(29) #Ilaap taptowa-h.
    self chop
    'It was chopped up by itself.'
Licensing ilaap – interim summary

(30) NACT verb | +LA. tests | Licenses ilaap?
---|---|---
\[\text{fama} \text{'be whipped}\] | ✓ | ✗
\[\text{alwasha} \text{'fry/be fried'}\] | ✓ | ✓
\[\text{koowa} \text{'smash'}\] | ✗ | ✓

- Difficulty of deployment: medium
  - Requires minimal context.
  - ‘Passing’ the test involves judging a natural sentence as ‘✓’.
  - Potential for false negatives:
    - If the best-translation English verb cannot be used as an inchoative (e.g. (31)), you may end up supplying an awkward/ungrammatical English sentence (see Matthewson 2004 on why this should be avoided).

(31) **Ribs ish nonáchikma¯ iláp toshtowah.**
    ribs 2SG.ERG-cook.ACT-if-DS self **shred.NACT-TNS**
    'When you cook ribs, they [??shred/come apart] by themselves.'

4.2 Licensing ‘success-with-difficulty’ readings when a dative object is added

How the test works: ‘success-with-difficulty’ readings are possible when beneficiaries are added to unaccusatives (see Schafer 2008). There can be no agent in the semantics.

7. It is also unclear how well the ilaap ‘by itself’ sentence works with animate subjects:
   - (i) ??The king worsened by himself.
     - Requires minimal context.
     - ‘Passing’ the test involves judging a natural sentence as ‘✓’.
   - Potential for false negatives:
     - If the best-translation English verb cannot be used as an inchoative (e.g. (31)), you may end up supplying an awkward/ungrammatical English sentence (see Matthewson 2004 on why this should be avoided).

8. This test relies on the general requirement that arguments of the same verb must have disjoint reference; in the absence of special (reflexive) marking. In SwD contexts, the individual that performs the action is not represented as an agent, and so can be picked out as the beneficiary argument without violating disjoint reference. But when the individual performing the action is represented as an agent in the event semantics, it cannot simultaneously be introduced as a beneficiary—to do so would violate disjoint reference.

32. **People had been trying to open the jammed door all day. But after Katie gave it one particularly hard shove...**
   a. it opened for her. (no agent)
   b. #it was opened for her. (implicit agent)
   - Test: If [non-active verb + dative object] can yield a success-with-difficulty reading...
     - there is no implicit agent.
   - Some non-active verbs license success-with-difficulty readings:

33. **Kana hat moyyomat tali pa kochoffi bannash maya na shohbi kak(o), polaka Katie ano kochoofah.**
    kánah-at möyyoma± tali-p-a kochoffi bänna-sh máya-na someone-NOM all.TG-PTCP metal-DEM-OBL bend.ACT want.LG-SS be.PL.G-AND-DS shohbi-kak-o, all.day-although-DS
    polaka/Katie-ano i:koochofa-h
    finally Katie-OBL.CONTR DAT-bend.NACT-TNS
    'People had been trying to bend this piece of metal all day, but it finally bent for Katie.'

34. **Kana hat okkísa tiwwi bannash maya na himmak ak(o), Katie ano 1 tiwátok.**
    kánah-at okkísa tiwwi bänna-sh máya-na himmek-a-kak-o, someone-NOM door open.ACT want.LG-SS be.PL.G-AND-DS now-?-although-OBL
    Katie-ano 1-tiwa±-tok
    Katie-OBL.CONTR DAT-open.NACT-PST
    'People had been trying to open the door for ages, but it finally opened for Katie.'

35. **Anáno akakoshi-t am álwashah nanit kiyoh, chishnáno katina akakoshi chim álapálí.**
    an-anño akakoshi-t am-alwashah-h nanit-t kiyoh,
    me-OBL.CONTR egg-NOM 1SG.DAT-fry.NACT-TNS somehow-PTCP not
    chishn-ano katina akakoshi-t chim-as-lapaali-h
    you-OBL.CONTR why egg-NOM 2SG.DAT-LOC-stick-TNS
    'The eggs are frying for me no problem, why are they sticking for you?'
• Other non-active verbs fail to license success-with-difficulty readings:

\[(36) \#\text{achi-t an-aano am-ahchifa-t taha,}\\ \text{blanket me-OBL.contr 1SG.DAT-wash.NACT-PTCP finish.NACT}\\ \text{kátit chishn-aano chim-ahchifa-kiyo-h}\\ \text{how you-OBL.contr 2SG.DAT-wash.NACT-not-TNS}\\ \text{(intended: 'It washed for me, why didn’t it wash for you?')}\\ \text{Actual: ‘Mine was washed, why wasn’t yours washed?’}\\\]

\[(37) \#\text{kátit chi-tapa-tok-ak-ô,}\\ \text{how 2SG.DAT-cut.NACT-PST-although-Ds}\\ \text{an-aano a-tapa-tok}\\ \text{me-OBL.contr 1SG.DAT-cut.NACT-PST}\\ \text{(intended: 'Why didn’t it cut for you? it cut for me.’)}\\ \text{Actual: ‘Why didn’t yours get cut? Mine got cut.’}\\\]

### ‘Success-with-difficulty’ readings – interim summary

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>NACT verb</th>
<th>+I.A. tests</th>
<th>-I.A. tests</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>fama ‘be whipped’</td>
<td>✓</td>
<td>X</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>alwasha ‘fry/be fried’</td>
<td>✓</td>
<td>✓</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>koowa ‘smash’</td>
<td>X</td>
<td>✓</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

• Difficulty of deployment: medium
  - Requires some context.
  - Prone to false negatives: same problem as with the ilaap ‘by itself’ test. If the English verb can’t be inchoative, then the presented sentence can be awkward (e.g. (37)).

### Proposed classification of non-active verbs

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Classification</th>
<th>Implicit agent?</th>
<th>Example</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>passive</td>
<td>+</td>
<td>fam-a ‘he was whipped’</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>mediopassive</td>
<td>+/-</td>
<td>alwash-a ‘it (was) fried’</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>inchoative</td>
<td>–</td>
<td>koow-a ‘it smashed’</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>reflexive/body-action</td>
<td>N/A</td>
<td>lom-a ‘she hid (herself)’</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

10. See Spathas et al. 2015; Kastner 2017; 2015; Schafer 2017 for analysis of non-actives with reflexive semantics.
5.1 Typological sanity check


• Greek and Hebrew famously have non-active (a.k.a. ‘middle’) morphology (Alexiadou and Doron 2012, ‘A&D12’), whose semantics can be...[11]

(42) Inchoative

a. ha-ši’ur nigmar the-lesson end.NACT
   ‘The lesson ended.’ (Hebrew, A&D12:9)

b. i supa kaike the soup.NOM burnt.NACT
   ‘The soup burnt.’ (Greek, A&D12:16)

(43) Passive

a. moed ha-bxina nikba date.of the-exam set.NACT
   ‘The date of the exam was set.’ (Hebrew, Kastner 2019a:58)

b. to pukamiso stegnothike apo to Jani the shirt dried.NACT by the Janis
   ‘The shirt was dried by Janis.’ (Greek, A&D12:18)

(44) Reflexive or reciprocal

a. dani ve-dina nifgešu Dani and-Dina met.NACT
   ‘Dani and Dina met.’ (Hebrew, A&D12:9)

b. i Maria htenizete the Maria.NOM combs.NACT
   ‘Maria combs herself.’ (Greek, A&D12:15)

...And many verbs allow various possible readings, e.g. [12]

(45) Mediopassives (i.e. inchoative or passive semantics)

a. ktovet muzara nixteva inscription strange write.NACT
   { al-yedey ha-mafginim / me-acma b-a-šamayim }
   by the-demonstrators from-itself in-the-sky
   ‘A strange inscription { was written by the demonstrators / got written in the sky by itself }.’
   (Hebrew, A&D12:11)

b. i times miothikan the prices lowered.NACT
   { apo to diefthindi / me tis nees ekseleki }
   by the director with the new developments
   ‘The prices [were lowered by the director/went down because of the new developments].’
   (Greek, A&D12:17)

Upshot: Choctaw’s system falls into an attested typological class.

Choctaw and Greek/Hebrew-style voice systems: other similarities

• Root-specific morphological realization of active and non-active morphology (see [10]).

• Root interpretation may differ unpredictably between actives and non-actives:

(46) a. i. atob-bi she paid him
   ii. a<lh> tob-a he was paid’/he was replaced

b. i. halasbi-chi ‘she ironed it’
   ii. halasbi-Ø ‘it is slippery’

---


Note also that Hebrew has multiple non-active templates in addition to the nif’al template. See Alexiadou and Doron 2012, Kastner 2018 for discussion.

[12] I alter Alexiadou and Doron’s (2012) terminology somewhat. They use ‘mediopassive’ to refer to just the passive-equivalent interpretation of the non-active, while they reserve ‘passive’ to refer to the actual morphologically-distinct passive voice (which Choctaw lacks).
6 Practical considerations

6.1 Why is it important?

- The Language Program at the Mississippi Band of Choctaw Indians (MBCI) is assembling a modern lexicon.
  - Distinct from the one published by the Choctaw Nation of Oklahoma (2016).
  - Uses MBCI modern orthography.
  - Reflects contemporary Mississippi Choctaw usage.
- Definitions for non-active verbs should ideally be as accurate as possible.

Why can’t you just ask people directly?

1. The passive/inchoative difference is not obvious to speakers.
2. In out-of-the-blue translation tasks, speakers tend to use active voice (in both Choctaw and English).
3. The English ‘be X-ed’ construction is ambiguous between verbal and adjectival passive.
   → Adjectival passive neutralizes agentivity.
4. Translation tasks may set up a false choice between inchoative and passive meanings.
   → Some non-active verbs can mean either (mediopassives).
5. Translation tasks will be confounded by mismatches between lexical semantics of English and Choctaw verbs:

\[
\begin{align*}
(47) & \quad \begin{align*}
\text{a.} & \quad \text{toshto-li} & \text{‘she shredded it’} \\
\text{b.} & \quad \text{toshtow-a} & \text{‘it came apart’ (‘*it shredded’)}
\end{align*} \\
\text{c.} & \quad \begin{align*}
\text{a.} & \quad \text{kinaf-fi} & \text{‘she cut it down’} \\
\text{b.} & \quad \text{kinaaf-a} & \text{‘it toppled over’ (‘*it cut down’)}
\end{align*} \\
\text{d.} & \quad \begin{align*}
\text{a.} & \quad \text{lhakof-fi} & \text{‘she saved him’} \\
\text{b.} & \quad \text{lhakoof-a} & \text{‘he was saved’/’he escaped’}
\end{align*} \\
\text{e.} & \quad \begin{align*}
\text{a.} & \quad \text{chokcho-li-h} & \text{‘she tickled him’} \\
\text{b.} & \quad \text{chokchow-a-h} & \text{‘he was tickled’/’he became aroused’}
\end{align*}
\end{align*}
\]

6.2 Ease of deployment of the tests

- Purpose and rationale clauses (§3.1-3.2): hard!
  - Time-consuming—lots of setup.
  - Prone to false positives and false negatives.
  - Minimal setup required.
  - Prone to false negatives.
  - Some setup required.
  - Prone to false negatives.

6.3 English definitions of non-active verbs

Non-actives in the MBCI modern lexicon: ‘to be X-ed’.

\[
\begin{align*}
(48) & \quad \begin{align*}
\text{a.} & \quad \text{taptolih} & \text{v to cut in pieces} \\
\text{b.} & \quad \text{taptowah} & \text{v to be cut in pieces, chopped, pl. (sg. tapah)}
\end{align*} \\
(49) & \quad \begin{align*}
\text{a.} & \quad \text{tiloffih} & \text{v to break off} \\
\text{b.} & \quad \text{tilófah} & \text{v to be broken off}
\end{align*}
\end{align*}
\]

- **Pro**: captures the uniform ambiguity between stative and eventive semantics (not discussed today, see Broadwell 2006:127).
- **Con**: neutralizes the idiosyncratic distinction between inchoative, passive and mediopassive semantics.
7 Conclusion

• Choctaw non-active verbs have a non-uniform interpretation:
  - Some ban implicit agents Inchoatives
  - Some mandate implicit agents Passives
  - Some allow implicit agents Mediopassives
  - Plus some have reflexive/body-action interpretations.

• There are various tests to distinguish presence/absence of implicit agent.
  - They differ in ease-of-deployment in fieldwork environments.

• Open questions:
  1. Are there better tests, particularly for the presence of implicit agent?
     → Perhaps agreement—see Appendix B.
  2. Why do certain [root+nact] combinations have inchoative, passive or mediopassive meaning?
     - Is it arbitrary and learned?
     - Or can it be determined from the semantic content of the root?
  3. Does the morphophonology of the causative alternation (see (10)) bear any relation to its interpretation?

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References


### Appendix A: Stativity licenses purpose and rationale clauses

In §3, I said that stative interpretations can license purpose and rationale clauses, even in the absence of an implicit agent:

(50) a. The grass is green [to promote photosynthesis].
    b. The window is open [because it was cold earlier].

This is illustrated for purpose clauses with an ‘inherently’ stative verb and an inchoative in a stativizing construction.

### Appendix B: Agreement in non-actives

Non-actives with passive interpretations must take ABS agreement:

(52) a. *Chi fammiláchi*.

    chi-2
    fammi-l-aachi-h

    2SG.Abs-whip.ACT-1SG.ERG-FUT-TNS

    'I’l whip you’ [active]

b. *Chi fámatok o*?

    chi-2
    faama-tok-o

    2SG.Abs-whip.NACT-PST-Q

    'Were you whipped?’ [non-active]

But, non-actives with inchoative interpretations generally take ERG agreement:

(53) a. *Ish kochoffahí kiyo ho bina hat apissah*.

    ish-2
    kochoff-ahii-kiyo-h-o

    2SG.ERG-bend.ACT-MOD-not-TNS-Q

    'Couldn’t you bend it?’ [active]

13. ABS agreement is accepted in examples like but dispreferred.
b. *Katiña ish kochófahí kiyoh?*  
   kátiña  ish-  kochoof-ahii-kiyo-h  
   why  2s.G.ERG-bend.NACT-MOD-not-TNS  
   ‘Why won’t you bend?’  
   [non-active]

→ This could potentially be used as a diagnostic for interpretation. More work is required.

Appendix C: Are passive and mediopassive really separate categories in Choctaw?

- They differ only in whether an inchoative reading is possible.
- **However**, what if sufficient context can remove an implicit agent from any verb?
- The following ‘passive’ verbs pass the *ilaap* ‘by itself’ test, given some context:

(54) Veridical contexts

a. *Na chippashi achifa chinna kiyoh, ilaap achiﬁächinii!*  
   ná  chi-ppašhi  achiﬁa  chi-nna-kiyo-h,  
   NPI  2SG.ABS-hair  wash.ACT  2SG.ABS-want-not-TNS  
   ilaap  achiﬁ-aachiﬁni-h  
   self  wash.NACT-FUT-TNS  
   ‘You don’t need to wash your hair, it will get washed by itself!’

   *Oven mat ilaap kashósah.*  
   oven-m-at  ilaap  kashoofa-h  
   oven-DEM-NOM  itself  clean.NACT-TNS  
   ‘That oven gets clean by itself.’

c. Context: You’re in a spooky Halloween house and you’re looking at a creepy book.  
   *Annopat ilaap ichowah.*  
   annöpa-t  ilaap-it  ichowaa-h  
   writing-NOM  self-PTCP  write.NACT-TNS  
   ‘The message wrote itself.’

(55) Negative or counterfactual contexts:

a. *Kana hat yappa pashpolit tahlitoka, ilaap pashpowatok kiyoh átok.*  
   kánah-at  yapp-a  pashpoli-t  tahli-tok-a,  
   someone-NOM  this-OBL  sweep.ACT-PTCP  finish-PST-DS  
   ilaap-it  pashpowa-tok  kiyoh  aatok  
   self-PTCP  sweep.NACT-PST not  because  
   ‘Someone swept this room, because it didn’t get swept by itself.’

b. *Kana hat icholitok pa, ilaap ichowatok kiyoh.*  
   kánah-at  icholi-tok  p-a,  ilaap-it  ichowa-tok  kiyoh  
   someone-NOM  write.ACT-PST  this-OBL  self-PTCP  write.NACT-PST not  
   ‘Someone wrote this, it didn’t get written by itself.’