

## On the avoidance of abstract nominalizations

Pamela Munro

“Beauty is truth; truth, beauty”  
– that is all you need to know...  
*Keats, “Ode on a Grecian Urn”*

“Nih nàa nchiàa’ nih nàa làihny; nih nàa làihny nih nàa nchiàa”  
– ndèenn nàa ra’ta’ nih nàa pahr gachèu’...  
*(Tlacolula Valley Zapotec)*

“Chokma’sikat áhlhi, áhlhikat chokma’si”  
– yammakillaho ithána chibanna...  
*(Chickasaw)*

“Skeegkam ’o ud: vohokam, vohokam ’o ud: skeegkam” –  
heg ’apt ’am o va’i smaaced:...  
*(Pima)*

There are languages with no, or almost no, abstract nominalizations. This paper analyzes data from two such languages, Tlacolula Valley Zapotec and Chickasaw, unrelated (and typologically very different) indigenous American languages that do not have productive strategies for producing abstract nominalizations, although they do have regular ways of producing various other nominalizations and have no difficulty expressing the abstract ideas. In Tlacolula Valley Zapotec, abstract nominalizations are either headless relative clauses (which remain transparently analyzable to speakers) or loanwords (usually well assimilated). In Chickasaw, there are no abstract nominalizations at all; such ideas are expressed with complex sentences using switch-reference subordination. This paper, then, is offered to broaden our understanding of nominalization typology – but it does not mean that lack of abstract nominalization is a feature characteristic of languages of the America, as briefly discussed data from Pima illustrates.\*

### 1. Overview

This paper considers how abstract nominal ideas – especially abstract deverbal nominalizations – are expressed in two typologically very different languages with few if any native abstract nominalizations. The two languages are Tlacolula Valley Zapotec (TVZ), a Zapotecan (Otomanguean) language spoken in central Oaxaca, and Chickasaw, a seriously endangered language of the Muskogean family spoken in south-central Oklahoma. In the case of TVZ, we have the benefit of extensive data on an earlier stage of the language, Colonial Valley Zapotec, a language documented in 16th to 18th century descriptions and writings. For both languages I’ve worked on quite extensive dictionaries (Munro & Lopez *et al.* 1999; Munro & Willmond 1994), which provided data considered in this paper.

The inspiration for this paper was the translations into TVZ and Chickasaw of the United Nations’ Universal Declaration of Human Rights (Office of the High Commissioner of Human Rights 1998), a document that is full of abstract concepts. The idea that these are not expressed with native noun words in either language seems a bit shocking.

As part of my work on this paper I asked speakers to translate Keats’s famous lines above into their language; these are included as epigraphs at the beginning of this paper, along with a translation of the lines into a third language, Pima, a Uto-Aztecan language of central Arizona. Like TVZ and Chickasaw, Pima is a language used for daily communication among members of a shrinking speech community, without a standard written form in ordinary use by speakers.

As an introduction to our topic, let’s look first at how Pima, a language with very free word order and second-position clitic auxiliaries, expresses the first part of Keats’s lines:<sup>1</sup>

- (1) “S-keeg-kam ’o ud: voho-kam; voho-kam  
STAT-beautiful-NMR AUX.3.IMP COP true-NMR true-NMR  
’o ud: s-keeg-kam”...  
AUX.3.IMP COP STAT-beautiful-NMR  
“Beauty is truth, truth is beauty”...’ (Pima)

Despite their considerable typological differences, Pima and English express this thought very similarly, using nominalized forms of adjectives to express the abstract concepts ‘beauty’ and ‘truth’. It’s thus certainly not the case that a lack of abstract nominalizations is

characteristic of indigenous languages of the Americas, or that we should expect that a language without a long written tradition necessarily cannot use such a morphosyntactic strategy.

However, this is not true of either of the two languages we'll focus on in this paper.

First, TVZ:

- (2) “Nih nàa n-chiàa’ nih nàa là=ihny;<sup>2</sup> nih nàa  
REL COP ADJ-beautiful REL COP PRON=3S.REV REL COP  
 là=ihny nih nàa n-chiàa’”...  
PRON=3S.REV REL COP ADJ-beautiful  
 “‘That which is beautiful is that which is true; that which is true is  
 that which is beautiful’...” (TVZ)

In this language, almost all depredicative nominalizations are expressed using headless relative clauses; there is no single native word for ‘beauty’ or ‘truth’.

Next, Chickasaw:

- (3) “Chokm-a’si-kat<sup>3</sup> áhlhi; áhlhi-kat chokm-a’si”...  
be.good-DIM-CMP.SS be.true be.true-CMP.SS be.good-DIM  
 “‘For it to be beautiful is for it to be true; for it to be true is for it to  
 be beautiful’...’, “‘Being beautiful, it is true; being true, it is beau-  
 tiful’...’, “‘It is beautiful and true; it is true and it is beautiful’...’  
 (Chickasaw)

As the multiple translations given for (3) indicate, it is much more difficult to give a literal expression of the Chickasaw into English. But, as in TVZ, there is no noun that means either ‘truth’ or ‘beauty’.

Thus, both TVZ and Chickasaw express Keats’s idea without using nouns that mean ‘beauty’ or ‘truth’.

## 2. Zapotec

### 2.1. TVZ and its nominalizations

Tlacolula Valley Zapotec (TVZ: Munro & Lopez *et al.* 1999; Lee 2006; Munro, Lillehaugen & Lopez *in preparation*) is a VSO language of central Oaxaca, Mexico. The language has no case marking, as exemplified in (4), and generally all arguments of a clause must be overt:

- (4) Gw-àa'izy bùunny bèe'cw.  
PERF-hit man dog 'The man hit the dog'.

Most deverbal nominalizations in the language are expressed as (headless) relative clauses beginning with the relativizer *nih*,<sup>4</sup> as in the expressions for 'truth' and 'beauty' in (2). Since there is no case marking, many such relative constructions can be ambiguous (the head can be either subject or object):

- (5) bùunny nih gw-àa'izy bèe'cw  
person REL PERF-hit dog  
 'the man who hit the dog' / (perhaps also) 'the man the dog hit'

Such *nih* relative clauses work like nouns in some ways, but not in others. Like nouns, for example, these relative clauses may be preceded by quantifiers such as the plural marker *ra*:

- (6) Chiru' nu'=gza' ra nih r-culoh zhi'illy  
then NEUT-be.in=also PL REL HAB-take.care.of sheep  
 nehzga'ih...  
 nearby  
 'At that time there were also shepherds [those who take care of sheep] nearby...'

Like nouns, they may be followed by a periphrastically expressed possessor, as in

- (7) nih r-luu'b làa'ny-yu'uh x:tèe'n=a'  
REL HAB-be.swept inside-house of=1s  
 'my broom [that with which the inside of the house is swept]'

But, unlike nouns, they may not have a morphologically expressed possessor,<sup>5</sup> with the possessed prefix *x:-* preceding the whole *nih* phrase:

- (8) \*x:-nih r-luu'b làa'ny-yu'=a'  
POSS-REL HAB-be.swept in-house=1s intended: 'my broom'

*Nih* relative "nominalizations" are clearly always viewed by speakers as analyzable. Thus, 'invention' is

- (9) nih r-bèe'eh-gue'ihcy bùunny  
REL HAB-take.out-head person  
 'invention [what a person takes out of his head]'  
 but 'my invention' must be

- (10) nih b-lèe'eh-gue'icy=a'  
 rel perf-take.out-head=1s  
 'my invention', i.e. 'what I took out of my head'

with perfective rather than habitual marking and a first-person singular subject clitic pronoun on the verb (because 'I' must have invented whatever it is at some point in the past).

There are two morphological nominalizers in TVZ, a prefix *w-* and a proclitic *gahll=*. The prefix *w-* (which is not productive) often appears to have an agentive meaning when added to a verb stem:

- (11) a. w-gyàa'ah  
       NMR2<sup>6</sup>-dance 'dancer'  
 b. w-bwààa'n  
       NMR2-steal 'thief'

*Gahll=* is the only (apparently) productive deverbal nominalizer, used to express a meaning like that of an English gerund when procliticized to a habitual verb.

- (12) R-yu'lààa'z Gye'eihlly gahll=r-gyàa'ah.  
       HAB-like Mike NMR=HAB-dance 'Mike likes dancing'.

This seems like a regular morphosyntactic construction, but it's not really clear how productive it is. Only two examples of this type of *gahll=* nominalization appear in 200 pages of analyzed narratives about the immigration experience (Lopez & Munro (eds.) *in preparation*):

- (13) Chiru' b-èi'ny=a' zèèi'ny làa'any restaura'aann gahll=r-guì'by  
       then PERF-do=1s work in restaurant NMR=HAB-wash  
       plàa'd=zhi'.  
       dish=END  
       'So I worked in a restaurant washing dishes'. (Lopez & Munro (eds.)  
       *in preparation*)

- (14) N-u'=rih todo el' tye'eemm r-tèi'dy=rih  
       NEUT-be.in=3P.DIST all the time HAB-pass=3P.DIST  
       canzàa=rih ladca'i, n-u'=ih gahll=r-i'ah ra  
       stroll=3P.DIST street NEUT-be.in=3.DIST NMR=HAB-drink PL  
       serbe's=ih...  
       beer=that

‘There are some that spend *all the* time hanging out in the street, there’s some drinking those beers...’ (Lopez & Munro (eds.) *in preparation*)

Most *gahll*= nominalizations in these texts, and all those in the dictionary (Munro & Lopez *et al.* 1999), however, are lexicalized, and sometimes, as with *gahll=r-zyàa’ah* in (15), it’s not even possible to identify a verbal source for them:

- (15) R-u’=ëng      gahll=r-zyàa’ah x:u g-uny=ëng zèèi’ny  
HAB-be.in=3S.PROX    NMR=HAB?-?                    how    IRR-do=3S.PROX    work  
 o càa      ne’ehhz y-rìaa’    mùuully.  
 or where    way                    IRR-leave money  
 ‘He was worried [in (a state of) worry] about how to find work and where money would come from.’ (Lopez & Munro (eds.) *in preparation*)

In some of these lexicalized cases, the element following *gahll*= is not verbal, as in (16), and the meaning may seem quite abstract. Generally, though, as (17) suggests, such derived forms denote specific instances of such apparent abstractions:

- (16) gahll=milàagr  
nmr=miracle                    ‘miraculousness’
- (17) Loh x:-cahll=milàagr Dyooz b-ìe’d    Cria’st loh gax:lyuh.  
to            POSS-NMR=miracle    God            PERF-come Christ    to    earth  
 ‘Through God’s miraculousness Christ came to earth.’

Unlike *nih* relatives, both *gahll*= and *w*- nominalizations are full-fledged nouns: they may be freely morphologically possessed, for example, as in (17). The *nih* relative clause strategy is the one that speakers use productively, however: for instance, when asked to name an unfamiliar object or to talk about a quality like ‘truth’ or ‘beauty’.

## 2.2. Colonial Valley Zapotec

Zapotec has been written for more than 400 years: a grammar and dictionary were prepared by the Spanish missionary priest Juan de Córdova (1578a, 1578b). Colonial Zapotec data in this paper come from these sources and from Feria’s *Doctrina* (1567) and various archival manuscripts written by native speakers from the 16th to the 18th centuries and analyzed by the UCLA Zapotexts group.<sup>8</sup>

The two TVZ nominalizers we just saw both have ancestors in Colonial Zapotec. A *hue-* nominalizer usually has an agentive or subject-related meaning<sup>9</sup> and is used much more often than the TVZ *w-*. As in TVZ, it never seems to have an abstract meaning:

- (18) a. hue-yàa  
NMR2=dance  
 ‘baylador’ (1578a: 50v) (‘dancer’)  
 b. huè-ni  
NMR2=do  
 ‘hazedor’ (1578a: 215) (‘doer’)

Even more frequently used is the *quela=* nominalizer, which may have the same activity sense as its descendant, TVZ *gahll*, but also frequently appears to express an abstract meaning:

- (19) a. quela=t-àgo  
NMR=HAB-eat  
 ‘comestacion...el acto de comer’ (1578a: 81) (‘eating...the act of eating’)  
 b. quela=t-ápa  
nmr=hab-have  
 ‘possession’ (1578a: 323) (‘possession’)

Córdova’s dictionary contains some 500 entries with *quela=* translations of Spanish words ending in *-ción*.<sup>10</sup> This would suggest that *quela=* nominalizations were considerably more common in Colonial Zapotec than in modern TVZ, but a few caveats are in order. We don’t know as much as we’d like to about how the dictionary was compiled, so it is possible that at least some of these *quela=* words are forced or nonce translations that might not have been used in ordinary speech. Their use in our analyzed documents is largely confined to two areas. First, they occur in fairly formulaic expressions at the beginning of testaments, as in (20):

- (20) r-apa=ya    quela=ri-jene    quela=r-acapea    xteni=ya  
HAB=have=1s    NMR=HAB-understand    NMR=HAB-know    of=1s  
 ‘I have (my) understanding and knowledge’ (Te675b: 2)<sup>11</sup>

As in TVZ (16), but much more commonly, there is another puzzling use of the same morpheme, before borrowed nouns, often denoting instances of abstractions:

- (21) c-oni=ni quela=casado...  
IRR-do=3s NMR=married/husband  
 (if/when) he marries (i.e., “does marriage”)...’  
 (Feria 1567, marriage section, 1: 20-21)
- (22) ti-niyopeya=tono quela=Justiçia, qui-ropa=tono alldes  
HAB-command=1P NMR=justice IRR-two=1P alcaldes  
 ‘We order justice, we two alcaldes’ (Te568:19)

### 2.3. Expression of abstract nominalizations in TVZ

So, then, here’s the question: if modern Zapotec does not use *gahll*= nominalizations to express abstract concepts, how does it express them? Answer: with Spanish loanwords.

Below, for example, is another way (in addition to (2)) to express Keats’s line:

- (23) “Beye’s nàa verdaa; verdaa nàa beye’s” ...  
beauty COP truth truth COP beauty  
 “Beauty is truth, truth is beauty”...’

Of the 13 nouns in our TVZ dictionary defined with English nouns ending in *-tion*, all but one are Spanish loans. Many more such borrowed nouns occur in the narratives in Munro & Lopez (eds.) *in preparation* and other free narratives in Zapotec; these are not included in the dictionary, however, because my collaborator feels they are not genuine Zapotec words. For example, consider (24) (from our narrative collection), in which the speaker plays on the similarity between one fully assimilated loan (*liberasyoony* ‘freedom’, from Spanish *liberación*) and the unassimilated *libertinaje* ‘libertinage’:

- (24) B-yu’làa’z=a’ re’nn, tye’nn n-u’uh-dùa’x liberasyoony  
PERF-like=1s here because NEUT-be.located-much freedom  
 re’nn n-u’uh. Chiru’ *después* nìi g-uhc zi’cy  
here NEUT-be.located and later thatPERF-be like  
 te’ihby *libertinaje* pahr nà=a’.  
one libertinage for PRON=1s  
 ‘I liked it here because there was a lot of freedom here, there was.  
*Later* that [freedom] became like *libertinaje* for me’

Further, consider the TVZ translation of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights (Lopez & Munro 1998),<sup>12</sup> whose 1947

English original contains numerous abstract nouns. These too are typically translated into TVZ with Spanish borrowings, as in the extracts in (25) and (26), where we first give the English original, then the TVZ expression, and then a translation of the Zapotec.

- (25) “Whereas recognition of the inherent dignity and of the equal and inalienable rights of all members of the human family is the foundation of freedom, justice and peace in the world...” (Preamble)

Zi'cy nàa dignidaa deree'ch=nah x:tèe' ra'=ta' b̀unny  
 thus COP dignity right=CONJ of all=EMPH person  
 gax:lyuh nih nàa que'ihy z-iie'd libertaa, just'iisy, c̀hnn  
 world REL COP where INC-come liberty justice and  
 pa's nàa pahr g-a'c=rih rreconoseer, ...  
 peace COP for IRR-be=3P.DIST recognize  
 ‘Since the dignity and rights of all the people of the world, which is where liberty, justice, and peace come from, must be recognized,...’

- (26) “Everyone has the right to life, liberty and security of person”. (Article 3)

Ra'=ta' b̀unny r-àa'p deree'ch pahr y-baany b̀unny,  
 all=EMPH person HAB-have right to IRR-live person  
 libertaa, c̀hnn seguridaa x:tèe' b̀unny.  
 liberty andsecurity of person  
 ‘All people have the right to live, [to] liberty, and [to] security of person.’

Since we prepared this translation my collaborator has become a Zapotec language teacher, and he now has very proscriptive feelings about teaching his students recent Spanish loans. Thus, for example, he now greatly prefers the Keats version in (2) to that in (23).

### 3. Chickasaw

#### 3.1. Chickasaw and its nominalizations

Chickasaw is an SOV language that is definitely verb-centered, as we'll see below. The language has no adpositions (Munro 2000, 2006). However, it has plenty of nouns, and uses an accusative case marking system in examples like

- (27) Hattak-at ofi'(-a) isso-tok.  
 person-NOM dog(-ACC) hit-PT  
 ‘The man hit the dog.’

There are two commonly used nominalizers. One, *-ka'*, appears only in some 30 items in our dictionary (Munro & Willmond 1994), a number of which are not fully analyzable. Two of these appear in (28). The scarcity of such nouns in the dictionary suggests that *-ka'* is not productive, and indeed attempts to use it to make up new nouns fail. However, examples like (28c) (presumably a fairly recent calque from English) suggest that it is not fully fossilized.

- (28) a. *obya-ka'*  
       be.evening-NMR2  
       'evening'
- b. *nanna=aa-ashshachi-ka'*  
       something=LOC-sin(v.)-NMR2  
       'hell' ('place of sinning', 'place of sinners')
- c. *bala'bolbo' ahoob-a'si-ka'*  
       bean kidney resemble-DIM-NMR2  
       'kidney beans' ('beans that kind of look like kidneys')

The meanings of *-ka'* nouns seem not to be abstract.

The more common nominalizer, a *-'* (glottal stop) suffix, derives concrete deverbal nominalizations, as in<sup>13</sup>

- (29) a. *hilha-'*  
       dance-NMR  
       'dancer; dance'
- b. *abika-'*  
       be.sick-NMR  
       'sick person; sickness'
- c. *taloowa-'*  
       sing-NMR  
       'singer; song, singing event'
- d. *to'li-'*  
       play.ball-NMR  
       'ball player; ball game'
- e. *impa-'*  
       eat.intr-NMR  
       'eater; food'

There are over 1800 main entries for *-'* nominalizations in our Chickasaw dictionary (Munro & Willmond 1994). Typically, such nominalizations can be interpreted as referring to the subject of the source verb, as well as to that verb's conceptual object, even in the case of completely intransitive verbs such as *abika* 'be sick' or *impa* 'eat', which cannot be used transitively – thus, as shown in (29),

*abika*’ means ‘sickness’ and *impa*’ means ‘food’. Sometimes these -’ nominalizations may refer to a specific event involving the verb, as with *taloowa*’ ‘singing event’ (rural Oklahoma churches host “all night singings”, especially in summer) or *to’li*’ ‘ball game’.

Such nominalizations can include applicative clitics or prefixes, such as instrumental *isht-* in (30a); loosely incorporated and/or compounded nouns, as in (30b); or *nanna / naa* ‘something’, as in (30c):

- (30) a. *isht=achifa-*  
INST=wash-NMR  
 ‘washcloth, soap’  
 b. *lowak toba-*  
fire become-NMR  
 ‘matches’  
 c. *nann=ashshachi-*  
something=sin(v.)-NMR  
 ‘sinner; sin’

Speakers use the -’ nominalization strategy very freely and productively. There are over 1800 main entries for -’ nominalizations in our Chickasaw dictionary (Munro & Willmond 1994). Typically, however, these have only concrete reference – even a noun like *nann-ashshachi*’ ‘sin’ would normally be interpreted to refer to a specific action, not a general concept of evil.

The dictionary contains only four items that are translated with English nouns ending in *-tion*:

- (31) a. *Illi-t Falama-t Taani-*  
die-PRT return-PRT rise-NMR  
 ‘the Resurrection [dying, returning, the rising]’  
 b. *Nann=oktani-*  
something=appear-NMR  
 ‘Revelation [book of the Bible] [something’s appearance]’  
 c. *naa=holhtina-*  
something=be.counted-NMR  
 ‘arithmetic (problem), calculation [something’s being counted]’  
 d. *naa=alhtoka-*  
something=be.elected-NMR ‘election [something’s being elected]’

Each of these refers to a specific item or event rather than an abstract concept (for example, *naaholhtina*’ ‘arithmetic’ generally is used to refer to something like ‘arithmetic homework’, rather than referring the abstract field of study).

### 3.2. Clausal expression of abstract concepts in Chickasaw

Chickasaw, then, does not use nouns to refer to abstract concepts. English abstractions are consistently translated with verbal structures using switch-reference, a syntactic system in which all subordinate clauses are marked for whether their subject is the same as (SS) or different from (DS) the subject of some higher reference clause. (Different pairs of switch-reference markers express different types of subordination). Thus, my Chickasaw teacher offered two ways to express the English sentence in (32), one of a number of cases where I tried to elicit translations of more-or-less abstract nouns. In (32a), the subject of both *taloowa* ‘sing’ and *chokma* ‘be good’ is the same third person (I’ve arbitrarily used a plural translation).<sup>14</sup> In (32b), on the other hand, the subject of ‘sing’ is a singer or singers, while the subject of ‘be good’ is the fact of the singing.

- (32) “Singing is good”.
- a. Taloowa-kat      chokma.  
     sing-CMP.SS      be.good  
     ‘They sing and they are good.’, ‘Singing, they are good.’
- b. Taloowa-kma      chokma.  
     sing-IRR.DS      be.good  
     ‘If they sing, it’s good.’

(32) uses the same type of construction as in (3) (the Keats translation), repeated below as (33):

- (33) “Chokm-a’si-kat áhlhi; áhlhi-kat chokm-a’si”...  
     be.good-DIM-CMP.SS    be.true    be.true-CMP.SS    be.good-DIM  
     “‘For it to be beautiful is for it to be true; for it to be true is for it to be beautiful’...”, “‘Being beautiful, it is true; being true, it is beautiful’...”, “‘It is beautiful and true; it is true and it is beautiful’...”

Since ‘be true’ doesn’t make sense with a human subject, we assume that the subject here is some ‘it’, which is also beautiful.

Example (34), translated on the model of a verse from the Choctaw New Testament ([Byington] 1848), contains a noun, *nanni-hollo* ‘love’, which looks like a true abstract noun. Again, the subject is some unnamed “it”:

- (34) “The greatest of these is love.” (I Corinthians 13)  
     Nanna    móma    ímmayya-kat      nann-i-hollo-’.  
     something    be.all.DS    be.greater.than-CMP.SS    something-DAT-love-NMR  
     ‘It is greater than everything; it’s love.’

Chickasaw speakers, however, consider *nannihollo'* a “Bible word”, an expression used only when talking directly about Biblical concepts using the language of the Choctaw Bible. The Chickasaw and Choctaw languages are very closely related (some consider them only dialects), but the Bible was only translated into Choctaw, and the Choctaw Bible has traditionally been used in both Choctaw and Chickasaw services. (Consequently, Chickasaw speakers tend to be more familiar with Choctaw and Choctaw words – and Bible expressions – than vice versa.) It’s certainly possible that Chickasaw speakers of 150 years ago used more such abstract nouns. But, as in the case of the Colonial Valley Zapotec dictionary data, it is also possible that Byington’s collaborator/translators on the Choctaw Bible were using words that were not fully natural.

There are ten verbs meaning ‘to love’ in our dictionary, but the noun *nannihollo'* doesn’t appear there (though perhaps it should have, since it is familiar to speakers). It can’t freely be used, even in a Biblical context, as the impossibility of (35b) (which follows Chickasaw’s normal ‘NOUN is NOUN’ copular structure) shows:

(35) “God is love.”

- a. Chihoow-aat nanna mómá i-hollo.  
 God-NOM something be.all.DS DAT-love  
 ‘God loves everything.’
- b. \*Chihoow-aat nann-i-hollo-’.  
 God-NOM something-DAT-love-NMR

(36)-(37) present some more examples of Chickasaw sentences that in English would be translated with abstract nouns:

(36) “I’m afraid of death.”

- Illi ik-sa-bann-o.  
 die HYP-1sII-want-NEG  
 ‘I don’t want to die.’

(37) “Life is precious.”

- a. Okcháa-cha holítto’pa.  
 be.alive-CONJ.SS be.precious  
 ‘It’s alive and it’s precious.’
- b. Okcháa-kmat holítto’pa.  
 be.alive-IRR.SS be.precious  
 ‘If it’s alive, it’s precious.’

As we saw for TVZ, the Chickasaw Universal Declaration of Human Rights (Willmond & Munro 1998) provides numerous examples of English abstract nouns translated without nominalizations:

- (38) “Everyone has the right to life, liberty and security of person.”  
(Article 3)

Hattak-at hattak yoka’sh-cha ab-a’ni-kat  
 person-NOM person imprison-CONJ.SS kill-MOD-CMP.SS  
 im-alhpi’sa ki’yo.  
 DAT-be.right not  
 ‘It’s not right for people to imprison or kill people.’

Hattak-at holitto’pa biyyi’ka.  
 person-NOM be.precious eternally  
 ‘People are truly sacred.’

- (39) “No one shall be subjected to arbitrary arrest, detention or exile.”  
(Article 9)

Hattak-at nanna kanihmi ki’yo-ka  
 person-NOM something do.something not-CMP.DS  
 yokach-a’ ki’yo  
 imprison-ever not  
 kana-hoot nanna onhochi-ka.  
 someone-FOC.NOM something blame-CMP.DS  
 ‘If a person didn’t do anything he or she should never be imprisoned  
 when someone accuses him or her of something.’

- (40) “Everyone has the right to freedom of movement and residence  
 within the borders of each State.” (Article 13, section 1)

Kaniya’-o aya chi-banna-kmat ish-iyi-a’hi biyyi’ka.  
 anywhere-FOC.ACC go 2sII-want-IRR.SS 2sI-go-shalleternally  
 Kaniya’-o anta chi-banna-kmat ish-ant-a’hi biyyi’ka.  
 anywhere-FOC.ACC live 2sII-want-IRR.SS 2sI-live-shall eternally  
 ‘You should truly be able to go anywhere you want to go.  
 You should truly be able to live anywhere you want to live.’

- (41) “Everyone has the right to equal access to public service in his  
 country...” (Article 21, section 2)

Kana-haat naa=alhtoka-’ nanna-ho  
 someone-INT.NOM something-be.elected-NMR something-FOC.ACC  
 malili banna-kmat malil-a’ni.  
 run want-IRR.SS run-MOD  
 ‘If someone wants to run in some kind of election he or she can run.’

### 3.3. ‘Something’ nominalizations

One of the few apparent abstract nouns I know of in Chickasaw  
 is *nannayya* ‘peace’, as in (42):

- (42) Nannaayya-kat      míyyi't-a'chi.  
 (be?)peace-CMP.SS      come-will  
 'Peace is coming.'

In this sentence, 'peace' is the subject. But it is marked not with the ordinary nominative case marker *-at* or *-aat* seen in many sentences above, but with a same-subject switch-reference marker. This indicates that 'peace' is not, in fact, a noun, but rather a verb ('be peace?'): thus, the sentence must literally mean something like 'It will be peace and it will come'.

The odd behavior of 'peace' is exceeded by the strangeness of the word *nanna* 'something' (probably a component of 'peace'), which we've seen used as an incorporated proclitic in (30c), (28b), and (31b-c), as a free argument in (39), and as some kind of modifier in (41). Clearly, 'something' seems as though it ought to be a paradigmatic member of some kind of (pro)nominal category – but in Chickasaw, it really isn't.

- (43) Nanna-kat              ilhko'li-ka      pís-li-tok.  
 (be?)something-CMP.SS      move-CMP.DS      see-1sI-PT  
 'I saw something moving.'

- (44) Nanna-ka              isht=anompoli-ka      ithána-li.  
 (be?)something-CMP.DS      INST=talk-CMP.DS      know-1sI  
 'I know they were talking about something.'

Not only can *nanna* 'something' take verbal subordinating (switch-reference) morphology instead of ordinary case marking, just as 'peace' does (something other nominal indefinites, like 'someone' and 'somewhere', do not do), it can even be used as a verb (!), expressing the idea of 'maybe' or 'whether'. Thus, (45) might literally mean something like 'it was something like she went'.

- (45) Aya-kma      nanna-tok.  
 go-IRR.DS      (be?)something-PT  
 'Maybe she went.'
- (46) Aya-kma      nann-a'chi-ka      ak-itha'n-o.  
 go-IRR.DS      (be?)something-will-CMP.DS      1sN-know-NEG  
 'I don't know if she is going to go.'

What a puzzle!

#### *4. Conclusion (?)*

The purpose of this paper is to present information on a little recognized type of language, one without native abstract nominalizations. The first case we looked at, TVZ, makes very little use of abstract nouns or nominalizations, preferring relative clause constructions or (increasingly) Spanish loanwords – which means that, in fact, TVZ speakers are not really avoiding the use of abstract nouns, just expressing them without using native nouns. The second, Chickasaw, however, is very different, since Chickasaw really uses almost no abstract nouns or nominalizations of any type, preferring explicitly verbal constructions. Both languages have potential evidence of earlier stages in which more abstract nominals were used, but in both cases the evidence is somewhat suspect: the abstract nominalizations might be translation artifacts.

In fact, although the translations of the Chickasaw passages in which verbs are used look very different from the corresponding English ideas containing abstract nouns, the meanings involved are not that different. Chickasaw seems to be following sound advice by English teachers, e.g.

Instead of boring your readers with a lot of abstract nouns (such as those formed by a verb root + “-tion”), revise your sentences in order to make your verbs do the work... Nominalized sentences may be grammatically and factually correct, but vague. Most humans learn best when they can form specific, vivid mental images – and verbs are more vivid than nouns. (Jerz 2000)

In fact, Minkoff & Katz (1973) argue that readers have trouble processing abstract nouns and nominalizations, and that sentences with verbs are easier for them to read.

So maybe Chickasaw speakers have the right idea!

#### *Address of the Author*

University of California Los Angeles, Linguistics, Box 951543, 360  
Royce Hall, Los Angeles, CA 90095-1543, USA  
<munro@ucla.edu>

#### *Notes*

\* Great thanks to Felipe H. Lopez and others for Tlacolula Valley Zapotec and to Catherine Willmond and others for Chickasaw. Recent support for work on both these languages (as well as for Pima, discussed below) was provided by the

Academic Senate of UCLA, to whom I'm most grateful. I also thank the speakers who contributed the narratives in Lopez & Munro (eds.) in preparation, some of which are quoted below, and to audiences at the UCLA American Indian Seminar and the Conference on Nouns Cross-Linguistically for helpful comments. Data on Colonial Valley Zapotec comes from Córdoba (1578a, b) and from archival documents from the 15th-17th centuries written in Zapotec and analyzed by the UCLA Zapotexts group, whose current members include Xóchitl Flores Marcial, Michael Galant, Maria Ornelas, Aaron Sonnenschein, Lisa Sousa, Kevin Terraciano, and myself. Earlier group members who have contributed to the work include Christina Esposito, John Foreman, Brook Lillehaugen, Felipe Lopez, Olivia Martínez, Julie Morgenlender, and Diana Schwartz. Thanks to all. Finally, great thanks to Virgil Lewis for the Pima data, and to Marcus Smith for helpful discussion.

<sup>1</sup> Abbreviations used include ACC : accusative, ADJ : adjective, AUX : auxiliary, CMP : complement, CONJ : conjunction, COP : copula, DAT : dative, DIM : diminutive, DIST : distal, DS : different subject, EMPH : emphatic, FOC : focus, HAB : habitual, HYP : hypothetical, IMP : imperfective, INC : incomplete, INST: instrumental, INT : interrogative, INTR : intransitive, IRR : irrealis, LOC : locative, MOD : modal, NEUT : neutral, NMR : nominalizer, NMR2 : additional nominalizer, NOM : nominative, PERF : perfective, PL : plural, PRON : pronoun, PROX : proximate, PRT : participle, PT : past, REL : relative, REV : reverential, SS : same subject, STAT : stative, V : verb. A period separates elements of a complex word or gloss, and = indicates a clitic boundary. Pronominal elements are glossed as 1, 2, 3 and s, p, I, II, and N are Chickasaw agreement classes.

<sup>2</sup> The TVZ expression for 'true' here is an idiom literally meaning 'be it', using the reverential pronoun for 'it'.

<sup>3</sup> In Chickasaw, 'be beautiful' is expressed as a diminutive of 'be good'.

<sup>4</sup> Lee (2006) has argued that *nih* is a complementizer rather than a relative pronoun (though in contrast to English *that*, *nih* is not used to introduce full clauses).

<sup>5</sup> Constructions like (8) are fine if a noun precedes the relative clause (Munro 2002):

x:a-nchàa'	nih	zuubi=a'
POSS-dish	REL	NEUT.crack=1s

'my cracked dish (my dish that is cracked)'

<sup>6</sup> I use "NMR2" in both TVZ and Chickasaw for the less productive of two nominalizers; "NMR" is used for the more productive one.

<sup>7</sup> Unassimilated loanwords and their translations are italicized.

<sup>8</sup> Colonial Zapotec spelling was not standardized, even in Córdoba's own work; all data here are as in the original, and my discussion of specific forms uses the spelling in the quoted items.

<sup>9</sup> This analysis (by the late Thomas Smith Stark) was brought to my attention by Brook Lillehaugen.

<sup>10</sup> Córdoba's dictionary is organized only from Spanish to Zapotec, and clearly some words are probably repeated (but many of the 500 entries in fact include two or more Zapotec *quela*= words). This search would not have been possible without Smith Stark *et al.* (1993).

<sup>11</sup> References like this one are to analyzed archival Colonial Zapotec documents. The "675" here means that the document dates to 1675, and so on.

<sup>12</sup> The TVZ and Chickasaw versions were prepared for the fiftieth anniversary of the original Declaration. The online TVZ version (Lopez & Munro 1998) regrettably uses a now outdated orthography. Note that the language code used by the United Nations to refer to TVZ, *ztu*, is incorrect. The correct code is *zab*.

<sup>13</sup> Some nouns derived with the hyphen, not dash suffix' also include an additional glottal stop before the final consonant of the verb. It's not clear in what types of words this second ' is added. In some cases there is a contrast between two nominalizations, one with the extra ', one without. Two examples derived from *nosi-chi*, the causative of *nosi* 'to sleep', for example, are *nosi'chi* 'with who can put you to sleep and then come into your house' and *nosichi* 'anesthesiologist'.

<sup>14</sup> Some Chickasaw verbs lexically distinguish singular and plural subjects, but most do not.

*Bibliographical References*

- ANONYMOUS [BYINGTON, Cyrus *et al.*] n.d. *The New Testament of Our Lord and Saviour Jesus Christ translated into the Choctaw Language / Pin Chitokaka Pi Okchalinchi Chisvs Klaist In Testament Himona Chahta Anumpa Atoshowa Hoke*. New York: American Bible Society.
- CÓRDOVA Fr. Juan de 1987 [1578a]. *Vocabulario en lengua çapoteca*. México: Ediciones Toledo (INAH).
- CÓRDOVA Fr. Juan de 1886 [1578b]. *Arte del idioma zapoteco*. Morelia: Imprenta del Gobierno.
- FERIA, Pedro de 1567. *Doctrina cristiana*. Mexico: Mexico City.
- JERZ Dennis G. 2000. Nominalization: Don't Overuse Abstract Nouns. <http://jertz.setonhill.edu/writing/grammar/nominalization.htm> (Accessed 30 Sept. 2010).
- LEE Felicia 2006. *Remnant Raising and VSO Clausal Architecture*. Dordrecht: Springer.
- LOPEZ Felipe H., & Pamela MUNRO 1998. Declarasyoony x:tèe' Derèe'ch Ra'ta' Bùunny (Declaration of the Rights of All People) [The United Nations' Universal Declaration of Human Rights]. Ms. Online (in an earlier orthography than that used in this paper) at <http://www.ohchr.org/EN/UDHR/Pages/Language.aspx?LangID=ztu1> (Accessed 30 Sept. 2010).
- LOPEZ Felipe H. & Pamela MUNRO (eds.) *in preparation*. *X:a Mo'od Biè'd Ra Bùunny Sann Lu'uc Lohs Aa'nngl: Zapotec Immigration Narratives [How People of San Lucas Came to Los Angeles]*.
- MINKOFF Harvey, & Sharon KATZ 1973. Spoken and Written English: Teaching Passive Grammar. *College Composition and Communication* 24. 157-162.
- MUNRO Pamela 2002. Aspects of Stativity in Zapotec. Presented at the LASSO annual meeting.
- MUNRO, Pamela, Brook Danielle LILLEHAUGEN, & Felipe H. LOPEZ *In preparation*. *Cali Chiu? A Course in Valley Zapotec*.
- MUNRO Pamela, & Felipe H. LOPEZ, with Olivia V. MÉNDEZ [MARTÍNEZ], Rodrigo GARCIA & Michael R. GALANT 1999. *Di'csyonaary X:tèe'n Dii'zh Sah Sann Lu'uc (San Lucas Quiavini Zapotec Dictionary Dicionario Zapoteco de San Lucas Quiavini)*. Los Angeles: (UCLA) Chicano Studies Research Center Publications.
- MUNRO Pamela, & Catherine WILLMOND 1994. *Chickasaw: An Analytical Dictionary*. Norman, OK: University of Oklahoma Press.
- Office of the High Commissioner of Human Rights, United Nations 1998. Universal Declaration of Human Rights. Online at <http://www.un.org/en/documents/udhr/index.shtml> (Accessed 30 Sept. 2010).
- SMITH STARK Thomas C., coordinador, con la colaboración de Sergio BOGARD y Ausencia LÓPEZ CRUZ 1993. *Versión electrónica del Vocabulario en lengua çapoteca (1578) de Juan de Córdoba*. Centro de Estudios Lingüísticos y Literarios, El Colegio de México.
- WILLMOND Catherine, & Pamela MUNRO 1998. Hattak Móma Iholisso (The Document of All People) [The United Nations' Universal Declaration of Human Rights]. Ms. Online at <http://www.ohchr.org/EN/UDHR/Pages/Language.aspx?LangID=cic> (Accessed 30 Sept. 2010).