



The Wichita Language Documentation



The Grasshouse - Traditional Wichita Dwelling

I. Wichita

Ia. About Wichita

Wichita is a Caddoan language spoken near Anadarko, Oklahoma, USA. There are approximately 2100 enrolled tribal members but only one person, Doris Lamar, now an octogenarian, can still speak the language fluently. Wichita is structurally prototypical of polysynthetic languages; i.e. most of the information in an utterance is contained in bound verbal morphology.

Lines 14 and 15 from "Turtle, Buffalo, and Coyote" (Rood, 1976)

- a. *natf?arikite?er?i?arikih
 b. "Where my horns stick out on top
 c. na t uy ?arik ru kita ?ir?i? ?ariki hirih
 d. ppl 1.subj prev.have horn pl.pat on protrude stand loc
- a. harah iste?erhi?lawa." akok?a, "kirih!"
 b. there, go into the brush." He replied, "No!"
 c. harah ?i s te?erhika wa a? ki wak?a kirih
 d. there imper 2.subj brush go-perf quote aorist say no

Wichita Polysynthetic Structure



Map of Anadarko, Oklahoma, USA

Ib. Linguistic Affiliation

By 1960, there were no longer any dialect variations among the Wichita speakers. In the past Waco, Tawakoni, and Wichita were recognized as separate dialects (Rood, 1996). Along with Pawnee, Arikara, Caddo, and (now extinct) Kitsai, it forms the Caddoan family of languages.

Ic. Current Condition

At the time of the last DoBeS-sponsored field trip in 2003, about 10 people could still speak the language well enough to participate in the recording sessions. In 2013, that number is 5. Some people remember songs or short phrases, but only one can actually use the language any more. The DoBeS projects documented this language at the last possible moment.

II. Documenting the Language

Ila. Older Material

In the pilot phase of the project Rood's text-based database of words and sentences was imported into (i) the IDD dictionary program and (ii) a searchable web-based tool. The sound recordings of the words and verb paradigms, as well as the oral narratives and a 28 minute conversation from 1966, were digitized at 16bit, 44.1 kHz from the original reel-reel tapes and are now included as examples in the multimedia dictionary.

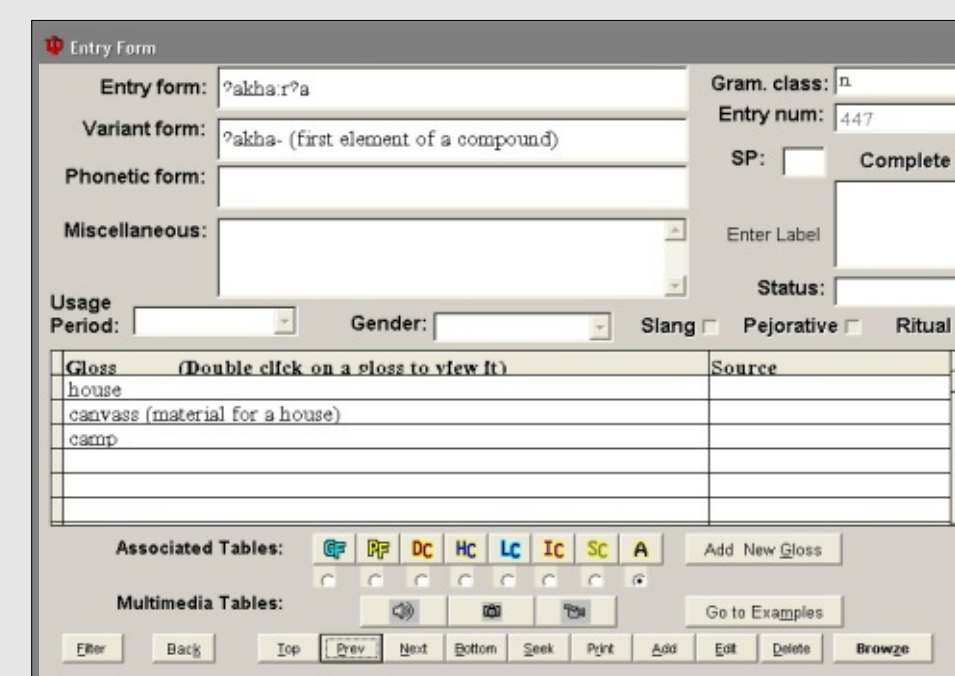
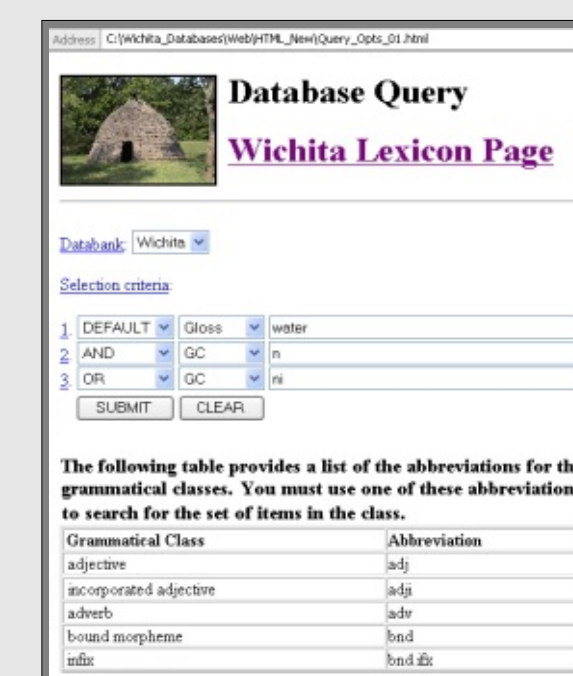
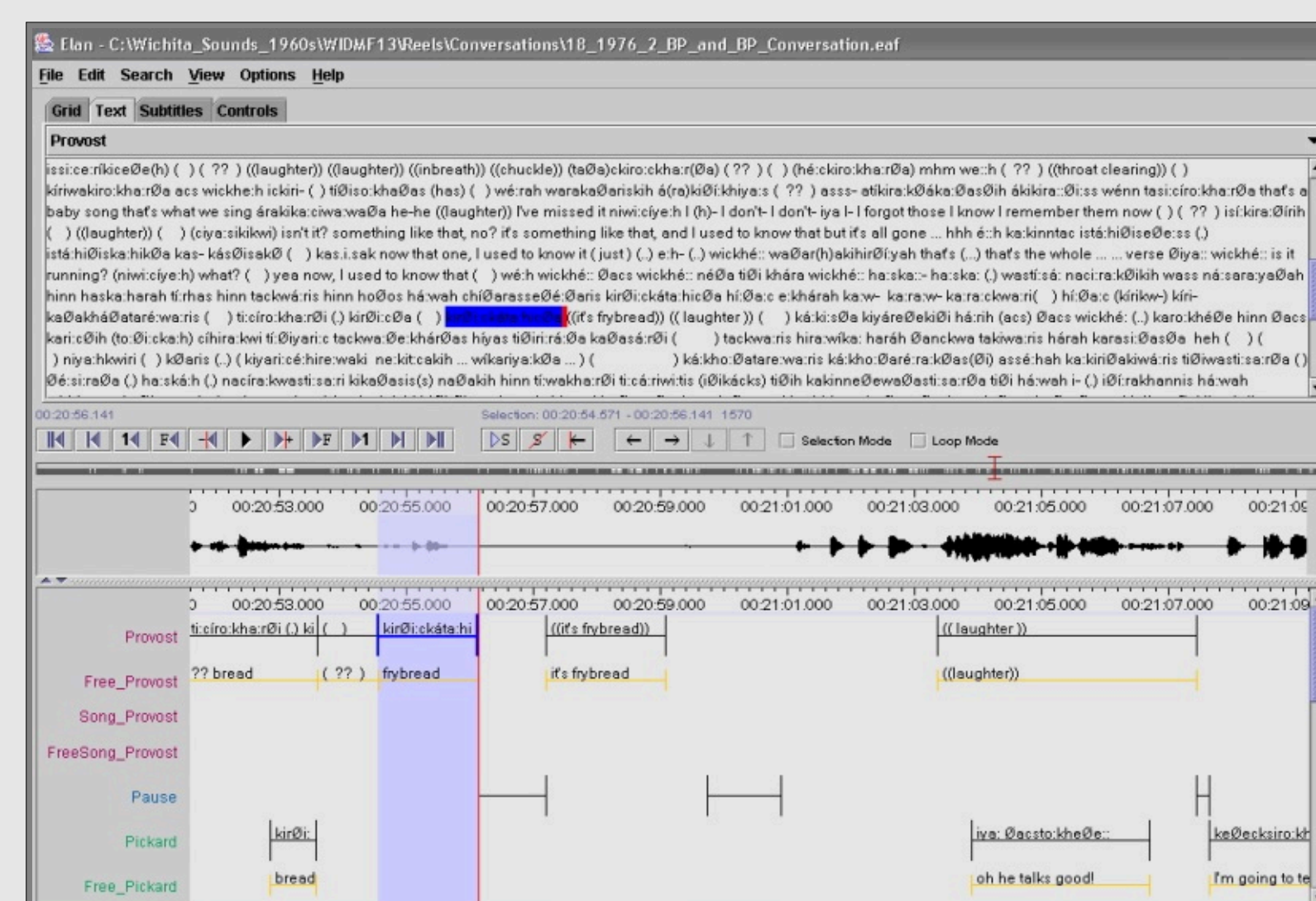


Illustration IDD (Indiana Dictionary Project)



The Web-based Lexicon

In the main phase of the project the already digital transcripts of the oral narratives were entered into Shoebox with sound time-alignment information. We are in the process of moving these transcripts into the ELAN grids and associating them directly with the sound files. Some of the texts and the conversation piece have been directly entered into the DOBES ELAN annotation tool. Tiers for morpheme-by-morpheme glosses and grammatical categories are being added to these time-aligned transcripts.



Annotation of Wichita Conversation in ELAN

II b. What's new?

Fieldwork was conducted in June 2002, July 2002, March 2003, and June 2003 by the team members. These resulted in nearly 200 hours of interview sessions in which the aid of the native speakers was sought for a careful transcription of some previously untranscribed narratives. The 28-minute conversation clip was digitally replayed in the field and carefully transcribed by Rood and Mirzayan.

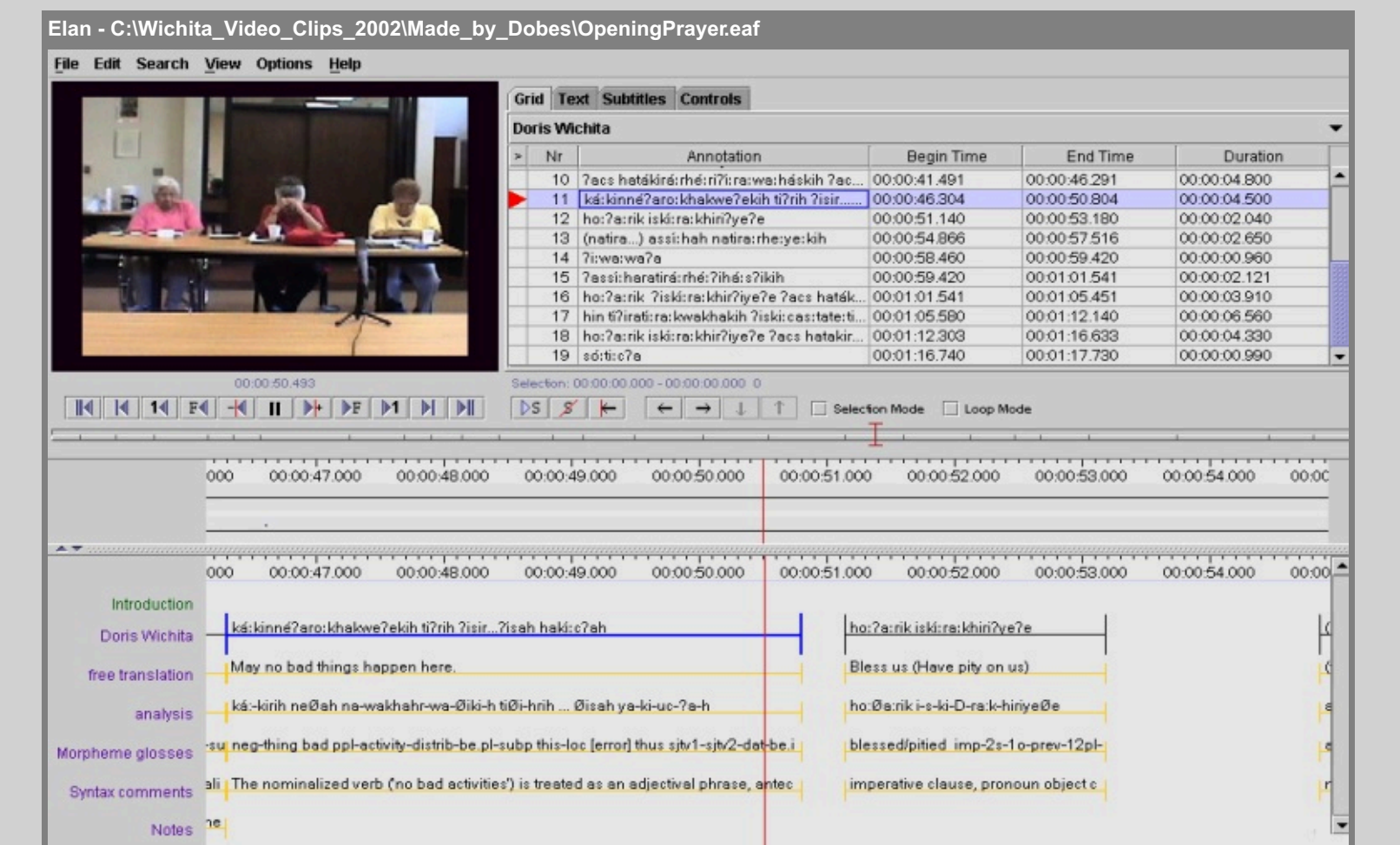
Some of the time during the individual interview sessions was used for elicitation of more verb paradigms. Rood's 1980 list of nouns was re-elicited in order to obtain high quality sound recordings for the archive.

During the summer of 2002 and 2003 field trips the researchers also organized various "Language Sessions" with the remaining ten fluent, or semi-fluent, Wichita speakers in the hopes of inspiring the elders to speak the language and to generate more natural language material for the archive. Eight sessions, varying in length between 1.5 hours and 2.5 hours, were recorded with digital video and audio.



Wichita Language Session at the Tribal Center in Anadarko (12 June 2003)

Most attempts to get the speakers to use the language failed. The language meetings also revealed that the type of material that is found in the older stories, conversations, and elicitations is irreproducible. These language sessions did generate some Wichita but the segments were not nearly as fluent as the older material and the discourse was primarily in English. Despite the lack of fluency, the video sessions contain interesting cultural material that is important for the archive. There is a prayer, some songs, some short segments of storytelling, and sequences of question-response pairs in Wichita. These segments have been organized into media sessions and are being transcribed with the DOBES ELAN tool.



Annotation of the "Opening Prayer" in ELAN

The videos also contain personal narratives which give us a glimpse into the reality of language endangerment and how the native speakers react to the state of endangerment.

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