

Durbin Feeling, William Pulte, and Gregory Pulte. *Cherokee Narratives: A Linguistic Study*. Norman: University of Oklahoma Press, 2017. 228 pp. ISBN: 978-8061-5986-7.

<http://www.oupres.com/ECommerce/Book/Detail/2274/cherokee%20narratives>

Durbin Feeling has been one of the luminaries of Cherokee language and linguistics for a long time. The list of his accomplishments cannot be briefly enumerated, but his value to the field lies broadly in his connection to the Cherokee community of Oklahoma, his deep knowledge of the language, the fact that he has received an education in linguistics, and that he has collaborated with many teachers, scholars, and even tech specialists such that all of us have benefited from the window into the Cherokee language that he has opened. Dr. Feeling and linguist William Pulte first collaborated on a Cherokee dictionary published in 1975. This work has been vitally important to those who study the language because of several crucial features, among them being that it systematically marks tone and vowel length, and it provides templates of the most common verb conjugation patterns. This has given researchers both a toehold on the structure of the language and a jumping-off place for more meticulous analysis.

More than 40 years later, Dr. Pulte has rejoined Dr. Feeling, together with his son Gregory Pulte, to create a most valuable work, *Cherokee Narratives: A Linguistic Study*. The book begins with an informative introduction, which gives a history of efforts to bolster the Cherokee language in Northeastern Oklahoma, and a description of how the narratives are organized. “Narratives” is an apt choice to describe the texts that appear in this work. They represent a very diverse range of types and themes: there are the somewhat expected versions of folk tales, but more often stories about experienced phenomena, especially supernatural intrusion into the natural world, a common theme, as Cherokee literary scholars such as Christopher Teuton explain to us (170-173). Rarer types are a personal diary entry, a memoir, a legal document, a Bible story, instructions for food preparation, and two conversations.

What makes this book unique is the way these narratives are treated: the “linguistic study.” Each narrative begins with a short contextualizing statement of perhaps two sentences. Then it is rendered in four different ways, each with a particular focus and audience. The first rendition gives the narrative in a three-way interlinear format: the first line is Cherokee written in the syllabary, the second line is the same Cherokee written in the roman orthography, and the third line is a word-level literal English gloss. The gloss is somewhat bewildering for those with no Cherokee language skills. The following is an example of one of the more transparent phrases: *dikalvgv* ‘to the east’ *asi* ‘yet’ *jidinehe* ‘when they lived there’ (*Origin of Evil Magic*, p. 51). The second rendition is termed “Morpheme by Morpheme” and consists of the Cherokee in the roman orthography, divided into meaningful units and glossed using linguistic terms. Tone and vowel length are also accounted for with underscores for short vowels and a superscript number system for the tones. The authors use 40 linguistic notations in their analysis, and although Cherokee morphology is rather more complicated than this, this level of analytic detail will be helpful to students of the language who can relate it to their classwork and to linguists. The same phrase in this rendition thus becomes: *dikalv³²gv* ‘in-east’ *asi³* ‘yet’ *ji-di²³-n-e³h-e* ‘Rel-Pl-Pl-live-repP.’ The third rendition is the narrative written in syllabary, and the fourth and final is the English translation. The phrase from above in English is ‘still living in the east.’

We can easily appreciate the astounding amount of painstaking work that the authors have poured into this volume.

The selections themselves are products of a number of speakers using their own family dialects. Based on how they are presented in-text, the larger number of narratives appears to be of transcriptions of oral materials. This means that the reader must prepare for authentic but unsmoothed language in many cases. Several of the selections, for example the legal document and a lengthy interview, feature linguistic registers that are far more elevated than one generally encounters in reading material. One very interesting narrative, *Reminiscence* by Mose Killer, shows the only instance I have ever encountered of English-Cherokee code switching as a speaking style. Speakers' hedges have not been edited out.

Translation is always both an art and a craft, and translating between languages that have no genetic connection posits a challenge indeed. The English translations in these narratives reach for clarity in meaning, and are for the most part successful in negotiating clarity and the deep oral quality of the narratives themselves. My expectation for this kind of work would be an English translation that "sounds" like a bilingual Cherokee speaker, which is an admittedly impressionistic standard, but one that has been carefully considered in other languages. Joshua Hinson has an intelligent discussion of this issue with respect to translating Chickasaw texts. Most of the translations here do indeed meet this standard.

A few of the translations might have hewn more faithfully to the original Cherokee. For example, in *The Invisible Companion Black Fox* by Durbin Feeling (33-40), the Cherokee version twice talks about 'road numbered 33' but the English translation says 'state highway.' People are well accustomed to roads being numbered, especially in rural areas, and referring to the road by its number would have preserved a bit more of the original. One translation in particular, *Throw It Home*, also by Mose Killer, stands out because its style is so different from the others. In the structure of the Cherokee version, a story told in first person is encapsulated in a second story also told in first person, such that both first persons need to be kept distinct. Mr. Killer does this in a way that is quite illustrative of how Cherokee discourse works. In the English translation, the central story is related in third person, with occasional quotes.

As a tool for learning the Cherokee language, the book is likely to be most helpful to advanced students who do not need instruction in basic grammar. Understanding language as it is actually spoken is both necessary and challenging to those who would be fluent. The linguistic analysis will be very helpful here to those who can apply it to what they already know. For the Cherokee speaker, these rare and authentic narratives are precious additions to the sparse collection of modern works written in syllabary.

It is unlikely we will be fortunate enough to get another work like this. The authors form a rare collaboration that will not see again. Everyone interested in Cherokee language and literature should acquire this book for immediate enjoyment and long-term reference.

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Works Cited

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