Móhe? Šáaa! Nóoóo! Tšéške'e: Tsėhésenėstsestötse tséhmé'anohe naa tséxho'xe'éstove

(Cheyenne Particles: Flavoring the Cheyenne language)
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Particles play a crucial role in Cheyenne conversation and add vitality and spice to the language. They can also be difficult to translate and challenging for language learners. In addition, they are one of the least studied and most varied aspects of the Cheyenne language.

In the Cheyenne language, much work has focused on verbs. Cheyenne, like other Algonquian languages, is polysynthetic; verbs can stand alone as sentences and do in many cases. For example, the Cheyenne sentence in (1) is a verb with many component parts:

(1) Náto'seno'ke'hanaa'e

'I'm going to eat by myself.'1

In addition to verbs, the main word types in Cheyenne are nouns and particles. Particles are self-contained – they don't need any additional components the way nouns and verbs do. They can stand alone or they can be part of a larger sentence. For example, in (2) is a common particle used to question something, though it can have other uses as well. Cheyenne (2) can be used as a response to (1) if the speaker of (2) wants to question some aspect of (1).

(2) Móhe? 'Really?'

The particle *móhe* can also be used in forming yes/no questions. In (3), *móhe* occurs with the sentence *Ésáahoéhe Náhkóhenoné'e* 'Jan is not here' to form a question. The question in (3) is another possible response to the statement in (1).

(3) Mó=ésáahoéhe Náhköhenoné'e? Is Jan not there?'2

(4) Héehe'e / Hová'aháne Yes / No

In (4) are possible answers to the question in (3), illustrating two other common particles.

There are many types of particles in Cheyenne, from the ones above to exclamations like Šáaa! and Nóoóo! to quantity words like tšéške'e 'a little'. The Cheyenne Dictionary (Fisher et al 2004) lists over 400 particles, including discourse particles, conjunctions, numerals and question words. In this talk we look at different kinds of particles in Cheyenne, discussing their importance, meaning, and use, especially in conversation and with examples in context. Including context is very important – the meaning of a particle depends on what was said before, so contexts help with understanding the particles as well as learning how to use them.

"These are words that give variety and meaning to our languages. When these words are isolated, they do not stand alone because they often depend on grammatical and semantic links to whatever is being discussed. So when our people are recorded speaking their own languages, often these "spice words" are omitted and the languages become very stilted and formal." (Littlebear 1999)

² Mó=é-sáa-hoé-he (question=3-negation-be.at-negation.suffix)

¹ Ná-to'se-no'k-e'hanaa'-e (1-going.to-alone-eat-sit)