A Note on ?ə Constructions in Lushootseed

Vi Hilbert, taqʷšəblu
Indian Studies
University of Washington

and

Thom Hess
University of Victoria

While preparing a Lushootseed Reader, we came across two difficult sentences in a fascinating text on how to play the Bone Game, sləhal. The sentences are:

(1) kʷa? ɬəcuxəčadadid dxʷʔal tiʔə? sʔacuss (h)əlgʷə? dəxʷxəbil ʔə tiʔə?.
    Instead he is sending-his-power-of-thought-over-them to their faces so that these (opponents) become heavy.

(2) ɬəcəčadadid tiʔə? stabtablaʔəd ʔə tiʔə? də(χʷ)xʷəkʷils, dəxʷgʷəʔələds ʔə tiʔə? sudzígʷicuts.
    He directs-his-thoughts to the arms of these (opponents) so that they become tired, so that they stop their back-and-forth-movement.

Students are troubled by the fact that the verb in dəxʷ- clause (1) does not have an -s suffix while in clause (2) it does:

(1) ... dəxʷxəbil ʔə tiʔə? ... so that they become heavy.
(2) ... dəxʷgʷəʔələds ʔə tiʔə? sudzígʷicuts. ... so that they stop their swaying back and forth.

Both sentences were grammatical, but why?

1 The name Lushootseed is now being used instead of Puget Salish. Lushootseed is based upon the Indian name for the language, dxʷləšucid.
The problem lies with the several uses of ?ə. Phrases beginning with this particle look the same but fit into the rest of the sentence in several different ways. Some other Salish languages have a similar ?ə word, so its use in Lushootseed and the explanation for the difference above may have general interest.

The ?ə in Lushootseed links six different types of phrase and clause to the rest in the sentence. These six are:

I Phrases of manner and instrument:

(3) ?u?ə?əd ?ə tə qa.  He ate a lot.


(5) ?upusud ?ə tə 3'a?  He threw a rock at someone. (He threw at someone with a rock.)

II Phrases expressing patient of verbs that do not have a transitive suffix:

(6) ?ugWəqə?d tə x'ubt.  He looked for the paddle.

(Compare (7) ?ugWəqə?d tə x'ubt.  He looked for the paddle.
The - d is a transitive suffix; therefore no ?ə precedes tə x'ubt.)


III Phrases expressing agent of "passive" verbs:


Similar to ?ə is the word ?al which introduces phrases of location and time. Often, ?ə replaces ?al in both of these, especially in phrases of location.

The term passive is not particularly appropriate for Lushootseed. More precisely, we mean those verbs that end with a transitive suffix plus {b}.
IV Phrases following benefactive verbs that express the item transferred:

(11) ?utagwic tsi?i? ?e ti?e? xaw’s q(w(e)ti?e?.
She bought me a new (pair of) shoes.

He stole the paddle from me.

That woman gave me some bread.

V Phrases expressing possessor:

(14) ti sq’əbəy? ?e ti?i? stubə. That man’s dog. (The dog of that man.)

(15) te səpələl ?e tsi dsk’uys. My mother’s bread. (Bread of my mother.)
(Compare (16) ti sq’əbəys his dog; (17) te səpələs her bread)

VI Subordinate clauses expressing manner, means, (or sometimes location (instead of ?aI). This is an extension of I.)

(18) ?uk’ax’atəb ?e tsi dsqa ?e ti sətəqalik’s.
My older sister helped with her (someone else’s) bread-making.

A dog saw it climb (the tree).

4 Here benefactive is a cover term designating verbs having the secondary suffix -yi- and verbs of giving like ᵛiI-. The action may be to one’s detriment (cf. 12) as well as benefit.

It may well be that, from the Lushootseed point of view, phrases I, II, and IV state the same type of information and are grammatically equivalent. It would be interesting to compare the grammatical formations that related languages use to express these concepts. Do any other Salish languages convey all of these concepts with the same grammatical structures as does Lushootseed?
Subordinate clauses have one characteristic that bears upon the problem, viz., the agent of the verb is expressed by the same affixes that denote possession. For third person that affix is the suffix -s; and like possessive constructions, the -s can be replaced by an ?a phrase. (Compare (16) and (17) with (14) and (15).) Therefore, it is possible to make explicit who was helped with the bread-making in (18) and who (or what) climbed (the tree) in (19) by replacing -s with ?a as in (20) and (21).

(20) **?ukwaxwatób ?e tsi dsqa ?e ti sułqalikʷ ?e tsiʔit škʷuyčət.**

My older sister helped our mother make (bread). (My older sister helped with the bread-making of our mother.)

(21) **ʔušudub ?e te sqʷəbayʔ ?e ti suʔigʷət ?e ti ḥaʔxəlus.**

A dog saw a raccoon climb (a tree). (A dog saw the climbing of a raccoon.)

Sentence (9) can be expanded with this type of subordinate clause giving (22):

(22) **?ukwaxwatób ?e tsi dsqa tsiʔit škʷuyčət ?e ti sułqalikʷs.**

My older sister helped our mother make (bread). (My older sister helped our mother with her bread-making.)

Sentences (20) and (22) are synonymous, but in (20) tsiʔit škʷuyčət our mother is patient in the independent clause while it is agent of the subordinate clause in (22).

In most situations sułqalikʷ refers to making bread. (Literally, it means patterned or organized plastering, stroking - note staʔxʷ beaver, the animal that plasters its home with its tail.) Nevertheless, there are times when, either for clarity or style, we choose to mention səpłəl bread (or flour) specifically as in sentence (8). Including mention of tə səpłəl in (22) gives the following:

(23) **?ukwaxwatób ?e tsi dsqa tsiʔit škʷuyčət ?e ti sułqalikʷs ?e tə səpłəl.**

My older sister helped our mother make bread.

Contrasting (23) with (20) and (18) provides the explanation needed for the problem raised concerning the presence of -s in (2) and its absence in (1). (Subordinate clauses with dəxʷ- and s- pattern identically.)
The ?ə phrases are different; even though they look the same, they represent a different grammatical facet of the language. In (1) there is no agent of the verb in the subordinate clause, dɔx'əqəbil so (they) become heavy; and ?ə tiʔə? this (these opponents in this case) is patient as in II. In (2) there is an agent expressed by -s as in VI and the following ?ə phrase is another subordinate clause expressing manner. It is treated grammatically much like II. (The -ad of g'əqəqələd stop is not a transitive suffix inspite of its similar shape to a large class of transitives.)

(2) ... dɔx'g'əqəqələds ?ə tiʔə? sud'ig'icuts.

... so they (-s) would stop their (-s) swaying back and forth.

(23) ... ti su'əqəqəqəl's ?ə te əəpələ.

... her (-s) baking bread.

While it would seem easier to learn the single word ?ə in place of a variety of terms like for, with, of, by, etc. as in English, the many uses of ?ə constructions prove instead to be a stumbling block around which the teacher must carefully guide the student.
Upper Chehalis

I. ?it yúsəmʔʷ tat stiq̓íws iʔ t x̣iʔw̓íc. He worked his horse hard. p.134.35-38
II. ?it ʔəxʷt iʔ t swáwaʔ. I saw a cougar. p.165.19
   ?it k̓aʔm̓ t sx̣yas. He looked for blackberries. p.164.17
   ?it sáʔm̓ t sáʔmíʔ. He made a wedge. p.164.16
III. ?it k̓əxʷtm čn iʔ tat c̣ičs. I was stung by the bee.
IV. tit čáituxʷt čn spaticaʔn. I gave him a rock. p.50.87-92
V. tit yəmčišʔs tat q̓últn the fat of the elk
VI. ?

Cowlitz

I. sʔiʔann iʔ t qiy̓aluy̓ʷs. He's eating soup. J11.185
   but iʔxʷt tit sʔiʔani. He ate fast. J12.76
II. sʔán̓ st sx̣tkʷlx looking for spirit power M5.145
   sʔáʔm̓ t t yaxʷát. He's making a fish trap. M4.155
III. ?it šəkʷtm iʔ t psáʔq. He got bitten by a mosquito. M9.56
IV. ?it ṣəšn k̓ n iʔ t w̓ iʔ. I made a boat for him. J14.43
   but ?it yax̣txʷc stúkʷali. He told me his dream. J16.42
V. ṣətxʷn iʔ k̓aʔxʷʔ? bear grease M4.289
VI. ?