Bella Coola Prepositions

Hank Hudson
Ross River, Yukon

1. There are in Bella Coola four prepositions, which are of a proclitics nature. A two-way distinction is made: one of location vs. direction, and one of centripetality vs. centrifugality:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Centripetality</th>
<th>Locational</th>
<th>Directional</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>?a (1)</td>
<td>?a (2)</td>
<td>x (3)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>centrifugal</td>
<td>?a (1)</td>
<td>wixx (4)</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

These elements translate freely as: (1) at, (2) towards, (3) via, (4) away from. When precision is required as to the exact location or motion of a person or thing, use is made of verbs: to be (pc) underneath, to be in front of, to be outside, to be (pc) behind, to be to the side of, to be on top of, to go inside, etc.:

- ?astx-c ʔala suʔ_c
  - I am inside the house
- ?asankc ?aʔ_1tu
  - I am (standing) beside you
- kwaʔišic ?aʔ_tx
  - I am (standing) behind him

The terms “centripetality” and “centrifugal” are used in a rather loose sense; a more detailed discussion of the semantic properties of the prepositions is offered in 4.1 through 4.4.

2. Syntactically, the prepositions are typical of adjectives:

- ksaŋaʔ ʔaatxuθalk
  - I work in Bella Coola
- ?apc ʔutxánamas
  - I am going to Victoria
- sp?i̍kx̂is x ti stn
  - he hit him on the head with a stick
- wixx?_tu_sʔakʷatlc_tk
  - since the time I bought it

3. After the prepositions ?a and ?u, the plural article wa is reduced to a; at the same time, the final 4 of these prepositions is replaced by 1, thus yielding the quoted forms ʔala and ʔula. Also after x and wixx we usually find the allomorph a, although in deliberately slow speech the w is sometimes retained: x_a or x_wa, wixx?_a or wixx?_wa.

4. The English glosses of the Bella Coola preposition as suggested in 1 are mere approximations; in what follows, I will discuss the use and semantics of each preposition in detail.

4.1. The basic meaning of ?a is connected to. It is related to ?ut as ?a- is to ?u- in general (see my contribution to the XIIIth International Conference on Salish languages: A List of Bella Coola Prefixes, 3.5.11). The connect English rendition of this preposition poses, in general, no difficulties, since the relation between the predicate on the one hand, and the ?a-phrase on the other, will rarely be ambiguous:

- niʔ?x̂ncayc ?aʔa_m[adí
  - I got poisoned from (eating)
  - "sink eggs"
- ?usqs ?aʔ_tu_sub_tk
  - he came out of the house
- ?aladícic ?aʔ_tuʔ_c? alxʔw tx
  - I will tell about Raven
  - we were happy with that show
- "we enjoyed that show"

Ambiguity seldom arises, and when imminent, can be avoided: for instance, ksaŋaʔ ?aʔ_tx can mean both I work for [him] and I work with him, but the latter gloss will preferably be rendered as ?aʔ?naʔxαc ?aʔ_tx, ?aʔ?naʔxα meaning to accompany [him] be a co-worker.

Furthermore, there are “spatial” verbs of 1 that facilitate the proper translation of ?a:

- txasucaʔaʔaʔtus ?aʔ_tuʔ?amataʔaʔaʔuc? tx
  - he took it from under the dining table
- ?usuucaʔamutu sʔaʔnʔax ?aʔ_t?ikataʔax tx
  - they kicked their shoes under the bed
- ksaʔ?_waʔitxʔac ?aʔaʔuʔon_c
  - we remove these rocks from the fields

(txasucaʔaʔaʔtu- to cause to come from underneath something, ?usuucaʔamutu- to cause to be underneath something, ks to pull something out of something)

Compare further:

- x̂saŋaʔ ch ʔaʔ_tx
  - she had a child with him
4.1.1 In some instances one has a choice between, on the one hand, "at" and "a" and on the other:

*at* _ti_ _stn  
*ati* _ti_ _stn

with a stick
with a stick

Although the English translations are identical, there is here a difference of "centripetality" vs. "centrifugality": the first phrase implies that the stick happened to be around, and had to be picked up before it was going to be used; the second phrase is used when one already had the stick with oneself.

Compare also:

*ati* _ps* _at_ _tu_qaan_ _tkx* he ate the salmonberries  
*ati* _ps* _x_ _tu_qaan_ _tkx* he ate the salmonberries

Again, there is a distinction as to availability: in the first example, the berries happened to be around; in the second, the person already had the berries with himself.

*ataci* _?a_- _ti_ _q-kan_ _tkx* I will tell about Raven  
*ataci* _x_ _ti_ _s_ *ataci_ _fayx* I will tell this story

Here the dichotomy is more obvious: Raven does not belong to the story-teller, but the story does!

The choice between "at" and "a" is less clear-cut. In my notes I have only one minimal pair, viz.:

*ti* _xaasms* _ala_ _ka_ _sknix* he is looking for food  
*ti* _xaasms* _se_ _ala_ _ka_ _sknix* he is looking for food

The difference may now lie in two different conceptions of the verb "ti* _xaasms": possibly to be searching for vs. to be in a searching motion towards.

4.2 "at" conveys a motion or direction towards; it is related to "at" in the same manner as "a" is to "a" in general (cf. 4.1). Examples:

*ati* "at_ _tkx* look at him!  
*ati* _"at_ _ti_ _amakaak_ _tkx* sit in my chair!

*Kap* _"at_ _qamass* I am going to Victoria  
*ti* _"at_ _"i* _"at_ _"i* I am speaking to you

*ti* _"at_ _"i* _"at_ _"i* he carries her  
*ti* _"at_ _"i* _"at_ _"i* they boarded the canoe

Certain verbs that do not themselves express a motion or direction can be followed by a "at"-phrase; they then translate as to go somewhere in order to for:

*qaq_ encontr_ _at_ _tkx* he went to the spring in order to drink (from it)

*at* _"at_ _"i* _"at_ _"i* he went towards the water in order to dip some up

*ati* _"at_ _"i* _"at_ _"i* he was mad at her

*ati* _"at_ _"i* _"at_ _"i* he went to it in order to measure however deep it was [burst!]

*ati* often translates as *striving for or in search of:

*ati* _"at_ _"i* _"at_ _"i* _"at_ _"i* _"at_ _"i* _"at_ _"i* _"at_ _"i* _"at_ _"i* send for a doctor!

*ati* _"at_ _"i* _"at_ _"i* he was thinking of what to do  
*ati* _"at_ _"i* _"at_ _"i* he was looking for food

*ula_ _sk* followed by a finite verbal form means until:

*ati* _"at_ _"i* _"at_ _"i* _"at_ _"i* _"at_ _"i* _"at_ _"i* (I am) staying here until he will come back

When pronounced with a dragged vowel, "at" appears as a semi-verb in phrases that can take the place of a predicate; it is then glossed as until he arrived at, reached:

*ati* _"at_ _"i* _"at_ _"i* _"at_ _"i* _"at_ _"i* _"at_ _"i* _"at_ _"i* until he got together with this fourth woman he lived with

*ati* _"at_ _"i* _"at_ _"i* _"at_ _"i* _"at_ _"i* until he arrived at one river

4.3 The basic meaning of _x_ is *via*. I distinguish four different types of usage:

(1) When a _x_-phrase is preceded by a predicate containing a finite transitive verbal form, it is glossed as with or by means of (the noun contained in the _x_-phrase is inanimate):
A sentence can contain several x-phrases:

... napix x ti_?a?wux
?linaq x ti_ka_signals
spix=nis x ti_stn

[2] After passive forms, x translates as by (the noun is now animate):
?#psptum x ci_stans cx
he was fed by his mother
he was hit by his father

[3] After an (in)transitive predicate, x can be translated either as 0
(in this case the verb contained in the predicate translates into English
transitively, and the noun following x is the object in the English sentence,
and usually inanimate), or as with (the verb then translates either transitively
or intransitively, and the noun following x is always inanimate):

?#usq=x=x x tu_stix-tm_tnx
he was covered with the mats
numux=x=x wa_?asans tu_six tx
x a six the sidewalk of the house
became red with blood
?#psptum x a_#lx
he was fed (with) hearing
k=ntuxm x ti_ka_titq=uu+ta
bring me some paper!

[4] Preceding proper names, x a_s- means by the name of, but is usually
ignored in the English translation. In my notes, I have added only after paak
in the name somebody and ?#paaxtu- id. [lit.: to cause somebody
to be named):

?#paaxtut x a_sJesus
they named him Jesus
ka_paaxtina ma x a_stom
maybe I will name you Tom

... and then she seemed to be followed by a frog

4.3.1 The plural article wa is deleted before the noun: this is because the noun
nominative, some; thus we would expect *x (w) a_ka to become x O _a_ka, but x is also dropped
in that position:

whad?tw O_0_ka_swi
they were fishing (for) halibut
napim ?#a_ka si_ayaktsu
she was given something to use
(lit.: ... that she would use)

In hyper-connective speech, however, x_O_ka is occasionally used in lieu of
O_O_ka.

4.4 wixtu occurs both as a (semi-)verbal root (cf. 4.2: ?u=?) and as a
genuine preposition. In both cases it conveys a motion away from: (1) to be,
come, originate from somewhere, (2) away from:

wixtu O_Holland
I am (come) from Holland
O_?anux=um O_wixtu=s ti_ku=sal ti_snt payx
a stream that flows
down from this mountain-side

wixtu+ta wa_taaaxsal+c
the one who care from Hoon Bay
wixtu+tu_ku=x fak=
from up there
wixtu+ta maax+ta
from [the] upstream (area)

In a temporal sense, wixtu translates as since:

wixtu+tauni=x
since yesterday

wixtu+u=am_c wixtu+tu_s kalatik tx
"it is two days new since my
buying it" = I bought it two days ago

wixtu+u=amutc
since [the time] he left us

wix tu+am=sa
"this is cut food since long
ago" = this has been cut food for a long time

5 Semantically, the four prepositions form a continuum: ?u= [going] TOWARDS,
?u [having come, being close] TO, x [having at one's disposal, available, doing something] WITH, wixtu [going] AWAY FROM.

The dynamic nature of ?u and wixtu explains why these can sometimes be used
as (semi-)verbs. wixtu must be historically complex; it can be compared to
wixtu= [wix tu=] resulting from, because (cf.). ?u may be related etymologically
to *u= to be somewhere, whereas x cannot be separated from x= to have.