

Bella Coola Prepositions

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

| | locational | directional |
|-------------|------------|-------------|
| centripetal | ?aʔ (1) | ?uʔ (2) |
| centrifugal | x (3) | wixʔʔ (4) |

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 (gc) underneath, to be in front of, to be outside, to be (gc) behind, to be to the side of, to be on top of, to go inside, etc.:

| | |
|--------------------|----------------------------|
| ?astxʷc ?ala_suʔ_c | I am in(side) the house |
| ?asankc ?aʔ_ʔinu | I am (standing) beside you |
| kʷuʔʔʔikc ?aʔ_tx | I am (standing) behind him |

The terms "centripetal" 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 and 5.

2 Syntactically, the prepositions are typical of adjuncts:

| | |
|------------------------|-------------------------------------|
| kʷnʔakc ?aʔ_nuʔalk | I work in Bella Coola |
| ʔapc ?uʔ_ʔaamas | I am going to Victoria |
| sʔiixʷis x_ti_stn | he hit him on the head with a stick |
| wixʔʔ_tu_sʔakʷatic_tʔʷ | since (the time) I bought it |

3 After the prepositions ?aʔ and ?uʔ, the plural article wa is reduced to a; at the same time, the final ʔ of these prepositions is replaced by l, thus yielding the fused forms ?ala and ?ula. Also after x and wixʔʔ we usually find the allegro allomorph a, although in deliberately slow speech the w is sometimes retained: x_a or x_wa, wixʔʔ_a or wixʔʔ_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 ?aʔ is connected to. It is related to ?uʔ as ?a- is to ?u- in general (see my contribution to the XIIIth International Conference on Salish Languages: A List of Bella Coola Prefixes, 3.5.1). The correct English rendition of this preposition poses, in general, no difficulties, since the relation between the predicate on the one hand, and the ?aʔ-phrase on the other, will rarely be ambiguous:

| | |
|----------------------------------|---|
| niiʔsnucayxc ?ala_madi | I got poisoned <u>from</u> (eating) "stink eggs" |
| ?usqas ?aʔ_tu_suʔ_tʔʷ | he came out <u>of</u> the house |
| ?aalaʔiic ?aʔ_ti_qʷaʔʷ_tx | I will tell <u>about</u> Raven |
| yayaatwiiʔʔ ?aʔ_tu_ʔaʔlʔʷim_ʔaʔʷ | "we were happy <u>with</u> that show" = we enjoyed that show |

Ambiguity seldom arises, and when imminent, can be avoided: for instance, kʷnʔakc ?aʔ_tx can mean both I work for him and I work with him, but the latter gloss will preferably be rendered as ?aʔʔnayxakc ?aʔ_tx, ?aʔʔnayxak meaning to accompany in work, be a co-worker.

Furthermore, there are "spatial" verbs (cf. 1) that facilitate the proper translation of ?aʔ:

| | |
|---|--|
| txasucaaaʔaʔʔtus ?aʔ_ti_nuʔamataaʔʷuciʔ_tx | he took it <u>from</u> under our dining-table |
| ?usucaaaʔamtut scʔʔiʔnit wa_qinʔʔaw ?aʔ_ti_sʔixtanaw_tx | they kicked their shoes <u>under</u> their bed |
| ksiʔ_c wa_tʔʔʔ_ac ?ala_ʔuʔiqn_c | we remove these rocks <u>from</u> the falls |

(txasucaaaʔaʔʔtu- to cause to come from underneath something, ?usucaaaʔamtu- to cause to be underneath something, ks to pull something out of something)
Compare further:

| | |
|-------------------|---------------------------------|
| xʔmpalx_ʔn ?aʔ_tx | she had a child <u>with</u> him |
|-------------------|---------------------------------|

| | |
|--------------------------|--|
| ʔaʔkʷultc ʔaʔ ʔinu | I am indebted <u>to</u> you |
| kʷxʷmicuttums ʔala nan_c | he warned me <u>for</u> the grizzly bears |
| sunxʷs kʷuks ʔaʔ ʔmiʔ | it is daytime <u>to</u> us |
| ʔanaykc ʔala ka_qla | I wish " <u>for</u> " water = I want water |
| ʔixaasnms ʔala ka_sknix | he is looking <u>for</u> food |
| ʔaʔic ʔala_suʔ ʔac | I am staying <u>at</u> this house |

4.1.1 In some instances one has a choice between, on the one hand, ʔaʔ and x, and ʔaʔ and ʔuʔ on the other:

| | |
|------------|--------------|
| ʔaʔ_ti_stn | with a stick |
| x_ti_stn | 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:

| | |
|------------------------|--------------------------|
| ʔaʔpss ʔaʔ tu_qaaʔ_tʔʷ | he ate the salmonberries |
| ʔaʔpss x tu_qaaʔ_tʔʷ | 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.

| | |
|--------------------------------|-------------------------|
| ʔaalacʔic ʔaʔ ti_qʷaʔʷ_tx | I will tell about Raven |
| ʔaalacʔic x ti_sʔaalacʔii_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 ʔaʔ and ʔuʔ is less clear-cut. In my notes I have only one minimal pair, viz.:

| | |
|-------------------------|------------------------|
| ʔixaasnms ʔala ka_sknix | he is looking for food |
| ʔixaasnms ʔula ka_sknix | he is looking for food |

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

4.2 ʔuʔ conveys a motion or direction towards; it is related to ʔaʔ in the same manner as ʔu- is to ʔa- in general (cf. 4.1). Examples:

| | |
|------------------------------|------------------------|
| kʔxʔ ʔuʔ tx | look at him! |
| ʔayaaʔʔ ʔuʔ ti_ʔamataaʔʔc_tx | sit in my chair! |
| ʔapc ʔuʔ ʔaamas | I am going to Victoria |
| ʔkmc ʔuʔ ʔinu | I am speaking to you |
| talaws_c ʔuʔ ʔiʔ | he marries her |
| nmpayxaw ʔuʔ ta_ʔalas_tʔ | they boarded the canoe |
| sxliktʔ ʔuʔ ʔiʔ | he was mad at her |

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

| | |
|------------------------------------|---|
| qaaʔlas ʔuʔ ta_xʷnaʔ_tʔ | he went to the spring <u>in order to</u> drink (from it) |
| mntxʷas ʔuʔ ti_qla_fayx | he went towards the water <u>in order to</u> dip some up |
| mnckis ʔuʔ ʔaʔ sʔaʔays ti_sonks_ck | he went to it <u>in order to</u> measure however deep it was (buried) |

ʔuʔ often translates as striving for or in search of:

| | |
|-------------------------|-------------------------------|
| ʔltnmʔ ʔuʔ ti_ka_takʷta | send for a doctor! |
| ʔixlʔms ʔula ka_ʔktas | he was thinking of what to do |
| ʔixaasnms ʔula ka_sknix | he was looking for food |

ʔula_ska followed by a finite verbal form means until:

| | |
|---------------------------------|---|
| ʔaʔic ʔala_ʔac ʔula_ska_lipayxs | I am staying here until he will come back |
|---------------------------------|---|

When pronounced with a dragged vowel, ʔuʔ 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:

| | |
|---------------------------|---|
| ʔuʔ ci_stannumusam_cayx | until he got to (together with) this fourth woman he lived with |
| ʔuʔ la_smax_kʷ ʔ_ʔanuʔʷum | 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):

napis x_ti_?a?qu? "he presented him with a book" =
 he gave him a book
 ?iinacx x_ti_ka_s?als "present me with a bottle!" =
 give me a bottle!
 spii?iis x_ti_stn he hit him on the head with a stick

(2) After passive forms, x translates as by (the noun is now animate):

?a?pstum x_ci_stans_cx he was fed by his mother
 spii?iim x_ti_mans_tx he was hit by his father

(3) After a(n) (in)transitive predicate, x can be translated either as \emptyset (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):

?a?usquxs x_tu_s?x?m_t?x he was covered with the mats
 numuk?lxs wa_?asanks tu_su?_t?x x_a_six the sidewall of the house
 became red with blood
 ?a?pstum x_a_k?k?l he was fed (with) herring
 k?nmtumx x_ti_ka_tit?uu?ta bring me some paper!
 ?asisxc x_?ayx I do not like (the taste of) this
 kstx?atuminu x_?awx?_c I am doing this for you

(4) Preceding proper names, x_a_s- means by the name of, but is usually ignored in the English translation. In my notes, this construction appears only after paax to name somebody and ?a?paaxtu- id. (lit.: to cause somebody to be named):

?a?paax?ut x_a_sJesus they named him Jesus
 ka_paa?cinu_ma x_a_sTom maybe I will name you Tom

A sentence can contain several x-phrases:

... napim_k?c x_ci_?k?lx ci_?a?ay_tuu x_cn? x_ti_pa?a?ta
 "she was presented then by an old woman a being like exactly \emptyset herself
 with an awl" = then an old woman who looked just like her gave her an awl
 ... knixalstnim_k?c x_ta_q?a?x?_t?x x_tu_s?a?ik?s
 "he was deprived of his food then by a raven the with \emptyset his barbecue" =
then Raven stole from him his barbecued food
 ... ?a?ay_k?iluc?ik ?ayx x_ci_?a?aw?im_cx x_ta_mac?k?
 "being like subsequently this woman \emptyset a she was followed the by a frog" =

= and then she seemed to be followed by a frog

4.3.1 The plural article wa is deleted before the proclitic ka hypothetical, some; thus we would expect *x_(w)a_ka to become *x_?_ka, but x is also dropped in that position:

wnc?itaw ?_?_ka_p?wi they were fishing (for) halibut
 napim_?i? ?_?_ka_si?ayaktus she was given something to use
 (lit.: ... that she would use)

In hyper-correct speech, however, x_?_ka is occasionally used in lieu of ?_?_ka.

4.4 wix? 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:

wix?c ?_Holland I am (come) from Holland
 ?_?anu?um ?_wix?a?is ti_k?u?als ti_smt_?ayx a stream that flows
 down from this mountain-side
 ta_wix?_t?x wa_t?a?aa?_c the one who came from Alert Bay
 wix?_tu_?u?_?a?x? from up there
 wix?_ta_?aa?_t?x? from (the) upriver (area)

In a temporal sense, wix? translates as since:

wix?_tunixa since yesterday
 ?wask?tam_c wix?_tu_s?ak?atic_t?x "it is two days now since my
 buying it" = I bought it two days ago
 wix?_tu_swaltus since (the time) he left us
 wix_?ac wa_sknixi? wix?_a_?ay? "this is our food since long
 ago" = this has been our food for a
 long time

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

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

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