

Secondary significance of gender in a Wishram text¹

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Nouns in Chinookan have initial prefixes that mark number, and, in the singular, gender. Syntactically, the prefixes enter into a system of concord with prefixes for subject, object, and indirect object in the verb. Lexically, the prefixes classify the noun-stems with which they occur. On the one hand, they enter into a variety of patterns of plural formation; involving addition of one of several plural suffixes, or change of singular prefix to plural prefix, or both. On the other hand, the initial prefix itself defines a class. A few nouns require either a dual or a plural prefix. (A noun with plural prefix may still participate in plural formation: it-qwki 'house', it-qwki-max 'houses'). The vast majority of nouns have one of three singular prefixes: i- 'masculine', a- 'feminine', i- 'indefinite'.²

Often the gender implication of the prefix is not active. Some nouns do use the potential contrast of gender productively. Thus, i-ya-xan 'his son', a-ya-xan 'his daughter'; i-ya-duiha 'his steer', a-ya-duiha 'his cow'.³

The possibility of contrast among prefixes, yet where gender is not pertinent, was noticed long ago by Boas in a discussion of 'Secondary significance of gender' (1911: 603). Boas cited four cases in which the masculine and feminine prefixes distinguish large and small with the same stem in (Lower) Chinook. (He had earlier observed that large animals tend to have the masculine prefix, small animals the feminine (598-9). Boas noted one inverse case, in which 'large boulder' is feminine, but 'stone is masculine'; and he noted a case in which the feminine prefix marks plurality: i-kanim 'canoe', o-kunim 'canoes'. (The Upper Chinook prefix a- is o- in Lower Chinook, where the o- induces harmony in the initial vowel of the stem).

Further semantic connotations of the prefixes may be identified through further study. Plants and implements used with plants, for example, usually have the feminine prefix; both sun and moon are feminine; so are both bow and arrow. Here I should like to report a secondary significance of gender that seems to have emerged in

-1-

regard to 'canoe' in the speech of Louis Simpson, the source of most of Sapir's Wishram Texts (1909).

Let me review briefly the situation in the several known varieties of Chinookan. The situation in the (Lower) Chinook speech of Charles Cultee is reported above: masculine prefix marks singular, feminine prefix marks plural. The same is true in Cultee's Kathlamet speech, where the plural (feminine) prefix is a-. In the Clackamas of Victoria Howard (Jacobs 1958, 1959), -knim almost invariably has a-, but differentiation of the plural by means of the distributive suffix -max appears to have been emerging. Thus one finds: singular a-knim (95.14, 103.11, 161.13, 223.9); plural a-...-max (104.10, 157.13, 207.6, 381.12). (I omit possessive prefixes in some of the forms). Notice that alternative marks of the plural occur in the same line of a text (104.10). The masculine prefix i- occurs in Clackamas with this stem, but as a marker of size: i-ya-gaiti 'its-bigness his-canoe' (208.8); the same canoe retains i- later in the story (223.9).

In Louis Simpson's Wishram, the situation of Lower Chinook and Kathlamet generally obtains: i-knim 'a canoe' (40.5); i-ga-blad a-knim 'many canoes' (40.12); saq^u a-knim 'all the canoes' (40.18).⁴ In one narrative, that of 'Coyote and the mouthless man', i- and a- occur both in the singular. There appears to be a semantic contrast, but not one of size. i- occurs when the canoe is seen or gone toward. a- occurs when the canoe serves as a container, either of persons or of fish. Thus one has i in lines 18.16, 18.23, 20.1, but a- in lines 18.18, 18.20, 20.2, 20.4 (cf. also 2.11). In successive lines (20.1-2) the mouthless man comes up out of the water to his canoe (i-) and lays his sturgeons down in his canoe (a-). (The a- in 20.22 thus must indicate that the mouthless man goes back into his canoe).

So far as I can tell, the connotation of containment is not attested elsewhere in Chinookan. Compare Cultee's (Lower) Chinook: 'Now he-slept in their-canoe' and 'slowly she-pushed-it their-canoe' (74.21, 74.22), both with i-; and 'he threw-him-down in their-canoe' (118.5) with i-. Compare also Cultee's Kathlamet 'they-put-it-into their-canoe-at' (42.5), 'he-went-into their-canoe-in' (182.15, 183.1) both with i-. And notice Victoria Howard's Clackamas

-2-

'they-jumped-into their-canoe'(321.13-4), 'their-canoe they-got-into' (354.9), 'she-hid-in their-canoe' (161.13), all with a-, but where no contrast with singular i- is available on a dimension of containment, since a- is the general form, and i- connotes size.

There is a patent exception to the use of a- to connote containment in Louis Simpson's Wishram texts. In 'The adventures of Eagle and his four brothers' the word for 'canoe' occurs first with a-, then with i-, in successive sentences in which the role of the canoe as container is the same: a-knim qust i-a-g-lait-ix 'canoe indeed they (i-)-it (a-)-are-seated-in' (76. 12), and qustia i-knim i-i-g-lait-ix 'indeed canoe they (i-)-it (i-)-are-seated-in' (76.13-4). The contrasting prefixes of the noun are matched by concord in the marking of the object in the verb, by a- and i-, respectively. Thus the choice of prefix must have informed each phrase as a whole.

Why this inconsistency, alongside consistent alternation in two other texts? The sequence suggests an answer. Use of a- in the singular with a connotation of use as a container may not have been a matter of conscious awareness to Simpson, or at least not recognized as normative. The sequence, first with a-, where a connotation of container is appropriate, then with i-, may have resulted from a moment of awareness, and then a correction. If so, this would be in keeping with Silverstein's demonstration of another case of a semantic distinction (having to do with augmentation) as something present in spontaneous speech, but as something which could not be elicited directly, even as a repetition (Silverstein 1981).

Simpson's use of a- to connote containment is not in fact odd. On the one hand, the containment sense has a source in the language. Stems for various baskets, and for dipper and bucket, take a- in the singular. For any noun with a- or i- in the singular, on the other hand, the fact of productive contrast for a subset of common forms might suggest the possibility of productive contrast elsewhere. When asked if one could use i- with the stem for the inset 'fly', as well as the standard a-, Hiram Smith did not reject the suggestion out of hand. He did not insist on the attested formal relationship as the only possible one, but entertained the possibility of the gender contrast, remarking that flies are too small to tell (Hymes 1961). And among the stems which take only one prefix in the singular, not two, there are a number of semantically coherent sets. That fact suggests that

dimensions other than gender, and augmentation or size, have been active. The subset of stems for baskets, dipper, bucket, is one such. Thus, the alternation of i- : a- in the singular with the stem for 'canoe', the latter indicating containment, seems to have arisen at the fertile border of grammatical productivity and lexical selection.⁵

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FOOTNOTES

- 1 This paper has been written in tribute to Eric Hamp.
- 2 See Silverstein (1974) for the development of the hinookan varieties, including gender, in an areal context.
- 3 Cf. discussion in Hymes (1961).
- 4 Curtis (1911: 173) obtained several terms for kinds of canoe, all with singular i- or ii- as prefix. He also reported that 'The generic word for canoe is akunim' (where the -u- is to be taken as an obscure, nonphonemic vowel). I take this form to be plural, as it is in Louis Simpson's Wishram, and in all other sources for Wasco-Wishram. (Distinct plural forms are not noted by Curtis).

- 5 Notice that there may be a thread of analogy among the several uses of a-, as involving inclusion, whether of objects, numbers, or kinds.

