Which of transitive subject (Agent) or object can be deleted under identity with a previously mentioned nominal is a crucial test of syntactic accusativity or ergativity. In this respect, English, which is syntactically accusative, and Nisgha, which is syntactically ergative, behave as textbook illustrations, with no common ground. This fact creates problems, both for bilingual speakers in trying to translate from one language into the other, and for the untrained investigator, who has to be able to distinguish between what is true language, and what can be attributed to interlanguage phenomena arising from interference between two incompatible systems.

The subject of this paper is therefore twofold: its major purpose is to provide a description of an aspect of Nisgha, thereby contributing to linguistic knowledge about a language with syntactic ergativity. The persistence of Nisgha syntactic patterns alien to English, when clothed in English words, confirms that the basic principle underlying Nisgha syntax is not the same as that underlying English syntax. Secondly, this paper also illustrates how 'the presence of the observer affects the outcome of the experiment'--how an investigator's method may unwittingly but crucially affect the data. Eliciting through translation is fraught with pitfalls if the sentences to be translated do not mean the same to the translator as to the investigator.

Before proceeding any further, it is necessary to define ergativity: in the past few years this formerly obscure though well-defined term has emerged into the limelight, with very confusing results as different definitions vie for acceptance. The definition used here is the traditional one according to Kuryłowicz, Comrie, Dixon, and several other specialists in ergative languages. The term 'ergativity' is applied to a precise linguistic complex, the central element of which is the marking of the transitive Agent differently from, and usually more strongly than, the transitive Object and the Intransitive Subject, which are marked by the same means. This contrasts with the identification of transitive Agent with Intransitive Subject, contrasting with the specially marked transitive Object, in the accusative languages, a group which includes most European languages. These morphological phenomena usually have deeper syntactic repercussions as well, one of them being which of Agent or Object is deleted under identity with an item in a previous clause: a syntactically accusative language deletes the less marked Agent, but not the specially marked Object; a syntactically ergative language deletes the less marked Object, but not the specially marked Agent.

A very different model has been recently proposed by Marantz as 'the Ergativity Hypothesis' (1981); unlike the traditional definition which gave a name to a complex of facts observed in a number of languages, this model derives a new definition of what ergativity should mean, from the Government and Binding framework. Having redefined the term on theoretical grounds, Marantz then decides whether a language fits his definition. As it turns out, very few of the languages hitherto considered ergative fit the new criteria.

That Nisgha is syntactically ergative according to the traditional definition was first shown by Rigsby 1975, and the identification was confirmed in more detail by Tarpen 1982, which briefly mentions deletion under identity as part of a review of the traditional criteria of syntactic ergativity, showing that they apply to Nisgha. The conclusions in both these papers have been criticized by Belvin (1984, 1985) as showing that Nisgha is not syntactically ergative--according to Marantz. Actually, Belvin confirms Tarpen's traditional interpretation by default, except in the case of deletion under identity—one of the few traditional criteria retained by Marantz—for which he gives (1984) countering data which are, as will be shown, unacceptable as evidence (see below p. 9).

Here I propose to give two kinds of data as proof that Nisgha does delete according to any definition of ergativity: first, spontaneous Nisgha data (as opposed to those elicited by translation), and second, interlanguage data which show bilinguals' attempts to cope with the differences between the two languages. It will be shown that Nisgha-influenced English continues the ergative syntactic pattern of Nisgha.

1 Conditions of deletion under identity:
In an accusative language, such as English, the transitive Agent (A) is deleted under identity with the transitive Agent or Intransitive Subject (S) of a previous clause.

In an ergative language, such as Nisgha, the (transitive) Object (O) is deleted under identity with the O or S of a previous clause.
Agent deleted in English. Agent pronoun in Nisg̱a’a

Where English deletes the second clause Agent (A2) if identical to the first clause Agent (A1) or Subject (S1), the Nisg̱a’a equivalents must include an ergative (Agent) clitic pronoun in the second, dependent clause, whether or not a noun Agent is present as well.¹ Note that the Nisg̱a’a transitive clauses with the verb in initial position have primary stress on verb and nominal Object, secondary stress on nominal Agent. The stress pattern for verb and nominal Object does not change if there is no nominal Agent, only the clitic pronoun.

English A2 deleted if identical to A1:

(1) Mary loves fish and hates meat.

Mary loves fish, but Lucy hates it.

(2) What is Lucy doing? -- Washing out the big pot.

Aguhl jijabs Lucy? -- Yukwt lupo’tkshl will anjam.

(3) Mary went in and saw Lucy (inside the house).

Ts’in t Mary lit gas us Lucy (ts’im wílp).

(4) Mary was afraid to meet a bear.

M̱̓it sáw t Mary dímt saa luusátōtkwní smax.

Object deleted in Nisg̱a’a. Object pronoun in English.

Where Nisg̱a’a deletes the second clause Object (O2) if identical to the first clause Object (O1) or Subject (S1), the English equivalents must include an accusative (Object) pronoun in the second clause. The Nisg̱a’a stress pattern of primary stress on the verb, secondary stress on the Agent noun does not change if there is no nominal Object. This is true of both dependent and independent Nisg̱a’a clauses.

Nisg̱a’a O2 deleted if identical to O1:

(5) Mary loves fish, but Lucy hates it.

Mary loves fish, but Lucy absolutely hates it.

(6) Does Lucy like fish? -- No, she absolutely hates it.

Niîl aam ni dim hoonî will anjamina?

(7) Can I use your big cooking pot?

Niîl aam ni dim hoonî will anjamina?

(8) Mary went in and Lucy waited for her (outside).

Ts’in t Mary lit gibas Lucy (gágl).
This ambiguity is mostly a theoretical possibility: in normal spoken Nisgáa, there is very little cause for ambiguity, first because the stress pattern gives stronger stress to Object than Agent, and also because these sentences occur in discourse where surrounding utterances, or internal details, make the interpretation clear. However, ambiguity can indeed occur especially under artificial conditions such as writing, which does not indicate differential stress, or elicitation by a linguist, where a speaker's deliberately slow and careful delivery of sentences often devoid of meaningful context may interfere with the normal stress patterns and produce ambiguous results. The linguist from an accusative language background also has a built-in bias towards interpreting the single noun as the Object of the verb. The question therefore must be addressed.

There could be ambiguity in the written sentence

(15-14) Yukwí gibás Mary:

which could mean either:

(a) S/he is waiting for Mary,

(b) Mary is waiting for him/her.

In normal spoken Nisgáa, there is no ambiguity, even out of context, since the Agent noun has weaker stress than the verb and the Object.

For instance, given the complete sentence:

(12) Yukwí gibás Mary t Lucy.

Mary is waiting for Lucy.

yukwí-t kýpás-s [t] Mary t Lucy
AUX-3ERG wait for s-DC [DM] M. DML

one can omit either the Agent noun (though not the pronoun), thus:

(13) Yukwí gibás Lucy.

She is waiting for Lucy.

yukwí-t kýpás-s [t] Lucy
AUX-3ERG wait for s-DC [DM] M.
In written Nisg̱a’a, the sentence is indeed ambiguous, but improbable as it seems to a person used to the accusative pattern. It is more likely to be interpreted as (b) than (a). If animate, the single noun following the verb is more likely to be taken as the co-refering Agent than the Object.

Where the Object is inanimate, ambiguity is rarely possible, even in writing. For instance, starting from the complete sentence:

(15) Yukw-t k’ulp’a’s m’lary (m’lary is the Object)
AUX-3ERG wait.for.s-DC [DM] PL

(16) Yukw-t k’ulp’a’s m’lary (m’lary is the Agent)
Lucy is washing out the big pot.

It is obvious that it is the Agent noun that is omitted in

(17) Yukw-t k’ulp’a’ssh’ m’lary
She is washing out the big pot.

and the Object noun in

(18) Yukw-t k’ulp’a’s Lucy
Lucy is washing it.

but even an inanimate noun can be Agent, as in:

(19) k’ulp’a’ssh’ m’lary (sh’ m’lary is the Object)
I have a rash on my hand from stinging nettles. (lit. ... where nettles burned it.)

Yet another source of disambiguation which does not depend on stress is number agreement between the verb and the Object, not the Agent. For instance Belvin (1984:44) gives the following example as supposed proof that Nisg̱a’a, like English, deletes the Agent, not the Object:

(20) Mdim’t m’lary m’lary im dit smil’t “k’ulp’a-t’k’ulp’aw
Mary smiled and hugged the children.

First of all, the Agent is not deleted, since it is the 3ERG pronoun. Second, the verb has the plural form k’ulp’a-t’k’ulp’aw, not the singular form k’ulp’a-t’k’ulp’aw. However, the plural noun k’ulp’a-t’k’ulp’aw, which is therefore its Object.

With the singular form of the verb, the sentence would also be unambiguous, since the plural noun k’ulp’a-t’k’ulp’aw could only be the Agent.

(21) Mdim’t m’lary m’lary im dit smil’t “k’ulp’a-t’k’ulp’aw
Mary smiled and the children hugged her.

Note again the difference in stress pattern, which is obvious in a normal conversational tone, but may not be apparent with artificially slow delivery. In (22) as in (15) above, the stress pattern is the only difference between sentences with a singular Agent or Object; however, a Nisg̱a’a speaker reading aloud a sentence like the following line would be more likely to read it as (a) (with Agent noun) than (b) (Object noun):

(22) Mdim’t m’lary m’lary im dit smil’t “k’ulp’a-t’k’ulp’aw
Mary came in ... (a) ... and the child hugged her.

... (b) ... and hugged the child.
With a plural animate noun in the first clause, there would be no ambiguity either, since the 3ERG Agent pronoun in the second clause is matched by a 3PL suffix only when under identity with a noun in the first clause, as in (23b).

(23)  

(a) ... /% luulmddawII k'ubatk'ilJl=kw.

The women smiled

and the children hugged them.

(b) ... /% luulmddawII/™ k'ubatk'ilJl=kw.

... and hugged the children.

To summarize: unless there is a contexual indication to the contrary, the single noun following a verb preceded by a 3ERG clltlc pronoun will most likely be Interpreted as co-referring with this pronoun and IndIcatIng the Agent, rather than the Object. This Is In keepIng with the ergatIve syntactIc pattern, whIch deletes the Object but not the Agent.

3 Interlanguage phenomena:

The brand of English spoken by most persons of Nlsgha background contains strong elements of an Interlanguage (here called N-Engllsh) medIating between English and Nlsgha, trying to fit English words Into Nlsgha grammatical structures and modes of thought. Similarly some bilingual speakers asked to translate an English text Into Nlsgha tend to stick very close to English surface structure, resulting in strange sentences if not in misunderstandings: these can be called instances of E-Nlsgha.

31 N-Engllish follows Nlsgha in omitting Object pronouns:

Since Nlsgha does not always require Object pronouns, N-Engllish does not either, hence sentences such as

(24) They ran after him and picked up (= picked him up).
(25) They heard him, but couldn't see (= couldn't see him).
(26) He heard women giggling beside him and made an attempt to grab (= to grab them).
(27) The children liked bright colors, so I like to wear (= wear them).

Using an English Object pronoun in the second clause would sound emphatic to a speaker of N-Engllsh, especially since there are cases where English does not use such pronouns: witness written Instructions such as recipes, and newspaper headlines and captions, which delete more than the normal range of both nouns and pronouns. Nlsgha syntax and English telegraphic style converge in sentences such as

(28) The method of preserving this fruit was to cook until tender, strain, and mix in a mixture of oolichan grease and water.

32 E-Nlsgha follows English In adding Object pronouns:

Asking for Nlsgha translations of English utterances containing pronouns frequently results in Nlsgha sentences containing overt pronouns, as the Nlsgha speaker strives to approximate the English utterance: to a speaker of N-Engllsh, which often does not use such pronouns, the Object pronoun obligatorily present in a Standard English sentence seems an emphatic addition, which must be specially translated.

For instance, asked to translate Gaay' k'Ya?~a-7, a bilingual speaker will most likely say 'I saw', even though when the word Is placed In a context such as (29), it is obvious that an O is implied and that the proper English translation requires an O pronoun:

(29) Nii mi ga as Mrya? -- Gaay'.

Have you seen Mary? --Yes. (lit. I saw her)

ni: ma k'Y~a=s tiYa~a(y)a -- k'Y~a a-y not 25ERG see.s=DC M==O -- see.s-CTL-15

Conversely, asked to translate I saw her (especially out of context), a bilingual speaker is likely to Interpret this as emphatic: I saw her, and to add to the sentence the third person singular pronoun Ìft, thus

(30) Gaay' Ìft

k'Y~a a-y Ìft

see.s-CTL-15 h

even though this sentence would not be uttered spontaneously:14 In normal Nlsgha discourse, Ìft is emphatic and used almost only in initial, focused position,15 as In

157/8
Similarly, asked to translate *Lucy is waiting for her*, a bilingual speaker is likely to say

(32) *Yukw t gibas Lucy nit.*

\[ yu^{\text{AUX-3ERG}} w-t \text{ for.s.} \text{CTL } L.\text{h.} \]

rather than *Yukw t gibas Lucy* which would be the spontaneous utterance, for instance in answer to a question (as in (9) or (15)).

The major differences between the two languages, and the interlanguage phenomena, can be summarized in the following chart:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Standard Nisg̱a’a</th>
<th>Standard English</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><em>Ga’ay</em></td>
<td>I saw him/her</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><em>Nithl ga’ay</em></td>
<td>I saw him/her (emphatic), that’s who I saw</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Standard English</th>
<th>E-Nisg̱a’a</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>I saw him/her</td>
<td><em>Ga’ay</em> hit</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Nisg̱a’a</th>
<th>N-English</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><em>Ga’ay</em></td>
<td>I saw</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

(33) Nisg̱a’a follows Nisg̱a’a in deleting *S*₂ under identity with *O*₂.

The major characteristic of the ergative syntactic pattern is the identification of intransitive Subject and transitive Object in opposition to the transitive Agent. This is carried over in N-English, which deletes the Subject of the second clause under identity with the Object, not the Subject or Agent, of the previous clause. Consider the following Standard English examples:

(33) He washed and dried the dishes.

\[ A_2 \text{ omitted } (=A_1), O_1 \text{ omitted } (=O_2) \]

(34) He washed the dishes and they dried.

\[ A_2 \text{ omitted } (=A_1), O_2 (=O_1) \text{ is a pronoun (English } O_2 \text{ cannot be omitted) } \]

Both these sentences are equivalent to the single Nisg̱a’a sentence

(35) *Yoo’oksitl nit limlimkt.*

\[ yu^{\text{AUX-3ERG}} w-t \text{ for.s.} \text{CTL } L.\text{h.} \]

where the Object noun is obligatorily in the first clause. *A*₂ and *O*₂ are both indicated by pronouns, but the *O*₂ pronoun is a suffix, not a separate word: there is no single word referring to the Object in the second clause.

It is not possible to omit the *O*₁ noun or replace it by a coreferent pronoun: the sentence

(36) *Yoo’oksit nit limlimkhl no’ohl.*

is only grammatical if it means:

(37) He washed them; and he dried them.

where *them* is understood to refer to another object than *dishes*.

In N-English, as in Nisg̱a’a, only one sentence is possible as a translation of (35):

(38) He washed the dishes and he dried (= he dried them)

which omits the English *O*₂ pronoun, but not the *A*₂ pronoun, as is normal in ergative syntax (see 12 above).

Now consider the following sentence:

(39) He washed the dishes and they dried.
To a speaker of Standard English, the Subject pronoun clause (52) can only refer to the Object noun in the first clause (O₁); the dishes dried. But to a speaker of N-English, the use of they in the second clause indicates, not co-reference with O₁, but a second clause Agent (A₂); the meaning of (39) is interpreted as:

(39a) He washed the dishes and they (other people) dried them.

The N-English equivalent of (39) is

(40) He washed the dishes and dried (= and they dried)

which omits the S₂ pronoun under Identity with the O₁ noun, as is normal in ergative syntax.

The same deletion of S₂ under Identity with O₁ is displayed in the following examples:

(41) Ask for it and will be given to you (= and it will be given...).
(42) Huge log jams piled on the rock, but remained put (= it remained put).
(43) The other children were acquainting him with his new surroundings and felt accepted (= and he felt accepted).

4 Concluding remarks:

The evidence of deletion under Identity in both spontaneous Nisgha utterances and Nisgha-Influenced English shows that Nisgha follows syntactic patterns characteristic of ergativity, patterns which persist when using English words. However, various factors both in the standard Nisgha language and in the interlanguage may obscure the significance of these patterns for the casual observer, and isolated data, especially those obtained by translation, may give the appearance of accusativity. Decisions about how to characterize the language cannot be made on the basis of a few sentences of the linguist’s own choosing. It is necessary to work with many, larger samples of Nisgha speech uninfluenced by English structure, especially from older speakers.17

Ergativity (according to its traditional definition) is not an easy concept for most linguists to get into. In many respects, it is the mirror-image of accusativity, the pattern considered “natural” by most Western linguists because of the biases of their own linguistic background.18 As with an actual image in a mirror, the concept of reversal may be easy to grasp intellectually, but working with it in practice is much more difficult: most people have little trouble with the reversal of one dimension, such as with right becomes left, or front becomes back, but having to reverse the other dimension at the same time can take a lot longer to get used to: the mirror image seems to insist on going in the wrong direction. Similarly, most Western linguists have no trouble dealing with some of the manifestations of ergativity, usually the morphology, but find others very puzzling, even aberrant, and try to reduce them to a familiar pattern; this is especially true of syntax.

Nisgha speakers have had to face the opposite problem when trying to square accusative English structures with their familiar ergative patterns. How they have solved this problem makes perfect sense when considered from the Nisgha language point of view, however unusual the solutions may seem to English speakers. To anyone investigating not only the Nisgha language, but ergativity in general, this point of view deserves to be heard.

APPENDIX

A single noun in a dependent transitive clause may be interpreted as either Agent (the most likely case, especially if it is animate) or Object. To show the relative frequency of these two interpretations, I give all the relevant examples from one short legend (Boas 1902: 102-107). (The beginning of this story is also presented at the end of Boas 1911, with a detailed morphemic analysis which the reader can compare to mine). The story is summarized as follows:

A group of children were in the habit of playing inside a huge hollow log on the beach. One day an exceptionally high tide carried the log far off to sea. Becoming hungry, the children were able to catch seagulls by smearing the log with their own blood, to which the gulls’ feet got stuck. One day they found themselves caught in a whirlpool, but they were rescued by Only-One-Leg, a seal hunter who harpooned the log and continued to look after them. When they expressed a desire to go back to their families, he lent them his magic canoe, which he kept well-hidden under a cover of little trees; this was a wise precaution since the canoe was actually a bag of sand, the cannibalistic monster with a voracious mouth at each end. The children were able to return safely home.

Passages relevant to the discussion are given in brief contexts in Modern Nisgha orthography and in translation; only the crucial portions, indicated in
bold type, are given in morpheme-by-morpheme transcription as well. Object pronouns necessary in English but not in Haisla are underlined. References are to page and line number.

102.8

Then it was high tide again, and the huge log floated and drifted out to sea; the children did not realize it.

Clausal 0

104.2

They [the seagulls] were unable to fly away: their webbed feet had dried stuck to the log. Then one child took it.

105.1

The huge log was up-ended, about to be swallowed by a whirlpool (lit. so that a whirlpool was about to swallow 1).

Clausal 0

105.2-3

Only-One-leg kept on spearing seals, and the children kept on carrying them up [to his house].

Clausal 0

106.2

My canoe is moored just over there; you will use it.

Clausal 0

107.1-2

It did not spare anyone who went in front of it: If a person went in front of it, he ate him.

Clausal 0

In 6 pages, there are 9 Instances of dependent transitive clauses with
understood nominal Object, where the single noun in the clause co-refers with the ERG clitic pronoun, and 2 instances with understood clausal Object.

In contrast, there are only 3 instances where the single noun is the Object, and does not co-refer with the ERG pronoun: In each case, the Object noun refers to an inanimate:

106.3  *̱ni'kîlt bɑ'w̱am̓l telk̓w̱l t̓simlx̱ât.
Then he wrung their [the seagulls'] necks.

\[\text{ni'k̓y̱l̓t-}t \text{ lu-ha} \text{t̓}k̓w̱l \text{ t̓simlx̱̓tl} \text{ e-}t\]
that's=NC and-3ERG in-parallel-PL wrings=NC neck-3

105.12-13  *̱ni'kîlt gah̓k̓w̱l ̓wil̓ gån ̓.
Then he speared the huge log...

\[\text{ni'k̓y̱l̓t-}t \text{ k̓y̱l̓k̓w̱l-}x̱ \text{ ̓wil̓ gån-}x̱\]
that's=NC and-3ERG spear.s=NC big tree

106.12-13  *̱ni'kîlt saat̓'m̓al̓n̓ hł̓g̓ gån-ht.
Then he removed the little trees [that concealed the canoe] 19

\[\text{ni'k̓y̱l̓t-}t \text{ sa-}l̓t̓ x̱k̓u \text{ gån-}x̱ \text{ k̓y̱l̓}-\text{â} \text{hł̓g̓ gån-ht}\]
that's=NC and-3ERG off=place.s=PL CTL=NC little tree=DISTAL

Where an animate or a human Object is mentioned (in 2 instances), the singular Agent is indicated by an overt noun (in bold type) as well as by the clitic pronoun, preventing ambiguity:

105.12-13  *̱ni'kîlt ang̓ax̱ k̓u̱bat̓k̓ n̓ih̓k̓w̱l h̓la g̓̓a̱l̓k̓w̱d̓ilt.
Then the children remembered those they had left behind.

\[\text{ni'k̓y̱l̓t-}t \text{ ?amq̓x̱ k̓u̱ba-}x̱k̓u̱ \text{ n̓ih̓k̓w̱l-}\text{â} \text{g̓̓a̱l̓k̓w̱d̓ilt}\]
that's=NC and-3ERG remember.s=NC little PL=child the behind-3P

106.3-4  *̱ni'kîlt hash̓its k̓̓am̓-k̓̓il̓m̓-̓asay̓l̓ k̓̓ubat̓k̓ n̓ih̓k̓w̱.
Then Only-One-Leg sent the children [on their way].

\[\text{ni'k̓y̱l̓t-}t \text{ hash]̓s} \text{ k̓̓am̓ k̓̓il̓m̓-}x̱ \text{ ̓asay̓l̓-}x̱ \text{ k̓̓u̱ba-}x̱k̓u̱w̱ \text{ n̓ih̓k̓w̱.}\]
that's=NC and-3ERG PL sends.s=NC only one-ATTR leg=NC little PL=child

There are also 4 instances of an overt Object noun where the ERG clitic pronoun is reinforced by the Animate plural suffix showing plural Agent 20

As this pronoun cannot co-refer with a noun in the same clause, the single noun is unambiguously the Object.

NOTES

* Nisg̱a’a /nisg̱a’/ [nisg̱a’] is one of the Tsimshianic languages, spoken in the Nass valley of British Columbia. The data presented here were collected during the course of my employment with the Bilingual/Bicultural Centre of B.C. School District #92, in 1977-80, in the summer of 1982, and in 1983-87. Analytical work on the language was supported by SSHRC doctoral fellowships held at the University of Victoria in 1981-82 and 1982-83. I have had the privilege to learn what Nisg̱a’a I know in its natural environment, from excellent speakers. I especially wish to thank, in alphabetical order, Mrs. Audrey A. Gosnell, Mrs. Nita Morven, Mrs. Rosie Robinson, Mrs. Verna Williams, all present or former teachers of the Nisg̱a’a language, and Mr. Harold Wright, who is an elder and a hereditary chief In the Eagle clan. Mr. Bert McKay, coordinator of the Bilingual/Bicultural Centre and a hereditary chief In the Frog/Raven clan, arranged for me to have access to these and other resource persons. The conclusions in this paper are my own, and I alone am responsible for any errors.

1 As for instance in the following quote (Belvin 1985:60):

... most of Tarpent’s arguments either show an intransitive agent [=Subject] patterning with a transitive patient [=Object] or else show that the transitive agent is treated differently from any other type of argument. But notice that this does not really establish Nisg̱a’a as [Syntactically]-ergative as Harlan and Levin have defined it. [Italics mine].

2 My interpretation of this fact is that the pronoun is the grammatical Agent, and the noun is an adjunct which indicates the semantic referent of the pronoun. Jelinek 1986 discusses whether the co-referent noun is Agent or adjunct, and follows Belvin in considering that the pronoun functions as an agreement marker. I believe this is incorrect and derives from Belvin’s misunderstanding of a statement in Tarpent ms [1981]. In any event, which interpretation is correct does not affect the conclusions in this paper. I use the term ‘Agent noun’ or ‘nominal Agent’ instead of the more cumbersome ‘Adjunct-to-Agent noun’, since the noun is the semantic Agent.

3 Data are given both in the standard Nisg̱a’a orthography (initially developed
by Bruce Rigsby), which is a broad phonetic transcription, and in a basically phonemic morpheme-by-morpheme transcription, ignoring the morphophonemic changes which are represented in the standard orthography. This second transcription also includes primary and secondary stress. English names are not transcribed, but stress on them is indicated.

4 Deletion of elements between square brackets is phonologically conditioned. I did not recognize the deletion of the singular determinate marker t after /s/ until my 1986 paper, where it was mentioned in a footnote but not incorporated into the morpheme-by-morpheme description.

5 Abbreviations: ATTR attributive; AUX auxiliary; CAUS causative; CTL control (two different but associated suffixes); ERG ergative; DC determinate connective; DM determinate marker; FUT future; IND indirect pronoun; INT intensive; NC non-determinate connective; PL plural; PROG progressive; Q question. (The verbal suffix -a- identified here as Control was erroneously called Ergative in my previous papers written between 1982 and 1986).

Morpheme separators: - separates most morphemes, including pronominal clitics; ) follows a reduplicated syllable; = separates a proclitic (adverbial) from the following element, or a connective from a preceding element; . separates a postclitic (evidential) from the preceding element.

6 The sentence would be grammatical without the 3rd person indirect pronoun /oo-/, but not idiomatic; its presence here has a contrastive role and indicates the change from one participant to another.

The meaning is:

...and one of the little birds carried Ts'ak's rattlebox.

Instead, Boas interprets k'egwilji'g t's'wts'w andalJaseeks Ts'ak. 

The meaning is:

... and he carried a little bird named Rattlebox.

To be fair to Boas, he collected the tales under very difficult conditions. They were slowly dictated in Nisg'aa, and translated through the medium of Chinook. Faced with having to translate 'rattlebox', the translator may have said something like 'that's what it's called', meaning the name of the object, while Boas thought he meant the name of the bird.

10 A translation error in Boas 1902 (123:12) can be partially traced to the SAE (Standard Average European) speaker's expectation that the noun following the verb is its Object. In one of the stories, the hero, Ts'ak, makes a grand first entrance as a shaman, surrounded by various little birds; he is carrying one bird, and...

...that's=NC and-3ERG carry.s.=NC one[animal]-CTl=NC little bird=NC container-rattle-DC [DM] Ts'ak

11 Number agreement is not always automatic, as the verb stem usually indicates the number of actions performed rather than the number of objects the actions apply to. Usually these numbers agree, as in (19), and also in

(a) qas-q-at-xks-t cut.s.-CTL-3=NC hair-3 k'aj/ith gest S/he cut h. hair

(b) qas-q-at-xks-t cut.s.-CTL-3=NC nail-3 k'ast/qith hnaig/st S/he cut h. nails
but they may differ, as in

(c) Qas̱gocy-š-át-xʔánəx

... bread

(d) Ḫa-lishis-š-át-ério?

In one spot | PL hit s. | CTL-3 | NC door

where the plural verb stem indicates a plurality of actions, performed on a single object.

12 The transcription and morpheme description have been corrected where needed.

13 The N-English data here come from written work by young students (who are largely monolingual in the local variety of English) and utterances and translations by older persons. Some sentences have been slightly edited, but their use of deletion has been maintained. Not all speakers of N-English would consider all of these sentences well-formed, but they occur often enough to illustrate a tendency that can only be explained with reference to underlying Nisg̱a̱a syntactic patterns.

14 But the linguist beginning the study of Nisg̱a̱a is unaware of this fact: thus Tarpent ms. (1981) and Jelinek 1986 both give this sentence type as normal. In fact it is only normal for sentences elicited under artificial conditions, not for natural speech.

15 The third person singular pronoun ṅift is one of six independent personal pronouns ( diffé-pronouns); the other five pronouns all appear obligatorily in sentences with the structure of (30), e.g. Qas̱gocy kiłt̓ kiy̱?-a-ʔ ṅift̓ 'I saw you', Qas̱gocy kiłt̓ kiy̱?-a-ʔ ṅift̓ t̓ 'I saw them', as well as (31). Only ṅift is normally absent from unfocused sentences, as in (30). The addition of ṅift under the influence of English structure then fills a gap in the pattern of use of these pronouns.

16 Actually, (34), which considers the two actions as more separate than (33), could also be translated by two independent clauses, without an equivalent for the word 'and', thus

(34a) Yo'oksîthl nooth, limlimgit. He washed the dishes; he dried them.

REFERENCES


