An autolexical sketch of Sgūūxs (Southern Tsimshian) predicate adjectives and predicate nominatives

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1. Introduction. Several autolexical (Sadock 1991) notions have influenced this descriptive analysis of Sgūūxs predicate adjective and predicate nominative clauses: (1) a unitary X-bar phrase-structure template informs all the modules of grammar (morphological, semantic, syntactic, etc.), (2) X-bar trees representing these modules interface through association-type lines, (3) these interfacing lines effectively replace the move-alpha principle, (4) the semantic module universally represents proto-agents (Dowty 1987) as subjects, i.e., as specifiers to head verbs.

I use two module-trees in this paper: (1) a lexico-syntactic tree, which contains much the same information as the d-structure in Government-Binding theory, and (2) a morphological tree, which represents whatever lexical material is apparent in the concrete word order. The lexico-syntactic tree represents grammatical relations as positions in verb phrases and thematic roles as functions lexically assigned to those positions. I impose a strict local constraint on other phenomena, esp. case-marking and agreement. The preliminary contrastive characterization of Sgūūxs and English sentences this model generates indicates that agreement and overt case-marking are lexico-syntactic-tree phenomena in the former and morphological-tree phenomena in the latter. See sentence 1.1 below and Figures 1 and 2 on the following pages. Application of this model to a wide variety of languages may indicate two parameters: (1) agreement is either lexico-syntactic or morphological, (2) overt case-marking in either lexico-syntactic or morphological.

These characterizations (Figures 1 and 2) of Sgūūxs and English are preliminary, their purpose is to make the contrastive point only. This autolexical type description of Sgūūxs will doubtless look quite different once it has been applied to all the attested sentence types. To that end this paper will be a beginning. It will look at the autolexical properties of Sgūūxs sentences which have predicate adjectives and predicate nominatives as heads. I will refer to such sentences as 'verbless', more as a convenient designator than a technically precise term.

1.1 sits'iks'āxu k'āba'yū'uxwt
   sl- ts'īk- ts'āx- u k'āba- yū'uxwt
   make plural nose -1 little men
   I am making a nose on the boys
   making-a-nose-[on], i.e., pinching and pulling another's nose, an idiom meaning 'scolding,' thus
   I am scolding the boys.
2. The generic verbless sentence. There are a large number of Sgùùks sentences each of which competent Sgùùks/English bilinguals translate with interchangeable English predicate adjectives and predicate nominatives (Cf. 2.1 thru 2.7).

2.1 á'ë'sgi Gan  
á'ë'sg -i Gan  
straight-case pole  
The pole is straight or It's a straight pole or There's a straight pole.

2.2 á'mi bilhá:  
á'm -i bilhá:  
good-case abalone  
The abalone is good or It's good abalone.

2.3 á'mi daxhi  
á'm -i daxhi  
good-case hammer  
The hammer is fine or It's a good hammer.

2.4 á'mi ses'ô'o  
á'm -i ses'ô'o  
good-case rattle  
The rattle is good or It's a good rattle.

2.5 hlu:ntçt' yaxwt  
hlu:ntçt -i yaxwt  
angry -case man  
The man is angry or There's an angry man.

2.6 mihóksi midzaGaléi  
mihóks -i midzaGaléi  
fragrant-case flowers  
The flowers are fragrant or There are some fragrant flowers.

2.7 tčlápíq'i lax  
tčlápíq -i 'lax  
hard -case needle  
The needle is hard or It's a hard needle.

This simple pattern, Adjective-case Noun, can be elaborated in two ways: with the machinery of a noun phrase, e.g., with a quantifier specifier (Cf. 2.8), or with the machinery of a verb phrase, e.g., with a sentential negative (2.9) or a tense marker.
These elaborations make the construction unambiguously predicate nominative (Figure 3) or predicate adjective (Figure 4) and thus prove that the basic (unelaborated) construction is intrinsically ambiguous (Figures 5.1 and 5.2).

2.8 wihalbídi hónañ  
   wihalbí-di hónañ  
   lots-case fish  
   There are lots of fish but not *The fish are [not] lots of.

2.9 akndí hóksí yaxwt  
   akndí hóks-í yaxwt  
   NEG present-case man  
   The man was not there but not  
   *There was a not-present man nor *There was not a man present.

2.10 hla gikdi bání yaxwt  
   hla gik-dí bání yaxwt  
   TNS swollen-case belly man  
   The man's belly has just now become swollen but not *There's a man's just-now-become swollen belly.

3. Possessives in verbless sentences. When a verbless sentence has a possessive on a noun, that possessive can, in the predicate nominative interpretation, take the lexicosyntactic subject relation:

3.1 sipgl Gó:adu  
   sipg-í Gó:ad-u  
   sick-case heart-I  
   I am heartsick or I have a broken heart or My heart is broken.

3.2 tčáksgl ts’a’an  
   tčáksg-í ts’a-an-Ø  
   clean-case face his  
   His face is clean or He has a clean face.

Such sentences are, I believe, related to the type of predicate nominative construction seen in 3.3 thru 3.5.

3.3 'nλí sitaGó:ádi gwl:  
   'nλí sitaGó:á-di gwl:  
   this advice-case deictic proximate  
   This is the proximate, i.e., my, advice.  
   This is my advice.
3.4 'náxu nadúsit
   'ná xu na- dú s-í- t
   i POSS-cat -case POSS
   It is my cat.

3.5 'náxu nawa:lt
   'ná xu na- wá-í- t
   I POSS-do-POSS
   I own it, i.e., it is my possessing.

Figures 6 and 7 propose parallel analyses for 3.5 and 3.1. The independent pronoun in
3.3 thru 3.5 maintains its lexico-syntactic word order position; the pronominal
critics in 3.1 and 3.2 become morphological adjuncts (Af) to the predicate nominative.
[He's] an angry man.

Figure 5.2 Trees for sentence 2.5 interpreted as predicate nominative.

Figure 6. Analysis of sentence 3.5.
INFL 
I present 
sick-case heart-
I have a broken heart.

Figure 7. Analysis of sentence 3.1 as predicate nominative.

4. Four types of verbless sentences. The analysis to this point indicates that there are four kinds of verbless sentences: predicate adjective sentences, predicate nominative sentences, sentences with possessor subjects and those without possessor subjects.

Sentences of the type [Adj+case Noun] are ambiguous: they can be either predicate adjective or predicate nominative sentences (4.1 thru 4.21, Figures 5.1 and 5.2).

4.1 ámí bilhá.
good abalone
4.2 ámí daxhi
good hammer
4.3 ámí sesó'o
good rattle
4.4 am-ámí sesó'o
plural-good rattle
4.5 á'tsígi Gan
straight pole
4.6 a'tsígi GanGán
plural-straight plural-pole
4.7 amapá'si lakws
pretty light
4.8 q'ap amamá'mqsi lakws
really plural-prety light
4.9 amapá'si ts'lhlín'a'
pretty apron
4.10 q'ap amamá'mqsi ts'lhlín'a'
4.11 amapá'si yú:'s'il't
basket
4.12 q'ap amamá'mqsi yú:'s'il't
4.13 amapá'si sXá'l
mat
4.14 q'ap amamá'mqsi 'wa:n
tooth
4.15 hlú:'ntcí 'yauxw
angry man
4.16 hlúk-hlú:'ntcí 'yu'uxw
plural-men
4.17 mlhóksi mlzaGalé'l
fragrant flower
4.18 mlk-mlhóksi mlzaGalé'l
plural-
4.19 ml't-mutqu nhlánaGán
plural-full barrel
4.20 tclálp'í 'laX
hard needle
4.21 dzlzp-tclálp'í 'laX or tclzp-tclálp'í 'laX
plural-
Sentences of the type [Adj+case Noun+Possessor] are also ambiguous: they can be either predicate adjectives without possessor subjects or predicate nominatives with possessor subjects (4.22 thru 4.28, Figure 7).

4.22 əmi daXhi! nəwə:n
good hammer side-your
That's a good hammer you've got
or Your hammer's just fine.

4.23 am-əmi daXhi! nəwə:n
plural-
You've got some good hammers

4.24 sipgi Gə:du
sick heart-my
I have a broken heart
or My heart is broken.

4.25 wi'nəgi nts'u:p-t
long tail-their
Their tails are long.

4.26 tɕiaksgi ts'a:an
clean face-his
He has a clean face
or His face is clean.

4.27 tɕiak-ɕiaksgi Gats'al-ts'a'alisin
plural plural
He has clean ears
or His ears are clean.

Verbless sentences are unambiguously Predicate adjective type when there is an overt tense/aspect word or words (4.29 thru 4.31, Figure 4) and/or an initial adverb construction (4.33). They are also unambiguously predicate adjective type when the noun is 'heavy,' i.e., when it is compound (4.34) and/or follows more than one adjective (4.30 and 4.32).

4.29 hla ak'ala:sgwi yu'uxwt
hla ak'-ala:sgwi yu'uxwt
TNS plural-weak men
The men are suddenly weak.

4.30 hla ak'ala:isi wit'a as-'ōs
hla al'-ala:isi wit'a as-'ōs
TNS plural-lazy big plural-dog
All of a sudden the big dogs [have got] lazy.

4.31 hla gli:kdi bani yaxwt
TNS swollen belly man
The man's belly is all of a sudden swollen.

4.32 yikyi:xi wit'a as-'ōs
yik-yl:xi wit'a as-'ōs
plural-fat big plural-dog

Sentences of the type [quantifier+N'] are unambiguously predicate nominatives (4.35, 4.36, Figure 3).

4.35 wiḥайлidi hoan
lots-of fish
[There are] lots of fish.

4.36 wiḥайлidi williks giga:di anás
lots-of many kinds pelts
[There are] different kinds of pelts.

Other predicate nominative sentences consist of [pronoun NP]. The initial independent pronoun can function as a coreferent to the NP (4.37, 4.39), or as a possessor subject (4.38, 4.40, Figure 6). The former, which are quite rare, are the only SguuXs constructions that look like English predicate nominative sentences.

4.37 'naxu mii hikhligwidzO:sg-u
you(plu) sisters-in-law-my
You are my sisters-in-law.

4.38 'naxu na-dūs-it
you(plu) sisters-in-law-my POSS-cat-POSS
It is my cat.

4.39 'n'ni sitaGō:di gw:i
this advice here
This is my advice.

4.40 'n'ni na-wāl-t
this advice POSS-do-POSS
It is my possession.

5. Unresolved questions. If sentences 4.1 thru 4.21 can be interpreted as predicate nominatives (Figure 5.2), why does the -i- case marker occur in the middle of the NP rather than at the beginning where it belongs? Is it possible that the ambiguity in these sentences is an epiphenomenon, arising from English translation, and not a part of SguuXs at all? If so, then these sentences should be interpreted as unambiguous predicate adjective constructions (Figure 5.1). But then why do bilingual SguuXs/English speakers translate such constructions in two ways?

Why Is the NP in the predicate adjective sentence not a subject as in English? Especially in sentences like

hlu:nəći yaxwt 'The man is angry (4.15)'

does the NP not function as a proto-agent? If so, then does the sentence
The syntactic evidence for possessor subjects in verbless sentences is straightforward (Figures 6 and 7; see also Figure 1). But there is nothing in the predicate adjective syntax to indicate the grammatical relation status of the other NP. Perhaps, once this analysis of verbless sentences is integrated with autolexical analyses of SguXs 'active' intransitives, transitives and ditransitives, some resolution to the puzzle will present itself. But it has always been the the nature of the Tsimshianic languages to confound the notion of subjecthood.

References
