

THE MORPHEME *-ə-* AND THE MYSTERIES OF NISGHA SYNTAX

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0. **Abstract:** The morpheme *-ə-* occurs sandwiched between a transitive predicate and a pronominal suffix in only one of what appear to be the two basic types of Nisgha clauses. The morphosyntactic function of this morpheme has never been well-understood, and it has been given a variety of labels, none of them fully adequate. The key to a fuller understanding lies in the use of *-ə-*-suffixed transitive verbs in Object-Relative clauses: the mystery morpheme can be identified as the original O.REL suffix. The identification of the morpheme leads to a reinterpretation of the basic structure of Nisgha syntax, since what has been usually been considered as an independent transitive clause (under various labels) should actually be interpreted as a headless Object-relative clause used as clause predicate. This reinterpretation solves some morphosyntactic problems.

1. Traditional view of Nisgha syntax:

1.1. Two types of clause: The linguist beginning the study of a language usually starts with simple declarative clauses, and Tsimshianic equivalents to English declarative clauses seem to fall into two types, each with specific morphosyntactic characteristics. The opposition between two clause types is probably the best-known fact about the syntax of these languages; it has been commented upon by all researchers since Boas 1911, and much has been written about their differences: in fact, just about every paper on Nisgha or Gitksan syntax written in the last fifteen years begins with a presentation of this opposition.<sup>1</sup> For Nisgha, typical examples adduced for the two types are:<sup>2</sup>

- type 1:

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(1) intr: *kipéʔesk<sup>W</sup> t Māry*  
wait DM M.

*Gibeʔeskw t Mary*  
Mary waited.

(2) tr: *kipá-(y)ə-[t]=s[t]Māry t Lúcy<sup>3</sup>*  
wait.for.s.-SUFF-[3]=DC [DM] M. DM L.<sup>4</sup>

*Gibayis Mary t Lucy.*  
Mary waited for Lucy.

- type 2:

(3) intr: *yuk<sup>W</sup>-tkipéʔesk<sup>W</sup>-[t]=s[t]M.*  
PROG=NC wait-[3]=DC [DM] M.

*Yukwhl gibeʔeskws Mary.*  
Mary is/was waiting.

(4) tr: *yuk<sup>W</sup>-tkipá-[t]=s[t]Māry t Lúcy*  
PROG-3ERG wait.for.s.-[3]=DC [DM] M. DM L.

*Yukwt gibas Mary t Lucy.*  
Mary is/was waiting for Lucy.

The commonly accepted syntactic analysis is that in type 1 clauses, the predicate is the first major element of the clause, while in type 2 clauses, the clause predicate appears after an introductory element which is most commonly a higher predicate, an auxiliary (as in (3) and (4)) or negative verb, or a subordinator. This analysis is reflected in the different pairs of labels variously given to the two types: for Boas, they were 'indicative' and 'subjunctive' respectively; Rigsby 1975 called them 'independent-order' and 'dependent-order' clauses, labels also adopted in Tarpent (T) 1981, 1982, Belvin 1985, 1990 and Jelinek 1986. Livingston 1985 used the labels 'predicate-initial' and 'non-predicate-initial' respectively. However, there are cases where type 2 clauses, which are the most common, also occur without any of the aforementioned introductory elements,<sup>5</sup> hence the label 'regular clause' adopted in T 1989, while type 1 clauses, which put more emphasis on the predicate itself, are called 'predicate-focused.'

1.2. Morphosyntactic differences between clause types: In type 2 clauses the transitive or intransitive predicate obligatorily ends in a suffix pronoun<sup>6</sup> inflected for person and number and indicating respectively the (transitive) Object or (intransitive) Subject, while the transitive predicate is additionally preceded by an Ergative pronoun indicating the

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Agent. The absence or presence of the Ergative pronoun is the only difference between intransitive ((3)) and transitive ((4)) type 2 clauses.

However, in type 1 clauses there is a greater difference between transitive and Intransitive morphology: there is no pronominal affix on the intransitive verb ((1)), while the transitive verb ((2)) obligatorily takes two affixes: first the morpheme  $-a-$ ,<sup>7</sup> followed by a suffix pronoun<sup>8</sup> which this time indicates the Agent.

Much work<sup>9</sup> has been devoted to the fact that the preverbal Ergative clitic pronoun occurs only in type 2 clauses, while the suffix pronoun which in type 2 clauses indicates the non-Ergative argument, indicates the Ergative argument in type 1 clauses. However, in each case the transitive clause shows the presence of one more person/number morpheme than the intransitive clause:

	Type 1	Type 2
Agent	Suffix	Preverbal clitic (Ergative)
Subject/Object	Ø	Suffix

The person/number suffix, which can also be affixed to nouns and to some pronominal stems<sup>10</sup>, does not in itself indicate case, unlike the preverbal clitic, which is always Ergative. The real analytical difficulty lies with the additional presence of the morpheme  $-a-$ , which occurs only in the transitive type 1 clause.

1.3. The problem of the morpheme  $-a-$ : The function of this morpheme has never been satisfactorily defined. It was first isolated in T 1981, where it was called Control. As it seemed to indicate that the following suffix pronoun should be interpreted as the Agent, it was called Ergative in T 1982, followed by Belvin 1985 and Jelinek 1986. But the case-designation Ergative was not appropriate, since it is not the morpheme itself but the

following suffix which represents the Agent.<sup>11</sup> In T 1987, 1988 and 1989 the term Control was used again as it seemed to indicate that the Agent controls an Object, with the caveat that this term seemed 'still not fully satisfactory but suitably vague' (1988: fn.13). Rigsby 1990 called the analogous Gitksan morpheme a Transivizer ( ). However, we would expect a transitivity morpheme to occur in both types of transitive clause, rather than just one; other transitivity affixes do not have such selectivity, and moreover are always part of the quotation form of a transitive verb. Belvin 1990: , working in the GB framework, calls it 'a dummy Case-bearing element' indicating that the following suffix is to be interpreted as having Ergative case.

A multiplicity of designations usually indicates that the analysis is at least partially incorrect. In this case, it partly reflects linguistic elicitation methods and analytical biases rather than actual conditions of occurrence of the morpheme  $-a-$  in the language: encountering what seem to be two types of simple declarative clauses, syntactically-oriented linguists (myself included) have been asking: *Why are there two types of clause, and how are they related?* not: *Under what conditions does this morpheme occur?* The focus of attention on the two types of clause has blinded us to other conditions of occurrence of the morpheme, which are precisely the ones that are crucial for an understanding of its original function.<sup>12</sup> The following section presents an alternate view of Nisgha morphosyntax in which the morpheme in question receives a definite interpretation.

2. Alternate view of Nisgha syntax: Nisgha is a pronominal-argument language where nouns may be adjuncts to the obligatory pronouns which are part of the predicate phrase (T 1988, 1989). Nouns may be relativized through a following Relative clause. Relative clauses may also occur headless, and fill a variety of syntactic roles.

2.1. Regular clauses: Examples of regular clauses are given in section 1.1. above ((3), (4)) and details are described in 1.2.. The simplest clauses

are those which contain no nouns. The presence of some pre-nominal morphemes accompanying a noun often obscures the presence of suffix pronouns for phonological reasons (note 3). For this reason, most of the examples in this section contain only pronouns: suffixes indicate Subject or Object, an Ergative clitic indicates the Agent. In addition to (3) and (4), some examples are (pronouns are highlighted):

- |   |   |
|---|---|
| (5) ntá wilskí-t<br>which.way SUB be/lie-3                | Where is it?<br><i>Nda wil sgít?</i>                    |
| (6) ntá mə wilskí-t<br>which.way 2ERG SUB be/lie/put.s.-3 | Where did you put it?<br><i>Nda mi wil sgít?</i>        |
| (7) ?akú=t wá-t<br>what=NC name-3                         | What is it? What is it called?<br><i>Aguhl wat?</i>     |
| (8) ?akúməsiwáT-t<br>what=NC name.s.-3                    | What do you call (= name) it?<br><i>Agu mi siwadit?</i> |

In (5) to (8), as in most regular clauses, the predicate is preceded by an introductory element. But in (9) and (10) there is no such element:

- |  |   |
|--|---|
| (9) tisk <sup>w</sup> -y<br>finished-1S            | [I am] finished!<br><i>Hlsgwiý!</i>                   |
| (10) nəqaksfisa?an-t<br>1S.ERG finally finish.s.-3 | [I] finally finished it!<br><i>Na gaks hlisa'ant!</i> |

The presence of such a pre-predicate element is therefore not the crucial feature distinguishing the two types of clause.

2.2. Relative clauses: Relative clauses can occur with or without a head noun. Headless relative clauses are very frequent. As in a regular clause, the predicate may be accompanied by particles and modifiers.

2.2.1. Relativization as Agent: The Agent is marked by the 3rd person Ergative clitic *t* together with the Ergative-Relative (E.REL) clitic ?an ən, while the Object is marked by a suffix pronoun. The presence of ?an is the only difference between an Agent-relative and a regular transitive clause.

- |   |  |
|---|--|
| (11) ná: t ?an wó?-y<br>who 3ERG E.REL call.s.-1S                                   | Who <sup>13</sup> [was it that] called me?<br><i>Naa t an wo'oy?</i>               |
| (12) Máry t ?an wó?-n<br>M. 3ERG E.REL call.s.-2S                                   | Mary [is the one who] called you.<br><i>Mary t an wo'on.</i>                       |
| (13) tɑ: wít <sup>w</sup> -[t]=t ?an wó?-n<br>now come-[3]=NC 3ERG E.REL call.s.-2S | The one who called you has come back.<br><i>Hlaa wít<sup>w</sup>hl t an wo'on.</i> |

2.2.2. Relativization as Subject: The Subject is marked by the suffix -ət.<sup>14</sup> This suffix does not seem to be further analyzable (see also note 19).

- |   |  |
|---|--|
| (14) ná=tkipé?esk <sup>w</sup> -ət.ló.-y<br>who=NC wait-S.REL IND-1S                | Who [was it that] was waiting for me?<br><i>Naahl gibe'esgwit looy?</i>                                |
| (15) Máry=tkipé?esk <sup>w</sup> -ət.ló.-n<br>M.=NC wait-S.REL IND-2S               | Mary [is the one who] was waiting for you. <i>Maryhl gibe'esgwit loon.</i>                             |
| (16) tɑ: pák <sup>w</sup> -[t]=tqɑ-rá.t-ət<br>now come.back-[3]=NC PL-fishing-S.REL | The fishermen are back. (lit. the ones who fished/were fishing are back). <i>Hlaa bakwhl ga'aadit.</i> |

2.2.3. Relativization as Object: An Object occurs only in a transitive clause, which also has an Agent. This Agent is marked by a final suffix

pronoun. Object-relativization is marked by the suffix **-ə-15** (highlighted here) occurring between the predicate stem and this pronoun. The morpheme **-ə-** then, is none other than the Object-relative suffix:

(17) **ʔa: wɪk<sup>W</sup>-[t]=ʔ hanáq=ʔ kipá-yə-sih**

now come.back-[3]=NC woman=NC wait.for.s.-O.REL-2P

The woman [that] you are/were all waiting for is back.

*Hlaa wɪkwɪl hanakʔhl gɪbayisih.*

(18) **ʔamqókit=ʔ si: kútáq=ʔ kík<sup>W</sup>-ə-n** The new coat [that] you bought is pretty=NC new coat=NC buy.s.-O.REL-2N very nice.

*Amqogithl sii k'udatsʔhl giigwin.*

Object-relative clauses have not always been recognized as such because the idiomatic English translation is often not a relative clause.<sup>16</sup>

(19) **ntá=ʔ qatipti:-[t]=ʔ amʔúkit=ʔ ti: hax)hó:x-ə-t**

which.way=NC size.PL-[3]=NC clothes=NC indeed PL)use.s.-O.REL-3

What size [clothes] does s/he wear?

(lit. what are the sizes of the clothes that s/he wears?)

*Ndahl gadipdiihl am'ugithl dii haxhooyitʔ*

And in many cases, a pause in delivery may have prevented recognition:

(10) **ñi[t]=ʔ kɪ:ksax tkiñám-[t]=ʔ k<sup>W</sup>áik<sup>W</sup>a: tɔúx ... qan=ʔ k<sup>W</sup>áik<sup>W</sup>a: lá.x<sup>W</sup> yéqT-ə-t ʔa=ʔ k<sup>W</sup>ilqá-ñi[t]=ʔ hu)wóʔotk<sup>W</sup>-t==ki:**

that's=NC and only 3ERG give.s.-[3]=NC dry halibut ... and=NC dry trout distribute.s.-O.REL-3 PREP=NC all-that's=NC PI)guest-3==DISTAL

*Ñihl k'ii ksaxt giñamhl gwalgwa tɔox ... ganhl gwalgwa laaxw, yeekdit ahl gwilk'a ñihl huwo'otkw-t-gi.*

(a) [Boas' translation] Then he presented them with dried halibut ... and trout. **He gave presents** to all those whom he had invited. (161:9-11)<sup>17</sup>

(b) [New translation] Then he gave presents of dried halibut ... and dried trout, **which he distributed** to all his guests.

In the following sentences, a headless Object-relative clause follows a higher clause which consists only of a single predicate (noun, adjective or verb).<sup>18</sup>

(21) **ná:=ʔ kipá-yə-t**

who=NC wait.for.s.-O.REL-3

Who did s/he wait/was s/he waiting for? (lit. Who is the one that s/he waited/was waiting for?) *Naahl gɪbayitʔ*

(22) **Lúcy=ʔ kipá-yə-t**

L.=NC wait.for.s.-O.REL-3

S/he waited/was waiting for LUCY. (lit. The one that s/he waited/was waiting for is Lucy). *Lucyhl gɪbayitʔ*

(23) **ʔakú=ʔ timkík<sup>W</sup>-ə-t**

what=NC FUT buy.s.-O.REL-3

What is s/he going to buy? (lit. what is it that s/he will buy). *Aguhl dim giigwitʔ*

(24) **si: kútáq=ʔ tim kík<sup>W</sup>-ə-t**

new coat=NC FUT buy.s.-O.REL-3

S/he is going to buy a new coat. (lit. What s/he will buy is a new coat). *Sii k'udatsʔhl dim giigwitʔ*

(25) **ñi[t]=ʔ timkík<sup>W</sup>-ə-t**

that's=NC FUT buy.s.-O.REL-3

That's what w/he is going to buy *Ñihl dim giigwitʔ*

2.3. Differences between Regular and Relative clauses: In regular clauses, the predicate phrase can be summarized in the following formula:

(E) Pred-S/O

where E is the Ergative clitic occurring only in transitive clauses, while S/O indicates the obligatory person/number suffix indicating the

intransitive Subject or transitive Object.

The structure of Nisgha relative clauses can be summarized in the following formulas:

- Agent-relative: [head] E + E.REL Pred-O
- Subject-relative: [head] Pred-S
- Object-relative: [head] Pred-O-E

Although the Relative clauses are more highly differentiated, comparison with the Regular clause shows parallelisms:

- the relativized Agent, like the regular Agent, is indicated by an Ergative pre-predicate clitic;

- the relativized Subject and the relativized Object are both indicated by special suffixes.<sup>20</sup>

The major structural difference occurs in transitive clauses: while in Agent-relativized clauses the marking of the Object is identical to its marking in regular transitive clauses, in Object-relativized clauses the Agent is marked by a person/number suffix, not a clitic as in regular clauses. However, since the suffix *-ə-* uniquely identifies the presence of a relativized Object (whether mentioned or not in the clause), the person/number suffix can only indicate the Agent. As mentioned above (end of 1.2.), person/number suffixes are just that, and are not also case-markers, unlike the Ergative clitic pronouns. The result of this use of the person/number suffix to mark the Agent is a strong parallelism between Subject- and Object-relative clauses, which both end in suffixes.<sup>20</sup>

3. From Object-relative to transitive Predicate-focused clause: The morpheme *-ə-* can be identified as the Object-relative suffix by

comparing the different types of relative clauses. However, it is still true that it also occurs in transitive predicate-focused clauses (1.). Previous descriptions (T 1982, 1989), which took the predicate-focused clause as primary, considered the Object-relative clause as derived from the predicate-focused clause. The present description takes the opposite view that the transitive predicate-focused clause is derived from the headless Object-relative clause. The latter can perform both non-predicative and predicative roles in a sentence.

3.1. Headless relative clauses performing non-predicative roles: In the following examples, Object-relative clauses (predicate phrase highlighted) can take the role of Subject or Object of the main verb, in a complex sentence:<sup>21</sup>

- Subject:

(26) ʔáq=t kíp-ə-ŷ I have nothing to eat. (lit. What I  
non-existent=NC eat.s.-O.REL-1S eat is non-existent). *Akhl gibliŷ*

(27) ni ki ski-t cə tim kíp-ə-[t]-t t kù:k<sup>W</sup>-[t]-t sim ʔó kit  
not be/11e-3 IRR FUT eat.s.-O.REL-[3]=NC ch11d-[3]=NC chief  
The chief's daughter had nothing to eat. (146.2)  
(lit. What the chief's daughter was possibly going to eat wasn't there)  
*Nigii sgit ji dim gibihl higuuhlkwhl sim'oogit*

- Object (usually with the particle *ti* 'previously' *nii*):

(28) ta-t hux<sup>W</sup> wá-[t]-t ti wá-ya-[t]-t wák-t  
now-3ERG again reach.s.-[3]=NC previously reach.s.-O.REL-[3]=NC MBRO-3  
When again he reached what (= the place that) his brother had reached ...  
(202.4-5)  
*Hlaat huxw wahl nii wayihl wakt*

3.2. Headless O-relative clause raised to sentence predicate: In English, a sentence of the form 'What I like is X' can be transformed into 'X is what I

like". Exactly the same process happens in Nisgha: for instance:

- (29)  $k\acute{u}t\acute{a}\acute{c}=i\ k\acute{i}k^W-\acute{a}-t$  S/he bought a/the coat. (lit. What  
coat=NC buy.s.-O.REL-3 s/he bought is a/the coat).  
*K'udats'ni giigwis.*

This sentence can be reversed into:

- (30)  $k\acute{i}k^W-\acute{a}-t=i\ k\acute{u}t\acute{a}\acute{c}$  S/he bought a/the coat. (lit.  
buy.s.-O.REL-3=NC coat A/the coat is what s/he bought).  
*Giigwithi k'udats'.*

A sentence like (30) shows the lexical items in the same order as the corresponding idiomatic English translation, and the two sentences will in most cases be given as equivalents of each other, but neither the morphosyntactic structure nor the pragmatic effect of the two is equivalent. The English sentence is a 'simple declarative clause,' with neutral impact unless extra stress is placed on one of the components. The Nisgha sentence is not neutral, but highly marked. The form of the predicate in the Nisgha sentence is that of an Object-relative clause; the pragmatic effect is focus on that predicate, not on the noun. For instance, only (29), never (30), can be used as the answer to the following question:

- (31)  $?ak\acute{u}=i\ k\acute{i}k^W-\acute{a}-t$  What did s/he buy? (lit. what is it  
what=NC buy.s.-O.REL-3 that s/he bought) *Aguhi giigwis?*

A transitive predicate-focused clause, then, is one in which a headless Object-relative clause is used as the predicate. This can occur whether the Agent argument is indicated only by a pronoun, as in (31) above, or whether it is accompanied by an adjunct noun. Compare the following:

- (32)  $?ak\acute{u}=i\ k\acute{i}k^W-\acute{a}-[t]=s[t]M\acute{a}ry$  What did Mary buy? (lit. what is it  
what=NC buy.s.-O.REL-[3]=DC [DM] M. that Mary bought)  
*Aguhi giigwis Mary?*

- (33)  $k\acute{u}t\acute{a}\acute{c}=i\ k\acute{i}k^W-\acute{a}-[t]=s[t]M\acute{a}ry$  Mary bought a coat. (lit. What Mary  
coat=NC buy.s.-O.REL-[3]=DC [DM] M. bought is a coat)<sup>22</sup>  
*K'udats'ni giigwis Mary.*

- (34)  $k\acute{i}k^W-\acute{a}-[t]=s[t]M\acute{a}ry=i\ k\acute{u}t\acute{a}\acute{c}$  Mary bought the coat. (lit. The  
buy.s.-O.REL-[3]=DC [DM] M.=NC coat coat is what Mary bought)  
*Giigwis Maryhi k'udats'.*

In English, the literal translations of these sentences, while grammatical, are not characteristic of normal conversation. Translated into colloquial French (cf. T 1988), these sentences retain their flavour as well as their argument structure:

- (32a) *Aguhi giigwis Mary?* Qu'est-ce [que c'est] qu'elle a  
acheté, Marie?<sup>23</sup>
- (33a) *K'udats'ni giigwis Mary.* Ce qu'elle a acheté, Marie, c'est un  
manteau.
- (34a) *Giigwis Maryhi k'udats'.* Le manteau, c'est ce qu'elle a  
acheté, Marie.

In sentences such as (4) or (34), the predicate occurs first and a noun which seems to indicate the Object (semantically if not syntactically) is present in the clause. In most natural utterances however, there is no such noun. The headless relative clause can be a complete clause, where the emphasis is primarily on the predicate, secondarily on the Agent. Such clauses imply an Object, formally through the morpheme  $-i-$  and pragmatically through the immediately preceding context. This is especially frequent in conversation, when the semantic Object has been mentioned in the previous context (semantic Object highlighted):

- (35)  $nt\acute{a}=i\ wil-[t]=i\ k\acute{u}t\acute{a}\acute{c}=i\ k^W i\ \acute{a}\acute{q}alI-\acute{a}-\acute{m}h -k\acute{i}k^W-\acute{a}-[t]=s[t]M\acute{a}ry$   
which.way=NC be/act-[3]=NC coat=NC about examine.s.-O.REL-1P -

buy.s.-O.REL-[3]=DC [DM] M.

what happened to **the coat** we were looking at? - Mary **bought** it.  
(lit. it's what Mary bought)<sup>24</sup>

*Ndahl wi'hl k'udats'hl kw'ihl laak'aldim? - Giigwis Mary.*

(36) ká7-[t]=t kutá8-t k:k<sup>w</sup>-ə-ȳ-ʔanóq-ə-n==a-ʔanóq-ə-ȳ  
see.s.-[3]=NC coat=NC buy.s.-O.REL-1S - like.s.-O.REL-2S==0 -  
like.s.-O.REL-1S

Look at **the coat** I bought. Do you **like** it? - Certainly! (lit. is it what you like? - It is what I like, naturally).<sup>24</sup>

*Ga'ahl k'udats'hl giigwi'ȳ. Anoogana? - Anoogayis!*

(37) hi: ȳáq=t ʔú:q ʔa=t lax-ʔanísT - way tim ʔúx-ə-[t]=t  
txa hi:tk<sup>w</sup>s-[t]=t qaymáqs-ət  
on=hang=ND copper PREP=NC on-branch - well! FUT hit.s.-O.REL-[3]=NC  
all-[3]=NC young-S.REL

'There is **a piece of copper** hanging on a branch; I want all the young men to try to knock it down.' (lit. ... that all the young men will try to knock down) (138:3-4)

*Niiyáhl uuq ahl lax anist; way dim uyihl txaanitkwshl k'aymaksit!*

This type of clause also occurs frequently in narratives (e.g. Boas 1902). These consist mostly of series of regular clauses, often expanded by relative clauses, whether headless or with noun antecedents. Sentences then are often very long and complex. Transitive Predicate-focused sentences, if considered as basic clauses, appear oddly isolated among these long flowing passages. When seen on paper, they often seem to introduce new material after a pause, often with what seems to be unnecessary repetition of lexical material. Oral narrators, on the other hand, use them right after other material, thereby adding details: this delivery makes sense if the sentence indeed contains a relative clause, which provides a link to what precedes, rather than signalling a break with it or an aside. The predicate-focused relative clause may also be used in the absence of any semantically fitting noun, if the general semantic context is appropriate. In this way the predicate-focused clause becomes

more structurally independent, but still linked to the context of discourse. However, literal translation of such clauses into English as relative clauses is often very awkward if not impossible, and idiomatic translation often uses other syntactic devices to link them to previous context:

(38) hi:[t]=t ki: wí: lu:=láȳ-t - sim qalksə=ʔá:cax-ə-[t] kát==ki:  
that's=NC and big in=large-3 - really through=reach.s.-O.REL-[3]=NC  
man==DISTAL

Then it [the crack in the tree] became **wide enough for a man to get through** (148.9) (lit. ... became very wide, [it was something] which a man could get through).

*Nihl k'ii wii luulayt, sim qalks'aajaxahl gat-gi.*

(40) hi:[t]=t ki: ʔáikax-t ʔa=t tku-wilksitk<sup>w</sup> - máit-ə-t t wá-[t]=t  
qáq=t tku lá:x<sup>w</sup>  
that's=NC and speak-3 PREP=NC little-prince(ss) - tell.s.-O.REL-3 JERG  
reach.s.-[3]=NC raven=NC little trout

Then he spoke to the princess, **telling her** that the raven had found a little trout (152:3-4). (lit. ... what he told her was that ...)

*Nihl k'ii algaxt ahl higu wilksihkw, mahldit t wahl gaakhl higu laaxw.*

(40) hi:[t]=t ki: -t lu:=máqsaʔan-t ʔa=t wil sáq̄-t wí: qàn==ki: -  
lu:=sq̄a=ʔax)úx-ə-t=ki:  
that's=NC and-3ERG in=put.s.pl.-3 PREP=NC SUB cracked-3 big  
tree==DISTAL - in=barring=PL)hit.s.-O.REL-3==DISTAL

He put them [the lengths of wood] in the crack of the big tree, **hammering** them into place [to prevent it from closing]. (148.12-13)

*Nihl k'iiit luumaks'a'ant ahl wil sakt wii gan-gi, luusga'ax'uyit-gi.*  
(modern: ... *wil sakt'hl wii gan-gi* ...).

4. Two morphophonemic problems solved: The recognition of the morpheme -ə- as the Object-relative suffix, and of the transitive-focused clause as structurally complex, provides a solution to two morphophonemic problems: how to characterize the morphological structure of the 3rd person plural forms in these clauses, and how to explain some

discrepancies in the interaction between suffix pronouns and connectives.

4.1. The underlying structure of 3rd person plural forms: Object-relativized predicates take the Object-relative suffix *-ə-* between the transitive stem and the suffix pronoun, except, it seems, in the 3rd person plural: compare the 3rd person singular and plural forms for the verb *kí:k<sup>w</sup>* 'to buy *s*': *giikw*:

*kí:k<sup>w</sup>ət* 'what s/he bought'      *kí:k<sup>w</sup>tít* 'what they bought'

What appears to be the third person plural morpheme *-tít* *-diit* can be analyzed into the old indefinite plural *-tí*: *-di* and the 3rd person suffix *-t* which is undifferentiated for number (T 1989: 617ff.). It was suggested in T 1983 (210-211, fn. 90) that the reason for the lack of surface appearance of *-ə-* with these morphemes is that it is placed not before, but between them, thus for instance:

*kí:k<sup>w</sup>ət* < *kí:k<sup>w</sup>-ə-t*                      *kí:k<sup>w</sup>tít* < *kí:k<sup>w</sup>-tí-ə-t*

with the vocalic morpheme *-ə-* merging with the preceding long vowel. This interpretation, based on purely structural criteria since the morpheme never appears on the surface under these conditions, could be considered doubtful as long as the morpheme seemed to be linked in some way with the following suffix, for instance indicating its Ergative function. There is no such obstacle if the two are considered as quite separate, with *-ə-* as Object-Relative suffix occurring just before the personal suffix.

4.2. The morphophonemics of connective use: Nisgha has two 'connectives' (Boas' term), syntactic suffixes which link together major elements of the clause or sentence. Some differences in the use of these suffixes in the different types of transitive sentences are readily explainable when the true nature of the transitive predicate-focused sentence is recognized.

Of the two connectives, *=s* occurs before determinates (mostly proper

nouns) and *=í* before non-determinate elements, including other clauses. Many observations apply equally to the use of both connectives, but because of some of their differences it is easier to describe the problems separately.

4.2.1. The determinate connective =s:

4.2.1.1. In regular clauses: As mentioned above (2.1.), the regular Nisgha clause includes a predicate with pronominal arguments which may be specified by nominal adjuncts. If these adjuncts are determinates, the first (or only) nominal adjunct is linked to the predicate by a connective (both the 3 suffix pronoun *-t* and the pronominal singular determinate marker *t* disappear from the surface in the presence of *=s*, for phonological reasons, see note 6 and T 1989: ).

(41) *yuk<sup>w</sup>-t kípá-t*                                      S/he is/was waiting for him/her.  
PROG-3ERG wait.for.s.-[3]=DC [DM] M. DML.      *Yukwt gíbat.*

(42 = 4) *yuk<sup>w</sup>-t kípá-[t]=s[t]Máry t Lúcy*      *Yukwt gíbas Mary t Lucy.*  
PROG-3ERG wait.for.s.-[3]=DC [DM] M. DML.      Mary is/was waiting for Lucy.

(43) *yuk<sup>w</sup>-t kípá-[t]=s[t]Máry*                      *Yukwt gíbas Mary.*  
PROG-3ERG wait.for.s.-[3]=DC [DM] M.              Mary is/was waiting for her

(44) *yuk<sup>w</sup>-t kípá-[t]=s[t]Lúcy*                      *Yukwt gíbas Lucy.*  
PROG-3ERG wait.for.s.-[3]=DC [DM] L.              She is/was waiting for Lucy.

As the noun immediately following the predicate is linked to it by *=s*, regardless of its function, stress is the only way to determine whether the noun in (43) and (44) is meant as referring to the Agent or the Object.

4.2.1.2. In transitive predicate-focused sentences: In transitive predicate-focused sentences, the determinate noun is linked by *=s* only if it refers to the Agent, not the Object:



(45 = 4)  $\text{kipá-yə-[t]=s[t]Màry t Lúcy}$  Mary waited/was waiting for  
 wait.for.s.-O.REL-[3]=DC [DM] M. DM L. Lucy (lit. Lucy is who Mary  
 waited/was waiting for).  
*Gibayis Mary t Lucy*

(46)  $\text{kipá-yə-[t]=s[t]Màry}$  Mary waited/was waiting for her.  
 wait.for.s.-O.REL-[3]=DC [DM] M. (lit. [She was] who Mary waited  
 for) *Gibayis Mary.*

(47)  $\text{kipá-yə-t t Lúcy}$  She waited for Lucy. (lit. Lucy is  
 wait.for.s.-O.REL-3 DM L. who she waited for)  
*Gibayit t Lucy.*

4.2.1.3. Discussion: if (45) is considered a basic type of clause, and (42) derived, it is difficult to justify the different treatment of the noun adjuncts to the Agent and Object. However, the recognition that (42) (or rather (41)) is the basic structure, and (45) the complex one, affords an obvious solution.

In a regular clause such as (41), both Ergative and non-Ergative pronominal arguments are indispensable. In (42), both these pronominal arguments have nominal adjuncts, only the first of which can be linked to the predicate. In (43) and (44), only one of the arguments has a nominal adjunct: but any adjunct to a pronoun can be linked to the predicate, hence either the Agent or Object adjunct noun can be linked by =s.

In a transitive predicate-focused clause like (45), the clause predicate is itself a headless Object-relative clause. The predicate in this clause has two suffixes: -ə- refers to an implied Object, but is not itself the Object argument, therefore it cannot have an adjunct; only the person/number suffix, here the 3rd person -t, representing the Agent, is an argument of the predicate and can have a nominal adjunct. Therefore, only the adjunct to the Agent can be linked to the predicate by =s.

4.2.1.2. The non-determinate connective =t: In front of non-determinates, the non-determinate connective =t combines the functions of both the determinate connective and the determinate markers, so that it appears in the place of both.<sup>25</sup> Compare (42) above and (48), and also (45) and (49):

(48)  $\text{yuk}^W\text{-tkipá-[t]=t hanàq=t tki:k}^W\text{-t}$   
 PROG-3ERG wait.for.s.-[3]=NC woman=NC WSIS  
 The woman is/was waiting for her sister.  
*yukwt gibayit hanak'hi hgiikwt.*

(49)  $\text{kipá-yə-[t]t hanàq=t tki:k}^W\text{-t}$   
 wait.for.s.-O.REL-[3]=NC woman=NC WSIS-3  
 The woman waited/was waiting for her sister.  
 (lit. Her sister was who the woman was waiting for)  
*Gibayithi hanak'hi hgiikwt.*

The morphophonemic rules which cause the surface disappearance of the 3rd person suffix -t in the presence of =s apply also in the presence of =t, so that one would expect the suffix to disappear in the non-determinate equivalents to both (46) (which has =s) and (47) (which does not); as in (43) and (44), the only difference would be the stress pattern. But only (50), the equivalent of (46), shows loss of the suffix before =t:

(50)  $\text{kipá-yə-[t]t hanàq}$  The woman waited/was waiting for her.  
 wait.for.s.-O.REL-[3]=NC woman (lit. She was who the woman waited for.)  
*Gibayithi hanak'.*

(51)  $\text{kipá-yə-t=t tki:k}^W\text{-t}$  She waited for her sister.  
 (lit. Her sister was who she waited for)  
*Gibayithi hgiikwt.*

Again, this discrepancy is strange if it is assumed that the two nouns are on the same syntactic level, part of the same phrase, but it is entirely explainable if they are not. In (50), the noun is an adjunct to the suffix

representing the Agent, the only argument of the verb, therefore it is linked to it by the 'connective' and the morphophonemic, or perhaps morphophonosyntactic rule applies. In (51), the noun is not an adjunct to the suffix, and the function of the 'connective' =t is to indicate the nature of the following noun (as the determinate marker t does in (47)), not to link this noun with the predicate. This prevents the application of the rule.<sup>26</sup>

4. The structure of predicate-focused clauses: Having described the transitive predicate-focused clause as complex rather than basic, it is now possible to compare transitive with intransitive predicate-focused clauses and to identify their common features.

4.1. Unlike regular clauses, which have a pronominal argument structure, where nouns are optional lexical adjuncts to the pronouns, the predicate-focused clauses, both intransitive and transitive, seem to consist of a predicate (simple for intransitive or nominal predicate, complex for transitive) and a lexical argument, which may be deleted:

	Predicate:	Argument:	
(52 = 1)	kipé?esk <sup>W</sup> wait	t MARY DM M.	Mary <u>waited</u> / was <u>waiting</u> . <i>Gibe'eskw ... t Mary.</i>
(53)	kipé?esk <sup>W</sup> wait		S/he <u>waited</u> / was <u>waiting</u> . <i>Gibe'eskw.</i>
(54)	t ku hanáq little woman	t MARY DM M.	Mary is a <u>little girl</u> . <i>Higu hanak' ... t Mary.</i>
(55)	MARY=t M.=NC	wá-t name-3	Her name is <u>Mary</u> . <i>Mary... ...ni wat.</i>
(56 = 2)	kipá-yə-[t]-s[t]MARY	t LUCY	Mary <u>waited</u> / was <u>waiting</u> for Lucy

wait.for.s.-O.REL-[3]=DC [DM] M. DM L. (lit. Lucy is who Mary waited for).  
*Gibayis Mary ... t Lucy.*

(57) kipá-yə-[t]-s[t]MARY Mary waited / was waiting for her  
wait.for.s.-O.REL-[3]=DC [DM] M. (lit. She is who Mary waited for).  
*Gibayis Mary.*

(58) kík<sup>W</sup>-ə-[t]-s[t]MARY =t kutáč Mary bought the coat. (lit. the coat  
buy s.-OO.REL-[3]=DC [DM] M.=NC coat is what Mary bought).  
*Gigwis Mary... ...ni k'udats:*

The lexical argument may be a noun, other predicate, or a clause, as in:

(59) má:t-ə-t t wá-[t]=t qàq=t t ku lá:x<sup>W</sup>  
announce.s.-O.REL-3 3ERG reach.s.-[3]=NC raven=NC little trout  
He told her that the raven had found a little trout. (152:3-4)  
(lit. what he told [her] was that ... )  
*Manidit ... t wani gaaghi higu laaxw.*

Note that practically all the (literal) English translations include the verb *to be*, which is not needed in Nisgha as practically all lexical items can be clause predicates. This being so, the Nisgha sentences above could be considered as 'copulative' sentences, even though there is no overt 'copula' (cf. Russian *ya doktor* 'I [am] a doctor'). The meaning of a copulative sentence is not always equational, but it states a relation between the two elements of the sentence. (Note that in English, sentences such as *She is waiting* also have the form of a copulative sentence, because of the use of *to be* as an auxiliary).

4.2 If the lexical argument refers to a first or second person, it cannot be a suffix pronoun as in the regular clause, but an independent word consisting of the deictic base *ni(:)*- and a suffix pronoun.<sup>27</sup>

(60 = 1) kipé?esk<sup>W</sup> ní-ŷ I waited / was waiting.

	wait	that's-1S	<i>Gibe'eskw ... ñiiy</i>
(61)	slpk <sup>W</sup> sick	ñi-ŷ that's-1S	I am <u>sick</u> . <i>Siipkw ... ñiiy</i>

Rather than 'independent pronouns' (T 1989:\*\*\*), these complex words should rather be considered as consisting (at least originally) of a deictic *predicate* ñi 'that's..., it's ...' (Fr. *C'est ...*) with suffixed arguments. In the third person, the predicate is often used in a regular intransitive clause, for instance after a subordinator, as in:

(62)	ʔa: hux <sup>W</sup> ñi-t==a?-ʔ hu)wíl-ət	So that <u>was</u> him again! (Boas)
	now (=SUB) again that's-3==ASST=NC ASP)be/act-S.REL	
		(lit. now again that <u>was</u> him doing it)
		<i>Hlaa huxw ñida'ahl huwilit!</i>

With first and second person, it is more usual not to have a subordinator or other introductory word (cf. 2.1.). Such clauses are used in a variety of contexts, especially as higher clauses followed by relative clauses in sentences such as:

(63)	ñi.-n=ʔ hu)wíl-ət	It's/it was <u>you</u> ! (lit. it was you
	that's-2S=NC ASP)be/act-S.REL	who were doing it) <i>Ñiinh! huwilit!</i>
(64)	ñi.-n=ʔkipá-yə-ŷ	I am/was waiting for <u>you</u> . (lit. it's
	that's-2S=NC wait.for.s.-O.REL-1S	you that I am/was waiting for).
		<i>Ñiinh! gibayiy.</i>

They can also be used as complete utterances, as in:

(64)	ñi.-n==a MARY - ñi.-ŷ==əs[t]	Is that you, Mary? -- Yes (it's me)!
	that's-2S=Q M. - that's-1S==AFF	who were doing it)
		<i>Ñiina, Mary? -- Ñiiyis!</i>
		(Fr. C'est toi, Marie? ~ C'est moi!)

Such constructions are not restricted to the first and second persons, but

can occur with any personal suffix:

(65)	ó: - ñi-t==a:	Oh, is that so?
	oh! - that's-3==Q	<i>Oo, ñida?</i>

With a third person suffix, ñi- may also be used to refer to a preceding word, phrase or clause, which is not itself the clause predicate. Again, this structure is very reminiscent of the French *C'est ...* construction, for instance:

(66)	tim-t ʔankiti=kú:-[t]=ʔk <sup>W</sup> ilkswóxk <sup>W</sup> -ət+hí-t==sa-	
	ñi-[t]=ʔñi-t tim-t ʔannáksk <sup>W</sup> -[t]=ʔk <sup>W</sup> ú-ʔk <sup>W</sup> -ŷ	
	FUT-ERG E.REL back=take.s.pl.-[3]=NC bark.at.self-S.REL+talk-3==PROX -	
	that's=NC that's=NC FUT-3ERG E.REL marry.s.-[3]=NC child-1S	
		The one who gets the white bear will marry my daughter. (lit. [The one] who gets the self-barker, that's who will marry ...) (141:8-10)
		(Celui qui rapportera l'ours blanc, c'est celui-là qui épousera ma fille).
		<i>Dimt an gidiguun! gwilkswoxgwit-hit-sa, ñihl ñit dimt an nakskwhl ñiguuhlgwiy.</i>

The same description applies to the transitive predicate-focused clause, which translate very easily into French, for instance:

(67)	kipá-yə-t ñi-ŷ	S/he <u>waited</u> /was <u>waiting</u> for me.
	wait.for.s.-O.REL-3 that's-1S	(lit. what s/he waited for - that's me)
		<i>Gibayit ñiiy.</i>
		(Ce qu'il/elle attendait, c'était moi).

A noun coreferring with the Agent suffix -t can occur after ñi-, as a postposed adjunct to the suffix, again as in French:

(68)	kipá-yə-t ñi-ŷ t MARY	Mary <u>waited</u> / was <u>waiting</u> for me.
	wait.for.s.-O.REL-3 that's-1S DM1M.	(Ce qu'elle attendait, c'était moi,
		Marie -- where <i>Marie</i> refers to the

pronoun *elle*, T 1988, 1989).

The French sentences, although much more common, or even possible, than the literal English equivalents, are highly marked constructions, where both elements include a predicate.

4.3. We can conclude that the sentences hitherto described as predicate-focused clauses, both intransitive (including nominal and adjectival) and transitive, are highly marked complex sentences in which the main predicate (in the first part) appears without the non-Ergative argument (unlike the regular clause, where this argument is obligatory). In suitable context, the sentence may consist of this predicate alone, but usually it is juxtaposed to another predicate or a clause, which serves as its argument in a copulative construction.

5. Concluding remarks: The identity of the mystery morpheme *-ə-* is made clear when its function is studied in its original context of the Object-relative clause, rather than in the derived context of the transitive Predicate-focused clause incorrectly taken as basic. The correct identification of this morpheme is not just a simple morphological readjustment, but causes us to view the transitive Predicate-focused clause in a different light, as a complex rather than a simple clause. In turn, the discovery of the complex structure of the transitive predicate-focused clause provides the basis for comparison with its intransitive counterpart and for the identification of these clauses as copulative clauses.

Just as the identification of transitive predicate-focused clauses as including Object-relative clauses illuminates both the structure of these clauses and their use in discourse, the recognition the structure of predicate-focused clauses should remove the obstacle that researchers have found in the existence of two types of Nisgha clauses. The problem arose because the two types seemed to have the same declarative or narrative function; it disappears once the difference is correctly identified. In most languages, copulative clauses do exhibit significant

differences from other types of clauses, just as relative clauses are different from clauses considered as basic.

The morphosyntactic differences between the two clause types in Nisgha and its linguistic relatives have been considered by some as evidence of 'split ergativity' conditioned by clause type, the only known example of such conditioning, at variance with more usual criteria such as animacy or degree of involvement of the participants, or aspect of the verb (Dixon 1979, Hagège 198 ): for Nisgha, this view can no longer be seriously entertained, since it is entirely expected that relative clauses should have a structure different from that of regular clauses, and between copulative and other types of clause.

The identification of the morpheme *-ə-* then turns out to be the key to the description of the syntactic structure of the Nisgha language.

#### NOTES

\* The ancestral language of the Nisgha /nisqáʔ/ [nisgáʔa] *Nisgáʔa* people, who live in the Nass Valley of British Columbia, belongs to the Tsimshianic family along with Gitksan and Tsimshian. The data presented here were collected during the course of my employment with the Bilingual/Bicultural Centre of B.C. School District #92 (Nisgha), in 1977-80 and 1983-88 as well as in the summers of 1982, 1989 and 1990. 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 Nisgha 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 Nisgha 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.

<sup>1</sup> e.g. Rigsby 1975, 1990, Tarpent 1981, 1982, Belvin 1985, 1990, Jelinek 1986, Hunt 1989.

<sup>2</sup> Nisgha examples are given first in morpheme-by-morpheme phonemic transcription, with morphemes under discussion highlighted by bold type. Elements between brackets are epenthetically added. Deletion of elements between square brackets is phonologically conditioned. Below the English (and sometimes French) translation, complete Nisgha examples are written in italics in standard Nisgha orthography.

<sup>3</sup> Morphemes between square brackets are deleted here because of the phonological rules of deaffrication and cluster-simplification, but do show up whenever phonological conditions allow, e.g. in (2), (3), (4), see T 1988.

<sup>4</sup> (a) Abbreviations: AFF Affirmative; ASP imperfective aspect; ASST Assertive; DC determinate connective; DM determinate marker; EREL Ergative-relative pronoun; ERG Ergative pronoun; FUT future; IND Indirect pronoun stem; IRR Irrealis; NC non-determinate connective; O Object; OREL Object-relative pronoun; P or PL plural; PROG progressive auxiliary; Q Interrogative; S Subject (of Intransitive) or Singular; SREL Subject-relative pronoun; SUB subordinator; SUFF unidentified suffix.

(b) 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.

(c) The suffix -t is glossed as '3' rather than '3S' because it is undifferentiated for number.

<sup>5</sup> see examples (9), (10)

<sup>6</sup> The suffix pronoun rarely appears on the surface before a coreferring

noun, for phonological reasons -- see note 3.

<sup>7</sup> -yǝ- after vowel, -ǝ- after resonant in unstressed syllable, -ǝ- elsewhere.

<sup>8</sup> see note 6.

<sup>10</sup> including the 'independent pronoun stem' *ni-* (see 4.2.) and the 'indirect pronoun stem' *io-*.

<sup>11</sup> Livingston 1985 circumvented this difficulty by treating the complex -ǝ- + suffix pronoun as a single Ergative morpheme, but her analysis has not been accepted by other researchers.

<sup>12</sup> e.g. although most of the basic, data-type information in this paper was already presented (with a different emphasis) in T 82, the role of the morpheme was not recognized there, see note 20.

<sup>13</sup> Nisgha equivalents of English interrogative pronouns are actually nouns with indefinite meaning, T 1989:319.

<sup>14</sup> -t after vowel, -ǝt otherwise.

<sup>15</sup> see note 7 about alternants.

<sup>16</sup> e.g. in T 1981, 1982 and later, relativization is considered as secondary to the process of *focusing*, which brings a constituent to first place in the sentence. The relationship between the two was emphasized in Jelinek 1986:11.

<sup>17</sup> Numbers between parentheses identify pages and lines in Boas 1902. Passages quoted have been corrected and unless otherwise noted, retranslated as well, as both text and translation contain numerous errors. Boas considered the Nisgha stories in his collection 'not particularly well-told.' It would be more accurate to say that his translations are not

particularity good.

18 In previous work (e.g. T 1981, 1982, 1989), these were considered 'Object-focused' clauses with fronting of the Object.

19 Although at present the Subject and Object suffixes are different, it is quite possible that at an earlier stage both had the form  $-ət$ : in Nisgha the consonant /t/ is very frequently lost before another consonant, and all the person-number suffixes consist or, or start with, a consonant; conversely, after vowel the O-Rel suffix, like other vowel-initial suffixes, inserts /y/, but  $y$ -insertion may also be a relatively recent development. This scenario seems more likely than one in which the Subject-relative suffix is analyzed into  $-ə-$  and  $-t$  and this final /t/ is interpreted as the 3rd person person/number suffix (Jelinek 1986:fn.2), since there is no need for two suffixes to mark a single argument.

20 In T 1982 the surface similarity between Subject- and Object-relativization was noted, but because the morpheme  $-ə-$  was thought to indicate Ergativity in the following suffix, the statement was made that 'there is no overt Relative Object pronoun.' (p. 66).

21 Other relative clauses can also be used in some of these roles, but this is not relevant to the present discussion.

22 Older Fluent speakers would translate this sentence as into English as 'A coat is what Mary bought', which preserves Nisgha word order as well as the relativized structure.

23 Words in brackets are used in less standard varieties, which have a very definite pronominal-argument structure, unlike the literary variety (see T 1988).

24 The literal translation reflects my interpretation of the structure of these sentences, not necessarily native speaker intuition of how these sentences should be translated into normal English.

25 The term 'connective' therefore is not totally appropriate in this case, but it has become traditional since Boas 1911.

26 cf. In French the rules of liaison, which apply within a phrase, but not between adjacent members of unrelated phrases.

27 This describes the general structure, but not the morphophonemics of these words, which cannot be derived by current morphophonemic rules. e.g. the addition of the IP suffix  $-m̄$  gives  $h̄u:m̄$  *huun̄* not  $*h̄i:m̄$ .

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