PREPOSITIONS IN STRAITS SALISH AND THE NOUN/VERB QUESTION

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0. Introduction. In this paper I would like to call attention to a particular aspect of the grammar of Straits Salish that has received comparatively little systematic attention to date: prepositional phrases. I will argue that the syntax of prepositional phrases provides important data bearing on the important question of whether or not these languages show a distinction between noun and verb at the level of lexical categories -- a much-disputed question of considerable interest for the study of language universals. Although the passing mention of the noun/verb problem was made early on by those working on the languages of the Northwest, including Boas, the problem was first addressed in depth by Kuipers (1968). Jacobsen (1979) considered the problem primarily in Nootka (Makahian). More recently, Kinkade (1983) has marshalled evidence in support of the claim that there is a noun/verb contrast in the Salish lexicon; Jelinek and Demera (1984), and Jelinek (in press) have concurred, while others, for example Hess and van Eijk (1985), have argued against this view.

A question that remains to be settled is whether there is variation across the members of the Salish family with respect to this feature; since there are important syntactic differences between members of the family, this would not be surprising. We need to determine whether or not the disagreement has arisen from conflicting data, or from differing analyses of essentially parallel data. In order to make headway in solving the problem, we need comparative studies of particular aspects of the syntax of these languages that bear on the question. In this paper, I provide data on the syntax of prepositions in Straits Salish in order to show how this evidence can contribute to the resolution of the problem. I focus on the Lummi language; examples given are Lummi unless otherwise identified. 1 I note also relevant data I have found in the literature on other Salish languages. I will provide some background in the form of an overview of the analysis given in Jelinek (in press) concerning the absence of a noun/verb contrast in Straits Salish. The central claim is that there is a single open lexical class in Straits Salish, the Adjoined Predicates. Within this class of predicates, various subclasses may be distinguished on morphological and semantic grounds; but the external syntactic behavior of these predicates is identical. All inflectable words are predicates, and show two properties:

1) Straits Salish Predicates
   a. Appear with Subject clitics to form finite clauses; and
   b. Appear with Demonstratives to form Determiner Phrases.

Subject clitics and Determiners do not cooccur, but any open-class word in Straits Salish can occur with either of these elements, deriving in the first case a sentence and in the other case a nominalized construction. The first of these two properties is associated with VPs, and the second is associated with NP with Nouns. It is the presence of these two contrasting properties of Straits Salish predicates that call into question the presence of a N/V distinction at the lexical level.

Straits Salish has both main or finite clauses and subordinate clauses, which are more complex derived structures introduced by a determiner/complementizer. These subordinate clause types are non-assertive: Propositional, Irrealis, and Relative clauses. The adjoined Relative clauses are of the "headless" or "internally headed" variety that is commonly seen in Native America, and constitute a class of referring expressions. Propositional and Relative clauses may be designated nominalized clauses.

The generalization that emerges from the study of Salish is that while the contrast between main and nominalized clause types may be a language universal, Salish provides evidence that the contrast between "zero-level" nouns and verbs at the lexical level may be subject to parametric variation. The claim is not simply that in Straits Salish, nouns may be derived from verbs, as is not uncommonly seen across languages; the claim is that there are no lexical items that on syntactic grounds are exclusively either noun or verb. There is no subclass of predicate that alone is associated with the maximal projections NP and VP. Nominalized clauses are derived from finite main clauses.

Aside from the single open class of predicates to which all inflectable words belong, the Straits Salish lexicon includes only a few closed class items:

2) Closed class elements
   a. Second position Inflectional Clitics (the Subject; Tense, Modality, and Mood)
   b. Determiner/Demonstrative pronouns (third person);
   c. Sentence particles (modal, discourse markers, etc.);
   d. Adverbs (largely quantificational);
   e. Conjunctions
   f. Prepositions

All the closed classes listed in (2) are particles/clitics, with the single exception of the verb, which constitutes a closed class of predicates with a special syntax (Jelinek in press). Not included in (2) are the extensive systems of derivational affixes and other morphological processes. The list of closed classes is small, and each class contains relatively few elements, when compared to languages with more familiar lexical inventories. For most Salish languages, the closed class elements can be easily listed on a single page. As syntactic operators, their functions are quite complex, and a full treatment of their syntax is beyond the scope of this paper. I will identify the Clitics and Demonstratives, since they are crucial to the N/V question, and then concentrate on the class of Prepositions and the evidence they provide.

0.1 The derivation of the sentence: second position clitics. Finite (main) clauses are derived by combining a predicate with a clitic string where various inflectional categories are marked. Included are a Subject pronoun and other clitics marking the optional features of Tense, Modality and Mood.

3) a. t'ilom=s1=son
    sing=PAST=1sNOM
    I sang.

   b. si'emm=s2=ax
    noble=FUTURE=2sNOM
    You will be noble/a chief.

   c. lih=sa=yrax=4
    tired-EVID=1pNOM
    Evidently, we are tired.

Whatever the lexical-semantic features of the predicate may be, it combines directly with the clitic string; a central feature of Straits Salish syntax...
is the absence of a copular verb. The inventory of second-position clitics is:

4) The sentence operators

a. The Tense clitics
   - =sa' Future
   - =la' Past

b. The modal clitics
   - "yaq" Optative
   - "yoq" Evidential
   - "o'" Probability
   - "q" Conditional

c. Mood
   - "a" Interrogative

Sentences with no overt Tense marking are often given a past time or
perfective interpretation.

There is an "ergative split" in Straits Salish; first and second
person arguments show a Nominative/Accusative contrast, while third person
arguments are Ergative/Absolutive (Jelinek 1993b). Number is not marked in
the third person, where the Absolutive is phonologically null.

5) The Subject pronouns

a. Nominative case
   - "san" "I"
   - "sx" "you"
   - "l" "we"

b. Absolutive case
   - "lx" "you pl."

In addition to predicates like those seen in (3), corresponding
semantically to verbs, nouns and adjectives in other languages, there are
also predicates that are Wh-words, locatives, existentials and cardinality
expressions.

6) a. wet=sxw
   Who=2sNOM
   "Are you?"

b. ces=s=-1
   two =FUTURE=1pNOM
   "We'll be two (in number)."

c. ~weno=-NEG EXIST=JABS
   There isn't any.

A predicate appearing without a first or second person NOMINATIVE subject
clitic, as in (6c) is unambiguously interpreted as having a phonologically
null, definite third person ABSOLUTIVE subject. Additional examples are
given in (7).

7) a. t'i=man=7
   "He/she/it/they sing."

b. si'em=7
   He (etc.) is a chief.

c. li=ik'eo=7
   He (etc.) is tired.

Transitive predicates include a Transitivizing suffix and an object suffix.
Again, if no first or second person object is marked, and the predicate is
marked transitive, then a third person object is the default
interpretation.

8) a. leg-t-=sa
   see-TR=3ABS=1sNOM
   I saw him/her/it/them.

The set of object suffixes is:

9) a. Accusative
   - =ona 1sg or 2sg
   - =on=1 pl
   - =on= Reflexive (any person/number)

The third person Ergative pronoun (transitive agent) is -g.

10) leg-t-s=1s'==g
    see-TR-3ERG=PAST=3ABS
    He saw him.

The Ergative is morphologically an internal argument, preceding the clitic
string. The Absolutive can be either internal or external: transitive
object (Ex. 8) or intransitive subject (Ex. 7).

6.2. Possessive pronouns. Possessive pronouns occur with nouns across
languages; a question that immediately arises is whether there is a set of
Salish predicates that can be classed as nouns on the grounds that they
occur with possessive affixes (see discussion in Hess and van Eijk, 1985).
If the Salish predicate describes something that can be characterized
grammatically as possessed, for example material objects, relations,
feelings or experiences, a Possessive pronoun may be affixed to it.
However, the resulting complex form remains a predicate; these derived
predicates occur with the clitic string to produce a finite sentence.

11) a. na-gene=sa
    1sPOSS-child=2sNOM
    You are my child.

b. na-men=la'=RI
    1sPOSS=PAST=3ABS
    It is my late (deceased) father.

The examples in (12) illustrate "psych" predicates with a Possessive
pronoun marking the Experiencer, while the subject is a second position
clitic.

12) a. na-ak'ei'=sa
    1sPOSS-value=2sNOM
    You are my dear/valued. (I like you.)
    [ak'ei'= be dear/valuable]

b. na=lel=7
    1sPOSS=intent=3ABS DET go=1sIRR
    It is my intention to go.

Ex. (12b) shows an adjoined subordinate Irrealis clause, with Irrealis
subject marking; the subject clitics listed in (5) occur only in main
clauses. Possessive pronouns appear also as subjects in subordinate
Propositional clauses.
The set of Determiner/Demonstratives in Lummi is as follows:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Gender</th>
<th>General</th>
<th>Female</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>ti'oe</td>
<td>si'oe</td>
<td>proximate and visible</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>ca</td>
<td>se</td>
<td>neutral</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>k'oe</td>
<td>k'œ</td>
<td>distal or out of sight</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>k'wə</td>
<td>k'wə</td>
<td>remote</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Straits Salish Determiner Phrases correspond to NPs in that they are referring expressions, but it is important to note that they differ from NPs in two respects: a) their lexical head can be any member of the open class of predicates, and b) they are adjoined subordinate clauses which do not occupy A-positions, but are comparable to topics.

19) a. sway'ga'=o' man=3ABS DET see-TR-1sSBD
   He is a man, the one I saw.
   (The one I saw is a man.)

b. leg-t-6mon
   see-TR-2sSUBORD DET
   the (one that) you saw
   I saw him, the one who is a man.
   (I saw the/a man.)

Evidence that Determiner Phrases are adjectives that do not occupy argument positions is provided by the absence of expected subject/object asymmetries with respect to permitted coreference. In the following example, the NP follows the predicate of the subordinate temporal clause, yet it is coindexed with the third person pronominal subject in both clauses.

20) q'aq'enal=O 'al
    slow=3ABS CONJ SBD-walk-MIDDLE-3POSS DET old man
    The old man is slow when he walks.
    (*He is slow when the old man walks.)
1.1. Distribution of the proposed copula across predicate type. It might be argued that the feature of Straits Salish syntax that underlies these properties of predicates is the fact that the copular verb is null. Across languages, we see adjectival or nominal predicates appearing with a copular verb to derive sentences. In these constructions, the copula is typically a semantically empty tense operator that builds finite predicates based on nouns, adjectives, non-finite verb forms, and the like. Thus, some predicates require a copula to build a finite expression, and some do not; and in Straits Salish, it might be claimed, some predicates include a null copula, while others do not. This would explain the fact that all Straits Salish predicates have the same syntax, combining with a subject clitic.

The problem with a proposal of this kind, of course, is that we have no formal grounds for deciding which predicates would select this null copula. The problem is that unless an internal argument is present in a construction, the status of a predicate as "nominal" or "verbal" is indeterminate; this problem arises with all intransitive sentences, as noted by Kuipers (1968). Furthermore, a striking and frequently noted fact about Salish is that no root, even adverbial, appears to be immune from transitivization.

2) mak'k'-t=la'=san
   all-TR-3ABS=PAST=lsNOM
   I took all of them/it. ("totalled")

Across languages, it is not uncommon for the copula to be null in certain tense or person contexts, while overt elsewhere. Since there is no morphological or syntactic evidence for a verb corresponding to any tense, person or predicate type in Straits Salish, we must conclude that either all or no sentences have a phonologically null copula.

1.2. Distribution across clause type. We saw that Tense, Modality and Mood are optionally marked in clitics that precede the subject clitic, and take the same form whatever lexical features the predicate may show — whether the best available English translation is noun, verb, or adjective. If there is a universal null copula, then this system of inflectional heads might provide a copular element, an auxiliary verb "be". Let us consider the evidence on this point.

Subordinate clauses differ from main clauses in the inventory of inflectional heads they include. For example, sentence Mood is not marked in subordinate clauses, and some modal particles are excluded from all but main clauses, while Tense appears in all clause types. But the feature that is of interest here is that each clause type has a particular set of subject markers, distinct from the main clause clitics; and in each clause type, all predicate classes show identical subject marking.

23) a. Propositional clauses: Possessive pronoun marks the subject
   b. Irrealis clauses: Subordinate subject markers
   c. Relative clauses: "Head" is non-overt, bound by Determiner; non-head Agents are marked the same as subordinate subjects in Irrealis clauses.

Objects in subordinate clauses are the same as main clause objects. Whether the predicate has the semantic features associated with a noun, verb, adjective, noun, etc., they all share the same syntax in subordinate clauses, just as they do in main clauses. Consider the following examples of Irrealis clauses:

24) a. čte-t-p=son     k'a ye'=as
    ask-TRAN-PASS=lsNOM DET go-3SBD
    I was asked if he went.

b. čte-t-p=son     k'a 'oy-as
    ask-TRAN-PASS=lsNOM DET good-3SBD
    I was asked if it was good.

c. čte-t-p=son     k'a swi'qooal-3as
    ask-TRAN-PASS=NOM DET young man-3SBD
    I was asked if he was a young man.

d. čte-t-p=son     k'a t'am'-t-0-as
    DET hit-TRAN-3ABS-3SBD
    I was asked if he hit him.

e. čte-t-p=son     k'a na-s-l'ii'-as
    DET laFOSS-3SBD-value-3SBD
    I was asked if it's what I like. ("psych" predicate)

f. čte-t-p=son     k'a wet-3as
    DET who/person-3SBD
    I was asked who it was.

The uniformity of subject marking across predicate type in subordinate clauses in Straits Salish is evidence that it is not just the presence of the second position clitic sequence that produces the uniformity of syntax for all the predicate subclasses, since the clitic sequence is confined to main clauses. If a language has no copula, a contrast between noun and verb as lexical categories is precluded. I turn now to a survey of the syntax of prepositions in Straits Salish, which will bring conclusive evidence to bear upon this question.

2. Prepositions in Straits Salish. Prepositions are closed class elements, syntactic operators whose functions sometimes overlap with those of certain "oblique" case markers across languages. That is, in some languages there may be Dative and Benefactive cases, while in others these grammatical functions are assumed by prepositions (cf. English "to" and "for"). Prepositions also serve to introduce various oblique expressions that are typically "optional" or not subcategorized for by the verb: locative and temporal phrases ("in, at, on"); Passive agents ("by"), etc. A survey of the published literature on the Salish languages will show that Salishans agree that the inventory of the closed class of prepositions in these languages is extremely small.

2.1. The inventory of prepositions. There is one preposition that is attested in a number of Salish languages: i.e. generally called the Oblique marker. Some Lummi examples (Demers field notes, 1977):

25) a. k'oneg-t-p=son     a ca no-men
    help-TRAN-PASS=lsNOM DET laFOSS-father
    I was helped by my father.

b. 'oneg-t-0=son     ca no-sceen 'o ca sceenax
    give-TR-3ABS=lsNOM DET lsFOSS-relative OBL DET fish
    I gave a fish to my relative.
In (25a), there is an oblique optional agent; in (25b), the theme argument of the predicate "give" is oblique; in (25c) the derived intransitive (Middle) predicate takes an oblique "indirect" object; (25d) shows a temporal adjunct; and (25e,f) show locative adjuncts. Because of its wide range of functions, this particle was described informally as a "universal preposition" in Lummi by Charles, Demers, and Bowman (1978).

Montler (1986, pp. 237-239) provides examples showing a range of uses of the oblique 'a in Saanich. Galloway (1986) designates 'a as an oblique case marker in Samish. Efrat (1969) glosses the particle 'a as marking an "oblique referent" in Sooke. Thompson and Thompson (1971, p. 265) identify 'a as introducing oblique adjuncts in Clallam. In other Coast Salish languages, Gerelts (1981) identifies an oblique marker 'a in Halkomelem; Hess and Hilbert (1978, p. 30) survey the range of uses of 'a in Lushootseed, and identify it as marking the following: 1) Possessors; 2) Adverbial expressions; 3) "Indirect" objects of certain active intransitives ("Anti-Passives"); 4) adjoined subordinate clauses; 4) Passive agents; 5) the Theme argument of ditransitives. All these uses appear in Lummi also.

In Interior Salish, Squamish (Kuipers, 1967) and Thompson (Thompson and Thompson, 1992) also show a contrast between direct and oblique adjuncts, where oblique adjuncts are introduced by a particle 'a. Van Eijk (1985) defines a system of four proclitic prepositions for Lilloocet. Bella Coola, a northern outlier of the Salish family with many syntactic differences, shows a comparable set of four prepositions (Nater, 1981).

Aside from the Oblique marker, virtually no other (free-standing) prepositions have been attested for Straits Salish. Montler (1986) has recorded a directional preposition 'a in Saanich; in Lummi this form appears procliticized to a predicate, and will be described in a later section (#2.5).

2.2. The distribution of prepositions. A striking property of Salish is the absence of prepositional phrases consisting of a preposition with a pronominal object, or an 'inflected' preposition or postposition of the kind so common in Native America. That is, the pronominal object forms that occur with predicates do not occur with prepositions. Compare:

26) a. leg-t-onesaw-me
     b. *‘o-onesaw-me [to-me]

The subject and Possessive pronouns also cannot occur with prepositions.

27) a. *‘o-mon [to-I]  b. *ne-‘o [my-to]

The subordinate subject affixes are also excluded; this exhausts the inventory of pronominal paradigms in the language -- there is no set of object suffixes that are peculiar to prepositions. In fact, 'a and the few other attested prepositions occur only before DET Phrases, as in the examples in (25) above. Questions that immediately arise are:

28) a. How are oblique (non-subject, non-object) first, second and third person deictic arguments treated in the grammar?
   b. What is the feature of Salish syntax that motivates this constraint against prepositions with pronominal objects?

That is to say, what makes this typologically peculiar feature of Salish grammar a) possible, and b) obligatory?

2.3. The Person-deictic Predicates. What makes the exclusion of this construction type possible is the presence of a set of Person-deictic predicates. These predicates mark the bundle of semantic features associated with pronominal paradigms across languages: the features of person and number. These predicates are not pronouns; they are third person in syntax. Like all other predicates, they appear either a) in clause initial position, followed by the clitic string, or b) appear with a Determiner, to form Determiner Phrases. They occur in oblique adjuncts and in focus constructions. This set of predicates in Lummi is:

29) Person 1 2 3
     SG ‘as nak’mo ni
     PL ngel nak’mil1ye non11ye

An example showing an oblique Determiner Phrase built on a person-deictic predicate:

30) leg-t-onesav-me ‘a ca ‘as
     see-TR-PASS=2sNOM OBL DET BE ME
     You were seen by ME (masculine).

Note that since the Determiner marks masculine gender, the Determiner Phrase also has that interpretation. Gender is not marked in the pronominal system of Salish. A person-deictic predicate functioning as a main clause predicate:

31) nak’an=ysz=xw se na-ten
     BE YOU=EVID=3ABS DET BE ME
     It must be YOU who are my mother.

These predicates undergo various derivational and inflectional processes. In Irrealis clauses, they have overt third person subject inflection.

32) e-te-t-onesan k’o nak’an=as
     ask-TRAN-PASS=1sNOM DET BE YOU=3SBD
     I was asked if it was you. (Person predicate)
Since they are predicates with their own argument structure, they function much like cleft constructions in other languages in placing a referent in focus. A relative clause:

34) t4=° san 3
see-TR-3ABS=1sNOM DET BE YOU
YOU
I saw the one that was YOU.

Al Charles explained to Demers that (34) would be used as when recognizing someone in a crowd. Compare:

35) nak w
BE YOU=3ABS
Det see-TR-1SBD
YOU
YOU
are the one I saw.

In order to convey the directional and locative notions that are frequently expressed in prepositions across languages, Salish makes use of two strategies. The first is the use of full words, predicates, that are locative or directional in meaning; the second is a set of relational prefixes that convey these notions.

2.4. Locative and Directional predicates. These predicates build main clauses. Some Lummi examples:

39) a. slet=
be between two things
b. t'ek'el
cross over
c. 'anaw'=el
be in the middle
d. t'anan=el
sit next to s.o.

Predicates of this kind are well documented in the Salish languages. They may also occur with other "motion" predicates to build complex predicates. Some Saanich examples (Montler 1989):

40) a. c'asat; scec'el
be between two things
c. t'ek'el
cross over
d. t'anan=el
sit next to s.o.

2.5. Relational/Directional prefixes. Straits Salish shows a few relational and directional elements which may be prefixed to a root, deriving a complex predicate which is syntactically intransitive. These relational/directional prefixes are not analyzed as incorporated prepositions, since they cannot take objects, and thus do not increase the valence of the predicate.

41) Possessive Relational
a. tela=°
money=3ABS
It's money.
b. c-tela=sn
PSR-money=1sNOM
I have money.
c. sleni'=san
female=1sNOM
I am a woman.
d. c-sleni'y=sn
PSR-female=2sNOM
You have a wife.

This is the most common type of simple Possessive sentence. Note that these sentences are syntactically intransitive.

42) Attributive Relational
a. tel=°
money=3ABS
John is responsible/ It's John's fault.
b. c-tela=sn
PSR-money=1sNOM
I have money.
c. sleni'=sn
female=1sNOM
I am a woman.
d. c-sleni'y=sn
PSR-female=2sNOM
You have a wife.

43) Directionals
a. k'x=otqem=sn
to-Bellingham=1sNOM
I am going to Bellingham.
b. c-a-x=otqem=sn
from-B'ham=1sNOM
I am from Bellingham.

(Bellingham [x'=otqem "waterfall"] is a town in the Lummi area of Washington state.) An example of a Directional prefix in a subordinate Irrealis clause:

In order to convey the directional and locative notions that are frequently expressed in prepositions across languages, Salish makes use of two strategies. The first is the use of full words, predicates, that are locative or directional in meaning; the second is a set of relational prefixes that convey these notions.
In (44), the predicate ki-ta-wen (based on English "town") has a prefixed directional element, and is followed by the first person singular subordinal subject suffix. There are other prefixes (Causative, Purposive, Mutative) that can introduce subordinate predicates, and thus function as conjunctions or complementizers.

In this section, we have demonstrated that the Oblique marker in Lummi (and any other possible prepositions) occurs only before adjoined relatives and other subordinate clauses, deriving oblique adjuncts. These oblique Determiner Phrases may be derived from Person-deictic Predicates. We have established that there are no prepositional phrases with pronominal objects. We have also looked at other lexical and derivational means for assigning grammatical case - governed DET Phrase; deriving an oblique adjunct.

46) a. PREDICATE: governs pronominal object; assigns grammatical case - ACC, ENG or ABS.  
b. PREPOSITION: governs DET Phrase; assigns Oblique case, deriving an oblique adjunct.

47) * 'e [oblique null third person]  
This is evidence against a possible NULL third person pronoun occurring with prepositions, and we have seen that first and second person pronouns are excluded from this environment. Note also that the following are ungrammatical:

48) a. * 'e ca si'em =θ  
    [it is by, for (etc.) the chief]
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... na-wà:k'í kʷá:nələstə 'ək' nək'

... I want SUB I marry PREP.DET you

... I want to marry you.

Other versions of this story by Underwood (cf. Galloway's 1986 transcription) do not show this particle.

REFERENCES


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